



DE-LEARNING TO PLAY THE PIANO  
Fabienne Audéoud

OF A MUSICAL DISPOSITION

at it another way, she identified something that she had to reject. She had to reject as competent the point at which she could best conform to the performance of a musical score within the terminology of the concert format. Realising this assisted her in two ways.

- a) she avoided a premature surrender to artistic despair - (ah! That I will never say well what Chopin said once!) and
- b) she saw around the bend in the parlour door, past her waving parents and accomplishment conscious education, to a place where her problems would turn into questions:  
What is the piece of music? What is its variant? How do I play it?

**Improvisation**

The final episode of Fabienne Audéoud's performance was given on 24 September 1999, in an art gallery that was about to close on Tib Street in the North West quarter of Manchester, England, where it was attended by approximately forty people over a period of 2 hours. FA wore the soft, loose clothes traditionally associated with dancers' warm-ups. There was no announcement of the piece beginning; thus, instead of an anticipatory hush, there came a short sequence of overlaps: background tape & chatter/piano with tape switched off & fading chatter/solo piano. FA divided her playing time into 3 sections, with 2 intervals during which she left her seat at the instrument and came over to the area of the room where the audience lounged against the deep window sill, drinking. Her movements at the piano were energetic, dextrous and precise, suggesting that the flight from her accomplishment was requiring of her at least the same degree of application as her progress towards it ever had. The end of the performance came when, with FA's hands held perhaps 8 inches above the piano keys, a member of the audience called "c'est fini". (In French, this means "it is finished". FA is French.) FA said "yes". There was some applause during which FA rejoined the audience. The recording machines (still camera, video camera and mini disc recorder) were switched off and put away. A score existed for the piece neither before nor after the performance.

OF A MUSICAL DISPOSITION

Josephine Pryde

*There is probably some girl attached to it, at the top, and with her responsibilities of various sorts.....teeth....piano lessons....."*  
Donald Barthelme, Snow White

During her performance, Fabienne Audéoud spent four months practising to de-learn the grand piano. It was all recorded. For the final episode, an audience was introduced and the public performance of her practice formed the work's conclusion. Afterwards, there would be no more practising and no more performing. She could consider her talents unlocked.

*'Piano Hire North West - We have the keys to unlock your talents'*

Unlocked? Unscrewed? Set free? Released? Surrendered? Renounced?

Fabienne Audéoud at the grand piano. The path of de-learning in the domain of practice.

**Responsibilities of various sorts**

Fabienne had realised at an early age that, as she was unlikely to become a great interpreter of great works for the piano (see, for example, Chopin's Preludes, Debussy's Images, Mozart's Concerto No.2 in B flat), other forces had to be influencing her whilst she continued to play. Internal and external pressure was being applied. It was as if she were being deliberately trained to produce an inferior interpretation of another musician's work. Why? What could be the purpose of learning mediocre exposition? Of being encouraged by the very people who spoke of revering genius to go ahead and slight it? Her piano lessons were scheduled for many years to come, yet she quickly saw the place on the chart ahead of her at which her technique would falter in the expression of other composers' music. Looking

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*The question is on which aspect the emphasis is laid. Don't forget that at the beginning of our career, we simply couldn't play. The decision to improvise arose from a necessity<sup>1</sup>*

**Non-intentionalities of various sorts**

You might say that Fabienne Audéoud's decision to improvise arose from the realisation that she simply could play. For this piece, she used the uncertainties of improvised music in combination with two reversals; the first reversal being to position practice as a performance, which in turn foregrounded the second reversal, the production of the sound of her de-learning. Rather than seeing her work as an addition to the genre of improvisation, she used some of its principles to develop her themes. The trial and error aspect of this music became precisely the means by which she could force something indeterminate from a very over-determined musical education. This is not to interpret the performance of her playing as a deconstruction of the social forces or cultural values associated with arranging piano lessons for girls. Her approach is more to take the facts of the social situation as the material from which to assemble the elements of her protest against it. Music is then nothing more than the only possible substance with which to handle the diverse and contradictory data that involves her. The piece does not express a response to her questions, and nor does it merely reproduce the questions for a silent audience. It is the doubts that produce the music, and the audience that mingles with the noise. Improvisation functions to re-interpret the sounds of daily non-improvised life; whilst the introduction of practice as performance constructs an emphasis around the context of the music's composition, instead of merely presenting it as an item to be dutifully admired on the main stage. If it is not possible for an artist to begin working without intentionality, as this in itself would constitute an intention, then an adjacent position would be this: to fantasise displacing intention by developing a technical expression of the debilitating of technique. This is how non-intentionality may be deliberately deployed through de-learning to play the piano.

<sup>1</sup> Mayo Thompson talking to Christoph Gürk about The Red Krayola in Spex, No.09/99, transl. from German JP