

*Stop inhaling Oxygen and exhaling Carbon Dioxide, because “we did that in the 60s”*  
Andy Ingamells

The New Discipline is a retroactive term for a type of ongoing musical activity that is very easy to parody yet very difficult to pin down. The title of this article is taken from one of my contributions to the @textscoreaday Twitter feed<sup>1</sup> which addressed the familiar criticism that this kind of theatrical, arty, extra-musical, textual, experimental, conceptual stuff has all been done before (always with the implicit suggestion that it ought not be repeated).

Successfully defining a school of thought is hard. How do you find a name that sticks? The best names always seem to be re-appropriations of disparaging terms, such is the case with Impressionism, Punk, Baroque, and Methodism<sup>2</sup>. In fact Methodism would have been a great name for The New Discipline, with its focus on practice and activity, being a *method* rather than a style. Perhaps when the critics inevitably clamour to condemn the idea as “NOT NEW!!!” their invective might be mined for a catchy pejorative name that can be worn as a badge of honour.

What is the ‘new’ in The New Discipline? It’s not a buzzword. To me it refers to a passion for newness, an exploration of being new and what this means. People who do this kind of thing have a particular interest in the Twentieth Century avant-garde(s) because those people were *also* interested in the ‘New’. But whereas they smashed down artistic barriers The New Discipline plays in the rubble and uses it to construct. It doesn’t (just) look to technological advances as representative of newness. It is more nuanced, concerned with how our physical, emotional and intellectual capacities may adapt to a changing world.

‘New’ in this context could also refer to an intense focus on an everyday activity, looking at it anew. For instance, what rhythm do you make as you type your Facebook password? Is it the same every time? Can you repeat it ten or a hundred times? Can you do it with your toes? Would you like to work with other people to take this idea and make it into an activity that holds your attention for an hour?

Sincerity is the key to this type of work, requiring the same rigour being applied to an activity like typing your Facebook password as practising the violin for an important recital. All musical performance is a disciplined action of some kind, so why limit these disciplined actions to just operating musical instruments? After all, traditional performance techniques, from whichever musical tradition you choose, are just aggregates of small decisions taken by many different people in the past. They are far from perfect, so why be beholden to them?

Or perhaps the ‘New’ refers to something being new to a particular practitioner, undertaking an unfamiliar skill that involves a sincere attempt to learn. The process of learning and discovery through physically *doing* something is characteristic of The New Discipline, and draws attention to the individuality of the people involved. Work is made by individuals, for themselves and for other individuals, rather than for any nameless actor or instrumentalist. This time it’s personal.

My own ‘discipline’ is reading. You may have noticed from the opening paragraphs that I was raised in a religious household. I used to take part in Bible reading competitions (yes they exist!), where I would practise reading the Bible aloud for hours on end. This may sound boring, but I learned how to declaim text in an effective way, and it is a skill that I can bring to the table when I work with other people. Musicians read music in front of an audience all the time. In my own work I often consider how the act of (score-)reading can *become* the musical material itself.

In this kind of work the roles of composer and performer are fluid. My own experience has shown that these roles are constantly negotiated throughout the working process, and the history and

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<sup>1</sup> @textscoreaday was a project that ran from 12/10/12 until 12/10/13. A group of five composers and visual artists posted an experimental text score every day on Twitter to the account [www.twitter.com/textscoreaday](http://www.twitter.com/textscoreaday).

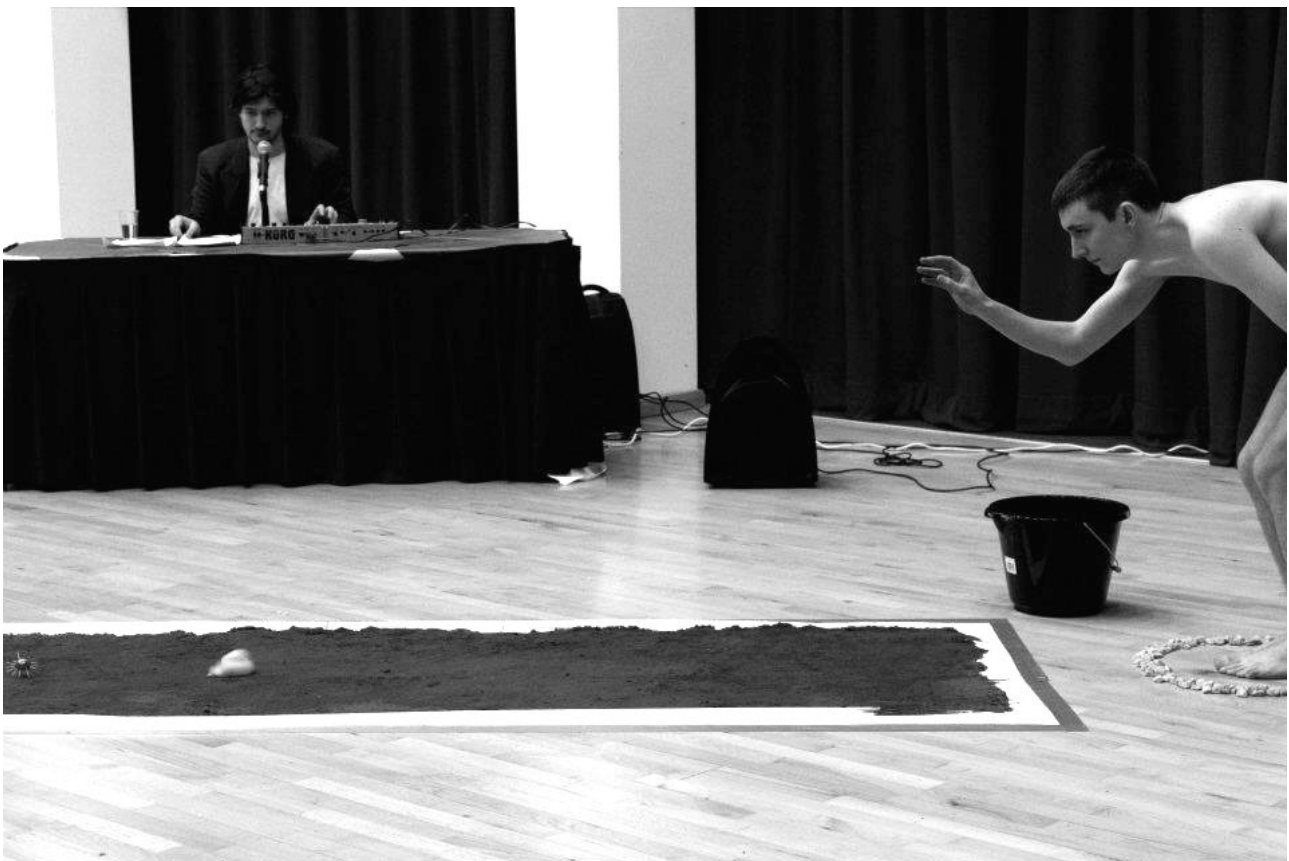
<sup>2</sup> The German word *Geusenwort* (from the Dutch *Geuzennaam*) specifically refers to this kind of linguistic re-appropriation.

baggage associated with such labels becomes an unnecessary burden. Following Christopher Small's example of music being a verb<sup>3</sup> I suggest that:

- Composing = Asking
- Performing = Tasking (like multi-tasking, which is something musicians can be very good at)

I ask and I task when required. These are activities that humans do every day. They can be done well or badly by anybody, but in order to be effective they should be done sincerely. Perhaps it's a little utopian, but I hope that The New Discipline can play some part in challenging the passive spectatorship of musical activity that has been so dominant for so long.

However, I don't think The New Discipline intends to supersede anything else. It's not 'new and improved' music. It's more like the new as in 'the new neighbours have moved in next door'. They are not necessarily any better or worse than the previous neighbours. They are not the first neighbours and they won't be the last. They are just different, so you'd better welcome them. Otherwise they might not invite you to join in the fun!



*Sport Music: Pétanque*, devised and performed by Ensemble Lös Caballeros (Jeremiah Runnels, Andy Ingamells, Ivan Babinchak Renqvist). A game of pétanque, using water balloons and a spiky jack, serves as notation to be read by a sports commentator (2012).

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<sup>3</sup> Small, C. (1998) *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press