

## HABITUS, RESISTANCE AND THE PRODUCTION OF MUSICAL MEANING

Niamh Dell

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**Abstract:** This article defines and explores the concept of ‘resistance’ as a source of musical meaning in performance. Using Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ as a framework, I examine my musical habitus: the embodied, internalised ways I play my instrument and think about music, which reflect my extensive musical histories and the fields in which these histories have taken place. Resistance arises in practice when this habitus is undermined. When the types of musicking undertaken circumvent my habituated understanding of acceptable performance and performative roles, it manifests as a pull towards more familiar modes of musical engagement. Making specific reference to resistance experienced in the development and performance of Alex Harker’s *Drift Shadow* (2021), for solo oboe and electronics, the article outlines the ways in which my subjective relationship to my instrument and my role as a performer produce particular understandings of a work that can then nuance the way I play the piece.

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For several years, my contemporary solo oboe practice – and the practice research that has accompanied it – has been preoccupied with works that produce a particular type of ‘resistance’ when playing. This is a resistance that manifests as a sense of misalignment between my embodied oboe technique, with its specific musical histories and beauty standards, and what I am doing in practice; it is not necessarily a negative sensation, but rather one of increased exertion on some performative plane as I *resist* a persistently lingering compulsion to play differently from the ways in which I am required by the piece. Taking cues from Pierre Bourdieu, I propose that the origin of this resistant force is my musical ‘habitus’, which has been shaped by the external – predominantly standard-practice, orchestrally focused – fields in which I have existed as an oboist and which exerts an embodied influence on my musicianship and technique. Resistance arises when this habitus is undermined; when pieces circumvent my internalised standards surrounding acceptable types of musicking, I experience a pull towards ‘correcting’ my playing in order for it to fit more comfortably with my standard-practice habitus.

I find that this experience is creatively *productive*, in the sense that the resistance that occurs in these settings acts as a force through which I come to understand aspects of the musical meaning of a piece. Its influence manifests differently according to the performative

context and practical requirements of each work, producing resistant sensations which guide my performance in ways that are unique to my particular set of musical predispositions. As well as expanding on the concept of a musical habitus, this article will discuss the resistance experienced when playing *Drift Shadow*, by Alex Harker,<sup>1</sup> outlining the ways in which the work interacts with my embodied technique and the specifics of my habitus, and explicating the musical meaning produced in these interstices.

### Habitus

The concept of habitus is at the core of my practice research. Though this term has a multifaceted philosophical heritage, especially through the work of Hegel and Husserl,<sup>2</sup> in the context of my research its use is primarily inspired by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu; it denotes a way of acting in and perceiving the world that is enculturated and socialised according to the value structures of one's surroundings. In Bourdieu's writing habitus is generally intertwined with his theories of capital and field. It is through the exposure to the capital structures and shared values in a field that an individual internalises a habitus, which then becomes their apparatus for interfacing with their surroundings.

In addition to its standard economic definition, Bourdieu's 'capital' refers to any resource that an individual can exchange for power and thus extends to the concepts of social and cultural capital – who one knows and what one knows respectively – as a means of accruing status.<sup>3</sup> The influence of a specific form of capital on an individual's status is determined by the collective ideals of the spaces an individual inhabits. These spaces are what Bourdieu calls a field: a conceptual territory in which networks of social interactions form shared attitudes and regularities. They are, as Michael Grenfell notes, sites of 'objective structural relations' in which 'objectivity is constructed by individual subjectivities'.<sup>4</sup> Fields have implicit rules which are determined by the dispositions of, and interactions between, those individuals within their boundaries, manifesting in socio-cultural phenomena such as dominant cultural tastes and expectations with respect to people's attitudes and behaviours. Bourdieu suggests that power is distributed according to how one's capital adheres to the collective dispositions that exist within the field; a type of capital that is valuable in one field may be virtually worthless in another.

Habitus, then, is the synthesis of the interactions between field and capital experienced by an individual. It is an embodied framework of acquired dispositions that mediate one's interactions with their surroundings: a way of existing in the specific environments occupied by an individual that tends to be learned through, and adhere to, the capital hierarchies of the fields of this particular world. Bourdieu suggests that habitus is both a 'structured structure' and a 'structuring structure';<sup>5</sup> it is structured in the sense that it is formed

<sup>1</sup> Alex Harker with Niamh Dell, *Drift Shadow*, for oboe and electronics, 2021. Premiere performance: <https://youtu.be/lHEWsysupaA>, studio recording forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> Loïc Wacquant, 'Pierre Bourdieu', in *Key Sociological Thinkers*, ed. Rob Stones, 2nd edn (New York: New York University Press, 2008), p. 322.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Grenfell, ed., *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 166.

by external environments, while also acting as the structuring lens through which one experiences the world. Habitus tends to be deeply internalised, to the extent that it appears as ‘spontaneity without consciousness or will’:<sup>6</sup> rather than being deployed deliberately with the intention of affecting experience, habitus is expressed as values and behaviours that are ‘taken-for-granted’<sup>7</sup> as an individual’s natural dispositions. While it is mutable due to its ability to accumulate and adapt to new stimuli, being inscribed in the body (in its movements and sensations, in the way it acts in and reacts to its surroundings) also renders a habitus motile and thus durable. As Loïc Wacquant notes, habitus ‘stores social forces into the individual organism and transports them across time and space’.<sup>8</sup> An individual can therefore carry their distant personal histories with them in their habitus, while also being influenced by newer experiences.

### Musical Habitus and Learned Affordances

Though Bourdieu’s framework is frequently employed in socio-musicological and music education contexts, it is rarely applied to performance and even more rarely from the perspective of a performer.<sup>9</sup> My practice research therefore aims to develop the concept of a musical habitus, which extends the notion of a learned technique to encompass ‘the embodied sediments of individual and collective history’<sup>10</sup> that reside in the ways in which performers interact with their instruments. A musical habitus necessarily considers the ways in which instrumental technique is socialised through exposure to specific cultural values in musical fields. My oboe technique, for example, developed as it was in conservatoires and orchestras, is in general designed for the efficient and successful performance of a particular genre of repertoire (Western classical, common-practice period repertoire), and in prioritising the musical actions required of this *physical* technique, I am also upholding and perpetuating the *conceptual* values that I have absorbed from those fields in which I have existed as a musician. The types of playing that are included in (or, indeed, excluded from) my habitus reflect the ideals I have been exposed to surrounding my role as a performer, the tenets of good musicianship, desirable types of playing and so forth.

The deeply internalised, sometimes even automatic, ways in which I now interact with my oboe are indicative of the extensive and deliberate efforts I have made throughout my studies at acquiring an

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, tr. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> Amit Singh, ‘Kickboxing with Bourdieu: Heterodoxy, Hysteresis and the Disruption of “Race Thinking”’, *Ethnography* (2022), p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14661381211072431> (accessed 10 January 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Wacquant, ‘Pierre Bourdieu’, p. 268.

<sup>9</sup> For specific reference to the concept of habitus as a creative tool in composition and performance, see Stefan Östersjö, ‘The resistance of the Turkish Makam and the habitus of a performer: Reflections on a collaborative CD-project with Erdem Helvacioğlu’, *Contemporary Music Review*, 32(2-3) (2013), pp. 201–13, and Kathleen Coessens and Stefan Östersjö, ‘Habitus and the Resistance of Culture’, in *Artistic Experimentation in Music*, eds Darla Crispin and Bob Gilmore (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), pp. 333–48. For discussions of resistance as a performative force, see Marc Couroux, ‘Evryali and the exploding of the interface: From virtuosity to anti-virtuosity and beyond’, *Contemporary Music Review*, 21(2-3) (2002), pp. 53–67; Richard Craig ‘by way of the BREATH, to the LINE’, in *Performance, Subjectivity and Experimentation*, ed Catherine Laws (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020) pp. 109–24; and Aden Evens, *Sound ideas: Music, machines, and experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Wacquant, ‘Pierre Bourdieu’, p. 85.

embodied technique that is suitable for the performance of standard repertoire. The values that led to its development are therefore still present to some extent in my habitus as I reproduce and prioritise the corresponding technique in practice. The way I instinctively form an embouchure, for example, reflects both the sound-production strategies I learned in my lessons and my implicit understanding, through experiences such as observing the distribution of praise and listening to peers' reflections on performances, of which particular type of oboe sound was most worth pursuing as my technique was developing. I feel this automaticity, reflecting as it does my standard-practice background, in every facet of the way I interact with my instrument: even as I ready myself to play new, experimental or highly complex repertoire, the muscle memory of the ways I have shaped my body around the oboe for so long is transporting. I feel the familiar grain of the wood under my thumbs and settle my fingers in place over the keywork, and I am still struck, regardless of the repertoire, by how these actions evoke this history of scales, excerpts, recitals and auditions that has characterised the majority of my interactions with the oboe.

These evocations are, I would argue, a result of the *affordances* of my instrument – that is, the particular types of use to which my oboe lends itself in my hands. Crucially I understand the affordances that are offered to me by my oboe to be subjective, shaped by the histories that are contained in my embodied musical habitus, and therefore they are cultivated by the types of actions I have prioritised and repeated over my two decades playing the oboe. The expansion of my practice into contemporary repertoire has naturally extended these potential modes of interaction as I investigate and internalise the feelings of producing new techniques and sounds. Nevertheless, those that are thrust to the forefront of my mind when holding and using my instrument are overwhelmingly those which were painstakingly cultivated in the pursuit of, often exclusively, standard-practice excellence. The embouchure I form, the shape of my fingers over the keys, the first sounds that I make when warming up and the timbral qualities and embodied feedback that I look for as I play them are all unflinchingly oriented towards this type of oboe playing.

James J. Gibson emphasises that affordances are indeed *relational*: while they derive from objective properties of an environment or object, such as material or shape, they are inseparable from the subjective characteristics of an individual agent's modes of perception and engagement with their surroundings (their relative size or strength, for example).<sup>11</sup> The perceptual properties offered to me by my instrument are similarly dependent on the cultivated characteristics of my embodied instrumental technique and those ways that I *relate* to my instrument as a result of it. As Markus Tullberg notes, extended exposure to the sensorimotor stimulus that cultivates an expert instrumental technique produces a relationship to the instrument that offers many different possibilities or affordances from those offered to a beginner.<sup>12</sup> It follows, therefore, that my long-standing relationship with standard practice exerts an influence on my perception of the properties of my instrument; involuntarily, I understand the oboe as first and foremost a tool for the production

<sup>11</sup> James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates), p. 127.

<sup>12</sup> Markus Tullberg, 'Affordances of Musical Instruments: Conceptual Consideration', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 73 (2022), p. 8.

## Example 1:

Alex Harker, *Drift Shadow*: a module of multiphonics from a subsection of the score, from which I select and order freely when playing.

of *standard* repertoire. Despite having been designed with Western musical properties in mind, this is not especially the result of the objective properties of the instrument itself.<sup>13</sup> Any oboist will probably attest to the extent to which non-standard sounds that occur ‘naturally’ on the instrument in the hands of a beginner are ‘trained out’ through instruction and practice. Rather, as Anna Bull suggests, these affordances are produced in and reinforced by the social and cultural contexts in which my technique developed and from which I learned to discern desirable and accepted modes of musicking.<sup>14</sup>

The combined forces of my socially produced habitus and its manifestation in my afforded relationship to my instrument constitute the conditions of my performative subjectivity. My individuated, embodied dispositions mediate my engagement with musical material in ways that are specific to my own experiences, through the epistemic lens of an embodied technique that is, as Ben Spatz notes, ‘structured by and productive of knowledge’.<sup>15</sup> The resistance that is the locus of my current practice is therefore a type of *knowledge* produced in the act of musicking: knowledge, often tacit and embodied, of the ways in which I diverge from the learned parameters of ‘good’ oboe playing.

### Drift Shadow

Co-creating and performing Alex Harker’s *Drift Shadow* was instrumental in forming my understanding of this resistance. Commissioned for the University of Huddersfield’s FluCoMa project, the piece was developed with extensive collaboration and exploration of potential modes of sound production. *Drift Shadow* is a work for oboe and live electronics in which I navigate a winding, open-form score containing potential gestures and pathways of multiphonics (see [Example 1](#) for a module of multiphonic fingerings from the score). As I play through the sections and subsections of the piece, both my location in the score and my execution of various gestural parameters are tracked in real time by a MaxMSP patch. These are used to determine the output of the electronics: drawing from a corpus of samples I recorded with Harker during the development of the work, the output is processed and manipulated according to the particular multiphonic that it recognises and the manner in which I play it.

Productive resistance arises in *Drift Shadow* through a number of channels. For example, the types of techniques used in the piece

<sup>13</sup> Luke Windsor and Christophe de Bézenac, ‘Music and Affordances’, *Musicae Scientiae*, 16, no. 1 (2012), p. 108.

<sup>14</sup> Anna Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 26.

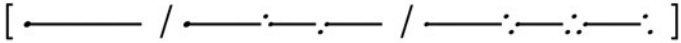
often feel as though they transgress the concept of high-quality oboe playing that resides in my habitus, influenced as it is by standard practice. The spluttering multiphonics, squeaks, hisses and honks that emerge from my instrument as I play not only sound antithetical to the types of playing I have, over time, internalised as desirable, but they also bring about a sense of bodily transgression through the ways I in which must move to produce them. This is compounded by my frequent inability to attain a comfortable degree of repeatability in these sounds; the liminal nature of their production methods seems to afford them a persistent technical unknowability that means they are frequently altered significantly under the most minor changes of conditions. Furthermore, the degree of authorship I have over these sounds – both through my input in the development of the work and through the gestural and navigational choices I make as I play – consistently produces a sense of resistance as I negotiate my habitual understanding of my role as a performer and that which I have taken in this collaboration.

*Drift Shadow* foregoes standard sound production techniques in favour of a soundworld dominated by unconventional ways of shaping the multiphonics in the score. Multiphonics are to be performed in a number of gesture types and phrase shapes specified in the score. These include – and combine – wide glissandi, the wavering isolation of particular pitches out of the harmonic cluster, stuttering and breaking rearticulations and numerous types building or dissolving the multiphonic sound (see [Example 2](#)). These gestures and techniques were devised collaboratively with Harker, who wanted sounds that possessed the harmonic properties of multiphonics but also undermined the often strident timbral qualities of multiphonics produced by robust airflow and embouchure. These sounds – softer and often far less stable than ‘standard’ multiphonic playing – were uncovered via extensive excavatory processes through which Harker and I aimed to explore the sonic boundaries of my instrument. Starting with fingerings and proposed performance parameters (such as dynamics, embouchure, glissandi and so forth) from Peter Veale’s seminal text *The Techniques of Oboe Playing*,<sup>16</sup> we sought to produce a catalogue of bespoke sounds and gesture types that satisfied Harker’s compositional aims.

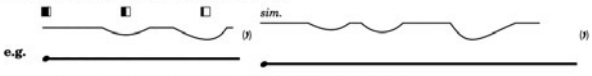
The aesthetic world inhabited by *Drift Shadow* is characterised, to me, by liminal sounds and sound-production techniques. Many of the gesture types outlined in the score involve a foregrounding of transitional sounds that exaggerate some of the types of playing moments that are typically deliberately minimised in my practice. For example, rather than starting and ending a sound neatly and without timbral disruption, I often play with the thresholds of air pressure or embouchure support at which a clear tone or multiphonic becomes under- or overblown, or otherwise greatly altered by embouchure and air activity. I wend around the precipice at which the harmonically full multiphonic ‘falls off’ into air or softer underblown timbral tones, or shifts upwards into more constricted sounds. Similarly, I often linger in the gritty, spit-filled sound that emerges before my tongue is fully retracted from the reed in an act of articulation; instead of the clean, smooth tonguing that I strive for in standard repertoire, here I am


<sup>16</sup> Peter Veale and Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, *The Techniques of Oboe Playing* (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1994).

**A** static with sporadic interruptions with colour fingerings

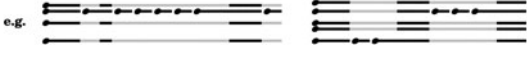


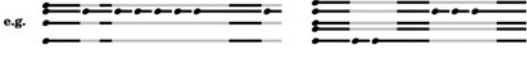
**B** on the edge of stability with underblown interruptions




e.g. 


**C** with rearticulated focus pitches (articulate with tongue/smorzando/dynamics)



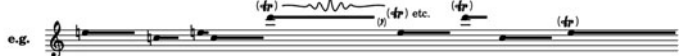
e.g. 

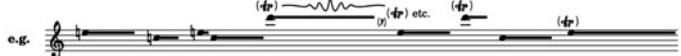
**A** multiphonics with moderate to rapid pitch focus and dynamic inflections




e.g. 

**B** single notes with optional 'breaking' trills as hairpins (irregular but with a vague sense of pulse)



e.g. 

**C** noise clouds/bursts (breath + keys + tongue constriction as needed)



Example 2:  
Various gesture shape options in  
*Drift Shadow*.

slowly drawing my tongue around and over the blades of the reed and allowing the sound to dissolve and break down.

These are, at times, transgressive sounds to produce, despite the fact that I find them interesting and often sonically attractive. They deviate so significantly from my habituated, embodied ideals surrounding oboe playing that I cannot help but feel a pull towards *correcting* the way I am required to operate my instrument in order to produce them. I am acutely aware when playing *Drift Shadow*, for example, of the physical and conceptual distance of my embouchure from its standard-practice form, so much so that I almost feel my mouth resisting the actions that I am taking as I shift around the reed in ways that go far beyond the limited movements it makes in the performance of standard repertoire. Drastic shifts of intonation and sound quality, as well as the abrupt initiation and cessation of sounds, are integral to performing this piece but often feel foreign to carry out. In departing so clearly from what Spatz refers to as the 'reliable pathways'<sup>17</sup> that are offered to me on my instrument through my embodied (standard) technique, I am transgressing not only the learned threshold of possible actions but also an internalised boundary of *acceptable* actions. Thus the sense of novelty I experience when playing *Drift Shadow* is also accompanied by an awareness, through resistance, that I would consider these sounds to represent a failure (of sound production, control, musicality and so forth) in another setting – one that is still highly active in my musical habitus. This sense of being pulled between divergent worlds is fundamental to my understanding of *Drift Shadow* as a musical entity. There is a transience in the way I slip between sections and subsections, and yet I often feel the need to return to specific multiphonics and gesture

<sup>17</sup> Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*, p. 26.

shapes, producing echoes and pulses of familiarity within a novel soundworld.

The transgressive sensations that I feel in executing the gestures in *Drift Shadow* are often exacerbated by the technical obscurity of their production. Multiphonics can be brittle, and this is especially the case when played with the unusual techniques in this work. While the aesthetic world of the piece is one of fluttering and breaking sounds, I nevertheless aim to have high levels of control over the actions that produce them. However, this is not always possible; the degree of technical precision required to replicate certain gestures often feels unattainably high, and in *Drift Shadow* I tend to find that sounds inexplicably fail in ways that are not part of the piece's fragile aesthetic. Where in one practice session I have consistently – and often easily – attained a particular sonic result when executing a gesture, in the next it might elude me, despite being attempted under circumstances of environment, reed condition and bodily action that are similar enough to have very little noticeable impact in a standard-practice environment. Things that have very minor effects on the performance of standard repertoire seem to be magnified in this piece: a slight change in the aperture of my reed, for example, or an exhalation performed with a fraction more force than usual would manifest in relatively minor ways in my standard practice but here can cause gestures to derail entirely.

These are the circumstances I aim to gain control over in practice, yet here the variables are frequently too volatile to achieve the often high degree of technical specificity required to have satisfactory repeatability in *Drift Shadow*. I therefore have a compounded sense of the transgression of my actions, and this is a further source of productive resistance. Not only am I making sounds that would, in other contexts, constitute a 'failure' of my oboe technique, I am also at times failing to succeed at this in the ways that I am used to. Even at its most rehearsed and performance-ready stage, there is an inescapable level of insecurity in sounds contained in *Drift Shadow*. My habitus, with its standard-practice preference for what Jennifer Torrence calls 'acts of self-preservation' in the form of 'drilling and repeating' in the practice room,<sup>18</sup> resists this, and as a result the piece is invariably imbued with a sense of the tentativeness I feel at revealing the inevitable imperfections in my playing.

Perhaps the most unexpected revelation of collaborating on *Drift Shadow* was the friction I feel as a result of my creative contributions to the piece. While the nature of the soundworld and harmonic fields in the piece stem from Harker's compositional ideals, the practical realisations of these things are the result of extensive collaborative conversations between us. My role in this aspect of the collaboration was often curatorial – Harker would request certain sound types or phrase ideas and I would offer suggestions of ornamentation, gestures, fingering alterations and so forth, generally based on my aesthetic interest in the sonic outcome. This differs from my usual role in collaborative work, where my suggestions tend to be of a problem-solving, rather than creative, nature. In these settings my input typically consists of providing practical aid to composers, who draw on my instrument-specific knowledge to help them fulfil their sonic ideas. Taking on more creative responsibility in the

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Torrence, 'Soft to the Touch: Performance, Vulnerability, and Entanglement in the Time of Covid', *VIS – Nordic Journal for Artistic Research*, 6 (2021), paragraph 2.



## Example 3:

An example of some of the navigation frameworks provided in *Drift Shadow*. Each subsection contains a varying number of multiphonics, which I select from as I play. The numbers (for example, 'x 6+') under the subsection names give the approximate number of times I might return to each subsection when playing through the larger main section. The arrows denote allowable travel directions between subsections; ordering of multiphonics, gestures and subsections is otherwise free.

The image displays a musical score with four main subsections and their internal details:

- Origin (x 6+)**: Located at the top, it features a staff with notes and rests. Above the staff are five vertical multiphonic diagrams, each consisting of a circle with notes inside and a downward-pointing arrow. The diagrams are labeled with numbers 3, 3, 3, 3, and 3. A note with a slur and 'glass' is present. Below the staff, the text reads: *pp-mf fragile and liminal (moving between stable and underblown)*. Measure numbers 48, 53, 97, 137, and 109 are marked.
- Ground (x 1+)**: Located in the middle, it features a staff with notes and rests. Above the staff are two vertical multiphonic diagrams, each consisting of a circle with notes inside and a downward-pointing arrow. The diagrams are labeled with numbers 1 and 1. A note with a slur and 'occasional flickering' is present. Below the staff, the text reads: *mf strong + focused (optional trill)*. Measure numbers 353 and 354 are marked.
- Displace (x 3+)**: Located at the bottom, it features a staff with notes and rests. Above the staff are five vertical multiphonic diagrams, each consisting of a circle with notes inside and a downward-pointing arrow. The diagrams are labeled with numbers 3, 1, 1, 1, and 3. A note with a slur and 'glass' is present. Below the staff, the text reads: *p-f messy and gestural, pushing against the established texture*. Measure numbers 40, 47, 52, 39, 118, and 103 are marked.
- Push (x 1+)**: Located on the right side, it features a staff with notes and rests. Above the staff are two vertical multiphonic diagrams, each consisting of a circle with notes inside and a downward-pointing arrow. The diagrams are labeled with numbers 1 and 1. A note with a slur and 'play sustain till elec double then [A] (+ [B]) elec double then follow the dissolve move on only once doubling dissolves' is present. Below the staff, the text reads: *pp-p dark and noisy fragments of broken sound*. Measure numbers 118 and 103 are marked.

Arrows indicate navigation directions: from Origin to Ground, from Ground to Displace, from Displace to Push, and from Push back to Origin.

development of *Drift Shadow* was challenging; though Harker invited my contributions, I frequently felt the need to defer to his tastes, and it was initially difficult to express (or even decipher) my own. It felt jarring to exert an influence on the musical material in this way, since my habituated understanding of my role as a performer is strictly that of interpreter rather than composer of any kind. Indeed, as Daniel Leech-Wilkinson notes, performance traditions in standard-practice environments offer very little *real* interpretive variation or novel creative input due to the ontological status of the score as representative of the composer's musical intentions.<sup>19</sup> There is a 'strong moral imperative'<sup>20</sup> to adhere to the borders of collectively standardised interpretations, according to Leech-Wilkinson, since they are assumed to offer the best insight into the intentions of the composer. Thus the borders of acceptable interpretive deviation that reside in my habitus are relatively narrow: I feel comfortable in producing performances of standard repertoire with some small novelty in their approaches to phrasing or articulation, for example, but the generation of musical material, like that which occurred in the development of *Drift Shadow*, is entirely outside those boundaries.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, 'Compositions, Scores, Performances, Meanings', *Music Theory Online*, 18, no. 1 (2012), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.12.18.1/mto.12.18.1.leech-wilkinson.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 3.3.

Once I became more comfortable in offering aesthetic input, this resistance at the prospect of creative ownership was transferred to the act of playing itself. In playing *Drift Shadow*, I feel a sense of exposure in performing a work to which I have had a significant musical contribution. This is magnified by the open-form nature of the piece, since the performer has a high level of influence over the shape and ordering of sounds, and therefore can contribute significantly to the overall morphology of the work. In navigating through the piece, I inevitably give importance to sounds that I linger over or repeat and in doing so form a particular type of sonic architecture that reflects my own aesthetic tastes. Like my hesitation at offering creative input into the sounds contained in the piece, this was a significant point of resistance in our early rehearsals, so much so that I would frequently ask Harker for an example 'itinerary' that might give me a sense of how he would like me to progress through a section of the work, rather than produce my own musical choices and accept artistic responsibility for them. The openness of the practical framework of *Drift Shadow* (see [Example 3](#)), and the subsequent use of improvised elements in its phrasing and form, invokes, as Anna Bull suggests, a powerful sense of apprehension at the prospect of making the wrong choice. Highlighting the ubiquitous presence of shame as a motivator for improvement in standard-practice learning environments, Bull notes that improvisation is often eschewed by young classical musicians due to the lack of predetermined sonic outcomes and the ensuing 'fear of getting it wrong'.<sup>21</sup> The improvised aspects of *Drift Shadow* – the overall form of the piece as well as my choices in gesture and phrasing – bring about this apprehension. I am still aware, each time I play the piece, of the ways in which offering my own musical ideas to a listener transgresses my habituated sense of acceptable performance practice.

### Conclusion

*Drift Shadow* is a piece that offers me many avenues through which to find and explore productive resistances. In collaborating on its development, I have exposed my musical tastes to a degree that they rarely, if ever, are in my standard practice. My curation of the sounds and gesture types included in the piece, as well as the choices I make when progressing through the score, are all indicative of aesthetic preferences that are not explored in the type of playing that my habitus upholds as ideal – neither are the particular types of sounds included in the piece, sounds that I helped to choose and that are still prone to failure in my hands despite my extensive familiarity with their production. It is a piece, therefore, characterised for me by a sense of the vulnerability I feel at the ways in which my performance and my performative role transgress the musical histories contained in my habitus, and the degree of control over what I play afforded by the piece allows me to utilise this musical meaning in interesting ways. I can, for instance, choose to spend time in 'breaking' sounds, repeatedly seeking out the point at which a multiphonic ceases to sound in its harmonic form, or I might deliberately return often to wispy, fluttery sounds as a way of emphasising the tentativeness that this piece holds for me.

<sup>21</sup> Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*, p. 85.

The process of working on *Drift Shadow* was key in refining my concept of what these resistant sensations were. The duration of the collaboration, as well as its collegial nature, allowed me to interrogate the feelings that arose when working on the piece of being pulled towards (or away from) certain types of playing or specific performative roles. In conceptualising my embodied instrumental technique as part of a larger, socially structured, musical habitus, I understand the ways in which those collective values that informed its development are present in each interaction I have with my oboe. In *Drift Shadow*, the presence of these standard-practice values is made known through my divergence from them. The ways I move around my instrument, the sounds I produce and the ownership I necessarily have over those sounds all offer me a kernel of understanding of the features of my musical subjectivity and the specific musical histories and beauty standards that are contained in my musical habitus. This subjectivity emerges in my subsequent musical understanding of the work, which reflects the intersection of habitus and musical material and the particular sensations produced in that meeting point.