

Parallel Session

Learning from Craft: Tool-building and Poiesis in Artistic Research Practices

Drawing from my experience as a craftsman designing and building musical instruments, I will propose ways in which artistic research can learn from the world of craft, and specifically, from a craft-oriented understanding of building and utilising tools.

For young artistic researchers seeking to design projects that harness their creative training as research and knowledge-making practices, an early and crucial component of their task is to identify and develop their conceptual and practical tools. This presentation focuses on the questions:

- What is a tool?
- How does one construct, repurpose, or develop a tool?
- And how do these tools then get applied to the work in question?

In artisanal craft work, one often encounters situations in which a specific, targeted tool must be designed and built before a creative project can even begin. Often, this process of tool design and fabrication is far more complicated and time-consuming than the eventual work to which it is turned. This process corresponds to Hannah Arendt's definition of the term *poiesis*. For Arendt, *poiesis* demarcates the creative act within *work*, her term for all types of artisanal endeavours distinguished from (what she sees as) more mundane *labour* or more socially-embedded *action*. In this sense, *poiesis* demarcates a process outside of time, in which tools are constructed which in themselves produce no artisanal products, but which are then used to bring specific time-oriented activities to fruition. This idea of a creative process geared towards the development of tools rather than objects can serve as an extremely fertile support to artistic research-in-practice.

This presentation focuses on the reflective and practical side of artistic research, in which attention and focus are given to these quasi-out-of-time processes of both conceptual and practical tool-building. I will draw from experience as a craftsman to show how a longer, more sustained period of careful tool-building can enable more carefully-attuned research phases, especially in the creative arts. Spending the requisite time to discover a healthy balance between these two elements can transform artistic research projects, particularly for students who are not yet experienced pivoting between artistic practice and academic research.



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Kevin Toksöz Fairbairn is a performer, sound artist, and scholar working around the edges of installation, improvisation, composition,

and craftsmanship. He is a regular guest of the premiere new music ensembles of the world,

such as Klangforum Wien and Talea Ensemble, with whom he performs at preeminent festivals

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and concert halls worldwide. He is also a founding member of experimental chamber music groups hoodwink (with Winnie Huang), Blechtrommel (with Joao Carlos Pacheco), and les Trombones de Bale. As an accomplished instrument builder, he performs concerts and builds installations using a variety of instruments of his own design and construction. He publishes about sound studies, artistic research, and musicology, and has given masterclasses and lectures throughout Europe, Asia, and North America. His recent book, *dis/cord: Thinking Sound through Agential Realism*, was published in 2022 by Punctum Books.