“BEING” A STICKIST: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION OF “DWELLING” IN A VIRTUAL MUSIC SCENE

Jeff Hodges, B.A.

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APPROVED:

Steven Friedson, Major Professor
Eileen Hayes, Minor Professor and Chair, Division of Music History, Theory, and Ethnomusicology
John P. Murphy, Committee Member and Chair, Division of Jazz Studies
Graham H. Phipps, Director of Graduate Studies
James C. Scott, Dean of the College of Music
Michael Monticino, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse School of Graduate Studies

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Musical instruments are not static, unchanging objects. They are, instead, things that materially evolve in symmetry with human practices. Alterations to an instrument's design often attend to its ergonomic or expressive capacity, but sometimes an innovator causes an entirely new instrument to arise. One such instrument is the Chapman Stick. This instrument's history is closely intertwined with global currents that have evolved into virtual, online scenes. Virtuality obfuscates embodiment, but the Stick's world, like any instrument's, is optimally related in intercorporeal exchanges. Stickists circumvent real and virtual obstacles to engage the Stick world. Using an organology informed by the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, this study examines how the Chapman Stick, as a material "thing," speaks in and through a virtual, representational environment.

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TO THE INSTRUMENT ITSELF

A Blank Slate

Musical instruments are not static, unchanging objects. They are, instead, things that materially evolve in symmetry with human practices. Alterations to an instrument's design often attend to its ergonomic or expressive capacity, but sometimes the process of innovation causes an entirely new instrument to come into being. For such a newly created instrument to survive beyond its origination, its physical manifestation is merely a starting point. An instrument circumscribes a phenomenological world of possibilities that converge on and flow from its materiality. Traditionally, the musical capacity of an instrument is transmitted in the embodied interactions that arise between teacher and student. The more contemporary cultural flows as described by Appadurai and Keil, however, are mediated, representational, and largely disembodied. In this environment, new instruments are explored by communities that exist in a state of perpetual dispersion.

One such instrument is the Chapman Stick.[1] The Stick's unique body-sound interface has allowed it to rise into prominence within certain circles as a musical *tabula rasa*, brimming with potentials yet to be explored. This instrument's history is closely

[1] It is common practice in the Stick community that, when referring to the instrument in print, it appears in all capital letters with a copyright symbol (i.e., "The Stick®") to reflect Emmett Chapman's multiple trademarks on the instrument. To preserve this tradition, "Stick" will appear capitalized in this text, but for writing clarity, the capitalized article and the copyright symbol have been dropped.

intertwined with global currents that have evolved into virtual, online scenes. Virtuality obfuscates embodiment, but the Stick's world, like any instrument's, is optimally related in intercorporeal exchanges. Stickists gather around the instrument using real and virtual resources, circumventing obstacles to engage the world that the Stick circumscribes. Using an organology informed by the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, this study examines how the Chapman Stick, as a material "thing," comes to speak in and through a virtual, representational environment.

During the eighties, I became aware of the instrument on various recordings, but I unwittingly subsumed its sounds within the conventions of electric bass and guitar. I had no concept of its construction and technique; I imagined that it looked something like a washtub bass and was played primarily for novelty. In the early nineties I saw a person play a Stick live and gained a concept of the unique principles behind the instrument's design. This awareness profoundly changed the way that I listened to those recordings, creating the foundations of my Stick world. I purchased my instrument in 2003, when, like many others, the increased connectivity of the Internet brought ordering information and instructional materials into my home. The successes and frustrations of realizing the instrument's sounding potentials on my own in purely localized contexts played an integral part in my involvement in the virtual Stick scene.

The Grain of the Instrument

In his 1977 essay "The Grain of the Voice," Roland Barthes describes the *grain* as the "encounter between voice and language" (Barthes 1977, 181). Barthes intended for

this term to provide space for semiotic alternatives to the "adjectival criticism" and "predicative interpretation" that has taken on "certain institutional aspects" in musical discourse (180). His argument emphasizes that the grain is "the body in the voice as it sings," (188) and "the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue" (182). Although his focus is clearly on vocal performance, Barthes also mentions that the grain "persists in instrumental music" (188). In this chapter, I examine the grain's instrumental implications as a phenomenological field in an organological exploration of the Chapman Stick's physical manifestation.

For Barthes, approaching a musical performance in terms of the grain centers critique on the semiotic image of the body as given to the listener, rather than on "rules of interpretation" or "constraints of style" (189). From this perspective, performance of the muscled arm produces a different sound on the piano than the more erotic pads of the fingers. Although Barthes seems to imply that the grain is something that may or may not be present in a given musical performance, his descriptions indicate the existence of a relationship between instrument and player. A similar acknowledgement of the body-sound interface as it arises between musician and instrument resonates in the works of several ethnommusicological scholars. In *The Soul of Mbira* (1981) Berliner notes that,

> In the performance of mbira music there is an intimate bond between the mbira player and his instrument. This intimacy is to some degree inherent in the physical relationship of the mbira player to his mbira. When the musician performs, the instrument's sound is amplified and projected directly back to him by the gourd resonator. Thus, enveloped by the sound of his instrument, he is

> closest to the music and in the best position to appreciate its nuances and subtleties (127).

Berliner goes on to describe the instrument as having a "voice" (128), giving "real musical feedback" to the player (130).

Chernoff noticed this intimate relationship as the body of Russian cellist Rostropovich "seemed to envelop" the instrument during a particularly virtuosic performance (1979, 142). As a practitioner, Chernoff also experienced a shift in his own body/sound interface doing fieldwork in West Africa. Initially, he felt inhibited by his stiff interactions as he learned to drum, but when he received a cat's hand, he noticed an extraordinary change in his playing.[2] Similarly, Rice noted that altering the way his thumb manipulated the Bulgarian *gaida* bagpipe created subtle ornaments that were "crucial to the bagpipe's style" (2003, 107-108). In both cases, the sound-body interactions of these researchers with an instrument in its context led to a broader acceptance within their relative communities that deepened their research.

Instrumental feedback in the grain is an experience that arises between a subject, the player, and the instrument. As such, phenomenological discourse, as a challenge to subject/object dichotomies, is particularly well-suited to examine the play of internal forces within the grain's horizons. Phenomenology productively mediates between experimental, objectivist strategies of observation and experiential, subjective knowledge (Rice 2003, 114). Other scholars, such as Friedson (1996; 2009) and Downey

[2] Chernoff, with hesitation, noted that this ritually created amulet "worked in a most uncanny way." With this *juju*, he felt as if his arm was pure vibration, as if it "had no bones," and that his speed increased noticeably as a result (Chernoff 1979, 16-19).

(2005) have incorporated phenomenological perspectives into ethnomusicological studies. Downey, in particular, recognized the potential of the grain in his investigation of the *berimbau* and its role in Capoeria performance, but the grain's larger relevance as an experiential field between instrument and player remained largely unexamined in his study.

It might be argued that appropriating Barthes' conception of sound-body interaction in such a way can be supplanted with more specific and identifiable terms such as "technique" or "timbre." While these terms and others are important and useful, they have connotations that are associated with everyday, empirical meanings. This is not to dismiss the importance and usefulness of empirical organology, which reveals much about the objective world. It is meant, however, to examine beyond the positivist paradigm to include musical instruments and their performance in a wider field of interaction. The grain is "the sense a listener has of the interaction between the musician's body and an instrument" (Downey 2005, 95). When activated as a phenomenological field of possibilities, it implicitly includes the relationship between the instrument, the player, and the broader structures of significance within which both are found. This conception of the grain embeds ontic ideas about technique, timbre, and design within the more ontological meanings associated with "intention" and

"world" and acknowledges the agency inscribed in the affordances of musical instrument design. [3]

Understanding how the grain is applicable in this organological investigation of the Stick, however, requires a descriptive exploration of the instrument itself. As an artifact of material culture, an instrument's objective nature tells a story about the conditions of its creation. Such a singular tale can be interpreted from multiple theoretical perspectives. In more traditional organology, as exemplified by the work of Kartomi (1990) and Sachs and Hornbostel (1961), the Stick would be examined in relationship to a taxonomic structure.[4] The Sachs and Hornbostel taxonomy, which based instrument categorization on design and sound production, was particularly influential in the twentieth century. Due to changes in musical technology, a loosely used electrophone category with varying levels of division was proposed and debated, resulting in differing opinions as to its boundaries Because the guitar is clearly related to an acoustic manifestation with a well-established sound-body interface, its classification as a "composite electro-chordophonic lute" seems justifiable, but Kartomi argues that "the electric guitar . . . is not technically an electrophone as is vibrations are mechanically produced and then electronically converted into instrumental sound by means of a variety of added equipment" (Kartomi 1990, 173). Because of its design and sound-body interface, the Stick further confounds this categorization.

[3] Ontology, an area of inquiry that is closely associated with phenomenology, examines what it takes for a thing to exist, rather than what a thing is (Thomasson 2005: 134). Within the ontological, a thing's ontic aspect is its concrete, everyday existence (Heidegger 1962: 14)

[4] Kartomi does note, however, that "A number of West African societies adhere to a concept of instruments that includes their relationship to their players. This view is quite opposed to the tendency encountered throughout Western history to classify instruments according to a primarily acoustic and morphological concept of instrument" (Kartomi 1990: 252).

Figure 1.1 - The Chapman Stick, Stick Enterprises, 2008, used by permission.

Increasingly, however, instruments have been fruitfully used as a focusing lens for ethnographic inquiry, providing insight into the political (Qureshi 2000; Weintraub 2001), structural (Kouwenhoven 2001), traditional (Fukui 1994; Kebede, 1977), symbolic (Roche 2001; Vetter 2001), racial, and gender-related (Waksman 1999) implications of the musical tradition connected to the instrument. In any of these cases, however, a physical description of the instrument's material aspects is essential. For the purposes of this project, this description will address what the instrument, as an object, brings to the grain.

The Stick Itself

The Stick was developed by Emmett Chapman between the years of 1969 and 1975 while experimenting with various approaches to playing and constructing the electric guitar. Despite the debt the Stick owes its forbearer in terms of its basic fretted electro-chordophonic construction, it is perhaps distinctive from the electric guitar in more ways than it is similar. The design of the Stick maximizes the sound potential of striking and holding strings against frets. This "tapping" or "hammering" technique is not exclusive to the Stick. Many highly visible electric guitarists and bassists, ranging

from Stanley Jordan to Edward Van Halen, use it as part of their usual performance repertoire. The Stick, however, is the first instrument that has been designed for the player to employ this method with the fingers approaching the strings from opposing sides of the fretboard.[5]

A crucial design feature of the Stick is the instrument's angle in relationship to the player. A traditional guitar is designed to be played with the neck anywhere from roughly 45 to 90 degrees from the musician's spine. From this position, one hand will perpendicularly engage the neck for fretting, while the other will asymmetrically relate to the strings in a parallel fashion for strumming and picking. The Stick is intended to be held at a much more acute angle, from about 15 to 45 degrees, and is secured by a belt hook at the waist and a shoulder strap under the opposing arm. At this angle, both hands relate to the strings in a more perpendicular and symmetrical relationship. Polyphonic interdependence that characteristically recalls the properties of the piano becomes available in this positioning. Additionally, expressive possibilities open up due to the acoustic

Figure 1.2 – Emmett Chapman, Stick Enterprises. 2008, used by permission.

[5] Dave Bunker and Jimmy Webster, however, both designed guitars for their earlier "touch" method, where their instruments were held horizontally in guitar fashion with the hands perpendicular to each other. In both of these cases, the fingers of the right hand had a parallel relationship to the strings while the fingers of the left hand were perpendicular, as with finger stopping on guitar (Emmett Chapman, e-mail to author, Dec 11, 2009).

nuance that is available through first-hand contact with a bare string.

The player engages the strings using both hands on the fretboard, which is itself also distinctive from the guitar neck. The unique configuration of marker inlays distinguishes the instrument from the traditional guitar. Rather than a 1-1-1-2 pattern of dots that outline whole steps, minor thirds, and octaves on the guitar neck, the Stick has a singular inlay every five frets, demarcating octaves and unisons depending on which "side" of the instrument the strings are located. The frets themselves are significantly larger than guitar frets and, in current models, are shaped to a rounded point. Electric amplification, provided by a hexagonal pickup at the bottom end of the instrument, renders an acoustic resonating body unnecessary. The resulting minimalistic design gives the impression that the majority of the Stick's body is a playing surface. The instrument is usually composed of a single piece of hardwood, graphite, or composite, and is significantly wider than the guitar neck in order to accommodate both a greater number of strings and the space necessary to tap them. To ensure uniform responsiveness on both the high and the low ends of the instrument, the fretboard is designed to be as flat as possible. Any bowing or arching of the neck greatly affects the

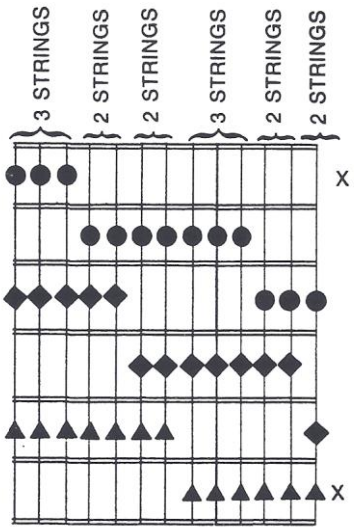

Figure 1.3 – The "fourths into infinity" pattern as found in *Free Hands* (1974). Used by permission.

instrument's playability. An adjustable truss rod is installed so that players can make occasional small adjustments to counteract atmospheric changes.

Grouping the strings into two "sides," referred to as the bass and melody, is also a distinctive feature of the Stick. While there are several tuning variations that are generally accepted in the Stick community, the instrument's range in "standard tuning" reaches from CC to a4. Technically no functional open strings on the Stick. Strings are muted at the nut by a damper to keep open notes from ringing uncontrollably as vibrating strings are released. Conventionally, the right hand plays the melody side, which is tuned in ascending fourths. Tuning this way creates an evenly recurring "fourths into infinity" pattern (Figure 1.3) that is easily transposed into any range on the fretboard, rather like a bass guitar or a conventional guitar without the traditional "dropped b" on the fifth string.

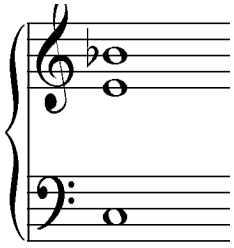

Figure 1.4 – Above: Basic left-hand shape for C7. Below: its notational standard, shown 8va. *The Stick Book* (1997). Used by permission.

The bass side is tuned in descending fourths, rather like an inverted cello. As a result, the lowest strings on both sides of the instrument meet in the middle of the fretboard. This tuning contributes significantly to the distinctive

nature of Stick music. [6] Tuning the bass side in what could be perceived as inverted ascending fifths makes larger intervals more immediately accessible and opens up new harmonic possibilities that are not readily available in standard bass tuning (Figure 1.4). Harmonic playing on a 4ths-tuned bass results in either "muddy" chords voiced in low intervals or voicing chords out of characteristic bass range. The Stick's wider tuning makes fifths and tenths easily accessible. In Chapman's conception, then, the player's left hand can play a harmonically flexible accompaniment in the bass range while having easy access to functional chord tones. Simultaneously, the right hand is free for melodic material and harmonic embellishment.

Instruments and Voice

This physical description could continue with a discussion of the ever-closing concentric layers of the Stick's material appearance, describing the instrument's specific dimensions, string gauges, the materials used in its construction, the acoustic qualities of these materials, the molecular structure of those materials, and so on. Examining the physical qualities of the instrument in such an objective way, however, will lead the study further away from what the Stick is in the experience of the listener and player. Like other instruments, the Stick has "an unrecorded background that is not represented in the object itself" (Karpati 1989, 5). In resonance with Merriam, it is circumscribed by

[6] This seemingly unorthodox tuning is the result of a natural exploration of possible guitar tunings that will be examined in chapter 2. Some players argue that, aside from the tapping technique, the inverted 5ths tuning is a defining characteristic of the Stick. The Stick and all of its component parts, however, are "designed to accommodate all possible tunings" (Chapman, e-mail to author, 2009).

sounds, behaviors, and musical concepts that give rise to each other in a mutually causal relationship (Merriam 1964).

Phenomenological discourse takes into account the causality of relational experience. Edmund Husserl developed this method in reaction to the positivistic dualism that was prevalent in the early 20th century, essentially arguing that subjects and objects lie on a continuum and give rise to one another in a reciprocal relationship. In this context, the grain, as an experiential field, is a particular manifestation of this subject-object rapport as it emerges between player and instrument, and by extension, stickist and Stick, during the arc of their intertwined experience. In an objective sense, the play of "language" and "voice" might initially seem irrelevant in instrumental music, when performance "no longer has language to lay open *significance* in all its volume" (Barthes 1977, 188, emphasis in original). In a more ontological sense, however, language and voice do not only refer the phenomenon of linguistic speech, or of producing sound with the lungs and throat, but to the existential conditions that allow these ontic manifestations of disclosure to arise.

Human beings are always already immersed in the existential world.[7] They are, in their fundamental essence, world-forming and world-disclosing, which is partially constituted in hearing, speaking, and keeping silent as ontic, and cultural, possibilities

[7] World, in the Heideggerian sense, is not an object, a collection of objects, or even a subjective coloring of objects. Instead, "world" is an a priori significance-structure that directs the things that human beings may meet as "the *means by which* something can be done *in order to* accomplish this or that" (King 2001: 51, emphasis in original).

(Heidegger 1962, 162).[8] In this existential discourse, an object discloses something of its material nature in its being and in sounding, but also situates itself within a world. As a result, "we never hear noises and complexes of sound, but the creaking of the wagon, the motorcycle….It requires a very artificial and complicated attitude to 'hear' a 'pure noise" (Heidegger 1996, 164). Objects, such as wagons or motorcycles, are often mute when left to themselves, yet these same objects can be given a thingly voice that always already belongs to a world.[9] A struck rock sounds in voice, as does a muffled footstep in the sand (Ihde 2007, 190).[10] The voices of things disclose something about the world in which they exist, and they speak "in terms of the direct sound of their natures: materiality, density, interiority, relations within experienced space, outward hollows and shapes" (Ihde, 192). As a humanly made "thing," a musical instrument also has a uniquely "thingish" voice whose ontic manifestation is the instrument's characteristic sound as it emerges from its physicality. This physical potential for sound is innately understood by people immersed in the world of the instrument. For example, Downey

[8] These ways of being-in-the-world belong to a larger ontological category that Heidegger refers to as discourse (*rede*), or the articulation of the world and the being of beings within the world. This existential state of discourse is a fundamental possibility for the human hearer, and Heidegger argues that organs such as vocal chords and ears have arisen in the human organism to realize this potential (King 2001: 84, Heidegger 1995: 218).

[9] In its objective sense, voice often refers to the physical and cognitive capacity to speak. In a more ontological sense, voice is the disclosive auditory aspect of being-in-the-world. Put succinctly, voice is the sound of being (Ingold 2000: 278).

[10] In his 1950 lecture "The Thing," Heidegger quite poetically describes a jug as a "thing," rather than a scientifically reducible "object." Its "thingness" is the physical manifestation of a creator shaping it for the purpose of holding and pouring wine and water. The jug's immanent usefulness in this task reveals it to be the bearer of the "poured gift" (Heidegger 1971: 170). Here, a thing refers not just to the jug as a mere object that holds liquid, but to a wider ontology that refers to the creator, the earth from which the jug is made, the space that the jug's walls encapsulate, and the poured gift that the jug holds. The Stick's "thingly" voice is the sound of its being, which is further refined into instrumentality by virtue of its design and the sounds, behaviors, and concepts it gathers.

reports that experienced Capoeria practitioners often describe the sound of a *berimbau* in terms related to its physical characteristics. If a plastic jug is used as a shaker in place of a gourd, experienced practitioners describe its sound as "plastic," and if the pitch of the bow is too low, it is not considered to be "flat," but the instrument has "grown loose" (Downey 2005, 94).

As an instrument's projected use is primarily to produce sound, addressing the Stick's "thingly" voice in the grain should attend to its distinctive potential for sound quality (Dawe 2001, 221). Objectively, the Stick's sound is not unlike a similarly amplified electric guitar or bass. Like these instruments, amplified vibrating strings are an essential component in its sound production and, as a result, such comparisons are unavoidable. In the majority of fretted chordophones, however, fingers are used to hold the string against the fret while the remaining length of string is plucked, strummed, or struck. The sound of the Stick, in contrast, is generated by fingers striking and holding its electrically amplified strings against the frets, an approach that is in no way superficial.[11] As a zither-like chordophone whose strings are essentially struck, it has a distinctively percussive attack, resulting in a sound that has a certain similarity to the clavichord. In the case of this early Western instrument, fret-like metal blades, or tangents, were activated by a keyboard mechanism, raising and striking a string. The stickist, however, has a profoundly different relationship between finger, fret, and string.

[11] I was once playing the Stick for someone and they commented that the instrument was odd because it "did not sound like it looked like it should sound."

The tapping technique provides an idiosyncratic method for the stickist to create sound on a stretched, uniformly vibrating string that enhances its distinctively well-ordered harmonic content. In addition, the Stick's solid-body construction reduces acoustic interference and maximizes the instrument's sustain.[12] These two acoustic properties, in conjunction with electromagnetic amplification and the wide tuning of the bass side, are fundamental aspects of the Stick's characteristically rich, chiming, and resonant tone quality (see appendix: Spectrographic Comparisons). Many Stick players additionally incorporate compression, distortion, MIDI, looping, and a wide variety of other effects into their sonic Stick identity. The Stick can gather an extensive array of sounds that lie outside the instrument's immediate physical nature by virtue of the technological world within which it is embedded. Ultimately, though, the stickist interfaces these sounds through bodily, physical contact with the instrument's material aspects. It is the Stick that the player plays.

The Stick, however, also plays the player. It is the instrument's implicit task to sound forth, but this task cannot be realized without the musician's body to attend to and complete its design (Downey 2005, 97). When a player engages the instrument, an organized set of bodily dispositions are circumscribed by the Stick's "thingly" nature. By somatically attending to the instrument, the stickist develops a habitus that includes the

[12] Through his own trajectory of innovation, Les Paul recognized that "when you've got the top of the guitar vibrating and a string vibrating, you've got a conflict. One of them has got to stop, and it can't be the string, because that's making the sound." Paul's search for a more stable surface led to his solid-body creation "the Log," which was known for its unconventional design, pure tone, uniform response, and surprising sustain (Waksman 2001: 42-43).

sounds, behaviors, and musical concepts that the instrument embodies.[13] Mantle Hood's bimusicality had, and still has, profound implications for ethnomusicological study, particularly in organological cases, because, in speaking, an instrument brings its circumscribed world into presence (Hood 1960). For example, through practice, Rice developed the *gaidarski prusti* (bagpiper's fingers) and, in tandem, an increase in the perceived authenticity of his playing. His newfound relationship with the *gaida* opened up a field in the overlap between his academic world and the world of the *gaidar* (a player of the *gaida*), allowing him to "dialogue with Bulgarians not just in their language, but in their music and dance forms as well" (Rice 1997, 111).

The thingliness of an instrument gathers behaviors so that its voice may be brought forth by the player in reference to world. Both the *gaida* and the Stick, however, stand mute when left to themselves. Thingly voices often sound in duet, such as when a metal spoon strikes a jug. The sound that results is the voices of both the spoon and the jug sounding as one (Ihde 2007, 190). A similar dialogic duet occurs between player and musical instrument; in this case, the stickist and the Stick itself. The material and objective aspects of the Stick's sound give rise to its thingly voice, which affords unique acoustic possibilities and opens up the auditory possibilities of the world beyond what is immediately available through the body alone. This is the case with all instruments; a flute can play notes that are higher in pitch than the average human voice can sing and a piano can, impossibly, sing in harmony with itself.

[13] Csordas defines somatic modes of attention as "culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the bodily presence of others" (1993: 138).

While auditory possibilities are inscribed in the design of the instrument, their initial inaccessibility is slightly confounding. As with a jug, a musical instrument has an objective, material aspect that seems to separate it from the human being using it, and it has a use that unfolds as its thingly nature is revealed. Although the sounding potential of the instrument may be immediately apparent, initially the instrument's voice often presents itself as opaque. Playing an instrument involves an experience of "becoming," in which a musician reveals the instrument's handiness and dissolves the perceived division between them. In contrast, a jug's usefulness is readily transparent in everyday experience, to the point where its presence is hardly noticed unless it fails to function in its task, which is to bear the "poured gift." [14] Unlike a jug, however, a musical instrument's voice can only be revealed by attending to the instrument as a causally connected, worldish thing.

This correlation between world and thing arises as a result of human agency in an active engagement with its context, or "dwelling" (Ingold 2000, 5). [15] In the Old High German, *bauen,* meaning "to dwell," included the act of building, as well as a modality of cultivation (Heidegger 1971, 144). This latter aspect of dwelling refers to nurturing the vine's natural predisposition to grow and ripen if tended to with care. In this Heideggerian conception, building, cultivation, and dwelling are not mutually exclusive;

[14] Heidegger emphasized that such instrumental equipment possessed a kind of Being that he called *Zuhandenheit*, or "handiness." This means that a useful thing is essentially a "something in order to…" (Heidegger 1996, 1962: 68-70).

[15] In this context, "dwelling" is a reference to Heidegger's "being-in." From this perspective, by "staying with things," world, and the things in it, continually comes into existence (Heidegger 1993: 144-145).

cultivation provides insight into the construction of edifices, and both of these meanings converge on what it means to both build and dwell in the midst of mortality and nature (Heidegger 1971, 147-149). In the current (post) modern environment, when it seems that everything material is already built, an increased emphasis on a mode of existence that conceives dwelling-as-cultivation can be particularly productive.

Language Bears World

My personal experiences with the Stick demonstrate the gradual shift from opacity to transparency that occurs by dwelling in the grain. In 1990, I worked at a record store with a person who owned a Stick, and we discussed it regularly. One day, he told me that a local music store had one in stock, and I eagerly took the opportunity to pick up the instrument and give it a try. I had only ever seen or heard the Stick function as a bass, and I was sure that the years of experience that I had playing electric bass would prepare me for this rare chance. When I finally laid my hands on the instrument, though, I remember feeling flummoxed by it. The shoulder strap was incongruous with any support mechanism that I had seen, and I do not remember even noticing the belt hook. It felt awkward and defiant, and a glance at the multiple strings stretched across the fretboard sent my perceptions reeling. As I assumed the perspective of the player, it was obvious that its potential lay far outside of my musical world. I do not remember exactly what kind of sounds I produced in this encounter, but I felt overwhelmed and inadequate. After a few minutes, I handed the instrument back to the salesman and walked away bewildered.

Despite this early experience, I never fully gave up on the idea of learning to play the Stick. Some ten years later, with quite a bit more research done on the instrument and more confidence in my ability to "self-teach," I purchased an instrument from Stick Enterprises. As my Stick was in transit, I excitedly told all my friends and when it arrived they gathered at my house. When I plugged it in, however, I made unintelligible "plonking" sounds for several minutes, searching for something that would be musically familiar to my captive audience. I felt a little deflated, but as good friends they assured me that they could see how it "*could* be cool."

In these early experiences, the instrument presented itself more as a worldless object than thing. Despite watching other people play it, the path to the Stick's musical potential was obscured. I found that I could make "stickish" sounds, but I could not bring forth its voice with the same ease that I was accustomed to on the bass or on trombone, instruments I had played and studied for years. For its production to be deemed musical by myself and my audience, I had to bring the instrument to speak in a language that would allow its thingly voice to bear world.[16] The language of the thing, and the horizon upon which the materiality of the body engages an instrument, is body language, or gesture. The nuanced, practiced gestures that comprise the tapping technique carry with them the potential to bring the Stick to speak to, through, and with

[16] In his essay "Language," Heidegger refutes the idea that language is exclusively an expressive, representative activity of human beings, although it does serve these purposes (Heidegger 1971: 190). Rather poetically and succinctly, Heidegger states that "language speaks" (et.al: 188). Using the poetry of Georg Trakl, he describes how, through language, world bears things, and things reveal world. Language "rings out" like a bell in the stillness between world and thing. Words peal through this silence, calling things in the world to presence (Heidegger 1971: 205).

the stickist. This duet is only realized, however, when the Stick is incorporated into what Merleau-Ponty (1962) would call the player's body image.[17]

This body image is most obvious when it breaks down or is impinged upon, as Merleau-Ponty theorized in his research into the experience of the "phantom limb" associated with amputation. He theorizes that in such a case, a limb and its associated uses are perceived by consciousness where none are to be found, causing a dissonance to arise between the body image and the reality of the body (87-88). A prosthetic limb may be fitted to restore some of the body's potential, but this independent "thing" is not truly part of the body and therefore cannot relive the experience of the phantom limb. Prosthesis can, however, be subsumed within the body image and become experientially transparent. Although the amputee and the prosthetic limb provide a particularly vivid example, human beings surround themselves with useful things that augment corporeal potentials, often beneath the level of conscious perception.[18] Through their thingish design, musical instruments "ask" to be played in the same way a handle on a door subtly "cries out" to be pulled (Norman 2002, 88).

[17] Merleau-Ponty suggested that our physicality is grounded in a fundamental knowledge of the body that is given by our total bodily immersion in the world (Ingold 2000: 169). Merleau-Ponty referred to this potential of the body and its behavior as the "body image" (Smith 1964: 112). The body is a thing that is closest to perception, and its proximity often allows it to lie beneath immediate awareness. The possibilities of the body are easily brought to attention, however. I can nod my head, or I can even imagine the possibility of nodding my head without actually doing the movement myself (Behnke 1997: 183).

[18] In this way, the automobile and the walking stick of a nonsighted person are similar. The automobile allows the driver to move faster and carry more than he or she could unaided. The walking stick of a person who is visually impaired allows him or her to "see" using tactile and auditory information. These things do not immediately present their full usefulness, but instead open up aspects of the world that reveal their handiness through gestural interaction. As the body image expands, the driver becomes aware of the space that a car can fit into, and a person who is visually impaired can navigate a college campus (Smith 1964: 113).

Due to the sensitivity afforded by electromagnetic amplification, producing sound on the Stick takes relatively little physical effort. Despite this, however, a stickist does not initially pick up the instrument and play with the same ease that they might open a door and enter a room. The Stick is embedded in Western virtuosic concepts, which stand in opposition to the everydayness of operating a doorknob. In this context, a musical instrument requires refined bodily interactions that must be "found" by attending to and with the body in a practice of copresent musical feedback (Csordas 138, 1993). Within this somatic loop, consciousness "grows" the skills that the instrument gathers, as well as an auditory intentionality to encompass the potential of these skills (Ingold 2000, 360; Smith 1964, 114).[19] The clumsy movements that were once the focus of consciousness recede, haunting the body as a "ghost gesture," or "a tendency-toward movement that can persist in the body even when the large-scale gesture [that is schematically implied] is not being performed" (Behnke 1997, 188). Inhabiting this corporeal potential in the practiced presence of a "thing" causes it to diminish into the horizon as it is subsumed within the expanding sound-body interface (Csordas 1993, 139).

Playing as a Modality of Weaving

From this perspective, the grain is not internal to the practitioner or to the instrument, but cuts across the emergent interface between the two. Dwelling within the grain's horizons provides an active and sensuous engagement of practitioner and

[19] The focus, field and horizon of the auditory field are investigated more fully in Ihde, 2007 Chp. 4.

material. The conceptual and physical resistance of the instrument's thingly nature allows musical form to emerge through the application of skilled, culturally informed movement.[20] As the Stick shimmers and punches with the most subtle shift in gesture, wailing in the higher registers and growling in the low, it carries the potential to produce distinctive and expressive musical artifacts. Its characteristic sounds, however, harbor possibilities that are informed by the bodily experience of the player. Each player comports themselves towards the Stick in terms of the bodily sedimentation provided by their musical world (Behnke 1997, 184).

Many of the players that I interviewed noted the instrument's formidable learning curve in relation to their "bodying" of a previous musical instrument. In some cases the unique physicality of the Stick's body-sound interface seems to be insurmountable. For example, one beginner, who had never previously laid hands on the instrument, made arrangements to have his first experience in a seminar on a Stick provided by the organizers. Despite his background in classical guitar and the assistance of experienced clinicians, he was openly frustrated. Holding the instrument awkwardly, he candidly challenged the practicality of the tuning and the lack of a less expensive "start-up" instrument, hoping to avoid paying full price only to find out that the Stick was "not for him." Despite the high cost of seminar tuition, he did not return after the

[20] Ingold provides a non-musical example of this perspective in the weaving of a reed basket. In the act of weaving, form is built up from the surface of the material by the application of force on the surface of the reeds through regular movement. The reeds also apply their own resistant force, which the basket, in its final form, will rely on for its rigidity. While the weaver may have a general idea of the basket, its final form is not imposed on the reeds to exactly match a virtual blueprint that exists exclusively inside the maker. Instead, gesture, as a learned, skilled movement, causes the basket to arise through an active exploration of the reed's resistant materiality (Ingold 2000: 340-342).

first day, and it was assumed that his initial dissatisfaction with the instrument discouraged him from participating further. One of the clinicians later sympathized with this beginner, saying that the "Stick often confounds expectations."

Another experienced clinician, Tim Boles, who also came to the instrument with a conservatory background in guitar, stated, "When I first got the instrument, I felt like I needed to hold it while I was watching TV or sleep with it or something, just to get it to feel less alien." After a year or so of practice, however, Boles recalled that this separation had largely subsided, and that the perceived barriers between what he "heard in his head" and what "came out of the instrument" began to "match." Sometimes, a beginner can attack the instrument and, without a strong conception of what will come out, "foretell" their musical future in a burst of untamed gesture (Chapman 1974, 4). In either case, the Stick can present itself as unruly at first, but its voice can be brought into service and refined into instrumentality (Heidegger 1995, 215; Ihde 2007, 192). In service, the Stick is similar to other "toolish" things in that it becomes an extension of the body image. Like the way in which the stick of a nonsighted person extends the awareness of his or her spatial potentials, the Stick extends the musician's auditory potentials.

There is more to the instrument than the everyday "handy" thing, however, in that it does not fully submerge beneath, but instead expands, consciousness.[21] Greg

[21] Heidegger's classic example of a handy thing is that of the hammer, whose genuine use is only revealed in the act of hammering. In being appropriated for hammering, the hammer becomes less proximal than its use, effectively disappearing from awareness (Heidegger 1996, 1962: 68-70).

Howard, an experienced Stick clinician and performer, stated "I don't think that I would say that the instrument disappears when I play it. I would say that I become totally aware of it." Everyday handy equipment often lies beneath perception, but instrumental performance, especially in a virtuosic context, creates an expanded awareness of the instrument that transcends everydayness. Dwelling in the grain foregrounds the duet that arises when the stickist embodies and inhabits the subtle nuances of tapping.

After my slightly disheartening first Stick "performance," I began spending several hours a day working on acceptable sound production. My background as a multi-instrumentalist and music educator provided me with a knowledgeable body that had certain skills and capabilities, but this corporeal sedimentation of the past also brought with it preconceived expectations of how the Stick would sing in my hands (Behnke 1997, 188). Many of these issues were the result of vestigial "ghost gestures" imprinted from my electric bass background.[22] For example, I became aware that my left hand rushed noticeably and uncontrollably, which caused quite a bit of anxiety when I took on the role of a bass player in a live context. I could hear and feel myself pushing the beat, but I felt helpless to stop doing so. After much frustration, I realized that on a plucked, fretted instrument, the fretting hand always moves slightly ahead of the beat while the other is more responsible for the time. I had to reconceive and

[22] Vestigal "ghost gestures" are particular to each player's background, and are, in part, the basis for the diversity of "Stick Music."

reinhabit a more percussive role for my problematic left hand, which required me to play, listen, and attend to my body in multiple capacities.

The Stick's voice, in its enveloping proximity, directed my movements through real musical feedback. A copresent experiential loop arose that was reminiscent of Rice's interactions with the *gaida*. By listening to recordings of his teacher, he "found" fingering patterns in the *rasvirvane* (playing around), the instrument's warmup exercises, that produced a "new kinesthetic understanding" of the instrument (Rice, 2003, 108-109). Similarly, as I began to develop an appropriate language of gesture in various localized musical contexts, the objective cause and effect relationship between my hands and the Stick eventually began to collapse. My gestures stopped causing the sounds: the gestures themselves became sounds. As they merged, I began to hear something of my own being in the voice of the Stick.

When I pick up the Stick now, my hands are immediately drawn to well-worn places on the fretboard and I begin, almost thoughtlessly, to tap out major scale patterns with my right hand. Satisfied, the instrument seems to "call" me, asking me to hook it into my belt and move on to two-handed exercises. This is in stark contrast to my initial encounters with the instrument, where all I could muster was a few incomprehensible sounds and apologies. Today, I have an awareness of the Stick and how its distinctive sound is shaped into music though physical interaction. Even without my instrument in hand, I can imagine a phantom "air Stick" and its accompanying potential for sound (Behnke 188, 1997). This embodied potential allows me to listen to

a recording of a Stick and, without visual information, gain an idea of how gestural language brings its voice into dialogic duet with the stickist based on my bodily experiences in the Stick world (Stubley 1998, 95). This is the interactive space of embodied existence from which technique emerges, a space that I can transcend as I attend to and become transfixed by the sound of the instrument. Although this mode of awareness is my own, each stickist manifests a similar mode of dwelling within the grain. Additionally, and centrally, it is the field from which "Stick Music," in its myriad forms, arises.

CHAPTER 2

BUILDING THE STICK WORLD

Worlds Emerge from the Guitar Shop

The Stick is a material manifestation that is both a product of and an entity in the media's collective imagination. This mediated environment is epitomized by complex "fractalized" cultural flows, and as a result the impact of people, technology, money, media, and ideology on music transmission and hybridization has been a significant topic in ethnomusicological and popular music studies since the late 20th century (Appadurai 1996, 33). In *Music Grooves,* Charles Keil points out that mediation has the "potential to plant seeds in places that would never get planted" (Keil and Feld 2005, 22). New genres and styles of music often arise as locality reinterprets and recontextualizes the flows of global culture. For Emmett Chapman, the creator of the Stick, these seeds not only blossomed into a new style of music making, but also into an artifact of material culture that embodied his emerging musical conception.

It seems somehow inappropriate, however, to situate a study of the Stick in a popular music study. It is not an instrument that is popular in the literal sense, like its predecessor the electric guitar, nor does it enjoy the broad cultural acceptance of institutionalized Western instruments. Although its image and voice travel in similar cultural conduits as these instruments, the Stick remains peripheral despite the musical potentials it opens up. As a result, the Stick inhabits the margins of contemporary

instrument design, and the stickist's grain often represents an expressive search for novel expression in a mediated cultural environment that is steeped in fantasy and nostalgia.

Chapman's own musical dwelling was and is circumscribed by technology, live performance, and virtuosity. Gaining an understanding of this world by examining the Stick's historical and cultural context provides insight as to how the instrument gained a life of its own, growing beyond the potentials of a single person. A brief biography of Chapman will trace the mediated and live disjunctures that were navigated in the instrument's creation. Chapman's exploration of guitar design eventually produced a new "thing," which took its own mediated avenues in the 80s and 90s. This setting became the means by which a spatially dispersed scene of musicians emerged, bound together by the instrument itself.

Development and Innovation[1]

At the age of 13, Emmett Chapman received his first instrument: an accordion. His early performances earned the notice of the pianist at his church, who offered to teach him keyboard. In these lessons, Chapman found inspiration in the polyphonic nature of the piano, and began to experiment with rudimental chords and bass lines. Later in his teens, Chapman's interests extended into mainstream music. By 1959 he was strumming a guitar as he sang Johnny Mathis standards. Eventually, Chapman's

[1] Chapman's biographical narrative was constructed from personal communications with Jim Reilly held in August 2009 and Emmett Chapman in December 2009, as well as Chapman's personal website www.emmettchapman.net.

interests led him to discover jazz through the music of Barney Kessel's guitar trio. These recordings revealed to him the potentials of instrumental jazz, nurturing an interest that would lead him to the work of McCoy Tyner, Oscar Peterson, Bill Evans, and later the freer approaches of Eric Dolphy and John Coltrane.

The recordings of these jazz pioneers profoundly influenced his musical conception, opening his ears to complex harmonic landscapes. He also became familiar with the roles that each instrument played in the jazz idiom due to their particular set of acoustic affordances. He found that the piano was ideal in its harmonic independence, but that it lacked the emotive expressiveness of the saxophone. It seemed that his chosen instrument, the guitar, had the potential to occupy both of these musical realms. It had expressive capabilities, but limitations of range and polyphony restricted its practical independence to "flights of harmonic experimentalism." To widen the instrument's potential Chapman began a journey of experimentation that would lead him through nearly forty permutations of guitar design, each representing a concurrent stride in his skills as a luthier and instrumentalist.

Between 1961 and 1963, Chapman began by extending the traditional guitar's scale and range. On an early model, he added a seventh string that was tuned a fourth higher than the e1 found on a traditional guitar, but the tension that was necessary to bring the pitch of this string up to the a2 that was the proper fourth above the e1 would cause it to snap. As a remedy, Chapman dropped the tuning of the entire instrument a whole step. The higher fourth opened up "modern" harmonic possibilities to

Chapman's ear. On subsequent models Chapman continued to add fourths, and also continued to drop the tuning. By 1965, he had "conceptually" added several more fourths on the top of the instrument, which lowered the major third found between the second and third strings of a traditionally tuned guitar (figure 2.1) to the third and fourth (figure 2.2). [2]

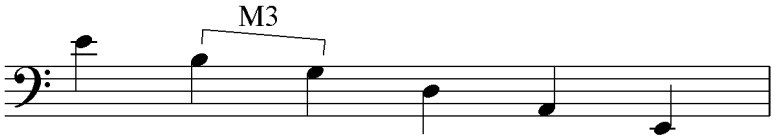

Figure 2.1 - Standard guitar tuning. Actual concert pitches of open string notes shown.

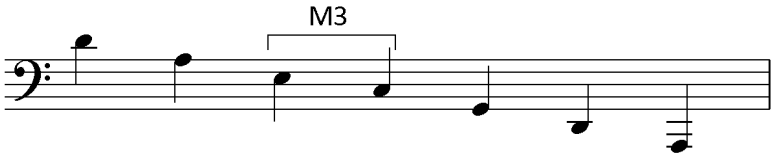

Figure 2.2 - A seven string guitar tuning.

As an Air Force officer in 1964, Chapman designed and built an eight-stringed, thirty-four inch scale guitar in the SAC headquarters wood shop near Omaha, Nebraska. The major third on this instrument was between the fifth and sixth string, and its lowest string, tuned to EE, expressed Chapman's interest in full access to the widest range possible (figure 2.3).

[2] Information concerning the historical evolution of The Stick's tuning can be found in Greg Howard's interview with Chapman, posted at www.stick.com.

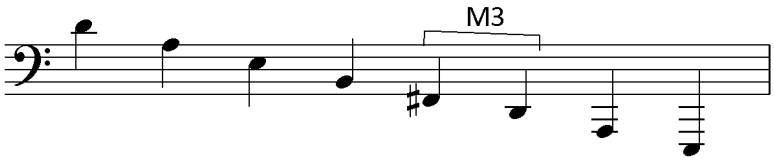

Figure 2.3 - Thirty four inch eight string guitar tuning.

On this instrument, Chapman found that he could create what he perceived as "modern" chord extensions with just a barre. The neck of this instrument was wide, however, and the bass notes on the eighth string were prohibitively distant and inaccessible from higher voicings available on the first and second. To make these chords more ergonomically viable, he inverted the tuning of the sixth and eighth strings (figure 4), extending the overall range of his instrument by a whole step, and situating the lowest string closer to the middle of the neck.

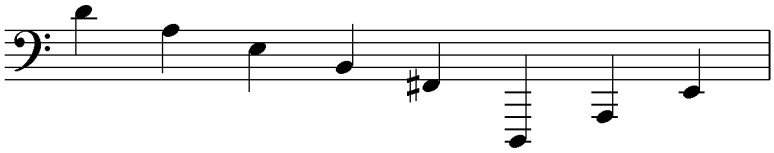

Figure 2.4 - Thirty four inch eight string guitar tuning with inverted fifths.

This trajectory led to a guitar design in which the bottom four strings were tuned in inverted fifths (figure 5).

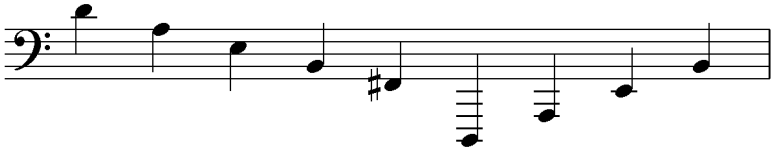

Figure 2.5 - Thirty four inch nine string tuning with four inverted fifths.

Concurrent with the development that led to this particular instrument, the musical environment surrounding Chapman was also changing. The electric guitar opened up a world of new sonoric possibilities within the music of the twentieth century as amplification transformed the relationship between the performing body and sound production (Waksman 2001, 289, 129). By the late 60s, the voice of the electric guitar was becoming increasingly defined by the playing of Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton. Recordings of these influential electric guitarists hung in the musical soundscape of Los Angeles, where Chapman was residing. This electroacoustic environment set the stage for Chapman's formative step in developing the Stick.

On August 26, 1969, in a moment of serendipitous inspiration, he seemingly "out of the blue" discovered his two-handed tapping technique. Given all the experimentation that led to this innovation, as well as the community's reverence for its date of origination, it is tempting to make the moment of his breakthrough more than it actually was. By all accounts, however, the innovation was no more and no less than a sudden realization. Innovations sometimes occur in an improvisatory moment, when a performer may realize an interesting possibility that the instrument, in its current physical configuration, cannot produce. The unique tuning of the instrument was already an electroacoustic locale when he "discovered" the tapping interface. As Chapman was practicing, he simply noticed he was tapping and angled the instrument up to bring his hands perpendicular to the fretboard.

He immediately spent several days reconfiguring the instrument's action to capitalize on this technique. With further adjustments, it became apparent to Chapman that the technique was a core ingredient of a newly emerging instrument, which he initially dubbed the "Freedom Guitar." Not only did tapping open up a more parallel relationship in the hands as equal partners on the fretboard, it provided the distinctive and, for the Stick, essential sound of metal strings against metal frets (Chapman, 1987). Interacting with frets and strings in this way provided a new perspective that drove further innovations. In subsequent models, Chapman "literally held his hands up in a mirror and made the instrument to suit that position" Here, Chapman's perception of his physical comportment toward an absent thing played a crucial role in its material realization.

In these early stages, the Stick was still forming as the potentials inherent in its design began to emerge. For example, Chapman did not initially intend for the tuning to be grouped into "bass" and "melody," as it is commonly perceived today. By assigning each hand to a general area of the fretboard, however, he found that relatively simple finger patterns could be used in conjunction with each other to maximize on both the overall range of the instrument and the significant overlap that arises in the inverted interval tuning. When coupled with the two-handed interplay available within the tapping interface, a single Stick can produce the impression of several instruments. The two-handed interplay presented in the tapping interface is somewhat reminiscent of the polyphonic interplay that arises in Shona *mbira* music. Berliner notes that in the music

of the mbira, musical complexity arises as a "product of the psychoacoustic fact that the ear does not perceive a series of tones as isolated pitches, but as a gestalt . . . the ear does not necessarily follow the precise linear melodic patterns being played" (Berliner 1981, 88). Instead, the large melodic intervals that arise in the relatively small movements of the hands cause "the ear to pick out pitches that are of a similar [pitch] level and group them in separate independent phrases" (Berliner, 88). This "inherent rhythm" phenomenon allows the Stick to occupy a significant amount of musical space in performance, filling multiple roles with a singularly distinctive and acoustically complex voice.

This Stick prototype and its successors began to appear in live situations in the Los Angeles area. In 1971, Chapman briefly joined Tim Buckley's adventurous *Starsailor* band. In contrast to Buckley's previously folk-inspired work, the *Starsailor* project was far more open-ended and improvisatory, receiving accolades from jazz critics while popular critics panned it. The band consisted of Chapman, Buckley, drummer Maury Baker, and occasionally trombonist Glenn Ferris, and their performances were likened to watching a "Stravinsky jam session" (Brown 2001, 218). The *Starsailor* project was short-lived, but the presence of the instrument, now dubbed the "electric stick," in the group marks an early instance of the instrument's voice in experimental musical situations.

The trajectory of Chapman's innovation is an example of a playing musician allowing an instrument to arise as a disclosive manifestation of his musical being-in-the-

world. As he worked to conceive the instrument, Chapman inhabited the "creative marginality" where the horizons of player and maker overlap (Bijsterfield and Schulp 2004, 667). His tapping innovation was dependant on the amplification conventions of the late 60s, and his harmonic approach was informed by the principles found in contemporary jazz. Chapman's experimentation with various tunings and designs of the instrument was, like reeds to a basket maker, an active exploration of piano chord voicing conventions, guitar design, and amplification possibilities woven into a coherent whole. Despite all the alterations he made to the thing itself as he explored various tuning possibilities, however, it was the change in gesture that brought the prototypical version of the Stick into being. This unique grain, in which electric strings are tapped by both hands as they approach the fretboard equally at right angles from both sides, allowed the Stick to manifest itself as a distinctive musical artifact.

The Early Adopters

Chapman filed his first two patent applications for the Stick in 1974 and 1975. During this time, Stick Enterprises was established to manufacture and distribute the instrument, making the Stick public. When production began, Chapman opted to alter the tuning of the bass side slightly in order to maximize the range of the instrument (figure 2.6).

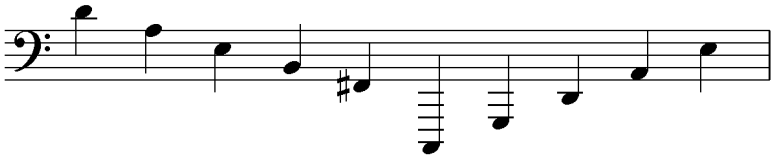

Figure 2.6 - Classic ten string tuning. All pitches at nut. The Stick's damping mechanism makes the first playable pitch one half step higher than pitch shown.

Chapman had already gained some notoriety as a solo performer in Los Angeles and New York, and Stick Enterprises came into existence primarily due to the excitement generated by his work. Raising public awareness of the Stick became part of the agenda of this small company.[3] Chapman himself introduced his instrument to the public on the celebrity game show "What's my Line." Musicians, producers, and engineers slowly began to become aware of the instrument through trade shows and ads and articles in guitar and bass magazines that admonished readers to "Put down the pick and pick up the Stick." Several high-profile musicians also experimented with the Stick: Josef Zawinul of Weather Report received an instrument in 1974 during one of the first production runs. The Stick, however, remained largely unknown to the community of professional musicians and, by extension, the general public.

In this regard, the influence of the session bassist Tony Levin on the diffusion of the Stick to its embryonic community should not be overlooked.[4] In 1976 Levin was

[3] Stick Enterprises is, and always has been, a small business. Even now, it has only five employees.

[4] In this context, I refer to visibility as the "quality of being known to an audience" (Slobin 1993: 17).

experimenting with tapping on the bass guitar, and a producer suggested that he try the Stick, as it was "made to do what he was doing." Levin subsequently introduced the instrument into his session work on a song-by-song basis. These recordings represent some of the first examples of the instrument appearing in recorded music. His recordings with Peter Gabriel played a significant role in widening the visibility of the instrument. The Stick first appeared on a Gabriel album in 1977 on a relatively obscure track called *Moribund the Burgermeister*. His association with Gabriel led him to become a member of Robert Fripp's progressive rock project King Crimson, whose 1981 release *Discipline* featured the Stick prominently. Many Stick players consider this recording to be one of the first "Stick albums." Additionally, and unbeknownst to the average listening public, Peter Gabriel's 1982 single *Shock the Monkey*, his first top 40 hit in the United States, prominently featured Levin's now-distinctive Stick voice.

Levin's work was and is both a boon and a bane for the instrument. Undoubtedly, he has done much for the instrument's visibility, and found a genre of music, progressive rock, within which it has garnered a level of acceptance. Levin, however, was never a self-described Stickist. He always considered himself to be a "bassist that played the Stick." He adopted it with the intention of adding it to his bass "arsenal," which included electric bass, full-size standup, and even tuba. Levin's grain, haunted as it is by the "ghost gestures" of his bass background, brought the Stick's bass voice to assume a central place in public perceptions. As a result, it is often stigmatized as a "bass with extra strings," and is usually expected to fill this role in an ensemble.

Additionally, due to Levin's influence, many of the instrument's early adopters come to the instrument with a bass background (myself included), and inadvertently perpetuate this preconception of the instrument.

Also, the Stick became primarily associated with progressive rock, which is itself a marginalized, and often maligned, style. While "prog-rock" often provides an atmosphere of experimentalism that coincides with the venturesome musical worldview that initially spawned Chapman's innovation, it also carries with it a stigma of excessiveness, pomposity, and intellectual elitism (Holm-Hudson 2002, 8; Walser 1992, 266). These preconceptions about the instrument have influenced the way in which it has been presented to the cultural mainstream and subsequently adopted. Pre-existing gender stereotypes surrounding the instruments that logically lead to the Stick, as well as the general racial profile of the progressive rock community, resulted in a community that is composed primarily, but not entirely, of Caucasian men over the age of 25.

In the case of Levin and other early adopters, exposure to the Stick was almost exclusively the result of first-hand, face-to-face contact rather than through mediation. A recording is an entirely different "thing" than an instrument in a live performance. Sound recordings are "split from their source through the chain of audio production, circulation, and consumption," and "open new possibilities whereby a place and a people can be recontextualized, rematerialized, and thus thoroughly reinvented" (Feld 1996, 13). On a recording, an instrument's voice is objectified, separated from its "thingly" nature, and "re-thinged." Perception, on the other hand, is a holistic

experience that includes modes of being in the world that overlap the auditory. As a result, it would be unusual for a listener, even one with access to musically informed ways of dwelling, to come to an awareness of the Stick's sound-body interface by way of a recording alone. Given awareness of the Stick's grain, however, the schizophonic recording can free the music from the sometimes dazzling processes of performance, presenting the music to the ear as itself. As the Stick world opens up, a musician can then embark on a kind of "musical detective work" to discover techniques of his or her own (Waksmann 2001, 93). Therefore, schizophonically decontextualized Stick performances play an important, but partial, role in the diffusion of the instrument.

The initially localized visibility of The Stick began to widen as it found its way into various recordings. Geographically dispersed communities often develop through the monological conduits of mass media (Slobin 1993, 17-18). Radio, TV, magazine articles and images, and other forms of mass communication provide decontextualized knowledge of an innovative technology so that opinions can be formed about its localized use (Rogers 2003, 18). Stick players frequently adopt the instrument at the junctures of these mediums. Although mass media has the potential to widen visibility and access, it also exploits as it commodifes (Jenkins 62, 2006). For example, In the 60s, the "electric guitar" had gained significance as an identity marker of resistance and independence. In twenty years time, however, it came to be known simply as "the" guitar: a bourgeois, imitatable commodity (Waksman 2001, 279).

In its early history, the Stick appealed to the "romantic conception of the artist as a heroic individual whose freedom of imagination permits him to transgress or transcend the constraints of everyday life" (Waksman, 243). The Stick's futuristic and novel design also imparted it with a "cool" factor that promised to distinguish its adopters from the imposed conformity of traditional instruments. Some early adopters believed that the instrument would "be their ticket" to finding a unique artistic voice in the commodified popular music landscape. Others felt that the Stick had the potential to "change the world" by providing an entirely new realm of musical expression. While it is possible that new musical instruments can provide a basis for "a utopian reconceptualization of musical order," this possibility cannot be realized by the instrument-as-object (Attali 1985, 265). The Stick-as-object was, and in some ways still is, little more than a virtuosic fetish and an identity symbol for musical resistance.

The playing of an instrument is more than a mere marker, however, "it is the individual's conquest of his own body and potentials" (Attali 1985, 135). If virtuosity is a conquering of the body, requiring that the player attend to and dwell within the grain, growing the skills necessary to embody instrumental potentials is not instantaneous: it takes time and attention. Mere ownership of an instrument as a commodity does not cause skills to grow. It was nearly fifteen years of dwelling within the Stick's grain before the creator of the instrument reached the public apex of his technique. By the mid-eighties, Chapman's live performances had become increasingly technical and harmonically complex. One of his few recordings, *Parallel Galaxy*, was released in 1985

and is a testament to this period. Other musicians that adopted the Stick early in its history would also take more than a decade to see their technique come to fruition through the cultural conduits that were then available.

Stick Tablature

As the Stick was reaching a wider audience through a combination of media and first-hand experience, it was also necessary for its "software," its technique, to reach the instrument's adopters.[5] Chapman's tablature system played a key role in this endeavor. Chapman introduced his system in *Free Hands*, his 1974 instruction manual for the Stick. Stick tablature is characterized by four shapes, circle, diamond, triangle, and square, which correspond to the index, middle, ring and pinky fingers, respectively (figure 2.7). Open notes indicate chord and scale roots. These symbols are then superimposed onto a representation of the fretboard (figure 2.8). Once decoded, this tablature shows how the player's fingers can navigate potential scales and chords within the fretboard's geography (figure 2.9).

Figure 2.7 – Finger/shape relationship in Stick tablature as found in *Free Hands* (1974). Used by permission.

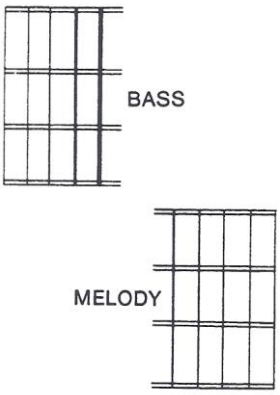

Figure 2.8 – Fretboard frames for bass and melody side as found in *Free Hands* (1974). Used by permission.

[5] Rogers refers to hardware as "the tool that embodies the technology as a material or physical object," and software as "the information base of the tool" (2003: 13).

Chapman's tablature was purposefully open-ended in order to minimize his stylistic influence on a particular player's interpretation of the Stick's voice. He intended to allow the instrument to speak for itself in the various contexts in which it found itself. For this reason, he provided very little in the way of specifically notated exercises in *Free Hands*. The tablature is, however, efficient at relating specific Stick technical issues as they relate to gesturally navigating the fretboard's geography. As a result, the finger-shape tablature has become standard in the Stick community and can be found in one form or another in many Stick publications, such as Chris Crain's *The Sticktionary* (2003) and *The Stick Book* by Greg Howard (1997). Howard, who has a background in saxophone and piano, began playing the Stick in 1985 and has since proven to be a particularly active pedagogue in the community.

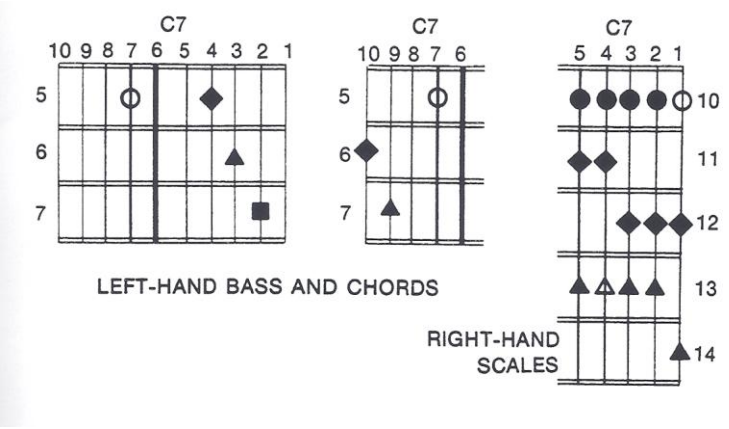

Figure 2.9 – Examples of Stick tablature as it appears in *Free Hands* (1974). Used by permission.

In *The Stick Book*, Howard collaborated with Chapman to form a compelling variation on Stick finger-shape tablature that incorporates its conventions into a notation system. The resulting "StaffTab" (fig. 2.10) expresses not only fingerings, but also note values on a grand staff.

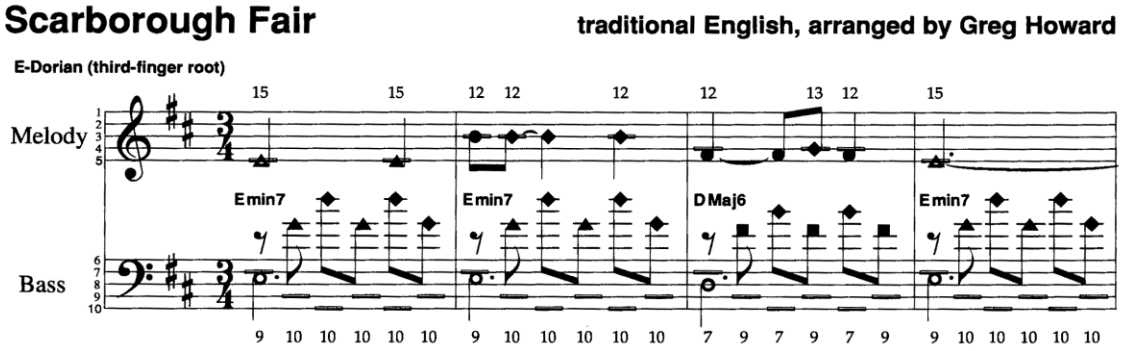

Figure 2.10 - An example of StaffTab as it appears in Greg Howard's *The Stick Book* (1997). Used by permission.

This system preserves the specific digital information of its predecessor within a clear theoretical Western framework, providing a medium for relating Stick pedagogy and repertoire. Further orientation on the fretboard assists in familiarizing the player with notational standards. Fret numbers above the melody and below the bass staff give clear indications as to where the notes should lie on the fretboard. An additional layer exists in the correlation between staff lines and strings. In StaffTab, the staff itself becomes a representation of the fretboard. Each line on the staff represents a string on either side of the Stick, with the right hand in the treble and the left in the bass. Marks on the staff graphically situate notes within the spatial and temporal relationships in which they occur.

The Cultivation of Stick Pidgin

As an adopter of the instrument, I initially attempted to develop my idiosyncratic sound/body interface on the Stick without any interaction at all from other stickists.

The successes and frustrations of this experience brought me to eventually engage the virtual Stick scene. Using *Free Hands* as my primary resource, it was my initial intention to construct my own personal Stick style by cross-referencing a wide variety of resources. I relied heavily on drumset and percussion rudiment books to provide a rhythmic framework for Chapman's open-ended tablature. I also spent some time working on piano music, but I found that reading notes exactly as written caused technical problems in my left hand. Closely voiced thirds were difficult to play in the fifths tuning, and constantly inverting thirds in the left hand required a significant amount of spontaneous reinterpretation. I eventually found myself simply reading chord symbols when they were available. This led me to use lead sheets, which were open-ended enough to allow me to utilize the Stick-appropriate chord voicings suggested in *Free Hands*. I arranged several non-Stick songs for the instrument during this period using chords printed from the Internet and recordings I had in my library.

Concurrently with my initial exploration of the Stick, I was teaching full-time at a public school. My "pet project" at the school was the jazz program, and over the years I had built up a couple of ability-based ensembles. In my second year of working with the Stick, I found myself short a bass player in my second group and took on this role (for the kids, of course). I worked through my own pedagogy which had, at its core, Steinel's *Essential Elements for Jazz Ensemble* (2001). In comparison to my experiences on a traditional electric bass, I found significant challenges playing walking bass lines in the fifths tuning. Executing a minor second across strings required a quick hand, accuracy,

and quite a bit of concentration; avoiding these physical skips caused my left hand to run into my comping right hand as I slid up and down a single string. The next year, the group needed a lead trumpet and pianist. I repeated the pedagogy, treating the first trumpet book like a lead sheet. This forced me to look at aspects of playing the instrument with which I, as a trombonist and bassist, had not previously "bodied."

When I began pursuing graduate work, I initially looked for an institution that would allow me to study the Stick, but most schools offered little explicit academic support in this endeavor. UNT's ethnomusicology program offered the Cross-Cultural Indian Ensemble, a performance group that had an open-ended instrumentation, and I studied in this group for several semesters. I also became a frustrated fixture in various jazz improvisation classes. In this environment, I gained some comfort with the blues, ii-V-I progressions, and the jazz conventions that are associated with improvisation in these harmonic environments. I learned to improvise over several jazz standards, such as *Bag's Groove*, *Equinox*, and *Ornithology*. Undoubtedly, this experience improved my overall approach to the instrument, and opened up an improvisatory voice in my playing, but it became apparent that I could not technically keep up with UNT's jazz pedagogy. With barely three years of self-directed experience on the Stick, it probably was not realistic to think that I could keep up with experienced students on culturally accepted instruments in their adopted style.

Additionally, my role as a stickist in a traditional jazz combo was ambiguous. When I began working in improvisation classes I decided to work in the melody side,

simply because, relating to the strings as a bassist, I was unsure as to the role that my right hand was to play in my budding style. As I explored this approach, I developed an improvisational voice in my right hand and a standard set of left hand accompaniment patterns voiced in the characteristically wide chord shells that were immediately available on the Stick. When I was playing solo, this relationship, although repetitive, worked adequately. In an ensemble situation, however, it was most usual for me to function in the rhythm section as a bass player, as it was the role with which I had the most familiarity. I had grown enough technique to walk a functional bass line while comping very simple chord shells with my right hand, but I found that I had difficulty maintaining an independent solo in the right hand without sacrificing characteristic walking bass movement in the left. The bass line would become static when my soloing voice came out in the right hand, and any movement in the bass would freeze the soloistic melody. I gained some proficiency in working around this issue by trading licks between the two hands, but the musical results of this compromise raised a few perplexed eyebrows over the eyes of some of the more traditionally-minded faculty.

I began to wonder if the Stick was better suited to play the role of the keyboardist in a traditional jazz ensemble, where melody and harmony interacted more freely. This approach required an entirely different pedagogic arc than I had been chasing, and one with which I had little first-hand background. It could have potentially freed my left hand from its bass duties, but required quite a bit of creative

interpretation of jazz keyboard texts. My initial explorations in this direction seemed prohibitively difficult from a technical standpoint.

As I was examining these possibilities in the context of one of my improvisation classes, the instructor commented that he "just couldn't hear my voice on the instrument," a statement that I knew to be painfully true. Despite my intention to develop a sound-body relationship with the instrument by cross-referencing a wide variety of resources and placing this technical knowledge in various musical situations, in the end I was no closer to bringing the instrument 's voice to speak clearly in the contexts within which I was playing. Later, for my final evaluation, the same instructor wrote "if you want to find enlightenment, you have to find a guru." This instructor's advice says quite a bit about the issues that surround marginalized instruments. Although I received generous support from the jazz faculty, no one on staff had personally grown a bodily expertise on the Stick. Their auditory knowledge of jazz convention could discern when I was playing in a characteristic style, but they could only make suggestions on how to physically access more appropriate sounds when I was not.

The horizons of my "Stick world" were becoming increasingly self-imposed, and I began to feel as if I had learned to play some music on the instrument rather than the music that was inherently in the instrument. All of my arrangements and interpretations were beginning to sound like the tricks I had learned to adapt to the environments into which I had thrown the Stick. It had become impossible for me to tell if these solutions were appropriate ways of interpreting the styles on the Stick or if they

were merely shortcuts, ways of getting around technical issues that I did not have the patience to disentangle. Without a teacher to offer suggestions based on first-hand experience, it was difficult to tell. In a sense, I had vernacularized a musical Stick pidgin, created from a pastiche of technique: a self-directed post-modern pedagogy that would only take me so far. This situation forced me to conclude that, contrary to the usual quick description of the instrument, the Stick was not a "bass and guitar at the same time." Approaching it from disparate and perhaps irrelevant pedagogies could lead to frustration. Instead, it was an instrument that had to be played in a way that was appropriate and feasible for its possibilities. For lack of a regular, local teacher to give my playing some direction, I began to interact in the virtual spaces of the online Chapman Stick community.

CHAPTER 3

THE HORIZONS OF THE STICK SCENE

Examining the Virtual Scene

The Chapman Stick is circumscribed by technology. The instrument itself relies on electric amplification technology to produce sound, and has historically depended on media for its continued acceptance. In its current manifestation, this technological world includes the virtual realms of the Internet. The impact of this often hyperreal environment on everyday life is still revealing itself.[1] Virtual anthropology, though poised to examine this emerging cultural setting, is wrought with issues. In particular, identity formation is pliable on the Internet. Online identities are glamorously created and projected, creating another layer of interpretation in ethnographic representation. Additionally, the technologies that mobilize these creations are constantly evolving. Over the course of my experience in the online scene, and in this study, the uses and proclivities of the scene have changed dramatically. Even in this techno-media slipstream, however, "research that focuses on social processes and emerging communicative practices" can be of use (Wilson and Peterson 2002, 453).

Studies about online scenes such as Lee and Patterson's *Music Scenes* (2004) were initially the template for this study. This volume utilized the term "scene" in place of "subculture" to discourage the presumption that a "society has one commonly shared

[1] Hyperreality is "an artificial reality… but is not a poor substitute. It surpasses traditional and natural reality in brilliance, richness, and pliability" (Borgmann 1992: 83)

culture from which the subculture is deviant," and that "all of the participant's actions are governed by subcultural standards" (3). Using the P2 listserv as an organizing principle, they examined the interactions of its members to compare and contrast them with scenes associated with physical spaces and musical genres. Following in their footsteps, I began my research on the listserv Stickwire, in search the of scene's role in shaping the grain of its geographically dispersed members. I found that, similar to the Lee and Peterson study, members of the Stick scene have levels of participation depending on their particular level of involvement in the community. There is often intense discussion about musical styles, and often the virtual scene coalesces into local manifestations (191-196).

In contrast, however, it is the express intention of the members of the scene to promote the Stick and its players. The overwhelming majority of participants are more than fans; they are adopters of the Stick. A few of these participants are professional musicians, but many are amateurs looking for a unique and novel venue through which to find musical expression and identity. One regular poster noted that it "takes a certain amount of courage" to play the Stick and this shared understanding of the difficulties presented by the instrument tends to keep the overall tone of the scene positive. Additionally, either due to changes in the technology since the Lee and Peterson study, the technological savvy of the Stick community, or a combination of both, the research spilled beyond its initial boundaries.

Stickists who are active in the online scene employ a constellation of resources that interact to form their online identity. Hyperlinks, text, and embeddable content centrifugally point out to and centripetally draw in these resources, forming an autonomous ecosystem of self-generated identity. Stickists who represent themselves in this online ecosystem do not represent the entirety of the Stick community, as there are many active stickists who are not involved in the virtual scene. The methods of self-representation of the contributing members, however, seem to comfortably fall within the boundaries of participatory culture, in which "fans and other consumers are invited to participate in the creation of new content" (Burgess and Green 2009, 10). Participating in the scene by uploading, viewing, commenting on, or creating content constitutes a form of cultural citizenship (57, 78). Despite the diversity of the scene due to the myriad vestigial ghost gestures that haunt its participants, graining the Stick is subtly normalized via the collective activities and judgments of the social network (Behnke 1997, 188; Burgess and Green 2009, 61). This scene has its own history that has developed alongside the Stick since the advent of publicly available Internet in the mid-90s.

The Flatness of Text

As early as 1993, players of the Stick began to experience a trickle of solidarity due to the emergence of listservs. These were automated e-mail lists, and by subscribing to the list, a member could send a message to other subscribers, who could then in turn respond. The capacity for dialogue in this retrospectively simple format

marked a major turning point in the progression of the instrument. Listervs did not initially make the community any larger, but they did open up conduits for discourse between geographically dispersed players. As these conduits opened, the Stick community suddenly realized that it was global. This newfound sense of cohesion provided opportunities for mid-90s stickists to connect. For the first time, it became possible for stickists to talk to other players in their hometown and beyond for discussion and support. For example, Simon Quinn, a stickist based in the Oregon area, came into contact with an experienced player based in New Jersey, who agreed to provide lessons by correspondence, in the mid-90s Internet. Quinn's lessons were recorded on one side of a tape he would receive through the mail. He would then record his responses on the other side and mail it back for evaluation. The turnaround for this exchange was roughly a month.

The listserv is still a vital and active component of the current Stick scene. The Stickwire listserv went online in 1995, and has since provided a virtual space for stickists to collaborate and connect. Because it is a subscription-only, email-based resource, Stickwire feels like a personalized and private interaction between its members. Conversely, the website www.stickist.com serves as a publicly centralized nexus. Stickist.com started out as five web pages in April, 2002, and has gone through "numerous evolutionary stages shaped by the needs of the community" (stickist.com portal introduction, 2009). Stickists engage this site as a stable, searchable resource. According to moderator Manny Tau, the forums at stickist.com are the primary feature

of the site. Activity is "catalyzed by current events," such as "seminars, new music coming out, receipt of instruments [and] new equipment."[2] Tau continues: "The main dynamic I've seen on the forums is that of mentoring. Many people are very willing to share, coach, and most often, cheer each other on. I believe this has been the foundation of the community's environment." Mentoring is evident in both the public forums of stickist.com and the more private e-mail interactions of Stickwire. The majority of online stickists seem willing to help others out by addressing inquiries into tuning, instrument care, new amplifiers, effect pedals, and so on.

When I first began posting on stickist.com and Stickwire, however, my inquiries into playing in the swing style were answered very briefly and vaguely. They certainly did not seem to catalyze nearly as much discussion as IPhone applications, computer software, and the recordings of Jeff Beck. This was, in retrospect, an issue with the medium itself. The grain represents an embodied practice that the flat, text-based format of the listserv and the forum in its early stages were ill-equipped to convey (Lee and Patterson 2004, 191). Purely textual communication obscures the intercorporeal interactions that occur within the body-sound interface as the stickist and the Stick interact. This is rather like explaining how to tie a knot using only verbal description or sequential art (Ingold 2000, 357). The current ecosystem of the Stick scene, however, is significantly different than it was just a few years ago. The rising use and popularity of

[2] Information concerning www.stickist.com is derived from e-mail exchanges with Manny Tau that occurred in August 2009.

networking sites such as MySpace and YouTube has dramatically changed the way that stickists represent themselves in the online environment.

The Changing Ecosystem

MySpace went online in August, 2003, just as broadband was becoming widely available to the public. The site's open-ended, seemingly unmonitored, and voyeuristic approach to social networking was widely controversial. The traditional media portrayed it as a breeding ground for pedophiles and pornographic advertising. For self-promoting musicians, however, the freedom to create and promote an online identity to a rapidly growing community was a benefit, especially as the music industry was scrambling for a newly relevant model. MySpace's designers became aware of its potential to play a role in the emerging music mediascape. By the end of 2004, the site embedded a streaming player that allowed musicians to upload MP3s for free (Angwin 2009).

Although MySpace has declined somewhat in popularity in recent years for a myriad of reasons, the potential for self-promotion inherent in the site is still an important component of the Stick scene's ecosystem. Essentially, it is a user-friendly resource that stickists use to post their recordings. Many players on Stickwire have their own domain names and their sites invariably have MP3s available. A personal website requires a certain commitment of time and finance, however, as well as a minimum level of digital literacy. MySpace provides a free and easy way to post the recorded

output of various stickists that is linkable through a URL to the site, as well as a built-in network of potential fans both inside and outside of the Stick scene.

Within the boundaries of MySpace, stickists often "friend" one another, forming a system that mirrors the connections found on Stickwire and stickist.com. Depending upon how active a given stickist is in the scene, he or she may announce gigs, post MP3s, or provide information on how to obtain recordings through their MySpace page. In other cases, the site is treated as a stable resource on the individual player much like the role that stickist.com plays in the larger scene. It is not, however, a particularly active place for discourse on the instrument. Despite the existence of groups dedicated to the Stick, stickists do not post information on MySpace as openly as they do on Stick-dedicated sites. Members who are active on MySpace often direct serious discussion towards Stickwire or stickist.com.

MySpace's overall contribution to the community has been an important enhancement, but it has not redefined the way in which its members interact. The biggest "game changer" in the online Stick scene has been the rise in popularity and use of YouTube. In my early experience, the Stick was a musical chimera. Finding video footage of one being played was rare, and seeing one played live was a privileged experience. YouTube has changed this dramatically. The curious and the interested can now find an immense amount of footage of people playing the Stick and explaining its principles. YouTube's explicit goal is to allow its users to "broadcast themselves." It

is not primarily a social networking site, but its members can subscribe to other member's channels, and receive notices when new video is uploaded.

Channels frequently serve as a place for online performances, where stickists perform for a virtual audience with their studios, living rooms, and studies in the background. In keeping with the open-ended mindset expounded in Chapman's *Free Hands* book, there is still a significant amount of emphasis placed on cultivating individual styles, so stickists rarely post performances of other players' repertoire (Chapman 1974). Instead, original streaming video, live performances, MP3s and CD releases are openly supported by the community, in the very least by offering words of encouragement, congratulations, or appreciation. Other times, players support each other by purchasing recordings and reviewing them through various venues in the scene. In virtual performances, the instrument itself often takes center stage, while the heads and feet of the players are out of the camera frame. In January of 2009, Folksinger, a septuagenarian Stick player that lives in Cairo, announced the addition of his first Stick video to his rather eclectic channel. His performance focused entirely on his hands and the fretboard. He was commended strongly by the scene for "putting it out there." He has since posted several more Stick videos to his channel, including one in which he improvises with an Oud.

In addition to virtual performances, more experienced and visible stickists also include Stick lessons on their channels. YouTube lessons often have a clearly stated pedagogy in which the teacher breaks down the components of a technique with the

intent of allowing the viewer to incorporate them into practice. These lessons are a far cry from the correspondence lessons that Quinn engaged in during the 90s. Responses to lessons can be posted in the form of video, and the lag time that is involved is certainly less than a month turnaround. Additionally, they contain visual as well as auditory information, allowing the player to see and hear the teacher's grain as the body interacts with the instrument. YouTube lessons are not, however, fully interactive or dialogic, and often they focus on idiosyncratic techniques that interest the teacher. Additionally, the principle of free enterprise that undergirds capitalistic ideology limits the prevalence of these exchanges. While the more visible teachers in the community strongly support and promote the Stick, the lack of compensation for YouTube lessons makes them less common than performance videos.

Longtime members of the Stick community are ambivalent about the impact of streaming video and YouTube. Interaction in this format is more dialogic, but is not simultaneous. Sound quality is still an issue, and one that is sometimes a point of critical discussion. More importantly, the prevalence of user-posted video has greatly expanded the visibility and accessibility of the instrument, but has also served to "demystify" the Stick, challenging its novelty in some respects. More experienced players also express concern over the anonymity that YouTube and streaming video afford. In the early days of the instrument, active stickists would often surmount significant obstacles to interact with each other. Information concerning the community was distributed through postcards and newsletters, and seminars were

attended by a relatively small group of highly invested participants. As a result, many of the stickists from this era knew each other well. Stickists in the virtual scene can participate at any level that they see fit, which allows a level of involvement appropriate for the casual Stick hobbyist. Although it is currently possible to contact virtually any stickist anywhere any time, a player can choose not to participate and still gain access to information found in the more public aspects of the scene.

Interactions within the Ecosystem

While it may be the case that it is now less work for members of the Stick scene to connect with one another, it might be risky to assume that the Stick community is less unified than it was before the existence of the present virtual ecosystem. Connections exist internationally that are both professional and personal, and are maintained in ways that were unimaginable in the scene's previous incarnations. In one case, a Stickwire discussion about a newly released bass amp floated off its initial topic as several members began to reminisce about a bass shop that they had frequented before adopting the Stick. After a thread of respectable length with many exchanges, two posters agreed to meet at the shop to try out the amp. Another called the store and decided to purchase the amp without actually trying it out, entirely due to the pleasant experiences he had in the thread, on the phone, and with the manager of the store.

Connections such as these are maintained through participation in the listserv, in some cases across considerable physical distance. For example, in April of 2009, a 5.2

magnitude earthquake hit Italy, and a stickist was residing close to the epicenter. Boles, who lives in Canada, became concerned about her safety. Checking in on Stickwire, he found that Chapman himself had been the first to voice concern, asking if anyone had heard from or seen her. Several postings followed, revealing quite a bit of unease until one of the members made contact and confirmed her safety. Later, she checked back in herself. While the exchange occurred in a matter of hours in real time, for Boles, it was virtually instantaneous.

Boles' initial reaction to post to Stickwire indicates the role of the listserv in the Stick scene. Its e-mail based discussions serve as an announcement of when and how things in the Stick community change, be that a friendly question about how someone is doing or when a new instrument model is released. While specific topics may be catalyzed by current events, there is a consistent background of announcements concerning CD releases, YouTube postings, new recordings by Stick players, and upcoming gigs. Even when these announcements are not explicit, many participants use a digital signature, which automatically adds personal hypertexted links to websites, MySpace listings, and YouTube channels to the end of every message. Linked hypertext provides the opportunity for much more information about playing the instrument than is initially apparent. While streaming video channels play a significant role, a posted audio track also opens up considerable possibilities for the body of the aware player. In the absence of any models for tapping in the immediate environment, the stickist has a corporeal perception of 'Stick Music' due to a corporeal conception of its musical

possibilities (Kohut 1985, 62). In effect, every Stickwire posting has the potential to contain one or more clickable links that centripetally organizes aspects of the poster's virtual identity to a knowledgeable community.

These new technologies are quickly displacing the previous media's role, sidestepping a few degrees of corporate hegemony in the process. When I first received my instrument, I purchased the VHS tape *Stick Night 99*. I watched this video many times as I was learning to play the instrument, hoping to gain some insight into how the various players were graining on the Stick. I often wondered why more videos like this have not been released by Stick Enterprises, as these events occur with some regularity. In March of 2009, however, another Stick Night was held in California, and many of Stickwire's participants requested that any available footage be posted, rather than released on VHS or DVD. YouTube postings of this sort have displaced officially sanctioned Stick videos in the years since I first received my instrument. It is much more cost-effective for an authorized representative of Stick Enterprises to record the performances digitally and post them on YouTube than it is to produce and distribute VHS or DVD.

The forums on stickist.com draw these postings and others like them together into a single resource. "Enhancing the textual aspect of the forum content . . . is the enhanced modifications to include multimedia to showcase music. Videos and audio files can be embedded into posts, as opposed to external links, for an easy and fluid end user experience" (Manny Tau, personal e-mail to author, August 26, 2009). YouTube

postings are embeddable either through coding or link and, because of this, stickist.com looks and functions much differently than it did three years ago. The scene's active participation in the creation of new content within various audiovisual resources is centrifugally drawn into the forums of stickist.com. Members often embed videos and upload recordings for self-promotion and discussion, providing an experiential layer that was not previously available the scene's earlier iterations. By navigating the centrifugal character of stickist.com with the centripetal nature of Stickwire, the individual members of the Stick scene construct a multifaceted, hyperreal identity, allowing them to simultaneously inhabit the role of the audience and the performer, the star and the fan, the teacher and the student.

Hierarchy and the Seminar Tradition

As its participants inhabit these polarized roles, it may be tempting to view the Stick scene as egalitarian, where all viewpoints are equally valued. Hierarchy is present in the community, however, and its members defer to the authority of those that are more experienced and active. This "brain trust" has the latitude to post on a broad range of topics, sometimes with only a tangential relevance to the Stick (Jenkins 2006, 38). Experienced, visible stickists sometimes participate in Stickwire as a medium for lightheartedly blogging about gigs, coffee, doughnuts, bowling, and museums. At other times, they fiercely defend the boundaries of the Stick community when it is brought under criticism or challenged. Most often, however, these participants make their perspectives and experience available to the scene to enrich the knowledge base of the

community. Several of these experienced members serve as teachers and clinicians, and have resources that range from the online text-based lesson enhanced with Stick tablature and streaming audio to the YouTube lesson video.

The emerging technology of Skype, however, has produced an increased level of interaction. At the suggestion of a poster on stickist.com, a few experienced stickists announced their intention to start teaching lessons through Skype, payable through a PayPal account, in the fall of 2008. This format seemingly brings its members one step closer to the full dialogue seen in more traditional musical transmission. Despite the increased interconnectivity afforded by these recent technologies, however, participation in the scene is still, in some regards, a flattened encounter. Lee and Patterson describe interactions in the virtual scene as "flat, in that it consists of words on paper and the images they can conjure" (Patterson and Bennett 191, 2004). In the current ecosystem, with its increasing reliance on streaming audiovisual technology, this description seems outdated. Television, however, itself becoming outdated, is a flattened projection of world that abolishes the remoteness of the represented. If television frantically "abolishes distance while bringing no nearness," the Internet truly brings that which is far near, and that which is near far, ensuring that "everything gets lumped into uniform distancelessness" of pixels and resolution (Heidegger 1971, 164).

Virtuality, however, does seem to induce a sense of presence. Skype teachers recount waking up in the middle of the night for a lesson with a stickist in mid-day Australia, or teaching a soldier stationed in the Iraqi desert followed by an Alaskan

student whose window reveals snow in the background, all without ever leaving the confines of their studio. Telepresence, the experience of a presence "here" of personae "there," is not unique to the online environment. Online moving images seem to transmit experiential traces of the actual individuals they represent, however, and their increased preponderance on the Internet creates a deeper layer of involvement into the virtual world (Hillis 2009, 67). Virtuality allows individuals to inhabit their representations, and in many ways reifies mind/body dualism by projecting the *cogito* without recourse to the "true materiality of the digital trace:" the body (Hillis, 265). It is because of this digital trace that online Stick resources readily converge on promoting the face-to-face environment of the Stick seminar.

In their discussion of local, translocal, and virtual scenes, Lee and Peterson point out that the boundaries between the three levels are fluid, and often feed into one another. The Stick scene provides a global locale in which local seminars can be organized and advertised. Seminars provide direct opportunities for the Stick to speak for itself, in its own voice, through embodied performance rather than textual discussion. Stickist.com promotes these events, sometimes using highly visible banner ads, and Stickwire announces relevant dates, discusses possible topics for upcoming seminars, and reminisces about past seminars. News about seminars also travels in less exclusive circles, like on Facebook and MySpace. These first-hand events are condensations of the Stick scene, in which stickists engage in the unique opportunity to play with and around other players of all levels of experience. Aside from the private

lesson, they were the first format in which the instrument's unique grain was propagated. Stickists often feel that seminar attendance is a necessary step in becoming a serious player. They also provide opportunities for the members of the community to be in the embodied presence of other stickists, an environment that is pregnant with implications for the grain. Navigating the constellation of resources of the online Stick scene, I made arrangements to attend a seminar in the summer of 2009. The experience had a profound impact on both my study and my playing; an impact that could not have occurred without my involvement in the online environment.

CHAPTER 4

BEING IN THE SEMINAR

Getting There

Having arrived in Vancouver in May of 2009 feeling more than a little self-conscious with Stick in hand, I was looking forward to the potential insights that my first Stick seminar might have on my playing, which was, admittedly, not at its apex. The seminar was scheduled right in the middle of selling a house and moving to Austin, as well as getting married. Coupled with the usual time constraints presented by writing and research, my practice time had been minimal. I did not particularly feel much like a stickist, but some Stickwire posters feel that, even after years of playing, they only began to make real progress on the instrument after attending one of these seminars. I hoped this experience, this live interaction with other stickists, would jump-start my playing in new directions.

Stick seminars occur several times a year internationally, but during my Stick career, I had never attended one. Most often, seminars are epitomized by two to three days of intense study with one or more renowned stickists acting as clinicians. I had been in regular contact with various people in preparation for the seminar, but Tim Boles, who was its principal organizer, had been my primary point of contact. Boles had provided me with information about accommodations and tried to put me in contact with another attendee through Stickwire to share the cost of a room. All of our

interactions, however, occurred either online or over the phone. I had been involved in the online community but I had not had face-to-face communication with anyone at the seminar and probably could not recognize most of the attendees if I were to meet them out of context. I had, however, saved all of the relevant numbers in my phone and assured Boles that I would contact him if I had any trouble; an assurance made completely irrelevant when I left my cell phone on the nightstand of my friend's guest room in Dallas.

After arriving in Vancouver and checking in the hotel room, I copied the directions from Google maps and, lugging my Stick clumsily in its flight case, I set off on foot forty-five minutes early for a ten-minute walk. Previously, at the airport, the Stick drew the attention of security, and in the elevator, a person, judging by the shape and size of the flight case, respectably estimated that it was a trombone. As I traversed several city blocks to the site, the hard case's awkwardness reminded me of the days of walking home from middle school, switching my trombone case uncomfortably from one hand to the other. At that time in my life, the case brought forth preconceived notions in the people around me as to what I did and how I saw the world. Although its function was little more than to protect the instrument, I endured some ridicule from others due to its seemingly constant presence. Superficially, the function of the Stick's flight case is no different, but the thing that it protects is unknown. Because it protects, the containing that it performs is not assumed to be empty; there is something inside to be protected by being so enclosed. For those experiencing its external aspect alone,

that precious thing which is enclosed is presented within the context of the experiencer's particular world. The hunter might assume that I am carrying a valued gun collection, while the sportsman might visualize a set of expensive golf clubs. While residing in its case, my instrument has been mistaken for all of these and more in the past.

It seems that more often than not, however, the case is seen as that for a musical instrument. When I was close to the site, I stopped at a Starbuck's for breakfast and was served by an inquisitive barista. After some discussion, I opened it to show her the instrument inside. She became quite fascinated by the Stick, recalling her own musical experiences as a french horn player in school, as well as her current interest in singing and songwriting on guitar. I noticed a hint of deference in her interactions with me after looking at the instrument, and I wondered if her enthusiasm would have been the same if opening the case had revealed a trombone, or a bass clarinet. Our discussion might have stopped at her school experiences, or they might have taken a different tone altogether. Over the course of our brief interaction, it became apparent that as a person who had experience bodying musical things and the worlds that they circumscribe, she was able to recognize that the Stick referred to a way of dwelling.

Carrying the Stick within non-Stick circles has the potential to open up musical worlds, a trend that would thankfully continue. Nearly forty minutes later, I found myself on foot and lost in suburbia. I was standing in the middle of the street, hands cramping, looking back and forth for an address that corresponded to the one I had

written down. A person came out of her house and, spotting my flight case, asked if I was "looking for some musicians." I eagerly said yes, and she suggested that the people across the street, who live in the downstairs apartment, have a studio in back. I went through an unlocked gate to find this studio locked. The downstairs apartment was open, however, and I could hear the sounds of a television. With no small amount of exasperation, I called down. A couple came out, and I breathlessly explained my situation in the simplest of terms that I could muster: "I'm lost, I'm doing research, I play an unusual instrument, can I use your Internet and phone?"

This married couple was in town visiting their son, who was still asleep. When they saw the instrument and understood what I was doing, they woke up both the son and his roommate. These two were, indeed, musicians that had booked time at Bryan Adams' studio later in the day. Both of them knew of the Stick, and the son, a guitarist, had heard about the seminar. As I checked my directions and contact information on their computer, they invited me down to the studio if time permitted, and I promised to let them know if an opportunity arose for them to see any Stick performances related to the seminar. When I had sorted out my directions, I asked if I could call a cab, but the couple offered to drive me to the seminar site, despite being from out of town. Together, in their SUV, we sorted out the incongruous information provided by GPS and street signs and, about thirty minutes late, I arrived at the site.

I had called ahead, and Boles came out to greet me as I arrived. As I entered the studios, the seminar was already in progress, and, in hushed tones, he asked me to

remind him how long I had been playing. I told him that I had owned a Stick for severa; years, and he grinned. He restated his question, this time emphasizing how long I had "played," because "owning" a Stick and "playing" a Stick was not the same thing. I was now firmly in the Stick world, where it was assumed that the instrument-as-object had begun to recede and reveal the Stick-as-thing. I said that I played pretty actively for a few years, but that I was currently a little rusty. Based on my cautious self-assessment, he placed me in the beginner group with seven other people, three of which had never laid hands on a Stick before the seminar. This proved to be fortuitous, as I had the sustained opportunity to see players interact with the instrument for the first time, when it is at its most objective.

In Class

Figure 4.1 – A group photo of the seminar participants, including the author second from the left in the back row. (photo by anonymous)

The seminar had been moved from its previous site due to a scheduling conflict, and was being held at a multi-room studio. This facility was under construction, and there were several rooms that were little more than drywall and concrete, but the room in which the beginner class met was much closer to completion. The walls were wood, and were carved and stained with references to First Nations art. When I entered, Greg Howard and the students were all standing in a circle around a PA board. I could clearly hear the sounds of the intermediate/advanced class ringing through the walls, but in this room, none of the participants had their instruments on. I had hopefully not missed too much.

The first classes were intended to address the initial experience with the instrument by explicitly pointing out the body's role in sound production. To begin, there was a map of the Stick fretboard outlining the notes of the D minor pentatonic scale in front of each student. Using this as a reference we were asked to visualize a larger version of the map on the floor, and at the direction of the clinician, we would physically hop from various "home base" notes. It was pointed out that, in hopping, the body's movement was not led by the feet, but with the body's natural weight. This approach was the beginning of a somatic pedagogy of gesture that would become relevant for Stick sound production.

Howard related this sensation of relaxed hopping to the hands using large movements from the elbow. His hands moved up and down the torso to touch his shoulder, then his thigh. Initially, he moved both hands in the same direction, but other

variations required movements in opposite directions, and in rhythmically opposed patterns of twos and threes. These became increasingly challenging, and several students began to struggle in their execution as the complexity increased. Following this, and after some suggestions on how to wear the Stick, we expanded on the gross movements of these exercises by applying them to the fretboard. Initially, we slid the hands up and down the fretboard in various combinations with little regard for specific pitches, but this movement was soon refined into smaller gestures as we began to play melodic fragments. This conception of playing the Stick was a major point in the first beginner classes that came to be an overriding concept throughout the rest of the seminar and my practice since.

When I began to reinhabit my left hand earlier in my practice, as described in chapter 1, I would warm up by placing my palm against a flat surface. Using rudiments I pulled from percussion books, I would strike my fingers against the surface in time with a metronome, working towards creating maximum volume from this movement. I would then transfer this sensation to the instrument, anchoring my thumb to the back bevel of the fretboard. Later, in the course of my studies in South Indian styles, I asked my teacher, Poorvalour Srijivanisan, about how he used his fingers when he played *mridangam*. Without his drum, he held his hand over the edge of a desk and struck its surface with astonishing power and relaxation. The impact sounded like the desk had been struck by a hammer, and made my finger rudiments seem like the drumming of an anxious student. The power behind this movement was not generated from his fingers

alone, but by a compound movement that emanated from his shoulder, though his elbow and wrist, and out his fingers. At the time, I was astounded, and thought that this approach might have some relevance to Stick playing, but I had difficulty executing it exactly in the same form on the fretboard without a dramatic loss of accuracy. This was another seeming dead end that, had I been involved in the community since the beginning of my playing, I might have been able to incorporate earlier.

This kind of movement is appropriate for the Stick, but must undergo some reinterpretation. For the *mridangam*, power is expressed in a lateral motion that is generated through the radial rotation of the wrist. On the Stick, a similar energy is generated in movements that subtly move up and down the torso. Like many Stick players that come to the instrument through guitar or bass, I tended to play "one finger = one fret" using my thumb as an anchor, but even when fingers are alternating on the same fret, which is an essential skill for smooth repeated notes, the thumb should move slightly. Howard showed the group the singular Chapman Stick callous that he acquired on his thumb from constantly sliding it up and down against the back bevel. I first felt this movement while playing the instrument when presented with the following exercise: [1]

[1] The arrows in this transcription show the direction that the hand moves to attack the designated note. An upward arrow indicates an "up-fret" movement towards the nut/shoulder, while a downward indicates a "down-fret" movement towards the pickup housing/waist. Refer to chapter 2 for an explanation of the note-shape conventions of Stick notation. This particular exercise also shows the alternating finger technique that stickists employ to smoothly repeat notes.

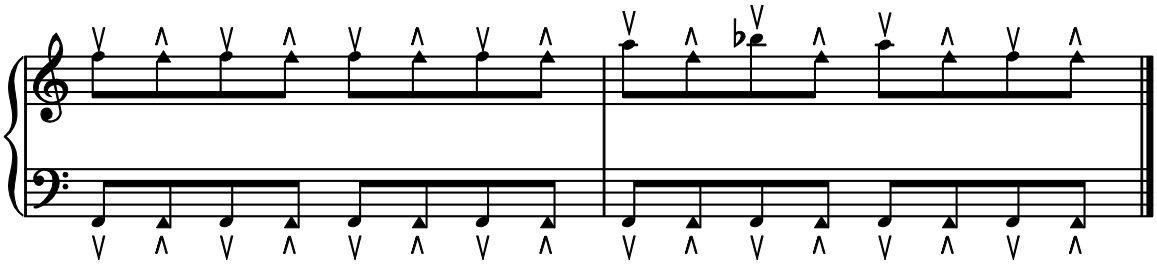

Figure 4.2 – A basic exercise in hand movement and two-finger dexterity.

In this exercise, hand movements are synchronized as the first two fingers repeat F in different octaves. The A and the B flat that occur on the downbeats of measure two are executed on the string above F, but the hand movement remains consistent, despite moving "up" a string. When employed in regular playing, hand movements such as this express cooperative and contrasting expressions of tempo and rhythm. An alternate exercise was as follows:

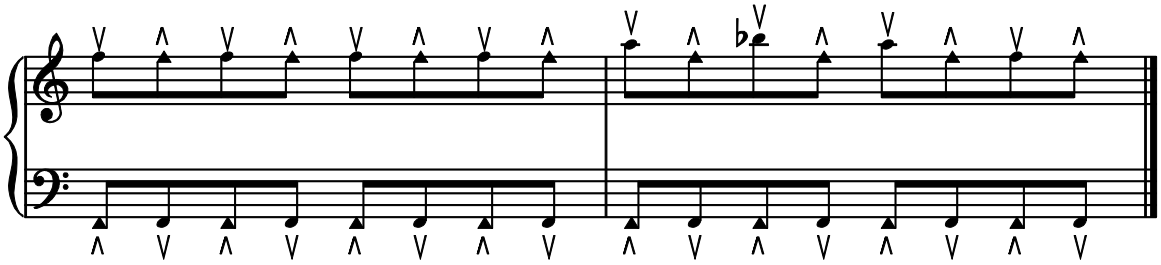

Figure 4.3 – A variation on 4.2. Notice the change in fingering patterns and the impact it has on the movement of the hands.

In this exercise, the left hand begins on the second finger, which causes the hands to move in opposition to each other. Hand movement also releases the fingers from the responsibility of keeping time. The larger movements of the hands can be

more easily correlated to a grosser expression of the time, such as a foot tap. Still another variation featured a three-finger pattern in the left hand.

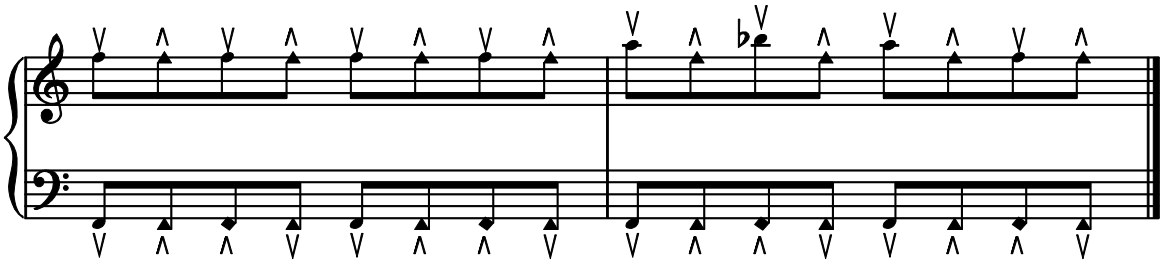

Figure 4.4 – Another variation on 4.2 using three fingers in the left hand.

In this case, the left hand is moving in an offset quarter note pattern to the right hand's regular eighth notes, but the overall output is generally the same. A pattern like this will cause subtle syncopated accents to arise unless care is taken to minimize this natural tendency.

Alongside the hand movement concept, the two other clinicians found ways to relate the foundations of their idiosyncratic style while taking care to avoid contractions. They seemed to be aware enough to accomplish this with relative ease, even on sensitive issues such as the use of three or four fingers on the right hand.[2] In some cases, pedagogies would overlap. In his clinic, Boles emphasized improvisation, and he employed the literal voice by asking us to play and sing a line simultaneously. Even

[2] The appropriate number of fingers to use on the right hand is a significant point of contention within the community. Advocates of the three-finger approach maintain that the pinky is weak and inaccurate, and maintaining consistent tone with the other fingers is prohibitively difficult. Four-finger players feel that it is inefficient to dismiss the use of the fourth finger. Additionally, using the fourth finger causes a shift in the hand position at the wrist, which some players fear may lead to physiological problems over time. There are successful players that employ both techniques, and as a result stickists often simply agree to disagree as to which conception is most appropriate.

though I would not characterize myself as a singer, I can sing expressively and on pitch without too much refinement. Using my physical voice as a tool brought my existential voice to the fore, and allowed my hands to sing my voice in a language that the Stick understood. When we sang along with our instruments there was a noticeable difference in everyone's playing. Inevitably, we became more expressive when the raw movements of our fingers were brought into the voice's subservience.

Undoubtedly, it is a huge benefit to have the first experience on any instrument in the presence of an experienced teacher. Although the phenomenal distance between the instrument and the player is initially vast, getting first-hand basics in an auditory, intercorporeal environment such as the seminar is a significant advantage. This may be compounded when others share the beginner's perspective. To this end, having a model was invaluable to the first-time beginners in the room. Another one of Bole's explicit goals was to familiarize the class with the geography of the left hand tuning. He introduced the root-5^{th}-10^{th} voicings for major, minor, and diminished chords, and took the class though the major diatonic triads on the bass side. On my own, this took several weeks to confidently execute, but in the presence of a model, there was a general feeling of success. Still, some people were having difficulties producing any sound at all, and for them this class was potentially very frustrating. The major diatonic pattern requires that the player execute a major 2^{nd} shift across strings, which can be a challenging gesture even when the fretboard's geography is familiar.

Dale Veidt, a beginner that I would later find had a unique experience on the instrument amongst the beginners, was having difficulty with the demanding coordination of Howard's Stick pedagogy. Although he shook his head in frustration several times, he was confident that if he could not get it at the seminar, he would be able to get it with practice. When it came his turn to play these diatonic left hand patterns, however, he engaged in a silent battle that was waged entirely in the language of gesture. He began looking sternly at his hands and concentrating on them as they stiffly copied the Boles' model. When it came time to shift across to another position, he became lost and deeply entrenched in a somatic mode of attention in which his auditory imagination was attempting to decipher what the Stick was asking him to do. The room stood silent, quietly rooting for him as he sighed in frustration. After an uncomfortable silence, a more experienced beginner abruptly broke rank and tried to point to the next position. Before she finished her movement, Veidt, without looking up, closed his eyes and waved a dismissive hand in her direction, staving off the silent musical expectations of his uniquely informed audience.

Extracurricular Activities

Many Stick seminars are large and, in Chapman's estimation, "greatly spirited" (e-mail to author, December 14, 2009). Due to the economic climate of 2009, however, seminar attendance was relatively low throughout the scene. Boles had previously mentioned that the financial issues had dissuaded several expected attendees, one of which was to be my roommate. Many inactive Stick owners were also selling their

instruments through Stickwire, and there was some discussion about cancelling the Santa Cruz seminar due to lack of attendance. Many stickists, however, were minimizing seminar attendance to show support for the upcoming Interlochen Stick Workshop in August. This clinic was organized to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the release of *Free Hands.* Chapman himself was scheduled as a clinician, and the event was well attended. Regardless, it still seemed like thirteen players, three of which were having their first experiences with the Stick, within a hundred mile radius of such a metropolitan area as Vancouver, was a small number.

The overwhelming majority of the group was local to Vancouver, and for those of us who did not know anyone, the first lunch was a little awkward. I sat with Boles and several of the people from the beginner's class. The easy topic of conversation was music, and we informally introduced ourselves to each other by telling the story of how we came to play the Stick. For all of the first-time beginners, YouTube played a significant role. One first-timer was particularly inspired by Rob Martino's posting of his original tune *One Cloud*, and discovered the seminar on a curious search. One of the more experienced beginners had played the Stick for the first time at the Vancouver seminar during the previous year. In contrast to most of the other members of the beginner class, however, Veidt had bought his polycarbonate grand in 1988. In his recollection, the Stick community was a "wasteland" in the late 80s, and he "mothballed" his instrument for over a decade. Having recently restored it to playing

condition, he hoped the seminar would provide the instruction that he never fully enjoyed when he first purchased his Stick.

Not all of the attendees were beginners, however. The intermediate/ advanced class included many stickists with several years of experience, and some seemed to be annual fixtures at the Vancouver seminar. Many were very serious about music and Stick playing, while others seemed to be quite content just to play the instrument on any level alongside other interested players. For most of these stickists, the seminar was as an oasis from the everyday as much a learning opportunity. Away from the pressure of being a fireman, a husband, a dog owner, a busker, or a computer technician, the Stick is something personal, and the seminar allows the stickist to explore something personal with another person. This mutual exploration of the grain provides a foundation for social interactions that can be sustained from one year to the next and reinforced by participating in the virtual scene.

This particular seminar has a history that predates the advent of publicly available broadband. Reminiscing on this history was also a significant topic of conversation. Although there have been other seminars in existence outside of the California area dating back to the Stick's inception, these were often organized under the auspices of non-Stick organizations and operated under the agendas of these organizations. Contemporary Stick seminars are organized by stickists for stickists, and as a result, the agenda of the seminar is motivated by the musicians that are directly involved in its organization. The Vancouver seminar was one of the first independent

Stick seminars outside of the California area. Boles took responsibility for organizing the event in 2001, but was introduced to the instrument at a well-established Western Canadian seminar in 1996 and 1997. From the very beginning of his experiences with the instrument, he learned to play within the intercorporeal environment that the community offers.

Bodying the Stick

While at the seminar, I took advantage of the opportunity to watch and listen to stickists at varying levels work through and catalog new techniques. Although the power relationships inherent in any classroom were undoubtedly present, stickists were also talking to each other in an effort to widen their vocabulary. A huge amount of information was related, much of it, probably, on an intuitive level. Each attendee came to the seminar already dwelling in some sort of Stick world within which the possibilities of the instrument were unfolding. By attending the seminar, this world underwent a transformation. In some cases, this change was profound, causing a guitarist to become a stickist over the course of the weekend. In others, the manifestation of an already existent grain was subtly altered, providing the player with a widened view of both the Stick's voice and the physical skills that were necessary to cultivate these potentials in his or her practice.

Figure 4.5 – Howard modeling the movements of the right hand for the beginner class (Jeff Hodges)

It became apparent to me that the overriding and fundamental concept presented at this seminar that my grain lacked was hand movement. To compare, Howard emphasized this approach by playing a passage with raw digital strength, and I immediately recognized it both visually and sonically as an elusive, negative characteristic of my playing. I realized that using digital strength was what I did when I played the Stick. It looked and sounded familiarly nervous and tense in comparison to the more relaxed flow that came from hand movement. Hand movement also seemed to provide solutions to the issues I had with smoothly swinging on the Stick. Since fingers did not have to be lifted and reapplied at the beginning of each note, the space between notes could be minimized and accents could be generated from the relaxed movements of hands.

The sedimentation of my self-directed pedagogy would have to be tilled for this approach to take root. I attempted to focus on hand movement as much as possible throughout the rest of the seminar, but my overall accuracy still suffered dramatically. I caught myself on several occasions relapsing into digital strength, but the sound quality I exchanged for this increased accuracy was no longer satisfactory. The energy provided by hand movement added a faint resonance to the instrument's sound as the wooden

body reverberated through the pickup housing. It was suggested that this resonance is a subtle characteristic of Stick sound, like the scratching of strings as fingers move from one position to another on an acoustic guitar.

Howard also predicted that, even in the most carefully worked out passages, approaching the instrument in terms of digital strength creates a technical "house of cards" that can collapse in the event that something goes wrong with the execution of the passage. I was ambivalent about this prediction, but I experienced it first-hand when I was presented with an exercise that should have been easy to execute given my already existent technique. I came to the seminar with the following pattern, which I generated from the *Free Hands* book, confidently in my body:

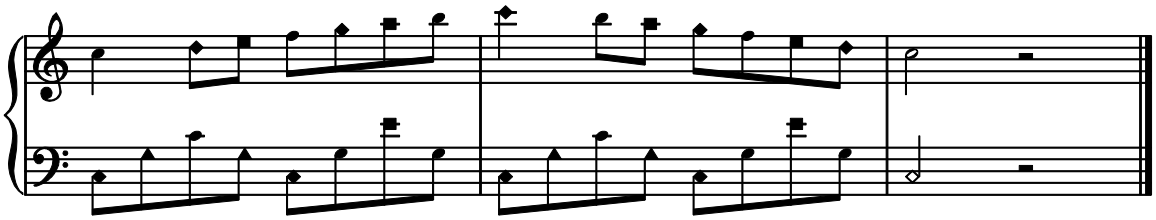

Figure 4.6 – A warmup exercise by the author.

In previously working out this exercise, I paid meticulous attention to the relationship between various fingering combinations. For example, the first fingers of both hands engage on the first beat, whereas the first finger of my left hand engage with my second finger on beat two. Eventually, this event-oriented approach got the exercise into my body, and I am now able to execute the pattern smoothly without thinking. At the seminar, however, I was presented with the following pattern:

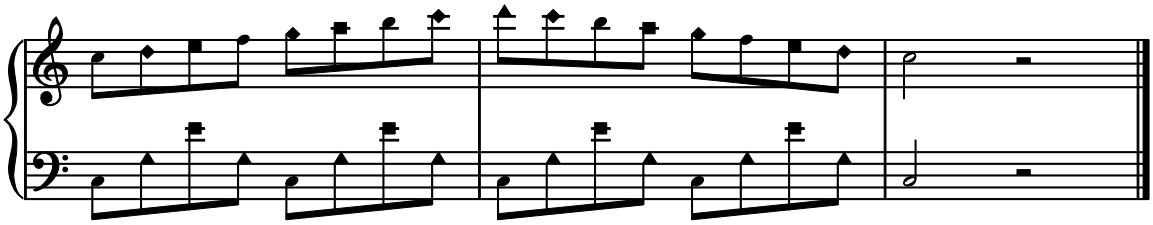

Figure 4.7 – Another scale pattern from Tim Boles' class.

While suffering a relapse into digital strength, my attempt to execute this pattern unraveled dramatically after the first three beats, despite having an embodied understanding of how it lies within the geography of the fretboard. In some ways, it is easier than my own pattern. The left hand ostinato had significantly less movement than my usual exercise and both hands were moving at a constant eighth note subdivision. This seemed to be an entirely new set of events to be worked out. I momentarily felt daunted by the possibility of having to spend the sort of time I had spent on my own warmup on every possible rhythmic and melodic permutation inherent in the left and right hand elements, especially since other players were having less trouble in its execution. When I began to think in terms of hand movement, however, my conception of the exercise changed dramatically.

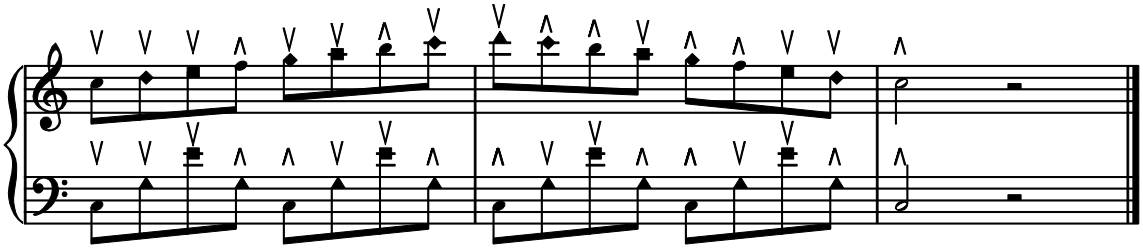

Figure 4.8 – The pattern from 4.7 with an emphasis on the movements of the hands.

From this perspective, I found myself thinking less about making sure that the fourth finger of my right hand was hitting at the same time as the third finger of my left on the upbeat of beat two in the second measure (an obviously convoluted approach). Instead, I perceived a larger macrorhythmic conception in which the hands moved up and down the fretboard in this relationship:

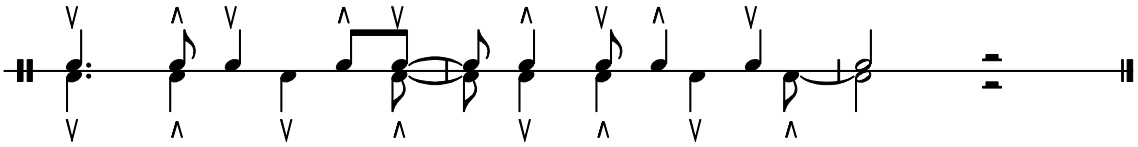

Figure 4.9 – The macrorhythmic relationship between the hands in the pattern found in 4.7.

Once I felt hand movement in this way, the pattern sounded more relaxed and the interplay between the hands was clearer. The specific fingering mattered less than the movement of my hands up and down the fretboard. Additionally, by using a foot tap as a reference, I was able to improve my overall tempo consistency, which, in my previous digital conception, would have been yet another bodily event to synchronize with the auditory feedback provided by the Stick.

The House Concert

I was becoming increasingly comfortable with this sound-body interaction late in the day on Saturday, the last full day of classes, when I came to the realization that it was part of the seminar tradition to have a miniature Stick Night in which all of the attendees had the opportunity to perform. Playing in front of people was not new for me, but I felt a shock of performance anxiety due to my recent lack of sustained

practice. The audience was mostly comprised of experienced stickists, and there was little chance that this group would be impressed by my Stick pidgin in the same way that a person from outside the Stick world would. Overall, the prospect made my stomach turn, but I decided to persevere and commit to perform.

The state of my playing would have contributed to serious trepidations about performing for such a knowledgeable audience just two days before, but, as one experienced Stickwire poster said of the seminar format, "the knowledge that you gain is always enhanced just by you being there." After two full days of attentive and creative immersion in the embodied Stick world I had a different perception of my instrument. On the walk back to the hotel, I noticed that the Stick's voice was still ringing in my ears. This was more than just imagining Stick sounds or humming a tune: I was acutely aware of a clear correlation between my auditory imagination and the physical affordances of the instrument. As long as I maintained this perspective, it seemed that there was nothing that I could not play. There were only a few hours between the final class and the arrival of my cab, though, and rather than explore the potential of this newfound state of consciousness, I thought it best to focus on piecing together some sort of performance from my already existent repertoire. Without the benefit of an amplifier in my hotel room, though, the first time I would actually hear what I was doing would be at the performance itself.

The cab dropped me off at a two-story Vancouver Heritage Home. It had a porch, and it was incongruously nestled between much larger apartment buildings. The wood living room floor had been cleared and multicolored Christmas lights had been hung around the white draperies. The edges of the room were lined with amplifiers, effect pedals, and percussion equipment. Couches and chairs were rearranged for the audience, which came to roughly thirty people, including the seminar attendees and the people who lived in the house. After refreshments, the evening program began.

Figure 4.10 – Boles playing at the House Concert (Jeff Hodges)

It was an informal affair. Each stickist casually plugged in and played for about ten minutes, with more time allotted for the clinicians. No performance was flawless, and even the more experienced players brought out pieces that they were working on or had not played for some time. Regardless, the specific character of each stickist ranged from timid to masterful, and where one performer was expressive, another would crumble, apologetically unable to recover. A couple of performers took the role of singer-songwriter, accompanying their vocals with the Stick. Some took a compositional approach, while others improvised. One player's performance was a hilarious spoken-word retelling of his "Stick Story," in which he let the instrument speak for itself by

incorporating the various exercises he used during his development. Although each performer struggled in one way or another the audience was congenial.

When it came my turn, I opened with Coltrane's *Equinox*. Often, when taken off-guard by a request to play something on the Stick, I play this tune. Its relatively static bass line translates well into my personal conception of the instrument, and echoes of Coltrane's first chorus, which I transcribed for an improv class, still reverberate when I improvise over virtually any minor blues environment. I introduced my second piece as the *Rusty Prog-Rock Medley: Songs that You Probably Don't Know,* and I muddled through passable renditions of three of my early arrangements: Yes's *White Car*, the Who's *Behind Blue Eyes*, and *Squonk* by Genesis. The performance was clumsy, but held together.

My status as a researcher at the seminar was well-known, and although everyone seemed to be supportive of my project, there had been some underlying questions concerning my motives, the least subtle of which was "how much of this is for you and how much of it is for your research?" By showing that I *played* the Stick and didn't just *own* one, I also showed that my dual identities as a researcher and as a stickist were not mutually exclusive; they, in fact, enhanced each other. As a result, I received very positive and interested feedback: Boles, for example, proudly named all three of the songs in the medley, expressing particular interest in my arrangement of *Squonk*, a song that carried some nostalgia for him.

Others were receptive to my improvisational work. In particular, a stickist named TheMatt, who I had been conversing with over the course of the entire seminar, was noticeably interested in my rendition of *Equinox*. In our ongoing discussions, it became obvious that we have a common love for music. Back home, he is involved in a live music project playing with a saxophonist whose style he compared to several Ethiopian jazz musicians from the seventies. I was floored by his casual reference to this rather obscure style. Further discussion revealed that we had a pretty significant overlap in non-mainstream musical tastes beyond the obvious King Crimson background that most stickists are assumed to share.

Keeping it to Yourself

Unexpectedly, we continued our discussion the next morning when TheMatt walked into my now-usual Starbuck's breakfast stop. We discussed more obscure music that we both liked, and I showed him the video footage I took of his performance from the previous evening. Despite the presence of much more visible members of the Stick community, and a slight stumble in the performance, I felt that he had really stolen the show at the House Concert. When I told him so, he smiled and thanked me, adding "I just tried to keep it to myself, y'know?" I thought this to be a curious response, so he elaborated:

> If I'm struggling during a performance, technically or nerve-wise, I try to not let on about it and tune everyone in the room out, if I can. If that's the case during longer performances I have time to re-establish a more personal or intimate connection with the audience . . . The informal setting seems to make it both easier and more difficult: easier because to my experience the audience tends to

> be more automatically accepting and supportive. It's more forgiving . . . More difficult because I personally don't get the same "vibe" as I do from a club's lighting, PA, bar, and crowd . . . The energy is a little more "built in" I guess. Then again, with a house concert what makes that difficult is that you can hear a pin drop during the performances so every "mistake" becomes magnified and depending on the performer and their level of focus it can really derail one's musical flow and confidence (e-mail to author, August 6, 2009)

TheMatt's initially curious response was formed on the basis of the inaccuracies he perceived in his performance. His voice, however, speaks as one that has had much experience playing in real places in front of real people in a wide variety of settings. In a live performance, there are no retakes, no postings, no comments, no channels, no clicking, no undoing, and no deleting. There is nothing more than the fragile duet that emerges from within the grain, which is always already embedded within a wider horizon of being in the world. In front of a live audience, with its multiplicity of overlapping horizons, the sound-body interface can potentially become so fragile that TheMatt has developed specific attentive strategies that allow him to maintain a connection with both the instrument and the audience that sustains this duet when it is impinged upon by the everyday world.

The embodied performance and practice of the Stick that TheMatt reports from is the ground upon which the horizons of the grain can widen. After spending several focused days with other stickists, I found that I could conceive of potentials in the instrument that simply were not there before. A similar change had last occurred when I was laboriously transcribing jazz solos for improv classes, but comparatively, the profound ease and speed with which I underwent this shift in awareness uniquely

marked my seminar experience. In the online scene, my instrument and its relationship to my auditory conception had never opened up like it did over that three-day period. While I could easily say that I had been inspired by some discussions on Stickwire and learned a couple of tricks from YouTube, no virtual interaction had put Stick music in my mind and body as profoundly as the seminar.

In this face-to-face interaction, the grain became both personal and shared because the audience is comprised primarily of other embodied stickists, and for these participants it is a particularly vital environment. While there is a way to play the Stick, there is also *your* way to play the Stick, and this latter interpretation of the grain has the potential to add to the former. For example, playing the Stick using hand movement as opposed to digital strength is not an explicitly outlined concern in either *The Stick Book* or *Free Hands*, nor is it universally acknowledged by the community. Instead, Howard developed this approach over the course of over fifty seminars, several of which have occurred internationally. By teaching, talking, experimenting, asking, playing, listening, and reflecting to the Stick's unique sound-body interface in multiple contexts, Howard mirrored and made physically manifest the experiences of other Stick players as he has taught them, building up an idiosyncratic pedagogy to the instrument. The seminar, then, emerges as a space in which members of the community mutually explore the potentials of the instrument in an intercorporeal environment.

CHAPTER 5

DWELLING WITHIN THE REAL AND THE VIRTUAL

Subverting Media and Migration

In his 1996 volume *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai identified mass media and migration as "constitutive features of modern subjectivity" (Appadurai 1996, 3). In this context, media is a form of communication that is inherently disembodied, projecting objective, unchanging images and words across distance. In contrast, migration, as an embodied experience, is constrained by time and space. Dwelling in this schism, human beings often rectify the disjunctures in experience that arise between material locality and global significance. The Chapman Stick came into being in this environment, and its voice continues to ride these currents of cultural flow to impinge on the horizons of already existent musical worlds. Concomitantly, Chapman's instruments have also been historically circumscribed by migratory movement, as they are shipped from Stick Enterprises to a global pantheon of players and regroup in seminar settings. The scene arose as a locale that is gathered within this rupture of embodiment and representation by the grain of the Stick.

The Stick has gained some acceptance in stylistic fringes that lie outside of the mainstream of popular culture but it has not become widely associated with any particular musical tradition. In comparison to some other twentieth-century instrumental innovations, such as the electric guitar or the Moog synthesizer, the

instrument's voice has remained relatively obscure. In the past, commercial culture has made this kind of marginality difficult to surmount. Until the widespread and public use of broadband Internet, media generally followed hegemonic currents from center-to-periphery. The increased dialogic capacities of online exchanges, however, have caused the dynamics of these cultural flows to pass a point of no return (McLuhan 1964, 38). The voice of the subject has become increasingly centralized and participatory in these interactions (Jenkins 2006, 3-4). Stickists who engage in the online scene ride the crest of this shift by appropriating the conduits of media and migration on behalf of the instrument's voice, bringing more perspectives and more bodies into the instrument's horizons. As a result, the Stick world very often seems to straddle the physical and the virtual as it expands.

The virtual Stick scene gathers around the instrument through the telepresent linkage of human personae represented on the web. In such a virtual representation, a stickist is situated within a layered ecosystem of resources that intersect to form identity. When these representations connect they form an invaluable resource for consubjective communications between the real human beings that surround the Stick. The participants bring the locale into being, allowing the instrument to speak through its virtual representation. Although virtuality is as inherently disembodied as more traditional forms of media, virtual conduits are increasingly multisensory and live, hailing "the viewer's latent understanding that the movement of any human representation is indexical to movements and gestures of human bodies" (Hillis 2009,

23). The perceptual "realness" of a telepresent persona has increasingly blurred the experiential distinctions between bodies and personae and the spatial distinction between actually being here and virtually being there (Hillis, 232). As virtual representation moves away from monologic text towards increasingly dialogic and multisensory interactions, a viewer can more readily unpack its flattened reality to reveal its implications on embodied existence. For the stickist, this movement opens up the potentials of the Stick world across distance.

After my face-to-face experiences in Vancouver, I, like many stickists, did not have regular access to a local teacher. As time passed, the embodied awareness of The Stick's sounding potential that I enjoyed in the time immediately following the seminar seemed to fade. I was able to resuscitate it to an extent with YouTube footage and careful listening, but despite regular practice, my resonance with the instrument did not seem as immediate as it did on the walk back to the hotel in Vancouver. With no immediate opportunity for first-hand reinforcement, I began to employ the resources presented by the scene's collective intelligence from a different perspective. While I did not post questions in its more public arenas, such as stickist.com, I interacted with its members through e-mail and webcam, following their progress if it were made available and using the seminar as a reference. I also began to take virtual Skype lessons for further instruction and inspiration in my actual practice, which revealed the role that the Stick's pixilated representation plays as an interlocutor in the absence of the actual instrument.

Virtual Instruments and the Skype Experience

A key component in the virtual Stick scene is its interactive, transmittable representation. Such virtual instruments can be thought of as either immersive or projected. For example, an immersive instrument might only exist in a given virtual environment such as Second Life, requiring a player's consciousness to be "moved" into an avatar for interaction. Conversely, a projected instrument involves the manipulation of an actual thing that is captured and represented in a virtual form. The virtual Stick lurks in the shadows of the MP3s and streaming video that stickists often craft from the vantage point of a home studio or upload from recordings of live performances. By capturing such a performance, a stickist extracts an interactive trace or essence that is projected as a vehicle for the grain of the actual Stick that it represents. As a depiction of a "thing" that always implies an embodied person, it reveals the sounding potential of a similar "thing" in its localized, material form.

Although the Stick's thingly voice can be made to speak through its virtual representation, the "vibe" that TheMatt describes in chapter 4 takes on a profoundly different form in online interactions. The performer can record an infinite number of takes and choose a representative favorite. Due to this kind of self-managed interaction, repeatable online performances present a different kind of risk than is offered in live interactions. "Keeping it to yourself" becomes an expectation that is built into the posted performance, rather than a strategy for performance. In reaction, the immediate response offered by applause or uncomfortable silence is replaced by

flattened textual comments provided after-the-fact by an audience remotely engaging the Stick's voice, perhaps surreptitiously, from their work cubicle or IPhone. This lag time that is apparent in the interactions between the online performer and audience permeates the virtual. Although mediation abolishes distance, bringing personae into proximity, it does so at the cost of the intuitive, instantaneous dialogue that is taken for granted in everyday embodied experience. This is most obvious in the uncomfortable silences that arise in newscasts when a reporter in the field remotely communicates with the studio. Contemporary viewers often take these awkward exchanges for granted, but they seem embarrassingly obvious when one is engaged in such a conversation.

Despite this latency, videophone technology continually strives to provide a conduit for nearly real-time audiovisual interaction between spatially separated players. This environment blurs the perception of "hereness" and "thereness," allowing an indexical representation to emerge that can convey human gesture. Skype has emerged as the standard for videophone interactions, and is currently used for everything from remote university lectures to cross-country coffee klatches (Hillis 2009, 8). In my experiences with Skype lessons, the real Stick is subtly manipulated in order to maximize the flattened potentials of its virtual doppelganger. Microphone placement is a concern, and there is constant shifting of body position so that aspects of the fretboard that lay outside of the camera's immediate field of vision can be transmitted. Also, the depth of the lesson often depends on the quality of available bandwidth. Quicker

movements are limited in their resolution and are often blurred, and the entire exchange can grind to a halt in the event that Skype freezes up.

Even in a clear, uninterrupted Skype lesson, however, I would often find myself inadvertently talking over my teacher, or waiting uncomfortably for a response while he was doing the same. Within a few minutes I would adjust to this barrier in conversation, but this latency was still a noticeable and pervasive issue when the instrument's voice took center stage. In the majority of my instrumental music education experience, a teacher and a student play together as a matter of course. When the voices of the two instruments dissolve into one, it is a visceral confirmation of success. It was, however, impossible to play with my teacher, because I was, in actuality, playing with his temporally delayed representation. The most successful lessons, however, circumvented this issue by allowing the Stick to speak through this projection in a call-and-response format, framed by verbal discourse.

In one lesson with Greg Howard, this turn-based approach was difficult to maintain and I was seduced by habit to play along with his virtual Stick as it was projected though Skype. From my perspective, this was not so confusing. I was playing in time with an image that had already been delayed. Howard, on the other hand, was experiencing my delayed image, which was synchronized with his already delayed image. As a result, the blending of our instrument's voices was a one-way experience that I exclusively enjoyed. It seemed that he was used to this phenomenon, though, and in spite of the incongruous feedback he was most assuredly getting, he continued to

provide a consistent model. During this brief synchrony, I began concentrating on both sound and image simultaneously. Although Howard's projection filled my screen, a smaller image being captured by my webcam was also visible. I found myself unconsciously and subtly altering my body to match both images and sounds. In this case, a Stick that was materially absent, but virtually represented, shaped my comportment towards my actual instrument. This bears a curious and almost reciprocal relationship with the way in which Chapman "held up his hands in a mirror" to assist in his visualization of the Stick in the late 60s, when an abstract conception of relating fingers to strings allowed him to imagine the design of the absent and still forming Stick.

The Depth of Bodily Incursion

This was, however, different and perhaps more alienating than the familiar practice of playing in front of a mirror. The words on my shirt were legible, and movement in my right hand was represented by the right hand of a person facing me, rather than my mirror image. This reversed perspective from which others see me created a vertiginous awareness of my own telepresence. I had an acute, unnerving sensation of watching myself in the third person as my "thereness" was projected into cyberspace. Conversely, I also, on a different occasion, momentarily experienced a loss of connection with my teacher's "hereness" when I became cognitively overwhelmed. In this moment, I had an urge to rewind and restart the explanation, which would have confused, if not offended, my teacher.

Although these experiences seem to oppose one another, both contrast sharply with everyday embodied actuality. In a Skype lesson, I cannot be sure if my teacher is wearing shoes, nor do I have a sense as to where his studio might be located within the architecture of his house. Because it is an image of me "here" that is projected as a signifier for embodiment, my awareness of what it is like to really be "there" in my teacher's presence is always absent. The virtual Stick, however, is a trace of the material "thingliness" of the Stick "here." This connection grounds the entire representational experience in a continuous, embodied reality that always already implies the completing and relating body that is both here and there.

The perception of embodiment in the virtual realm relies on disembodied images, and as a result, to engage the scene as a stand-in for an embodied interaction will bring the aspiring player only so far. The most subtle of gestures comprise the entirety of the body's language, and some of them undoubtedly lie underneath the threshold of everyday perception (Behnke 1997, 181). Intuition, imagination, perception, and sensation all play roles in intercorporeal cultural transmission, and it seems slightly artificial to consider the possibility of adding "resolution" to this list (Csordas 1993, 147). Additionally, the "bodily incursion" that human beings experience in the world has a depth that may not be entirely transmittable (Borgmann 1992, 106). This depth is more fully realized in the migratory movements of the Stick and its players and imbues the seminar experience with meaning.

In the embodied world, subjects are closer than they appear. Particularly in musical interactions, a unified performance occurs when all musicians are fully present and share the same space (Green 1986, 39). For the time being, participatory culture is not conducive to the subtle interplay as described by Keil's participatory discrepancies (1994, 96). While the limitations that latency places on virtual interactions will most assuredly continue to subside with technological advances, the limitations of physical laws may also assure that they persist to a degree. As Chapman points out, electricity can only travel so quickly along a wire, and as a result it may never be possible to fully "groove" with one another online (e-mail message to author, Dec, 26, 2009). Because of this the grain will always flourish most fully in the presence of another body.

Live performances and seminars provide the locale for a "shared subjectivity constituted in the interactive space of embodied existence" (Csordas 1994, 269). Some stickists engage the scene in order to set up and maintain opportunities for such embodied interactions within the community. Stick seminars, in particular, serve as bodily "thinktanks," in which players with a variety of experiences attempt to discern exactly what the instrument is asking them to do through intercorporeal discourse. As the grain of the Stick is explored in these localized interactions, the instrument comes alive and speaks for itself in the symmetry that arises between world and thing (Borgmann 1992, 111; Ingold 2000, 401). Given funds, availability, and access to travel, the dedicated stickist could conceivably attend several seminars a year through the advertising and organizational capacities of the scene. It is in these live settings that the

Stick speaks most clearly, but in this scenario, the type of sustained and personalized dialogue that emerges between teacher and student in traditional face-to-face musical transmission can be lost in the time and space between seminars. The resonant echoes of these experiences in perceptual awareness, however, can sustain a player's progress in the temporal gaps between physical meetings.

Dwelling in Telepresence

The overall size and regularity of such migratory gatherings rely on the relative visibility of the instrument and the connections between its players in the scene. These associations provide a sense of place and solidarity for anyone from the interested hobbyist to the seasoned player. In situating themselves within the scene, stickists commonly craft their own distinctive narrative that describes the circumstances leading to their incursion into the Stick world. Although the details of these "Stick stories" are broadly diverse, they usually include some combination of mediated or live interaction accompanied by a sense of identification with the instrument. It would be a precarious endeavor, however, to propose a specific reason why various musicians generally choose to adopt the Stick. It is relatively safe to say that, currently, most do not do so to expand their income or to "make it." Very few stickists make a living solely by playing the instrument. Superficially, it seems that participants in the virtual Stick scene represent a community of musicians connected by little more than their common interest in the potentials of a novel instrument. On a deeper level, however, stickists often adopt the instrument to better define and understand themselves as they dwell

within the disjunctures that arise between artistic self-fulfillment and commodity (Attali 1985, 77; Waksman 2001, 288).

In my descriptions of the Stick world, I have been outlining oppositions that might be perceived as binary, such as material/virtual, migration/media, embodiment/representation, and so on. These distinctions have been purposeful in order to decenter the instrument from empirical organology and illuminate the horizons of the Stick scene. Virtuality and materiality, however, are not divested from one another but are instead aspects of a unified, everyday existence that circumscribes the Chapman Stick (Wilson and Peterson 2002, 451). Holding the instrument in my hands, it is difficult to dismiss its physical nature, but it is often tempting to dismiss virtual manifestations as something less than their projecting materiality. The Stick, however, is tethered to and reliant on this representation for its propagation. While it serves as a performative link between musical presentation and the transmitted image, the virtual Stick is instrumental in its own right as it is employed as a vehicle for the voice of the instrument.

An organology of the virtual, however, cannot be conducted in terms of the size, mass, or acoustic properties of the musical object. Addressing the umbilical relationship that the virtual instrument has with that which it represents, however, provides a fuller acknowledgement of the work it performs. A virtual Stick is, in actuality, binary code with no materiality of its own, but despite this, the voice of an actual Stick is encoded within its transmission. As it is built up, pixel by pixel, the horizons of the Stick's

material, thingly world come into existence. The virtual Stick, as a projection, does not simply look like the Stick, but is a depiction of *a* Stick, a circumstance made more specific and particular when that instrument's design is bound to *the* musician's body. In being transmitted, the grain becomes proximal to the viewer, bringing the potentials of the Stick's body-sound interface to presence. The Skype environment, in particular, allows participants to imaginatively and virtually merge for a period of time with their signifying digital personae. While it is doubtful that the Skype experience is visceral enough to generate the kind of nostalgia with which I now view my experiences at the seminar, my lessons have doubtlessly provided further insight into the Stick's grain that would be difficult to convey in other disembodied arenas, such as Simon Quinn's taped lesson as described in chapter 3.

It could be argued that this connection that the Stick has to its virtual manifestation is not particularly unique, and that a webcam lesson on a piano would similarly employ a virtual piano. The piano, however, has its own thingly nature with a complex and long history that only now brushes against the virtual. As an instrument that is clearly central to Western music-culture, it would be more appropriate to associate the piano's thingliness with the spread of elitism, colonialism, printed music, and institutionalized canon. It does not primarily utilize a virtual representation for continued recognition and progression. In contrast, the virtual Stick is a sedimented aspect of the Stick as it has been situated within the onset of globalized media. This representational appendage is a profoundly appropriate medium for the grain as it

speaks within the polyvalent reality in which stickists, who are likely to have an innate understanding of the affordances of telepresence, dwell.

Because the Stick is unhinged from a responsibility to a given corpus of music the stylistic circumstances that surround it are unformulated in comparison to the piano. Due to this, the amorphous horizons of the Stick world can be as confining as they are liberating, and can breed frustration from the cognizance of things undone and challenges unmet (Borgmann 1992, 7). Dwelling in this nebulous world requires a "patient vigor" that breeds kinship when it is recognized in the things and practices of others (Borgmann, 122). Stick music is the tender in this connection, which is realized through the multiplicity of sounding bodies represented and displayed in commodified, pedagogic, and expressive forms in the virtual scene through the virtual Stick and the actual people that bring it to life. These representations are becoming increasingly indexical to actual human movement, allowing the kinship felt between the instrument's adopters to be more deeply perceived between the participants in the scene. Additionally, the Stick's virtual aspects are more broadly used by the community and provide the digitally literate the means to equally participate in the spread of images and sounds previously monopolized by mass media. Many of these broadcasts form an enduring stockpile of Internet postings that plays an integral role in the Stick scene by raising the visibility of the instrument and serving as inspiration for players at

different points in their practice.[1] In some cases, they also open up a depth of previously embodied experience, deepening the index through previously experienced face-to-face knowledge of "the" specific player being represented.

Before I found my place within this scene, many of these resources were not developed as they currently are. As they began to emerge, however, I remember feeling resistant to participate. In retrospect, I egoistically intended to "master" the instrument in localized isolation and emerge fully formed, as if from the head of Zeus. Hiding the cultivation of skills in this way reflects the objective, commodifed view of musical production that encourages the consumer to accept the polish of an end product as fully representative of a musician's everyday comportment towards their instrument and promotes the impression that a musician has always had the skills to produce such a flawless performance (Goffman 1959, 44, 47). This is a difficult ideal for anyone to aspire to as they develop a relationship with their instrument (Jenkins 2006, 190-191). Engaging the Stick's virtual aspect, stickists consent to become an active participant in the production of the wider Stick world while critically gazing upon his or her own actual instrument as a thing to be represented and performed. Furthermore, the virtual Stick also has the potential to acknowledge that playing an instrument is a sustained physical training. As a vehicle for the distinctive voice of the Stick, a material thing that sings in duet with human existence, it can indicate the way in which expanding the body's expressive horizons can cultivate a new sense of being.

[1] Attali relates "stockpiling" to a conception of music in which each listener enters into an endless number of repeatable solitary hearings, negating music's potential as a "form of sociality" (Attali 1985: 32)

The ground of this being sounds forth as the language that is presented in the player's gesture cuts across the voice of the instrument. This sounding forth always already implicates the discursive other that is both there to be played towards and here to listen and be played with. Telepresence, which is another, perhaps more ontic, manifestation of being here and there simultaneously, drastically widens the horizons of this sounding, but with an inevitable cost. Taken as a primary mode of dwelling, virtuality harbors the potential for other human beings to perceive others as purely objectified; a stockpiled resource. Even more stifling and troubling is the perception that oneself, as an expressive individual, is no more than such an object. Conversely, in an environment where virtually everything is always available, the search for novel personal expression can be isolating in the wholly actual. Like a tree without roots, expressive creation in this mode of dwelling must resist enigmatic forces to survive.

"Your" way to play the Stick comes out of the physical interplay of voice and language in the grain. The widely varied and individualized forms of Stick music create the Stick world with the tap of every string. Through the widened potentials of virtual representation, this world can reach beyond the self-imposed boundaries of post-modern therapy to a more public realm. Although it is empowering to feel unique and special, it is also, paradoxically, inspiring to come to the realization that others are similarly distinctive. By reappropriating the means of producing music through both physical and virtual means, this conundrum dissipates in the form of a musical virtuosity that includes the ability to manipulate technology to one's own ends. In this view, the

Stick, as its own instrument, does not have to encroach upon mainstream culture to assure its survival. Rather, the horizons of the Stick world become more widely known from within and without, allowing Stick music to be accepted as it is presented through the real and the virtual.

APPENDIX

SPECTROGRAPHIC COMPARISIONS

Timbre is often described in terms of experience and linguistic metaphors. It seems that "I hear pitch, but I experience timbre," much in the same way I see the sun but feel its warmth on my face (Fales 2002, 60). This aspect of musical sound is notoriously difficult to render in text. Nettl, however, mentions the usefulness of modern computer-assisted transcription techniques such as spectrographic analysis (Nettl 2005, 87; Seeger 1958, 187). Every nuance and detail of a musical event is rendered in such graphical representations, which is paradoxically a case against their use. Spectrograms can produce too much information; a simple single-line melody provides an astonishing amount of acoustic data.

Computer-assisted graphical representations of musical sound are admittedly far removed from the world in which they are usually recorded, but if spectrograms can be applied in the scientific way in which they are intended, they can interpret significant amounts of information not available through conventional notation. To this end, this appendix briefly examines the spectrograms of two instruments that are familiar in ethnomusicological discourse, the Balinese *gender* and the Western piano, to compare them to that of a Stick in order to provide a concept of the instrument's distinctive sound.

Albrecht Schneider relates a significant amount of information about the timbral aspects of gamelan by using spectrograms of the perceived notes G#, A, and C#, which correspond to keys 3, 4, and 5 on *gender* (Schneider 2001, 500). Using Ravenlite 1.0, I reproduced this experiment on a mated pair of gender, which produced the following result:

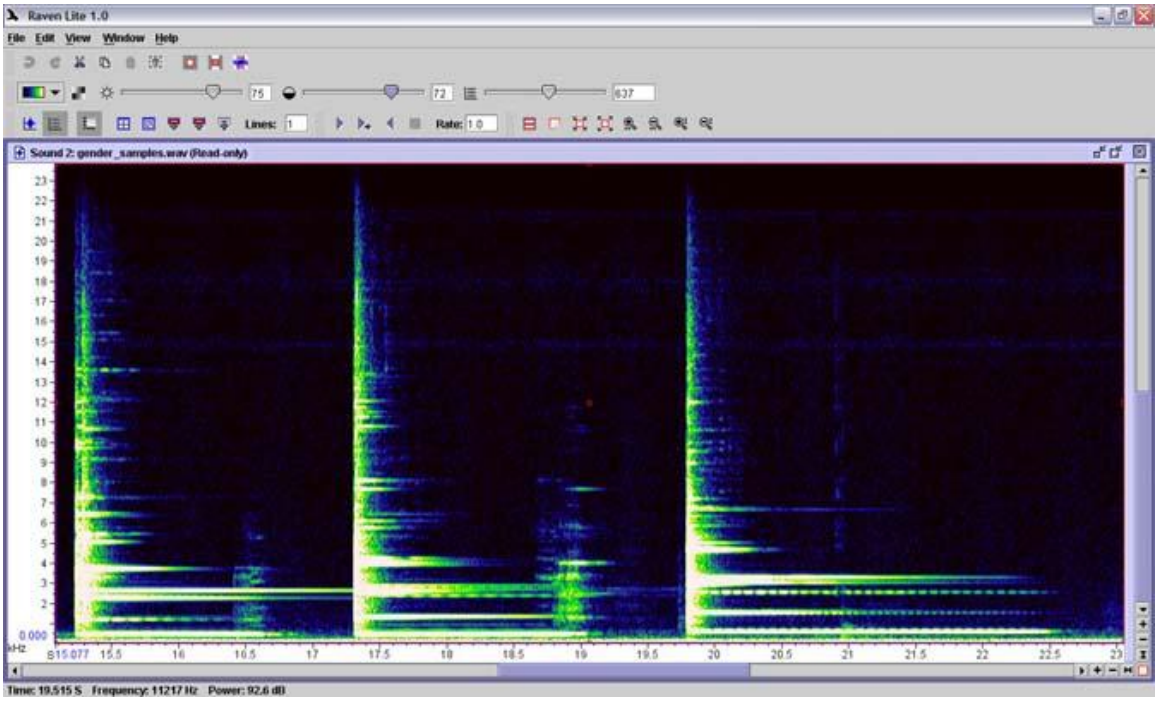

Figure A.1 - Spectrographic representation of a mated pair of *gender*.

As in Schineider's experiments, this spectrogram reveals clusters of irregularly grouped harmonics. The strong activity at 2-4 kHz is visibly larger than that in the 0-1 kHz range and masks the perceived pitch of the instrument by overpowering the fundamental (Schnieder 2001, 504). Besides the organization of *gender* overtones, the spectrogram also reveals large harmonic spikes that reach up into 23 kHz. This visualization represents the *gender*'s percussive attack, but also carries with it harmonic information that adds to its overall characteristic sound.

The following spectrogram uses the corresponding perceived piano pitches of G#, A, and C#, and is also timbrally revealing:

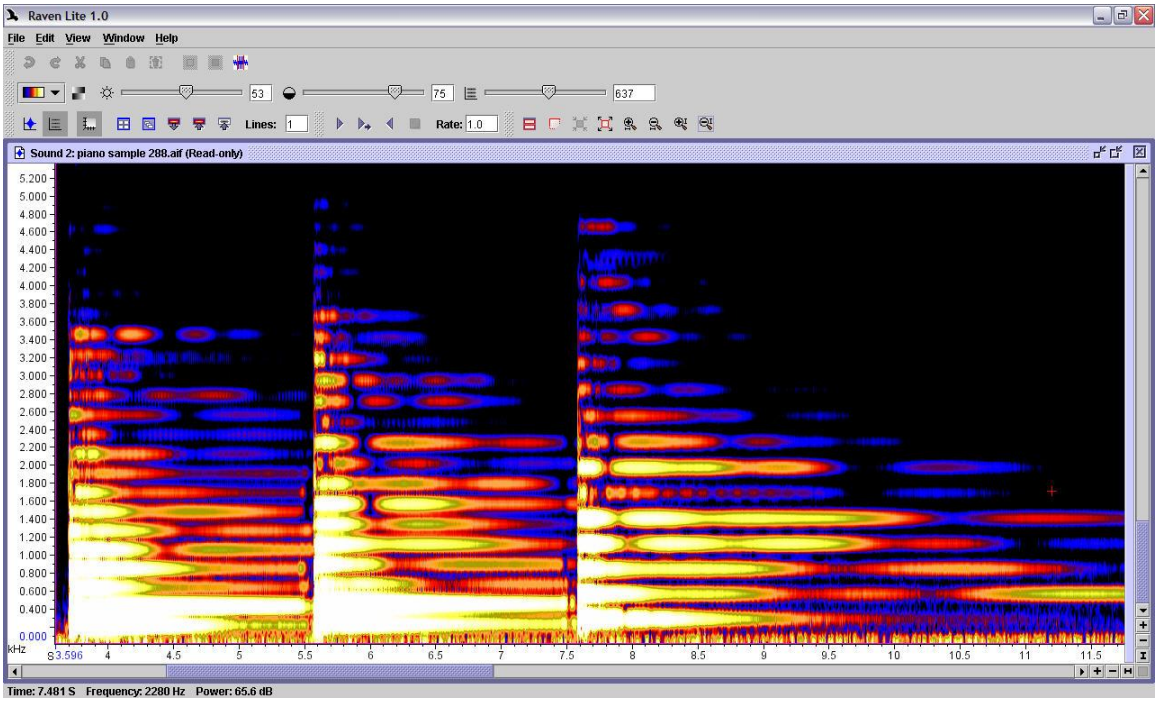

Figure A.2 - Spectrographic representation of a piano.

It should be noted that the vertical scale of this example is significantly different than the *gender* example. The two recordings were made by the same recorder with the same settings in only slightly different acoustic environments. If compared side-by-side, the attack of the piano seems to offer roughly one quarter of the harmonic information than that of the gender. Despite this, the even spacing of the piano's harmonics creates a clear perception of the pitch and a warm sound, regardless of the relative complexity of its attack.

In concordance, these two examples show the way in which attack and overtone structure interact to form the characteristic sound of both *gender* and piano. The following example is taken from a personal performance of the three pitch constants using the melody side of the Stick. For this recording, no processing was used and the EQ was set flat.

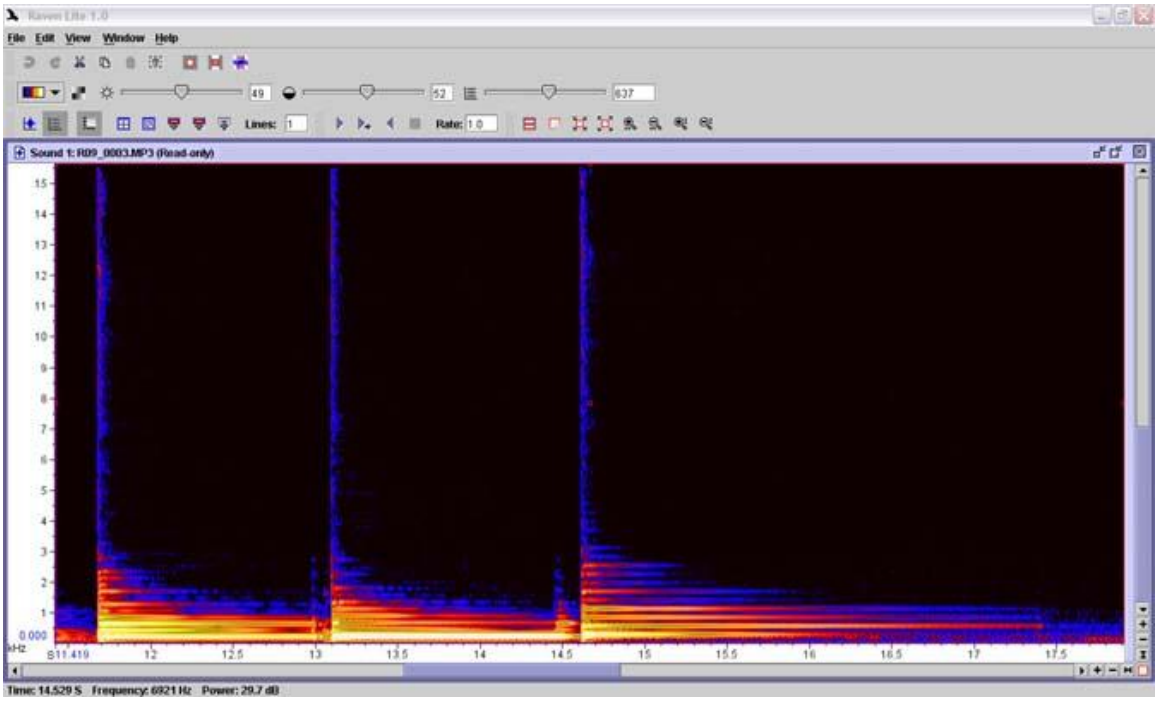

Figure A.3 – Spectrographic representation of the Stick.

The lower portion of the spectrogram compares favorably to the ordered harmonic structure of the piano example. This would indicate that it has a well-centered and resonant pitch. Its attack scale, however, resembles the percussive and metallic aspects of the *gender* as it is struck. Unlike the *gender*, however, this spike of acoustic information is not harmonically clustered, but is organized like the piano all the way up.

A look at a more professional recording will reveal this acoustic property of the Stick. Greg Howard's *Charmed Life* from his 1995 album *Stick Figures* is an outstanding example of the characteristic music that the instrument is capable of creating outside of its stigmatized status as a "bass with extra strings." The performance is entirely solo and is identifiably Stick music. A spectrographic representation of a portion of this recording reveals that with some processing, the harmonic information contained in the initial attack of a Stick string can be enhanced.

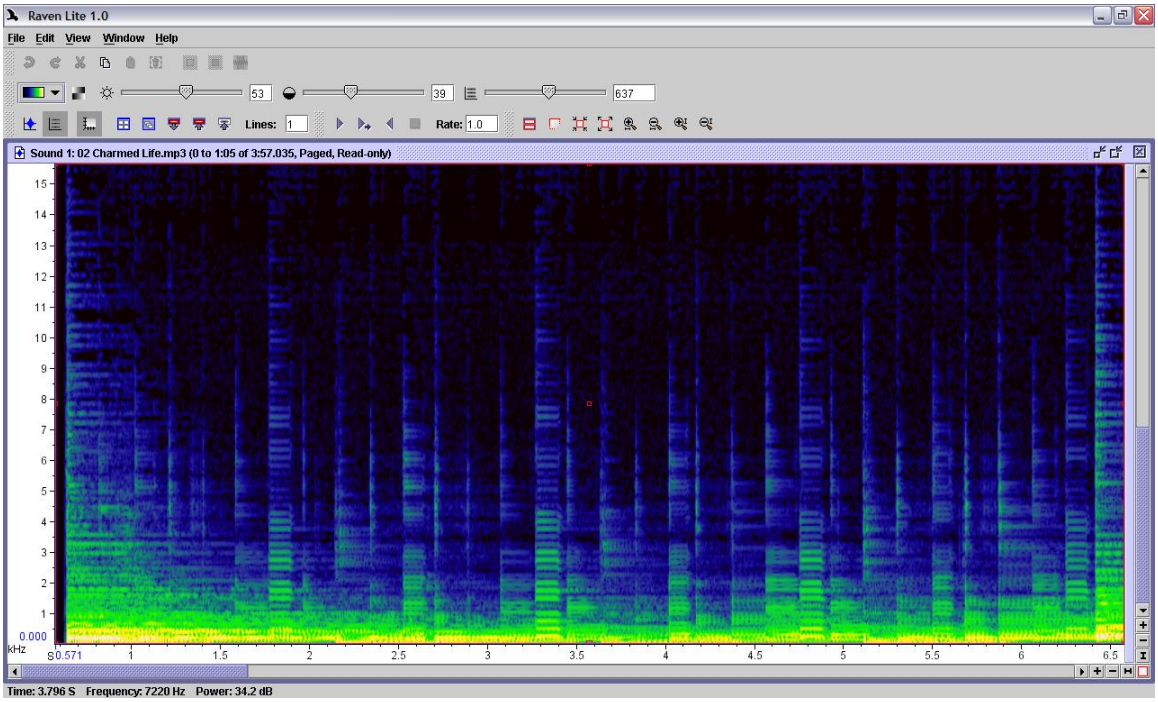

Figure A.4 - Spectrographic representation of the introduction to Greg Howard's *Charmed Life* from *Stick Figures*, 1995.

In particular, the activity at 1.7, 3.3, and 4.7 seconds shows overtones visibly stretching up to 15 kHz, rivaling that of the *gender*, but with an organization that recalls the piano. In this range, the Stick creates a chiming, percussive tone with a rich, well-centered pitch. Undoubtedly, comparing Howard's processed example studio to my dry, open-roomed samples is somewhat problematic. Despite this potential margin for error, comparing them as a whole relates important similarities and differences in the unique timbral aspects of the Stick that might otherwise remain elusive.

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