Sounding the Everyday: Working with Objects in New Music Practice

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2021
Abstract

*Sounding the Everyday: Working with Objects in New Music Practice* is an examination of how everyday objects can expand the music practices of composers, performers, and improvisers. I identify with each of these roles in my own creative practice, and my artistic research includes creation, critical enquiry, analysis and reflections of new and original work with everyday objects. I focus on the appearances of everyday objects in music from my perspective as a flutist, and my artistic research is exploratory and experimental. The unconventionality of everyday objects in music can be surprising and comedic, and creating space for them in this context can invite the unexpected. It is through this approach that I realise working with everyday objects as a form of collaborating with the nonhuman.

I acknowledge the historical and current practices of everyday objects in new music by conducting a context scan of existing literature, recordings, practitioners, and documentation, which helps me to position my own artistic perspective within the field. Theoretical models that level both humans and nonhumans as equal assist my research of expanding a music practice with everyday objects, and I discuss the ethical implications of the word *use* in a collaborative context. Considering these theoretical concepts, I present a Categorical Framework through which to approach working with everyday objects, and I apply this framework to the analysis of recent works by contemporary composers, performers, and improvisers. The practice-based component of this research is a portfolio of 15 original works and other performances of both notated and improvised music, and I discuss and reflect upon the creative processes in my findings. Major themes from my artistic work emerge in my reflections—the unexpected, collaboration, and function—and I present the practical considerations of working with everyday objects through the perspectives of composer, performer, and improviser. It is through these headings that I discover how the multisensory qualities of everyday objects can expand a music practice.
Statement of Authenticity

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

I declare that ethical clearance for this research was granted through Griffith University (Reference No. 2018/982).

Jodie Rottle

March 2021
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A concise online version of the artistic portfolio can be accessed at

[www.jodierottle.com/portfolio](http://www.jodierottle.com/portfolio)
Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners and First Nation Peoples whose land upon which I live, work, and conduct research, the Jagera and Turrbal people. I pay my respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging. Sovereignty was never ceded.

I would like to thank the many human and nonhuman objects that influenced my research. This document is the result of an assemblage stretched across over three years of reflection, action, play, collaboration, and discussion.

I am grateful for the academic guidance from my supervisors, Professor Scott Harrison and Dr Erik Griswold. Our discussions shaped the trajectory of my work and I appreciate your patience.

To my partner, Steve Newcomb: thank you for your support and for laughing along with me.

Hannah Reardon-Smith, you enrich my life and challenge me to unlearn in a safe and supportive environment. Thank you for your friendship.

Vanessa Tomlinson, thank you for your mentorship and inspiration. Your work amazes me!

Special thanks go to Greg and Emma Harm of Tangible Media for helping capture the majority of my artistic work through audio, video, and photography. I appreciate your willingness to document my work in rural bushland, industrial factories, at recording studios, and on stage.
Introduction

An artistic practice: Context

In my artistic research as a composer, flutist, and improviser I investigate the sounds of everyday objects, often alongside conventional musical instruments. Their functions and appearances drive my compositional processes and performing with everyday objects assists me in building a relationship with my immediate environment. As an improviser, my practice unfolds in the moment; I realise my own position within a collection of sounds, and I absorb visual and aural cues from other objects to collaborate with the nonhuman. Historical and current music practices involving everyday objects inform my decisions as I continue to understand an object’s multisensory elements within my own creative work.

I perceive my artistic practice as one situated in sound, but I recognise that everyday objects are tightly linked to appearance, function, and context. When I step onto a stage with my flute, there is an understanding of the conventions associated with the instrument in my hands. The times that I have stepped on stage with an electric toothbrush, however, have incited laughter, and I question: Why? Everyday objects introduce an element of absurdity into new music performance; objects can suggest the comedic, the uncanny, or the ridiculous in otherwise very serious traditions of contemporary classical music. This is where I point my artistic focus. Interacting with the multisensory qualities of nonhuman objects engages my abilities to incorporate that which may be considered non-musical or unconventional into composition, performance, and improvisation. Interpreting this approach as a collaboration heightens my capacity to work within a wider network of artists and nonhuman entities stretching beyond that which may be considered conventional. Decentring traditional instruments through the incorporation of everyday objects in music practices may evoke the absurd. Stepping into this realm of absurdity allows me to exist within a creative practice that
is not bound by restrictive attitudes of what constitutes music. I continue to question: If there was no absurdity, how else would art and music evolve? What might exist beyond absurdity? What other concepts are possible?

This text is a written account of my artistic practice that analyses and connects theory to my creative work as a composer, performer, and improviser. It includes the creation and documentation of new work, an examination of object-focused theories, analysis through a Categorical Framework, and reflections on my artistic portfolio. I recognise that the musical experience is an important place to begin. A significant portion of this project was practice-based, and the research in its written form may be best understood following the experience of the artistic material. I suggest that the reader first accesses the concise online portfolio before reading the written descriptions and reflections in Chapters 4-6, accessible at www.jodierottle.com/portfolio.

Why objects?

Objects expand the possibilities of my music practice. I consider when and why objects began to infiltrate my creative work. In 2011, I formed the new music ensemble Dead Language with cellist Meaghan Burke and pianist Tristan McKay, and through our friendship and collaborations I became fascinated with the musical potential of everyday objects. Initially, this ensemble was an outlet where we could perform existing repertoire for our instrumentation, performing compositions by Elliott Carter, Kaija Saariaho, and Bernhard Lang during our studies. As we started to realise our collective tastes as a trio, we began to write original works and commission our colleagues. Our instruments became just one sound source to which we added preparations, musical toys, card games, and our voices into notated work and improvisation. We found ourselves performing less at conventional staged music
venues and instead playing at toy music festivals, literary societies, and experimental music series.

Creating music with Dead Language was joyous work, and the whimsy we experienced as performers translated to our audiences. Everyday objects facilitated play and assisted us in exploring comedy, storytelling, and context in music. Many of these elements became points of inspiration for our original works. The historical and established traditions of found objects, as in the works of John Cage, found object percussion music, performance art, and sound art, helped us to realise our own compositional voices as instrumentalists. Our specific training (wind, string, piano) informed our interpretations of the practical and technical elements of objects. Our music became visually engaging, and we enjoyed the opportunities for audience connection that everyday objects helped us to make in different performance contexts.

What started in my collaborations with Dead Language is continued here in this body of research. There is an existing tradition of working with objects in music practices, and this tradition is evolving. My position within the field is a part of this evolution: I am a flautist who began composing in my early years as a professional musician. I am not a trained percussionist—a realm of practice where everyday objects are often common—and I did not formally study composition. I recognise improvisation as a common element of my work. When I compose, I often write in the style of structured improvisation, and much of my initial process as a composer-performer includes experimentation through improvisation and play. I also participate in open improvisation with other human artists and nonhuman objects. My artistic research with everyday objects is exploratory and experimental, and it is through this approach that I position working with everyday objects as a form of collaboration. My creative practice becomes a medium through which I form a discussion on the theoretical and ethical implications of collaborating with nonhuman objects, one that I hope “not only leads
to unexpected musicality but to narratives about shaping relationships with the world” (LaBelle, 2015, p. 41).

Research Questions

This research documents my experiences and perspectives as I continue to shape my creative identity. As an artistic researcher, I question: How can everyday objects expand the music practices of composers, performers, and improvisers?

The concept of expanding a practice is multifaceted, and as I explore this primary question, I will also be addressing the following enquiries:

- What is the role of an everyday object in a creative practice?
- Who are the musical artists who have historically and are currently working with everyday objects?
- What are the different ways of including everyday objects in music practices, and how might an object be understood in a musical context?
- Why are everyday objects included in music practices?

Methods

This work is founded in the principles of Practice-based research. Following a Context Scan, through Critical Enquiry I analyse the content to further enhance my practice and the practices of others. My creative work is central to this project, and Critical Enquiry and Content Analysis methods informed my artistic choices through Practice-based research. Edith Cowan University’s comprehensive online resource Research Methodologies for the Creative Arts and Humanities (Edith Cowan University, 2017) was a helpful resource in deciding on these methods, as it provided structures through which I plotted a path of investigation for this research. Barrett and Bolt’s Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry (2010) also outlined considerations within a practice-based method
and provided examples of how I could conduct my own research. Coessens’s (2014) idea of artistic practice as a web influenced my approach in considering how a sound-based topic could be explored in a larger philosophical context.

**Context Scan**

I conducted a Context Scan as a broader interpretation of a Literature Review for this research, which was completed in stages and through multiple streams of absorbing knowledge. Scholarly publications, while important, were only one facet to this method. Listening to and watching video documentation of performances was central to understanding the shape of my research project. I also physically attended many live concerts, events, museum exhibitions, and conferences where related content was presented in Australia and the USA. These resource-rich experiences offered an engaging way of understanding how the appearances of everyday objects in music practices are currently unfolding. This also fostered interactions with artists and other attendees who kindly shared their knowledge on this subject. I am grateful for these conversations and personal connections that widened my review of the literature.

Reviewing the literature was a process that has continued to evolve. It includes a historical account of the appearance of objects in artistic movements and addresses the music-based practices where it currently unfolds. I address specific composers, performers, and movements that have helped the evolution of everyday objects in music practices alongside important traditions within the field, such as percussion music. Theoretical ideas are also first presented in the Context Scan, noting both the philosophical and ethical views of working with the nonhuman.
Critical Enquiry

Part of this research includes connecting my artistic practice to current philosophical movements that position everyday objects as equal to humans. In this context, everyday objects are described as the nonhuman. I focus on both Object-Oriented Ontology, or OOO (pronounced “triple-O”), through text by Graham Harman (2018), as well as Jane Bennet’s (2010) vital materialist views of assemblage. These perspectives build an understanding of how everyday objects in a music practice can become a collaboration with the nonhuman. I discuss the need for a positive shift of the language directed toward everyday objects through Sara Ahmed’s 2019 *What’s the Use?*. These theories are each different but position the nonhuman as equal to humans. Harman (2018) states that “no theory survives its first contact with reality” (p. 7), and I consider the connections made between these philosophical movements and music with everyday objects as an initial method of expanding my artistic practice.

Content Analysis

Watching and listening to creative works throughout the Context Scan allowed me to further question how objects could be understood in music practices. I developed a Categorical Framework through which to approach working with everyday objects, and this framework provided a foundation for Content Analysis and assisted my Practice-based method. In Chapter 3, I explain four object categories (Sonic, Multisensory, Silent, and Prepared Instruments) and discuss the work of currently practicing artists that can be understood through this framework.

Practice-based

I am a composer, performer and improviser. The Practice-based component of this research is central but also influenced by the findings from the Context Scan, Critical Enquiry
and Content Analysis methods. I mentioned that the Context Scan included attendance at live events and making connections with other artists. I identify this as a form of artistic research where I physically interacted with music with everyday objects and facilitated connections with other artists. I present a portfolio in Chapter 4 where I describe my work and how it fits within my Categorical Framework. Many themes emerged in my Practice-based research, and I reflect on how object-focused theories discovered through Critical Enquiry guided my compositional processes. I present these reflections as findings through exegesis in Chapters 5 and 6.

My creative work was influenced by each of these methods, and the artistic products of my research bounce back into a loop of this evolving field. Brinkmann (2014) suggests that “we should, as qualitative researchers, allow ourselves to stay unbalanced for a moment longer than what is comfortable, for this is where we may learn something new” (p. 724), and in my Practice-based research this temporary discomfort revealed the most about how everyday objects expanded my own work.

The practice-based research in this project includes:

- A portfolio of 15 new and original works—many of which I also performed—documented through scores, video recordings, photos, reflections, analysis, and journal excerpts. The portfolio exists in written form in Chapter 4 and is available to view in a more concise online version at [www.jodierottle.com/portfolio](http://www.jodierottle.com/portfolio).

- A concert presented by Kupka’s Piano, curated by me, which featured six recent works for small ensemble. The works on the program explored the different ways of involving objects into notated compositions as described in my Categorical Framework. This concert was presented live in September 2019 at the Queensland
Conservatorium. The rehearsal and performance video recordings helped to inform my written analysis of logistical, practical, and artistic considerations.

- Reflections on my work as a collaborator and improviser. I worked with violinist Flora Wong in the premiere of Chris Perren’s Escapement (2019), and I also participated at events held through the Make It Up Club in Melbourne with violinist Elizabeth Welsh.

Definitions

*Everyday Object*

What is an object? I define an everyday object as any non-living thing that is not already considered a musical instrument within an existing cultural or social tradition. I exclude instruments because they are commonplace within a musical context, and I seek to investigate the visual and aural meaning of that which may be considered unconventional, outlying, or non-traditional in music performance. I also exclude animals for ethical reasons. Typically, everyday objects refer to items commonly encountered in daily life (although this may depend on specific cultural settings or lifestyles), and they often have an expected or intended functionality. I define function as an object’s most commonly accepted form of use within a context. Everyday objects can be explored in ways other than for their intended functions, and the term *everyday* implies that a performer does not need to be a technical expert of a particular object to incorporate it into music. This definition applies to both the term *everyday object* and simply the word *object* throughout this research.

My concept of an everyday object was influenced by Australian musician Leah Scholes’s study of found objects in percussion music. She defines found objects as “items used as musical instruments, but whose created intention had no purposeful musical intent. Examples are utilitarian objects, manufactured scrap and junk items, and articles from
nature…that are still recognisable in their original form” (2007, p. 8). In my practice, I adopt Scholes’s idea of exploring the everyday found object in its original form, which means I do not typically concentrate on purpose-built sculptures or newly designed musical instruments. I instead focus on existing objects.

In addition to my music-focused definition, theoretical concepts of what constitutes an object may also be helpful in understanding the term. Harman (2018) explains that:

the word ‘object’ often has the connotations of something physical, solid, durable, inhuman, or utterly inanimate. In OOO, by contrast, ‘object’ simply means anything that cannot be reduced either downward or upward, which means anything that has a surplus beyond its constituent pieces and beneath its sum total of effects on the world. (p. 51)

O’Callaghan (2016) suggests a multisensory way of experiencing objects, stating that they are the “subjects of perception-based demonstrative thought” where “vision is the paradigm. Humans see objects like corks and cormorants, and seen objects look some specific way, such as cylindrical, mottled, animate, or feathered” (p. 1270). This definition addresses the human perception of an object, and I consider how sound might contribute to perception. Coupled with Harman’s definition, an object becomes less of a material item and can be understood as something created through the human imagination. Throughout this research I focus on how the common human perception of an object may be preserved, altered, or subverted in a music practice in ways that explore its multisensory qualities.

**Nonhuman**

The nonhuman is any object that is not human, be it “natural, cultural, real or fictional” (Harman, 2018, p. 9). This follows on from the previously stated definition of an object. OOO and vital materialist thinkers, such as Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, and Jane
Bennett, approach the existence of nonhuman objects as equal to human (Morton, 2013, p. 10). Every thing—human or otherwise—is levelled as equal. Nonhuman implies that there is no hierarchy amongst human or the nonhuman. This is a term that frequently reappears in this research and in different contexts, and it is often synonymous with the term everyday object.

**Music Practice**

The term *music practice* best describes the artistic areas where this research is situated. Simply, the definition reflects my own music practice. This includes the contexts of staged concert music, site-specific, sound art, participatory, interactive, and improvisatory work where everyday objects are explored in an acoustic or electroacoustic way and, most often, made visible through live or video-recorded performance. This list is not exhaustive, and it may also include artforms where music is not typically a focal point. My work is often made for specific performance contexts, and although everyday objects may drift away from conventions of music, I identify that describing my practice as musical is a step toward creating space for objects in these realms.

**Musical Instrument**

The term *musical instrument* as it appears in this research refers to objects that are already culturally or socially accepted as conventional musical instruments. I acknowledge that what may be considered a musical instrument within one cultural tradition may appear to be an object in another. By defining the differences between an object and an instrument, I attempt to avoid the appropriation of cultural artifacts. Musical instruments are not referred to as everyday objects for the purpose of this research. In many cases, I refer to everyday objects alongside instruments. This is my way of showing appreciation for existing musical traditions whilst keeping space for everyday objects within a music practice. Hardjowirogo’s (2017) concept of instrumental identity helped to shape this definition. They explain:
simply being a musical instrument must not be understood as a property an object as such has or has not. Rather, it seems to result from using something in a particular way which we think of as instrumental. Consequently, an object is not per se a musical instrument (ontological definition) but it becomes a musical instrument by using it as such (utilitarian definition). (p. 11)

Through this assertion, I collect that a definition of a musical instrument is less of it’s physical or tangible properties and more aligned with conventionally accepted purpose, use, or function. This also connects to Sara Ahmed’s (2019) concept of Queer Use, which I explain further in theoretical discussions in Chapter 2. Palermo’s (2020) examination of queer organology is also a consideration in defining an object, in which they position how a queer perspective “is crucial in agitating normative beliefs, values, and attitudes that underpin notions of instrumental identity” (p. 18). I understand my perspectives, artistic work, and definition of what constitutes a musical instrument as a similar agitation. By understanding what a musical instrument is within the context of my Artistic Research, I can then make the deliberate choice to depart from this label in an effort to discover new creative possibilities.

I am also careful to consider theoretical concepts relating to objects in considering how to define a musical instrument. Object-Oriented Ontology (Harman, 2018) and Vital Materialist views (Bennett, 2010) help to outline the differences between what is an everyday object and what is an instrument within this research without hierarchy. I discuss these theories in detail, among others that are influential to my Artistic Research, in Chapter 2.

**Goals of this research**

A major goal of this research is to explore unconventionality. It is anticipated that the Context Scan, written analyses, Categorical Framework, and my portfolio will help other artists to embrace objects within their creative practices, and that these methods might invite
the discovery of the unexpected. The centre of this research questions how objects can expand the practices of composers, performers, and improvisers, and it is my hope that my discussions can help others in their artistic pursuits. Additionally, I hope that the new approaches to working with objects addresses the language commonly associated with objects. The word *use* is examined in Chapter 2, and I identify that a music-centred discussion of this topic may help artists to reconsider their relationships with everyday objects as a collaboration, one that emphasises positive approaches of reciprocity (Haraway, 2010) rather than those that may be manipulative, such as Creative Abuse (Keep, 2009).

**Contributions to the field**

This artistic research is a combination of creative content, written analyses, a categorical approach, and reflections on a portfolio of works investigating the appearances of everyday objects in music practices. It contributes the following new knowledge to the field:

- An examination of object-focused theories, which are connected to collaborative music practices with the nonhuman.

- A Categorical Framework through which to approach working with everyday objects as a composer, performer, or improviser. This also includes an analysis of existing musical work featuring everyday objects.

- An artistic portfolio of 15 new works described through videos, recordings, reflections, and scores.

- Video documentation and descriptions of six recent works performed by new music ensemble Kupka’s Piano and curated by me (*Sonic Objects*, 13 Sept. 2019, Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University).

- Reflections and practical considerations of working with everyday objects in a music practice.
A concise online portfolio of all artistic material within this document (photos, videos, scores) accessible at www.jodierottled.com/portfolio.

Chapter Outline

This research explores the possibilities of expanding a music practice with everyday objects. Influenced by philosophical movements including Object-Oriented Ontology and vital materialism, my approach to working with objects in a music practice examines the human artist and the nonhuman object as equal counterparts. Ideas surrounding collaboration and the ethical implications of working with nonhuman objects are explored. Through examples of my own work as a performer, composer, and improviser, I show how my practice includes everyday objects as reciprocal partners in the creative process.

Chapter 1 is a Context Scan that outlines historical practices and the evolution of everyday objects within artistic practices. I detail the specific movements, artists, composers, and events that have built this tradition within music and related mediums. This is an important acknowledgement of those artists who have built and continue to progress the musical traditions in which I identify my own creative practice. I also outline the theoretical elements that have helped me to draw connections to my practice outside of sound.

Chapter 2 examines object-focused theories of working with objects and discusses the possibilities and ethical implications of collaborating with the nonhuman. Object-oriented ontologists, such as Graham Harman (2018) and Timothy Morton (2013), each offer a perspective as to how humans and objects both shape each other’s existence, rendering them equal. Harman questions, “Are humans more special or important than non-human objects?” (2018, cover copy). I respond to the questions presented by Harman and other OOO philosophers through the lens of a creative practice. Jane Bennett’s (2010) vital materialist views bridge a connection between philosophy and music practices. Her ideas of assemblage
echo artistic collaboration, and her language of resonance, dissonance, striking chords, and vibrancy are familiar amongst a musical practice. Sara Ahmed (2019) offers perspectives on collaboration and the ethical implications of the word use. Ahmed discusses the positive and negative contexts of use, function, and context. Her perspective helps me to question my own approach to the word use, calling for a reassessment of respect through language. The combination of these philosophical ideas has shaped my own creative practice, and together help to form my perspective of collaborating with the nonhuman through music.

Chapter 3 outlines a categorical framework that I developed as an approach to working with everyday objects through composition and performance. Four categories are presented: Multisensory Objects, Sonic Objects, Silent Objects, and Prepared Instruments. Thinking about objects as fitting into four categories helped to direct my compositions as I assessed their playability, sounds, context, and visual appearance. This approach came about through my artistic research, but in this chapter, I have extended it into an analytical tool against which I examine recent works by other composers, performers, and improvisers. Analysing the works of others through my Framework helps me to explain my object-based approach outside of the context of my own work. The works analysed in each category can be considered an extension of the Context Scan. Many were recently created, and I attempted to include the work of artists who were living and practicing at the time of writing. I put the Framework into practice as I curated a concert program for Brisbane-based new music ensemble Kupka’s Piano. Sonic Objects was presented on 13 September 2019 at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, and it featured six recent works with objects according to the Framework. Video documentation of this performance is sprinkled throughout the explanation of the Framework, and I continue to reference this concert in my findings.
Chapter 4 is a presentation of my own work that was created during this research. It exists in two formats: a written chapter that fits within this dissertation, and a concise portfolio version on my website. Both show the same artistic content but are displayed in different ways. This written chapter includes descriptions of my work, similar to expanded program notes, and I present this alongside videos, photos, and scores from my creative process.

In Chapters 5 and 6 I present the findings of my research. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the themes that arose from my artistic research, such as the unexpected, collaboration, and functionality. Within these themes I connect my creative work to theories and the Categorical Framework and expand this into a philosophical discussion. In Chapter 6 I present my findings from a practical perspective. This chapter calls upon my experiences in composing, performing, and improvising as I present technical observations of working with everyday objects. Logistical requirements of music performance meet ethical and theoretical considerations; composing informs my work as a performer. Relationships emerge between the human and the nonhuman. The loop of influence becomes clearer as I discuss the findings to my research question.

I conclude this research by prompting the themes of context and convention. I consider the many situations where I found myself as a composer, performer, and improviser and how the context of my work may have challenged or subscribed to convention. This is how my own practice expanded. Employing the theories and Categorical Framework to my work allowed me to observe this expansion.
Chapter 1: Context Scan

The Context Scan for this thesis addresses historical and current musical practices with everyday objects. This includes an examination of performance contexts and artforms that I identify as intersecting with music and everyday objects, such as staged concert music, performance art, embodied practices, sound art, and object puppetry. I outline musical works that involve everyday objects and discuss how this type of practice often crosses among multiple artistic territories. Reviewing the literature through this perspective further sparks topics of terminology and artform boundaries.

In my investigations of everyday objects in a music practice I address the theoretical implications of working with the nonhuman, and I present the object-focused philosophies and theorists that have influenced this research. The ethical implications of making music with the nonhuman become a method of understanding new concepts of collaboration. I question what other ways of communication may be possible with everyday objects and consider how this may expand a music practice. Connecting the artistic to the theoretical, I outline existing music-based practices that are concerned with the nonhuman. It is my intention to review the work of composers, performers, improvisers, theorists, and philosophers that have shaped my artistic research of working with everyday objects and position my own work within this field.

Context, Medium, Terminology

Everyday objects can be difficult to codify into a single category of music or art. Across my own artistic practice, I question where my work fits within musical genres, and I often consider how the performance location or venue may influence its labelling. Everyday objects can appear in artistic mediums not exclusive to music. A few examples include collage and Readymades in visual art (Parkinson, 2008); Foley tracks within film sound
design (Tsang, 2017); the work of Dadaists within cabaret and performance arts (Brill, 2010); and installation art and sculpture (Krauss, 1979). Works within these mediums can include sound or music in addition to other artistic elements, and this is perhaps why it is difficult to pinpoint specific musical forms that include everyday objects. Reflecting on my own work, I can identify inspiration from different artistic practices that include everyday objects and music.

As I discussed in the Introduction, conducting a literature review was broadened to a Context Scan, which included viewing and listening to many works in live or recorded scenarios. This was a multisensory experience. As an audience member I have found myself seated in concert halls and small recital venues; walking through installations at a gallery; exploring a site-specific setting (both indoors and outside); and touching physical objects in interactive works. I have performed with objects in similar situations, including galleries, concert halls, museums, factories, moving mini-buses, and natural environments. The performances that I experienced as both a listener and performer crossed between many different artforms, and this can further confuse the appearance of everyday objects in a musical practice. Brentano and Georgia’s (1994) discussion of the beginnings and evolution of performance art practices since the 1970s suggests that this blurring of categorisation is perhaps typical of fringe artforms.

Context is important to understanding music with everyday objects. This type of practice is inherently reflective of everyday life as it incorporates many of the same items that are encountered on a daily basis. The sounds, rhythm, and tones of objects may be musically explored outside of their practical functionalities, but it is difficult to remove their appearance and typical associations. In scanning the literature and work within this field, I noticed that genre became a construct in flux, and I found elements of different artforms within another. Concert music often included gesture and the physical body, which was suggestive of
embodied practice; other works could fit equally among sound art and performance art. Sometimes, music with everyday objects borrowed from the traditions of theatre through the appearance of props and costumes. It is important to understand that music with everyday objects can transcend a singular artform and appear in all of these contexts.

I began to question the terminology that defines musical artforms and wondered if my own practice fell within the boundaries of an established medium. As I searched for a way to describe my practice, other scholars helped me to challenge the exclusivity of contemporary music genres and question the perspectives of who may be upholding such definitions. Lewis (1996) describes how the term experimental music in an improvisatory context often suggests “a particular group of postwar music-makers who come almost exclusively from either European or European-American Heritage” and can “delineate a racialized location of this tradition within the space of whiteness” (pp. 101–102). Dunaway (2020) equally questions those who maintained the artistic boundaries of sound art during its time of conception and calls for an evaluation of the rigid definitions that rejected women artists from the beginnings of the medium in the 1960s:

In the future, scholars studying sound art might consider questions such as: Does the evolution of the genre itself contain exclusionary behavior? How did opportunities denied to women and practitioners of diversity affect the trajectory of the form? How did interpretations of work that seemed ‘outside the aesthetic’ define the histories? (p. 40)

Ciciliani et al (2017) describe how the work of many contemporary composers “cannot be understood solely with reference to a single discourse” (p. 28). Hope and Devenish (2020) actively reject boundaries of genre in their musical concept of The New Virtuosity, which “values transgression” and “thrives on curiosity and transfer of ideas across mediums” (p. 3). Considering these perspectives, I found comfort in avoiding a label altogether. In general,
I locate my own work within the term of a music practice, and within this space I interact with everyday objects without the confinement or need for genre specificity.

In this Context Scan I outline a historical progression of when objects appeared in music. I have divided the following sections into headings that explain different music-related artforms to show how each of these mediums—concert music, performance art, embodied practices, sound art, and object puppetry—have influenced the current practices of everyday objects in music. In Chapter 3 I analyse a collection of works and artists within the context of my Categorical Framework, and I consider these discussions as an extension of this Context Scan that provides more insight into the different situations where everyday objects meet music practices.

**Objects in Musical Artforms**

**Concert Music**

Everyday objects can often be found in the percussion parts of notated works that are intended to be performed on stage. Early examples of this include the percussion works *Ballet Mechanique* (Antheil, 1923), *Ionisation* (Varése, 1929), *Bomba* and *Counterdance in Spring* (Harrison, 1939), and *Moving Space Theater Piece* (Dlugoszewski, 1949), to name only a few. Some of the objects scored in these pieces—cowbells, brake drums, and junk percussion—became so popular among composers that they are now considered common instruments within a percussion set-up (Scholes, 2007). This practice continued to be developed into the second half of the twentieth century by many other composers, such as Karlheinz Stockhausen (*Mikrophonie I*, 1964) and Mauricio Kagel (*Dressur*, 1977), who began to incorporate electronics and instrumental theatre into their percussion music. Everyday objects were not only featured on stage, but they were also explored through...
amplification and physical gesture. A blending of artforms began to emerge within the heading of staged percussion music.

It is now quite common to find everyday objects in works for percussion that explore elements beyond sound, such as staging, instrumental theatre, or physical gesture. A few examples include Unsuk Chin’s *Allegro ma non Troppo* (1994), which begins with the performer opening a large cardboard box full of tissue paper, and Mark Applebaum’s *Echolalia* (2006), a series of Dadaist rituals exploring objects such as office supplies, drinking glasses, and power drills. While this area of repertoire is rich with examples of everyday objects and has informed my research, I have chosen to focus on works that explore everyday objects outside of percussion traditions. This is because of my position as an artist who is trained as a wind player. Instead, I can point the interested reader to other scholars who have written about and practiced within a percussion-specific field, such Louise Devenish (Vickery et al., 2017), Kaja Farsky (2020), Aiyun Huang (2017), Steven Schick (2006), Leah Scholes (2007), Vanessa Tomlinson (2017), and Jessica Tsang (2017). This list is only a starting point and is not exhaustive.

Objects slowly began to appear in concert music outside of percussion. John Cage is most often credited with inventing the prepared piano in 1940 in his work *Bacchanale*, although other composers such as Henry Cowell explored this concept as early as 1923 (*Aeolian Harp*). I classify the prepared piano—or any prepared instrument—as an example of where everyday objects appear in music (this is further discussed in Chapter 3). Instrument preparations can include objects that modify the sound of a musical instrument, and often the conventional interface of the instrument remains intact. Stacey Russell (2016) details the appearance of the prepared flute in 1973 and its subsequent progression in notated compositions. Russell defines an instrument preparation as “adding objects on or inside the instrument, or subtracting parts to alter the sound” (p. 4). When explored as an instrument
preparation, an everyday object maintains close proximity to conventions of concert music as it is presented as a way of altering the sound of an item already established as common to staged performance. In this case, the instrument is a mediator that introduces the object. Perhaps it is through this proximity that objects began to occupy space traditionally reserved for musical instruments.

When not explored as an instrument preparation, everyday objects began to appear alongside and in addition to conventional musical instruments. Ferde Grofé has works in his catalogue dated in 1928 that feature a bicycle pump and a woodwind instrument (*Free Air; Sonata for flute and bicycle pump*), and Malcolm Arnold’s *A Grand Grand Overture* (1956) is scored for orchestra and soloists performing three vacuum cleaners, one floor polisher, and four rifles. Cage’s *Water Walk* (1959) and *Music for Amplified Toy Pianos* (1960) are examples of where everyday objects are explored for their sounds alongside a conventional or toy piano. In these early examples, everyday objects began to emerge from the inside of his prepared piano and became a part of the visual and aural layers of performance. Modern examples of instrumental works with objects include Malin Bång’s *Hyperoxic* (2011) for bass flute and objects, Hanna Hartman’s *Rainbirds* for flute and sprinkler (2010), and Ida Lundén’s *Boom-choff-leuit* (n.d) for 3-4 amplified flutes with 6-8 co-players. Everyday objects transcend the role of an instrument modification in these concert works and instead hold their own place as a source of musical sound and significance.

The absence of conventional musical instruments in a composition or staged concert work further elevates the credibility and creative potential of everyday objects in new music. These types of works explore the conventions of staged music without the sounds of musical instruments. Examples include Michael Coltun’s *Music for Seven Basketballs* (2017), which mimics west African beat patterns but with basketballs instead of drums, and Sven-Åke Johansson’s *MM Schaumend* for 15 fire extinguishers (2003), which satires staged
performance conventions of conductors and large ensemble playing. Specific everyday objects can also become a primary source of musical exploration. Artist Judy Dunaway chooses to work exclusively with balloons. She began including them as guitar preparations but now plays balloons as a primary instrument. On her website she recognises that balloons are “more than just a sound maker” and are her “singular focus” (Dunaway, n.d.). She notes how the “cornerstone” of her work using balloons is the AIDS crisis; she identifies the latex material of the balloon as a symbolic representation of the importance of preventing the disease that many of her friends contracted in the late twentieth century. Dunaway formed a tradition of the balloon as an instrument by not only developing her technique and its sonic capabilities, but also by establishing her practice within a larger social cause. Her explorations for different sized balloons (tenor, bass, twister, etc.) and her breadth of work across acousmatic works, sound installation, collaborative projects, and sonic sculptures shows the artistic potential of just one object. The exploration of balloons in the work of other composers, such as Michael Maierhof’s Shopping 4 (2005), exemplifies how an everyday object can transform into a lasting source of musical creativity. Across these works, conventions of staged music are explored solely through the sounds of everyday objects.

**Performance Art**

Music with everyday objects can be reflective of daily life, and this is also a characteristic of performance art. Joseph Beuys’s work in this medium is an example, as his work was suggestive “that art, common materials, and one's ‘everyday life’ were ultimately inseparable” (*The Art Story*, n.d.). Brentano and Georgia (1994) write that “the term ‘performance art’ first appeared around 1970 to describe the ephemeral, time-based and process-oriented work of conceptual (‘body’) and feminist artists that was emerging at the time” (p. 32). A key factor of this medium is the artistic examination of the physical body and
relationship to an audience. Everyday objects can assist in strengthening this enquiry. Performance artist Marina Abramović’s *Rhythm 0* (1974) explores everyday objects in a “piece in which the audience … provide[s] the action” (Abramovic, 2018, p. 67). For the premiere of the work, she placed 72 objects on a table:


The concept of the piece rests with the audience; those who are experiencing the work are to explore the objects on the artist “as desired” (Abramović, 2018, p. 68). While the objects in this particular work were not intended to be musical, they were a mediator that facilitated interaction between artist and audience.

Connecting performance art to music practices, I am reminded of Carolee Schneemann’s *Noise Bodies* (1965). This is a work that explores the sounds of a collection of small found or everyday objects that are strung together into a wearable but cumbersome garment. As the wearer moves, the objects react to the physical motions and make noise. The collection of objects become aurally percussive and visually cohesive. The performing body, elapsed time, and improvisatory nature of the work combine elements of music with performance art. Brentano and Georgia (1994) articulate how performance art can include a mix of mediums:

- It is somewhat misleading to describe performance as a single genre because many local factors—audience, space, and the community of artists—as well as broader social and political conditions, and differences in the sensibilities of individual artists, have contributed to the formation of many kinds of performance work. (p. 33)
Music, sound, and everyday objects can be a part of the diverse practice of performance art, and these elements can be reflective of typical cultural conventions. A recent example in which music, everyday objects, and performance art intersect is Meaghan Burke’s *MD-PhD* (2018), a piece in which the setting of a music concert is examined and subverted through a comedic string of disruptive events from a performer who pretends to be an audience member. In *MD-PhD*, Burke blurs what Brentano and Georgia (1994) describe as “the boundary between art and life” (p. 34) as she imposes a dramatised real-life scenario onto an actual event. When music, performance art, and everyday objects collide, the line between reality and art can become unclear.

**Embodied Practices**

A musical practice that may be related to concepts similar to performance art is an embodied music practice. Embodied music practices were perhaps inspired by artistic movements in the 1950-60s, such as Fluxus and Gutai Group. Works created under the Fluxus movement often incorporated everyday objects with elements of music, performance, and embodied practices. Many artists who identified as members of this movement were students of Cage in his courses at The New School in New York City, including Dick Higgins, George Brecht, and La Monte Young (Higgins, 2002). In addition to this obvious link to Cage, a significant connection between the movement and music is the *Fluxus Performance Workbook* (Friedman, 1990), which is a compilation of over 500 text-based scores by Fluxus artists. These works are classified as music scores and are presented as text-based instructions instead of through typical musical notation. Many of the instructional scores focus on sound, some of which involve traditional musical instruments or conventions of classical concerts. Conductors, tuxedos, and stages are referenced in the scores but are often explored in unconventional ways. The remainder of the scores often call for movement-
related actions with everyday objects and the human voice. Exploring Fluxus through a musical perspective that incorporates everyday objects, the voice, and instruments closely situates it alongside the artform of embodied practice.

Contemporary versions of an embodied musical practice can include everyday objects. Labelle (2015) suggests that “to press against, locate resonance, situate the body, physical presence confronting physical presence, opens up a vocabulary of sound based on direct contact” (p. 40). Sound becomes a medium through which to explore the physical, visual, and spatial. An example of an embodied musical practice is Jennifer Walshe’s (2016) The New Discipline, or her working method through which she realises her body as a necessary element to performing and composing musical works that explore “the physical, theatrical and visual” (Walshe, 2016). This can include “pieces which often invoke the extra-musical, which activate the non-cochlear” where both the “eye and the brain are expected to be active and engaged” (2016). Everyday objects can be a part of this extra-musical exploration. The New Discipline is a recognition of the physical presence and actions of the body, and it is through this focus that perhaps a correlation between embodied musical practices and performance art appears—again, a blending of artforms.

Artists working within similar methods, such as Jenna Lyle, Jessica Aszodi, Jesse Marino, and Natacha Diels, include embodied approaches in their practices as composers, performers, improvisers. Lyle’s Louise (2018) is an example of where embodied music practices and everyday objects collide. Lyle is a composer, vocalist, and movement artist, and she states that her work examines a “discourse of movement as motive” (Lyle, 2019). Louise is scored for solo performer, Sonic Fabric, analogue electronics and live video projection. Lyle’s voice and physical body interacts with Alyce Santoro’s Sonic Fabric, which was crafted into a skirt-like garment by Scarlett Le (Resonant Bodies Festival, 2018). Each element of the work—body, sound, object—are contingent upon each other. Lyle’s
incorporation of her voice, electronics, everyday objects, and her physical body motions combine to create a visual and aural staged work. In this example, elements of many genres are apparent.

**Sound Art**

The term sound art began to appear in the 1970s, a time at which it described “sound-based work that wasn’t typical music” (Dunaway, 2020, p. 25). Many composers and artists associated with the Fluxus movement created work that could be categorised under the then-new term, and Dunaway’s (2020) research shows that the first official museum exhibition of the genre was in 1979 at New York’s Museum of Modern Art and featured the work of women artists Maggi Payne, Connie Beckley, and Julia Heyward. She states that the works presented at this exhibition often had a visual or physical component, such as performance or video, and that in these works “the visual image [was] typically a necessary means for the examination of sound” (p. 35). This connection between the aural and the visual has developed into contemporary practices of sound art.

Brandon Labelle (2015) describes sound art as “the activation of the existing relation between sound and space” (p. ix). Often, sound art extends into a practice that includes the visual presence and aural exploration of everyday objects in staged, site-specific, and installation contexts. Early examples of everyday objects in sound art include Pierre Schaeffer’s initial investigations of a “symphony of noises” (Kane, 2014, p. 15), at which point his concept of an object referred “to a physical-material thing—a source for the production of sound” (Kane, 2014, pg. 16). Many of Cage’s works explored amplified everyday objects in a staged context without the presence of conventional musical instruments (*Cartridge Music*, 1960; *Child of Tree*, 1975; *Branches*, 1976). These examples
present a visual or tactile layer of creating sound with amplified everyday objects. Labelle (2010) further consolidates the potential of visual presence in sound art practices:

For what we hear is not mostly what we see, nor can it strictly be pinned down to a given source, or brought into language. Often sound is what lends to directing our visual focus—we hear something and this tells us where to look; it eases around us in a flow of energy to which we unconsciously respond. Sounds are associated with their original source, while also becoming their own thing, separate and constantly blending with other sounds, thereby continually moving in and out of focus. (2010, p. xix)

Many contemporary artists working with everyday objects indicate sound art as only one facet to their diverse creative practices. Cathy van Eck states her interest in “setting her gestures into relationships with sounds, mainly by electronic means. The result could be called ‘performative sound art’, since it combines elements from performance art, electronic music, and visual arts” (van Eck, n.d.). An example is her work *Empty Chairs* (2018), which explores electronic processing and recorded sounds alongside physical interaction with three chairs. Viola Yip’s work with light and sound examines an “unconventional relationships of objects”, and she mentions the role of Sound Artist as one of her many musical identities (Yip, n.d.). Australian artist Alexandra Spence “reimagines the intricate relationships between the listener, the object, and the surrounding environment as a kind of communion or conversation” (Spence, 2020). Her musical work stretches across installation, field recordings, performance, and composition, and this often includes the amplification everyday objects. She describes her installation *Inanimate dialogue* (2016) as a collection of everyday objects that:

are placed side by side with salvaged speaker-cones; a custom-built microphone placed inside each of the bottles. As the air inside the bottle vibrates the bottle begins
to softly resonate at a pitch dependent on its size and material make-up. The proximity of the microphones and speakers thus ignites a feedback loop that is pitch-dependent on the resonant frequency of each bottle. (Spence, 2020)

As evidenced through the work of these musicians, everyday objects can help to connect diverse mediums and performance contexts into the frame of sound art.

**Object Puppetry**

Object puppetry, or object theatre, is another realm where everyday objects can intersect with sound. This is a practice where the inanimate object becomes a character or figure within a theatrical performance (Object Theatre, 2017). Contemporary practices often explore the personification of everyday or found objects. The World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts cites that object puppetry was developed in the 1980s, and that “the practice is not confined to puppetry, but shared with allied fields, including dance and performance art” (Object Theatre, 2017). The definition of an object through the perspective of object puppetry opens possibility of relationship between human and nonhuman, “to extend the concept of objects as material things, objects can be thought of as ‘relational entities’ or ‘social objects’ that can only be experienced through the enactment of particular social acts” (Ryöppy et al., 2018, p. 286). Objects become a mediator through which the human operator can begin to understand their surroundings. Ryöppy et al. also describe how this practice evolved “from a form of fine arts called ‘object trouvé’” and that it has:

later developed into performative art forms, such as ‘performing objects’, ‘inanimate objects’ and ‘ephemeral animation’. In exploration phase the performer aims at new stories to emerge from creative improvisation with readymade objects, such as bottles, toys, household objects or souvenirs; and/or shapeless material, which can be sand, cloth or trash … It is theatre of readymade objects, where the object is not made to
walk, talk or breathe like a puppet, but rather, is charged with symbolic power.

(Ryöppy et al., 2018, p. 288)

The conventions of object puppetry stem from similar origins as found objects in music, such as Duchamp’s explorations of objet trouvé (Parkinson, 2008). The symbolism possible through object puppetry suggests that this medium can transfer into a music practice with everyday objects, one that is capable of connecting the human with the nonhuman.

Mixing object puppetry with music creates the potential to explore concepts of the uncanny and storytelling. Composer Natacha Diels (2014) details how the uncanny is an exploration of the life-likeness of inanimate objects, and that in her own work she explores “the niches created by the blurry dividing lines, by the unlikely merging on certain practices that elicit feelings of discomfort and uncertainty in the viewer” (p. 75). Perhaps the presence of the uncanny is a result of mixing the mediums of music with object puppetry. Combining sound with visuals of personification may further create a creepy sense of human likeness. The uncanny is a significant topic that I address later in discussing my own object puppetry works in Chapter 5.

Jennifer Walshe’s XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! (2003) is another example of where object puppetry meets music. This work examines the human-likeness of children’s dolls through the element of play; Barbies become the characters of a staged opera, which come to life through two puppeteers, two sopranos, a chamber ensemble, and video and audio engineers. This work combines different contexts of object music: staged opera and object puppetry. Walshe writes that she was influenced by the marionette operas of Haydn and Mozart (Saunders, 2017). The Barbie dolls resemble the human figure, much like puppets; however, their intended purpose as a toy is a focal point as the work was inspired by the abstractness of child’s play. The outfits, scenarios, and haircuts of the dolls are explored through a child’s perspective (Saunders, 2017), and this is accompanied by a score for small
chamber ensemble. Walshe suggests that the “movements of the dolls function as a silent film, and the music is layered on this” (Saunders, 2017, p. 351). There is a cohesive arrangement between the everyday objects—puppets—and accompanying music.  

XXX_LIVE NUDE GIRLS!! requires live video projection of the dolls because of their small size. I relate this back to the concept of performance context and how this may change the classification or perception of artform. This musical work with everyday objects combines traditions from puppetry, opera, staged chamber music, and live video. Again, a mix of artforms meet to create a musical work with everyday objects, but the work avoids classification within a singular genre.

**Other Similar Studies**

My investigation of everyday objects in an artistic practice has been influenced by researchers who have contributed to the knowledge of how, why, where, and when everyday objects appear in music. Svetlana Maras (2011) and Adam Neal (2014) have both written dissertations covering everyday objects in current composition and sound art practices, and each have situated objects within their own categorical frameworks. James Saunders (2013) and Tim Parkinson (Parkinson, n.d.) also cover everyday objects in their artistic practice as composers and performers. Stacey Russell’s (2016) dissertation on the emergence of the prepared flute informed my categorical framework of everyday objects as instrument preparations. Andy Keep (2009) provides a how-to approach to incorporating everyday objects into improvisation, and while I do find some of the language in his contribution to be problematic, it is a resource that I think deserves an examination. Most of these researchers have approached the inclusion of everyday objects in music through the perspective as an instrumentalist or a composer, which is where I also position my research focus.
This section of the Context Scan outlined where objects appeared within music-related artforms in an attempt to show how different mediums have informed the current practices of music with everyday objects. Ciciliani et al. also make this argument in *Music in the Expanded Field* (2017). In my own practice, I am less concerned with qualifying my work into a specific genre of music. Instead, I am excited by how objects may be included in a collaborative way of making music across composition, performance, and improvisation, any of which may fall into one of the artforms that I have previously described. In addition to the individual artists mentioned in this Context Scan and throughout the entirety of this research, many ensembles have influenced and informed my research, including the following:

- Mocrep
- Down the Rabbit Hole
- Seidl/Cao
- Curious Chamber Players
- Ensemble Pamplemousse
- Bastard Assignments
- Object Collection
- Clocked Out Duo
- Toy Death
- Adam Simmons Toy Band
- We Spoke
- Parkinson Saunders Duo

These ensembles represent a formalised practice of everyday objects in new music, and listing them here is my acknowledgement of their influence to my own research as they work with objects in composed and improvisatory ways that explore the unconventional. Many
were active at the time of writing and feature the work of composer-performers. The resources provided by these ensembles, including video, audio, and written documentation of new works exploring everyday objects was an important source of affirmation to my research.

**Theoretical Considerations: The Nonhuman**

To address the ethical implications of working with everyday objects in a music practice, part of my Context Scan included an investigation of contemporary philosophies that position nonhuman objects equally alongside or amongst humans. This includes theorists who work within posthuman realms of philosophy, including Vital Materialism and Object-Oriented Ontology. Language is also another important factor, and I have been influenced by feminist theorists who examine object function and collaboration. In Chapter 2, I offer detailed discussion of the scholars and contemporary philosophical movements that consider the nonhuman, but here I offer a summary of the theoretical concepts as a component of the Context Scan. The theories that I examine, while each expansive and complex, I view as complementary to each other and again to my Artistic Research. I outline certain thinkers and concepts that have shaped my work, some in practical and others in ethical ways, and I find my creative practice as existing at the intersection of many theoretical points.

The term nonhuman refers to any real or sensual object that is not human. Within my practice, the nonhuman commonly takes the form of non-musical objects, and I am influenced by the discussions surrounding the nonhuman in both Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO, pronounced triple-O) and Vital Materialism. OOO was formally introduced in 2010 (Harman, 2018, p. 8) and is attributed to philosopher Graham Harman. Other influential theorists of OOO include Timothy Morton (2013), Ian Bogost (2012), Levi Bryant (2011) and Seth Kim-Cohen (2009). Philosophers including Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and
Bruno Latour also investigate concepts surrounding the nonhuman. I acknowledge other terminology related to nonhuman, such as posthuman. Critical posthumanism is a perspective near to that of the nonhuman as it transcends an anthropocentric focus and concentrates on a collaborative model between the human and nonhuman. Scholars of posthumanism include Donna Haraway (2016), Anna Tsing (2015), Rosi Braidotti (2013), Karen Barad (2003), and Andrew Pickering (2001). These philosophers have informed my artistic work, but for the purpose of this research I have chosen to focus on OOO and the vital materialist views of Jane Bennett in my investigation of working with the nonhuman in a music practice.

Harman asserts that OOO is a realist philosophy that “holds that the external world exists independently of human awareness” (2018, p. 10). This view is an important decentring of the human artist in my examination of working with everyday objects in order to observe, collaborate with, and listen to the nonhuman. In Chapter 2 I examine Harman and Morton’s work most closely as I find many connections to music and art within these texts. Harman’s (2018) work has been influential in architecture and theatre. Morton (2013) references the exploration of the prepared piano and equal temperament intonation, and his previous work has influenced musicians such as pop singer Björk (Guðmundsdóttir & Morton, 2015). I acknowledge I am not the first to connect an artistic practice to these theories, however it is my aim to correlate a practice centred on everyday objects to these theories.

In her 2010 work Vibrant Matter, Jane Bennett references musical language, such as “resonate” (p. 42), “in concert” (p. 29), “dissonant” (p. 4, 34) and “a chord is struck between person and thing” (p. 120). I include her vital materialist concepts of assemblage in my discussion of ethically working with the nonhuman. Again, other musical researchers and artists have previously been influenced by Bennett’s work. Ashley Fure’s The Force of Things (2017) takes its title from the first chapter of Bennett’s 2010 text. Adam Neal’s (2017)
exploration of Cage’s works for toy piano also connects Bennett’s concept of assemblage to working with everyday objects. Bennett’s influence on other musical artists working with everyday objects help me to strengthen my discussion of ethically collaborating with the nonhuman. Similar to Bennett’s views, Suzanne Cusick (2013) states in her study of acoustemology that “we exist in something like a continuous feedback loop of vibrations”, and this could be a better perspective through which to view interactions with the world: “We vibrate sympathetically with other entities in our environments, as they do with us” (p. 276). I examine vibration as a way of better understanding Bennett’s views in a music practice.

Researching and reflecting on my artistic practice has changed my language toward everyday objects. In my artistic practice I am careful to specify that I work with everyday objects. As I am listening to and taking visual cues from everyday objects, I address them as collaborators. Feminist Theorist Sara Ahmed’s (2019) investigation of the word use uncovers contexts of the term through common function, intention, purpose, technique and educational situations. She concludes with a concept of Queer Use, which is described as a use as other than what is originally intended. Ahmed’s investigation of the term and its many meanings helped me to realise a relationship with objects that is focused on collaboration instead of intended purpose or function. Other texts by Bill Brown (2001), Howard Risatti (2007), and Henry Petroski (1992) address the functionality of objects. I am choosing to focus on Ahmed’s 2019 text as I find her perspective of Queer Use and feminist theory as important to my discussion of the ethical implications of working with everyday objects.

Chapter Summary

Music involving everyday objects can be considered through viewpoints of different mediums. Artists who work in this field identify as composers, performers, and improvisers across many disciplines as described through their personal biographies, manifestos, or
written descriptions of their work. The common element among these artists and their work is a music-focused practice. Concert music, performance art, embodied practices, sound art, and object puppetry collide with the common theme of everyday objects. They can appear alongside conventional instruments or as the stand-alone source of sound. Many elements of everyday objects become musical factors: gesture, movement, symbolism, and visual appearance become important components to creating and presenting new music with everyday objects. Artform classification becomes a blurry structure within which to realise music with everyday objects. Contemporary theories addressing the nonhuman can also assist in understanding the role of everyday objects in music. Considering the nonhuman as a collaborator may provide insight on how to work with everyday objects through this equalised perspective. Artforms and theory connect to inform a music practice that can be expanded through the inclusion of everyday objects.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Considerations of Working with the Nonhuman

My artistic practice with everyday objects is centred on reciprocity, and I consider nonhuman objects as collaborators. Communicating with the nonhuman in my music practice requires a sensitive approach and respectful language. Object-Oriented Ontology and other philosophies that examine the human existence alongside the nonhuman have helped to shape my view on working with objects. Subscribing to these concepts within an artistic practice presents opportunities to discuss both the practical and ethical implications of working with everyday objects as collaborators. In this chapter, I outline some of the texts and theories that helped me form an understanding of everyday objects, or the nonhuman, as potential collaborators in a music practice: Object-Oriented Ontology, vital materialism, and language of use. I view my practice as existing within an assemblage of these theories. The intent of this discussion is to question how crafting respect for nonhuman objects through musical composition, improvisation, and performance might transfer into other areas of life.

Object-Oriented Ontology

Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) is a theory that creates space for everyday objects in a music practice. This perspective has helped me to form a definition of an object for the purpose of this thesis, which is any non-living thing that is not already considered a musical instrument within an existing cultural or social tradition. Graham Harman (2018) proposes that a typical perception of an object “suggests a rock-hard, durable, inanimate entity” (p. 42). Through OOO, he offers an alternative concept that “an object is anything that cannot be entirely reduced either to the components of which it is made or to the effects that it has on other things” (p. 43), and “for the object-oriented thinker, physical objects are just one kind of object among many others” (p. 39). Objects are both physical and intangible, buzzing together within a shared realm. They can be present but unknown to another human or
nonhuman object; OOO implies a requirement to accept that objects unfamiliar to each other can coexist.

In OOO, any object—human or nonhuman—can only perceive oversimplifications of another object. An object never truly reveals itself, and an object can never gain direct access to another. In my music practice, I realise this concept through elements of the unexpected, surprise, and the uncanny, which I further detail in Chapter 5. OOO is a way of equalising all human, animal, and nonhuman objects that “tell us about the features that belong to everything” while still examining the “differences between various kinds of things” (Harman, 2018, p. 55). Harman writes, “all of the objects we experience are merely fictions: simplified models of the far more complex objects that continue to exist when I turn my head away from them” (p. 34). There is no hierarchy of objects in OOO, and human perspective is not favoured as dominant. Rather, it is the only perspective that a human can ever know; humans can only attempt to interact with other perspectives. Nothing is ever truly revealed by one object to another, and collaboration becomes contingent upon discovering modes of communication between the human and nonhuman.

A OOO-based perspective can transfer to an artistic practice with everyday objects. Considering this theory in a music practice may present sound as a metaphor through which humans can begin to understand the perspective of the nonhuman. Music and sound become sensory experiences through which to communicate with objects. As OOO is a flat ontology that equalises the human and nonhuman, it renders both the performing body and the everyday objects it encounters as equivalent components of performance. Harman points out that a OOO concept of metaphor already exists within acting and may be influential to other art forms:

However strange this may sound, there is one professional realm where it is already a commonplace; the craft of acting, where Konstantin Stanislavski’s famous system
insists that one try to become the object one portrays as nearly as possible. This theatrical structure of metaphor strongly suggests that theatre lies at the root of the other arts. (p. 85, emphasis original)

Sound becomes an intangible object: a metaphor. It is one method of communicating with the nonhuman. Music is an outcome of a multi-modal collaboration: “Art is not the production of knowledge about things, but that it creates new things-in-themselves” (p. 105). Harman warns it is impossible to fully realise another human or nonhuman object’s existence, “from a OOO perspective, there is no truth: not because nothing is real, but because reality is so real that any attempt to translate it into literal terms is doomed to failure” (p. 192), and that “aesthetic experience is crucial to OOO as a form on non-literal access to the object” (p. 260). If no two objects ever really reveal themselves, then any attempt to collaborate can be seen as art or metaphor. This is not exclusive to artistic realms; art can be identified as the outcome of simply existing with other objects. Art becomes the everyday.

OOO is a method of building connections between the human and the nonhuman, and it can also assist in understanding the multisensory qualities of everyday objects in a music practice. Harman writes, “objects come in just two kinds: real objects exist whether or not they currently affect anything else, while sensual objects exist only in relation to some real object … Real objects cannot relate to one another directly, but only indirectly, by means of a sensual object” (2018, p. 9, emphasis original). Music, perhaps, is a sensual object that serves as a method of communication between two real objects. Connecting OOO to a music practice with everyday objects becomes clear. The art that arises from collaboration between two sensual objects is an object itself. “For the object-oriented thinker, physical objects are just one kind of object among many others, and hence we should not be in a hurry to scorn or ‘eliminate’ those that are not a good fit with a hardnosed materialist worldview” (Harman,
Music as a sensual object helps to build relationships between human and nonhuman.

**Vibrancy**

Recognising the physical vibrancy of objects and understanding the location of agency may inform collaboration with the nonhuman. Political theorist Jane Bennett positions everyday objects as an important part of forming what she calls an assemblage. In this theory, agency “is located in the complex interinvolvement [sic] of humans and multiple nonhuman actants” (Khan, 2009, p. 102). Both human and nonhuman matter is vibrant; each factor within an environment contributes to a collective. This echoes the equalising values as presented by OOO theorists. Agency is not exclusive to humans, rather it exists within an entangled relationship between the human and nonhuman. In Bennett’s view, human agency is “the outcome or effect of a certain configuration of human and nonhuman forces”, and she consolidates sound as an object by stating that humans “engage a variety of other actants, including food, micro-organisms, minerals, artefacts, sounds, bio- and other technologies” (Khan, 2009, p. 101). Each of these nonhuman examples can offer “active, creative power to humans” (Khan, 2009, p. 92), and this is suggestive that humans are reactive to the nonhuman elements they may encounter. Agency is transferred like a ripple effect. It can be emitted into an assemblage, and other objects may absorb or react to it.

Realising an assemblage as a space where reciprocated transactions take place—one where agency is both offered and received—is a potential method of collaborating with the nonhuman in a musical practice. As Bennett (2010) points out, sound can be a factor within a collective environment as well as other physical, biological, and intangible elements. In a music practice, sound may not necessarily be the exclusive source of communicating with the nonhuman. The extra-aural becomes musical; listening becomes insufficient. Instead,
collaboration with the nonhuman requires a level of attention that can include witnessing or observing other cues that an object may offer. Visual, tactile, and other multisensory elements can assist in an understanding of the vibrant and fluid relationship between the human and nonhuman. The role of everyday objects in a music practice becomes extra-aural.

Suzanne Cusick (2013) connects a similar concept of assemblage and vibrancy to a study of acoustemology. She writes, “manipulations of the acoustical environment always produce the somatic effect of sympathetic vibration” (p. 276). This suggests that sound effects the body through vibration. To detect this vibration is a reaction. Perhaps acknowledging this reaction is to collaborate. But what if the vibrations are not audible?

Cusick confirms:

Vibrations that human ears cannot perceive, nor human brains process, nonetheless affect our bodies. We vibrate sympathetically with other entities in our environments, as they do with us. It is our own sympathetic vibrations (mostly in the small bones of our heads) that we describe as sound. Thus, we are never quite as separate from other vibrating entities as the narrative of the first framework implies. Instead, we exist in something like a continuous feedback loop of vibration. (2013, p. 278)

If the vibrancy of everyday objects is not at a frequency loud enough for the human ear, then communicating with the nonhuman may require more than listening. Collaboration may rely on the context of the environment (or assemblage), and this can include visual, tactile, or other sensory cues. It may also be important for humans to respect those cues that are largely invisible—such as the microorganisms in their body, as suggested by Bennett—that may or may not be present within an environment. A music practice can create an environment stimulating enough to entice an artistic outcome of what would otherwise be dormant.

Rebecca Solnit (2016) provides an analogy to accepting the possibility of the unknown:
Mushroomed: after a rain mushrooms appear on the surface of the earth as if from nowhere. Many do so from a sometimes vast underground fungus that remains invisible and largely unknown. What we call mushrooms mycologists call the fruiting body of the larger, less visible fungus. (p. xiii)

That which may be missed by a human operator may eventually become perceptible; all that may be required is a stimulus. Perhaps an artistic practice with everyday objects can create an environment where invisible objects can begin to emerge. Objects can be silent but present; in a music practice, this concept becomes reliant on observable multisensory elements (I explain this further in Chapter 3). What might awaken and become visibly or aurally present through the inclusion of everyday objects in a music practice? Perhaps that which is dormant will rise.

**Language of Use**

In her book *What’s The Use?* (2019), Sara Ahmed examines the connotations and language that surrounds the word *use*. She offers multiple perspectives on how to interpret the functionality and purpose of objects. She explains how the word can imply a positive willingness to help, but it can also become an exploitative requirement within an object-operator relationship. Use can be designed, tactile, or functional, and these concepts can be subverted into new identities. Her language of use offers an ethical way of addressing the nonhuman.

**Use as Exploitation**

Ahmed explains how the term use can imply an exploitative and one-sided relationship: “Use when used as a verb can mean to employ for some purpose, to expand or consume, to treat or behave toward, to take unfair advantage of or exploit, to habituate or accustom” (p. 22). Considering a relationship with objects in this view, a human operator
benefits from the material functionality of an everyday object. Ahmed suggests that these objects can be considered as “designed” (p. 22). When an object is seen only for its functionality or purpose, it can become an item perceived to be readily available for human consumption: its human-designed use exclusively exists for the benefit of the user. Reflecting on a OOO perspective, Harman (2018) also discusses the word use as an implication of human dominance over nonhuman objects. This negative view of the nonhuman is aligned with a Heideggerian perspective, and Harman sets OOO apart from this view:

Heidegger seems to think that human use of objects is what gives them ontological depth, frees them from their servitude as mere slabs of present-at-hand physical matter. And this is the point at which contemporary philosophy needs to part company with Heidegger in the most radical way: objects themselves are already more than present-at-hand. (p. 16, emphasis original)

The existence of an object renders it equal among humans. Usefulness, or a functionality that benefits the human operator, is not a requirement of an object for it to be equal matter within an environment. Considering Bennett’s (2010) view of vibrant matter, all objects contribute to an assemblage. The importance of function begins to fade.

As I examined existing methods of incorporating everyday objects into new music, I found that these practices were often accompanied by negative or exploitative language. In particular, there is a clear user-used dynamic within the terminology and rationale surrounding the incorporation of objects in improvisatory experimental music. An example is the term Creative Abuse, the title of a method that explores “instruments, objects, and/or digital protocols for use in manners that differ greatly from those known generally” (ElectroAcoustic Resource Site, 2020). I interpret this definition as a way of looking beyond functionality of an object in attempt to include new sounds into musical work. However, the
word abuse is problematic in that it implies the object is to be manipulated for the benefit of a musical performer, even though it may be explored beyond its intended function.

Andy Keep (2009) offers more information on the term and technique of Creative Abuse. He describes it as an “artistic approach that seeks to exploit a sounding object by any means necessary in order to access its potential sonic palette” (p. 116, emphasis mine). This is somewhat contradictory to Keep’s more respectful assessment of the playability of objects and their multisensory qualities, which I discuss in Chapter 3. At its foundation, the definition of Creative Abuse promotes problematic and one-way language. It suggests that a human performer has authority to manipulate, coerce, or knowingly abuse an object for artistic benefit. This takes the form of targeting the possible sounds of an object without considering the object’s other qualities or its role within an assemblage. Sound is only one form of interpreting the existence of an object: visual, tactile, contextual, and even sentimental attributes can form an object’s identity within a human’s spatial existence. To consider sound as the only signifier of importance in music is to erase potential: the object becomes objectified. I question the significance of art that arises from exploitative origins.

Creative Abuse and other related terminologies suggest that an artist is a controller of the object and is solely responsible for an object’s sounding capabilities. While the concept of these terms may be based in exploration or the intention to find sounds that would otherwise not be considered within musical improvisation, such as the sounds of everyday objects, this language is problematic as it ignores the object as equal within a musical context. Questioning why an object may be included in sound performance is important, and manipulative language denies this crucial examination process. Keep suggests that Creative Abuse can include “the sonic possibilities of the instrument’s case, any assorted maintenance tools that may be at hand or anything that may be in the concert platform during performance” (p. 117). Calling upon the instrument case or objects in the room—simply
because they are there—decreases the potential for collaboration. Improvising with an object without questioning why; recognising its qualities beyond sound; or attempting to collaborate with the nonhuman may be where abuse begins. In this scenario, communication and relationship are not considered, and this is evidenced in the language used by practitioners of Creative Abuse. Keep explains how he and other improvisers conceptualise working with objects, listing terms such as “manipulation” (2009, p. 116), “by any means necessary” (p. 116), Michael Nyman’s “exploitation” (p. 117), and John Richards’s “bastardization” (p. 117). While Keep’s discussion is aimed at providing methods of including objects in improvisation, the language of these practitioners that he promotes in his text is derogatory and normalises the human perspective as dominant. This language eliminates potential for discussion, communication, or collaboration with the nonhuman through musical improvisation. Use, in this context, is an unreciprocated act concerned with sound removed from respect.

Human consideration of the meaning of objects can exist only through human perception. The histories and cultural significance of objects are crafted through relationships between the human and nonhuman, and this inherently reflects the human experience. Brown (2001) describes this human attempt to understand objects, “These days, you can read books on the pencil, the zipper, the toilet, the banana, the chair, the potato, the bowler hat. These days, history can unabashedly begin with things and with the senses by which we apprehend them” (p. 2). Brown’s statement confirms that humans perceive objects in multisensory ways, and I attempt to clarify this view through a music practice in Chapters 3 and 4. He continues that as objects:

circulate through our lives, we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature or culture—above all, what they disclose about us), but we can only catch a glimpse of things. We look through objects because there are codes by
which our interpretive attention makes them meaningful, because there is a discourse of objectivity that allows us to use them as facts. (Brown, 2001, p. 4, emphasis original)

Brown echoes Harman’s (2018) concept that no object truly reveals itself, and that a human perception is all that can be attempted at understanding that which is nonhuman. Perhaps nonhuman objects have a culture of their own; however, this cannot be understood through human perception. The culture of objects as understood by humans, then, is reflective of human culture. Considering objects as an integral role in signifying culture is a step in treating the nonhuman with respect, and it is perhaps ironic that objects must first be centralised within the human experience in order for this to happen. Once humans can relate to, observe, and understand an object, then they can transcend their own cultural projections and begin to conceptualise collaboration with the nonhuman. Music can be a sensory method of learning this respect.

Reducing an everyday object to only its sound denies the possibility to acknowledge and explore narrative, story, history, and context within a musical setting. George E. Lewis (1996) argues that spontaneity in improvisation is referential to the human experience and that this practice is rich with context, “by fixing upon the surface level of immediate spontaneity, unsullied by reference to the past or foreshadowing of the future, the reduction of the notion of improvisative spontaneity to the present moment insists on ephemerality” (p. 108). He further explains the importance of acknowledging the historical, narrative, or other culturally significant factors within improvisation and highlights what can go wrong if these factors are ignored, specifically through the perspective of racial inequality:

On the other hand, the African-American improviser, coming from a legacy of slavery and oppression, cannot countenance the erasure of history … an insistence on being
free from memory might be regarded with some suspicion—as either a form of denial or of disinformation. (Lewis, 1996, pg. 109).

To erase the important contextual factors external to sound is to listen selectively. This can be a refusal to recognise or acknowledge the truth. Discarding the contextual elements of a tradition or object takes away the potential for future change. If a history is erased, then what is there to learn from in the future? Rebecca Solnit (2016) likens this denial of memory as a lack of ability to see change. She writes, “when you don’t know how much things have changed, you don’t see that they are changing or that they can change” (p. xvii). For Solnit, hope for the future is a product of memory, “the collective memory we call history” (p. xvii). Memory, history, and acknowledgement of contextual factors are necessary for hope and the future, and erasing this history eliminates the possibility of positive growth and learning. As Brown (2001) suggests, the cultural histories of objects are a reflection of the human experience. To acknowledge this in a music practice is to fully listen and understand the cultural histories of humans. Perhaps respecting objects may be good practice for treating humans with respect.

These perspectives can be brought into the ethical considerations of working with everyday objects. Elements that may be considered extra-aural emerge as equally important to sound. Eliminating the history or context of an everyday object in an attempt to only listen is to not listen at all. Listening requires an understanding that the producer of sound—human or nonhuman—has a place within a shared environment, space, history, or culture. Isolating sound is to ignore these important factors, and it is a deliberate ignorance of many other important cues. Brian House (2017) points out that ignoring factors other than sound stymies the potential to interact within this environment. He states, “to bracket the meaning of what we hear is to erase its cultural context and hence to remove the possibility of meaningful response”, and simply, “listening as a practice is culturally embodied” (p. 160). Exclusively
listening to sound erases the capacity to hear, observe, or witness crucial factors that everyday objects may contribute. Judy Dunaway (2020) also cautions against exclusionary behaviour within a context of sound art, presenting that historical forms of the genre that included visual elements, especially those created by women practitioners, have been dismissed (p. 40). Her warning is timely and transfers into critically examining the importance of contextual significance of everyday objects in music: “it is harmful to continue to enforce this dusty canon into the 21st century” (2020, p. 40). The importance of respecting and acknowledging the elements other than sound become clear in a music practice with everyday objects.

**Use as a Relationship**

The word use can also imply a mutual relationship with the nonhuman. Ahmed presents a relation of use, a concept in which the original function of an object is respected: “a relation of use could be thought of as an instrumental relation; the pot is described as a utensil, a precious utensil” (p. 6). Honouring the positive value that an object may bring to a human life is a path to considering a relationship with objects. In this scenario, use is seen as respectful when it is approached with affection. This concept begins to echo the theory of assemblage presented by Bennett. Ahmed writes, “to be in a relation of use is to be in an environment with other things … Use is thus an intimate as well as a social sphere. Use is distributed between persons and things” (p. 7). A human may respectfully use an everyday object, and that object may also have vibrational or situational influence within an environment of other human, natural and nonhuman objects. This suggests a relationship of reciprocity; collaboration between human and the nonhuman becomes possible.

Considering use as a reciprocal relationship may offer human operators a method of communicating with the nonhuman. Haraway (2016) describes her concept of interspecies
collaboration as an invitation reliant on the “reciprocity of partners” (p. 25). Collaboration requires equal participation, and this can occur beyond the limitations of human-only interactions. She questions an exploitative relationship with nonhuman subjects: “who renders whom capable of what, and at what price, borne by whom?” (p. 23). This question is both cautionary and curious: what might go wrong in a one-sided relationship with everyday objects, and what might be possible through a collaboration built on reciprocity between human and nonhumans? Use in a negative and nonreciprocal context is not only exploitative, but it also eliminates the possibility to listen, observe, respect, or witness the nonhuman.

Cusick (2013) further connects how both humans and nonhumans are a part of an environment mutually created by all participating entities:

the anthropocentric theory of subject formation must be understood as always enacted in counterpoint to a ground of ongoing, mutually sympathetic vibrations. In effect, the call-and-response drama of subject formation and interpellation would have to be understood as always a shaping of the intensity and degree of reciprocity with which the entities in a given space touch and retouch each other. (2013, p. 279)

Vibration is aural and tactile activation. Pisaro (2015) writes that “every sound begins with vibration; we hear some of those vibrations; we feel or see others. Vibration is a physical thought in a world” (Pisaro, 2015). A relationship with the nonhuman can be understood as reactionary, and it is important for human operators to recognise that their actions are equally distributed to the nonhuman. Sound is only one outcome of this relationship and can be one of many factors in an everyday object’s role in a musical practice.

A Way Forward

These theoretical concepts bring forth a questioning of exploitation versus exploration in a musical context. Navigating the landscape of musical exploration with the nonhuman may be
treacherous, and I question: What are the differences between an exploitative and an exploratory relationship with objects? I assert that a positive language of use may be a starting point in understanding a reciprocal collaboration with the nonhuman. An exploratory collaboration with the nonhuman may involve:

- dedication and commitment to respecting an object’s multisensory qualities, one of which may be sound
- acknowledging the possibilities beyond a human perspective
- embracing the unknown in collaboration
- discovery of methods of communication, which may be signalled by multisensory cues not limited to verbal language or sound
- employment of respectful language
- the acceptance that change is a vital part of the process, and that realising change may require remembering, acknowledging, and learning from the past.

How?

In my artistic research of composing, performing and improvising, I consider these values in a music practice. Each theoretical concept offers clues as to how they can be applied into a respectful music practice with the nonhuman. Harman (2018) presents practical advice of OOO, “The first task when analysing any particular object is to establish its limits in space and time” (p. 115). This translates into assessing an object within a musical situation, and it also speaks to the contextual factors of a performance location. Working in this way may encourage a reflective and reciprocal connection. Art becomes the product of this relationship. Harman writes that “a symbiosis occurs between two pre-existent objects, with ‘events’ being only the unmistakable echo of these objects in their interaction” (p. 125). The event, in this case, is a musical work. Timothy Morton (2013) draws a specific
connection of OOO to music as a sensual object that is the product of human and nonhuman communication. He explains that a justly-tuned piano, rather than equal temperament intonation, positions the instrument “as object, as open to its nonhumans as is possible for humans to facilitate. The pianist becomes the medium—in the spiritual sense—for the piano” (p. 167). Referring back to sensual and real objects, music is a sensual object—a language—through which the human and nonhuman can communicate. The human operator and the nonhuman object form an equal and reciprocal relationship that serves as what Harman describes as the lasting by-product of the interaction between two objects (2018). Bennett’s (2010) concept of assemblages and vibrant matter speaks to the possible physical encounters with everyday objects. This concept can be first approached in a musical practice by simply paying attention. The possibilities of collaborating with the nonhuman can be exciting. Cultivating respect within a music practice with the nonhuman can be surprising and spontaneous. Solnit (2019) describes this embrace of the unknown, “maybe paying attention is first of all an endeavour to survive and adapt when the unfamiliar arises, startles us out of our habits, carries us over some border into the unexpected” (p. 135).

Committing to a positive language of use may also help musical artists transcend exploitative forms of object use in their practices. Limiting the word use may be a place to start. Other terms, such as include, incorporate, or working with can replace the word use and the negative connotations it is associated with. Context, again, is also very important. Respecting the stories, history, or potential of an object, as earlier explained by Lewis (1996) and Solnit (2016), is an important factor to approaching a music practice with everyday objects. The context of an object aids in communicating with the nonhuman. Ahmed writes, “if use brings things to mind, use provides another way of telling stories about things” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 7).
Ahmed presents a concept of Queer Use as a method of examining an object outside of intended functionality. Queer Use is a rethinking of purpose; it is a “coming after” (2019, p. 200). It embraces the unexpected and uncommon qualities of an object, and this can be an examination of the relationships formed with objects based outside of intended functionality. Ahmed’s language indirectly refers to a musical assessment that considers listening within a context as a method of examining alternative purpose, “to queer use is to make use audible, to listen to use, to bring to the front what ordinarily recedes into the background” (p. 198).

This reconsideration of function is a form of liberating an object from the confines of human-imposed function. Ahmed writes, “if some are shaped by the requirement to be useful, others are released from that requirement” (p. 11), and that Queer Use can render objects “all the more lively” (p. 26). This is reminiscent of Timothy Morton’s idea that a prepared piano is a form of freeing the instrument so that it can “resonate with its own wooden hollowness” (2013, p. 166). When an object is recontextualized or repurposed, expectation fades away. Queer use is also a way to understand why everyday objects may seem comical, absurd, or laughable when presented in an artistic practice. Ahmed explains, “when things are used by those for whom they were not intended, the effect can be queer. We can laugh at the effect” (2019, p. 209). Context is, again, solidified as imperative. Everyday objects can be musically explored both within and outside of intended functionality, and this can be suggestive of comedy. In chapter 3, I discuss concepts of Queer Use in my own practice through elements of surprise, the uncanny, and the unexpected.

Lingering, mingling, and stumbling may also be methods of building respectful relationships with the nonhuman through collaboration. These are active states where the imagination is allowed to wander, and Ahmed, Bennett, and Brinkmann reference these ideas in their theoretical examinations. Ahmed (2019) presents the idea of lingering with an object to rediscover purpose. Lingering implies a pause, a reluctance to move on: “to linger can be
to go astray” (p. 206). It is an invitation to step beyond context and function into unknown territory. The willingness to question or reconsider a commonly accepted function is an entry point of discovering sound. Bennett (2010) also presents lingering as a way to understand objects outside of functionality. Lingering occurs when fascination strikes; it becomes a period of time when the commonly accepted use of an object is questioned, reconsidered, or deconstructed. She offers that those thinking from this perspective:

try to linger in those moments during which they find themselves fascinated by objects, taking them as clues to the material vitality that they share with them. This sense of a strange and incomplete commonality with the outside may induce vital materialists to treat non-humans … more carefully, more strategically, more ecologically. (pp. 17-18)

Lingering is the spontaneous result of an awe-struck state of fascination. It is an active method of looking beyond the object; it is a call to listen. Sound, which may have been a secondary outcome of functionality, steps into the forefront. Brinkmann (2014) adds that objects can make humans stumble and advocates for loose forms of collecting evidence about the nonhuman (p. 724). The active states of lingering, mingling, and stumbling allow for objectivity and exploration.

Why?

Why might an ethical and respectful relationship with the nonhuman be important in a music practice? I identify a commitment to nonhuman collaboration as a starting point for change on a broader scale. Outside of music, Solnit (2019) alarmingly describes many current values alive in Western cultures, stating that “ours is one in which even human beings are seen as objects and commodities not deserving of respect” (p. 94). Perpetuating an exploitative view of everyday objects in new music may maintain or promote broken
systems. If communication with the nonhuman is interpreted as a metaphor, as described in an OOO perspective, then any attempt to communicate with the nonhuman is, inherently, art. This can take place inside or outside a dedicated performing sphere. Composers, performers, and improvisers have an opportunity to lead by example by developing respectful relationships with the nonhuman in their artistic practices. If everyday objects can enter the sphere of music practice, then perhaps ideas of musical collaboration—listening, observing, witnessing, respecting—can be considered outside of the performing stage. Bringing the everyday into an artistic practice illuminates the ordinary as extraordinary. Lewis (1996) writes:

It should be axiomatic that, both in our musical and in our human, everyday-life improvisations, we interact with our environment, navigating through time, place, and situation, both creating and discovering form. (p. 117)

Humans perhaps are already unknowingly collaborating with the nonhuman; in Bennett’s (2010) view, all actions of human agency have a ripple effect onto an assemblage. She is hopeful of a wider public impact of her theories as she:

seeks to induce a greater attentiveness to the active power of things — a power that can impede, collaborate with, or compete with our desire to live better, healthier, even happier lives. Perhaps this new attentiveness will translate into more thoughtful and sustainable public policies. (Gratton, 2010)

What lies beyond the curiosity to experiment with everyday objects in a music practice may be a renewed sense of respect for the nonhuman objects encountered outside of a performance context. A personal practice becomes political as artistic ideas intersect with daily life.
Chapter Summary

Collaborating with the nonhuman becomes possible through theoretical approaches. Understanding music as the outcome of communication between the human and nonhuman is a method of realising the capacity of relationships with everyday objects. Concepts of Object-Oriented Ontology, vibrancy, assemblage and a positive language of use may assist in changing the negative or derogatory language that surrounds music practices of everyday objects. Committing to respectful considerations of the nonhuman in a music practice with everyday objects may transfer into non-musical areas of life, and it is through this optimistic view that musicians and artists have the special opportunity to be at the forefront of change.
Chapter 3: Categorical Framework

In this chapter I address how composers, performers, and improvisers can work with everyday objects in a music practice through the perspective of a Categorical Framework. In my artistic work I developed a method of assessing the playability of everyday objects while considering the theoretical concepts of collaborating with the nonhuman. I explain this approach through examples of existing works by other composers, some of which I have analysed as a performer. It is my hope that this approach can be further adapted and expanded by others seeking to work with everyday objects in a musical practice.

There are existing practical approaches to sounding a conventional musical instrument that can be applied to sounding everyday objects. Hornbostel and Sachs (1961) developed a method of classifying instruments based on how they produce sound, which includes categorisations such as aerophones (wind), chordophones (strings), or idiophones (percussion), among others. This system is focused on classifying methods of sound production and does not include the multisensory elements that often accompany everyday objects in music. Other artists have developed their own methods of understanding the role of objects in music. Maras (2011) approaches everyday objects in a categorical style that groups objects into headings: Found Objects, Cracked Objects, Symbolic Objects, Sculpture, and Toy (pp. 52-76). These headings stretch beyond the aural qualities of objects to address that which is physical, tactile, and sentimental, but focus on practices that include electronic music and circuit bending. Andy Keep (2009) discusses the multisensory qualities of objects through a perspective focused on improvisation, electronic music, and technology. While these studies are similar to my own, in my practices I consider a broader approach to everyday objects in music that examines their aural, visual, tactile, and other sensory elements which may help to assess the playability and theatricality of objects in a musical context.
As I listened to works by other composers and improvisers, and as I composed my own, I found myself questioning the visual significance, context, and sounding qualities of an object that were not addressed in the methods that I had yet encountered. These questions included:

1. What is the visual significance of the object, if any?
2. How is the object being sounded, if at all? Is the object being sounded by means of its intended functionality?
3. Are the objects to be performed in a theatrical sense? Is there a theatrical element associated with the object?
4. Are conventional instruments included in the work?
5. Is audio or video amplification required to see the objects on stage from the audience?

The Categorical Framework developed as an attempt to answer these questions. Four main categories emerged: Sonic Objects, Multisensory Objects, Silent Objects, and Prepared Instruments. Through these headings, I found I could navigate the diverse appearances of objects in staged, improvised, site-specific, and interactive musical settings. With everyday objects, sound became one of many elements in a creative work. This framework offered a way of understanding the multisensory elements that sometimes accompany object music, and it became my compositional and analytical approach to working with objects.

The four categories outlined in this chapter may assist listeners and creators of object music in understanding the possibilities within this practice. The examples discussed in each category are only a small snapshot of the variety of existing music including objects. I had personal contact with many of the works listed in this chapter; some I have performed, and others I experienced live during this research. In three of the four categories, I have included a work that was programmed on a performance with ensemble Kupka’s Piano (Sonic Objects, 2019, see Appendix A). Through my artistic research I collected rehearsal data and analysed
the preparations of these works, which further contributed to my understanding of how of everyday objects can expand a music practice. Each category is not limited to the examples and headings that I offer; rather, they are a starting point from which to understand the Framework.

I acknowledge the limitations of this Framework based on the theoretical concepts that I explained in Chapter 2. This Framework is situated within a human experience and addresses the five human senses. However, I accept that nonhuman objects may experience other objects in ways that I will not fully understand. Harman (2018) explains that “all of the objects we experience are merely fictions” (p. 34), and it is important to consider the diverse possibilities of how nonhuman objects may relate differently than humans. I can only assess and analyse through an informed human perspective, and this framework serves to better support methods of understanding the nonhuman within a music practice.

Category 1: Sonic Objects

Sonic Objects position sound as the artistic focus above all other sensory elements. While it is difficult to remove the context, materiality, and visual appearance from an everyday object, the aural properties are at the forefront in a work that explores a Sonic Object. Performers, composers, and improvisers working with Sonic Objects may become inventive with playing and reacting to objects outside of their intended functions. In these cases, the visual representation or the gestures required to sound an object are by-products in the pursuit of creating sound and are typically not of artistic significance. Sonic Objects can appear in works that explore resonance and open instrumentation, and their presence on a stage may be hidden or minimal. They can also help to tell aural stories—similar to narration—and they can mimic the sounds of conventional musical instruments.
Sonic Objects are a call to discover the sounds of everyday objects as music. Voeglin (2013) acknowledges the impulse to rely on visual appearance and material representation when attempting to listen to sound, which confirms the difficulty of dismissing the other-sensory qualities inherent to everyday objects. However, according to Voeglin, exploring everyday objects through the primary perspective of sound may help listeners “to access sonic works as environments, as sonic worlds” (Voeglin, 2013, p. 1). This is indicative that sound occurs in space and is perhaps an attempt to accept the physical materiality of sound as part of the experience. She continues:

on encountering sonic works, we still look for visual clues, anything to anchor the heard and find meaning rather that explore its sound. The re-identification, at least in part, of the sonic with its musical heritage might make us hear the invisible and thus illuminate that which is in the shade of the visual. (Voeglin, 2013, p. 2)

Focusing on the sounds of everyday objects may present opportunities to rediscover environments. Voeglin’s term of “sonic worlds” (2013, p. 1) provides a pathway through which to understand a realm that is to be experienced primarily through listening but without ignoring other multisensory elements, and Sonic Objects may be an approach through which to shift sensory dominance from visual to aural.

**Resonance**

Resonance and vibrancy are fundamental elements to working with Sonic Objects. Resonance can offer information about space and environment. Alvin Lucier’s *Opera with Objects* (1997) explores the “resonant properties of various ordinary objects” (No Ideas but in Things, 2012). It is an examination of the vibrancy of an object within a space that can be considered similar to Voeglin’s (2013) description of sonic environments. *Opera with Objects* is scored for a “performer with resonating objects” (Lucier, 1997) with instructions
to explore sonic capacities through a rhythmic tapping of two sticks or pencils in contact with the objects. Sound is at the forefront of *Opera with Objects*. Other visual and tactile sensory elements are present in the work, but the physical properties of the object are primarily considered in regard to how the object may be sounded through tapping. Placing the sticks or pencils on the object is a gestural and tactile function, but this is done as a means of playing and sounding the object. This work is reactive and unfolds in the moment; it requires a performer to be an explorer. The sonic world created by exploring resonance is unique to each performance space, be it indoors or outside, and is perhaps as fresh an experience for the performer as it is for the listening audience members.

**Stylized Sound**

The sounds of everyday objects can help to tell a story. Composer Anne LeBaron prefers the term stylized sound, which indicates that objects can evoke an event or idea without the need for visual representation. Her work *Is Money Money* (2000) requires “nine call bells and two ratchets” which are meant to represent “stylized sonic depictions of that now extinct instrument of commerce, the cash register” (LeBaron, n.d). The addition of everyday objects alongside instruments help to offer real-life situations that would otherwise be more abstract if recreated through instrumental sounds. I consider how the work might be interpreted if the call bells were replaced with the sounds of percussion triangles. Stylized sound—in this instance, with bells—can develop context in music. The visual representation of the object recedes into the background, allowing for sound to become the dominant quality.

Composer Rei Munakata incorporates Sonic Objects into his chamber work *Buckle in the Air* (2011). This is a piece that recreates the sounds of travelling on an airplane. The hum of the engine, muffled talking, the metal of a seatbelt buckle, and the sounds of airplane
snacks being consumed are aurally represented through the sounds of everyday objects, but the objects that help to represent these stylised events are not meant to be visually represented in performance. The composer distributes objects amongst the four instrumental parts scored for alto flute, clarinet, acoustic guitar, and objects. Each instrumentalist doubles playing objects such as tin cans, pipes, and almonds. The objects do not interfere with the instrumental playing, as common in prepared instruments, and are instead stand-alone sounds that help to tell the story of travelling on an airplane (Video 1).


Munakata is explicit in the program notes that the objects are not to meant provide any visual or gestural significance, nor is the story of the piece to be told to the audience verbally or written in a program (Munakata, 2020). Rather, the composer intends the instrumental and object sounds—on their own—to relay the storyline of the work. The program note he offers to audiences is brief: “Please take your seat comfortably and enjoy your relaxation time” (Munakata, 2020). This is meant to give a thought-provoking clue to the listener of what the work may be about. He further indicates in the score that the gestures required of one of the objects, eating almonds, is “not meant to be performed in over theatrical manner. It is only to suggest the calm and gentle atmosphere with an intense sense
of ‘observation’ and anticipation” (2011, p. 3). These deliberate instructions in the program and performance notes are evidence of the Sonic Object in music as they show how the sensory qualities of an object outside of sound are not necessarily required to tell a story.

**Open Form Composition**

Open form compositions, where an instrument or object is not specified by a composer, is often a direct exploration of sound over visual or other sensory properties. James Saunders has created a body of work that explores open form composition and cites the work of Ferneyhough (*Fanfare for Klaus Huber*, 1987) and Kagel (*Acustica*, 1968) as sources of inspiration for his work. In open form composition, sounds are not fixed to specific instruments or objects. In this work, Saunders gives the task of choosing objects to the performer and instructs them to play the score with their own selections. He outlines how the objects may need to be sounded within a work, giving a guide as to what object may fit within the brief, but the object selection is up to the performer. He describes the benefits of this form of composition:

> The focus here is on finding differences, or allowing them to emerge; it is exploratory, and the performers are charged with a task. The performers are asked to source the sounds and/or the instruments, not the composer. It points to a distributed creativity, where multiplicity is harnessed to create sonic variety. (Saunders, 2013, p. 477)

Saunders’s open form compositions are examples of the Sonic Object in music. There is minimal visual significance of the objects in open form works as the composer does not assign a specific object to a player’s part. Composers who write in the open form style acknowledge that their work will likely not sound the same through different performances and interpretations. Rather, the works exist as a concept for aural exploration, and this
signifies a focus on sound instead of other sensory qualities. Assigning the task of object selection to the performer perhaps offers more investment and personalisation to the interpretations of this type of work. The aural outcome of the composition becomes representative of both the composer and the performer, resulting in “sonic variety” and “distributed choice” (Saunders, 2013, p. 475). Each performance of an open form composition highlights a different interpretation, and this can occur through everyday objects.

An example of Saunders’s open form compositions is his ongoing series things to do (2014–). Saunders indicates that “players may use any instruments, sound-producing objects, devices or sound processing equipment (digital, analogue, or acoustic), and performances are characterised by the wide range of personal choices brought together as a group” (Things to Do, 2014). Part of this series is everybody do this (2014), which is a work of both variable duration and performers. everybody do this requires the players to make collective decisions on how to examine noise, pitch, and process of their chosen instruments or sound-producing objects. The text-based score presents as a list of instructions rather than notation, and this creates space for the non-linear organisation of sound. The unspecified instrumentation and open plan of the score translates into vibrantly different performance interpretations. On his website, Saunders collects the video documentation captured by performers and ensembles who perform everybody do this (Things to Do, 2014). This catalogue is evidence of how unspecified instrumentation translates into vibrantly different performance interpretations. The work exists as a concept through which to explore Sonic Objects.

Small Objects

Sonic Objects can be present on stage but not intended to be seen, only heard. The inclusion of small objects in a work can be a way to add non-instrumental sounds without drawing attention to the visual appearance of objects. I often work with small objects,
including finger puppets and other small toys, and I am aware that this type of practice requires aural and video amplification to capture the multisensory qualities of the object. However, when small objects are included in a musical context without video projection, the objects may be interpreted as Sonic Objects. This practice can occur alongside traditional instruments or as found objects in percussion set-ups. In these instances, sound is the primary focus, and the visual representation of the object is in the background.

Diana Soh’s chamber ensemble work *Incantare: take2* (2015) examines the Sonic Object alongside multiple instrumental techniques. The work calls for performers to explore small objects, prepared instruments, vocalisations, and conventional instrumental playing. The Sonic Objects in the work include toy hand bells, sandpaper, and metal coins. The sandpaper and coins are directed to be placed on the bottoms of the player’s shoes, and a scratching sound is made as each player moves the ball of their foot in a notated rhythm. A coin is placed on the heel of the shoe to imitate “tap dancing shoes” (Soh, 2015, p. vii).

Soh is strategic in writing for a mixture of objects and playing techniques for an ensemble of six performers. In particular, the placement of the sandpaper and coins on shoe bottoms extends the sounding potential of each player. All performers except the percussionist are to perform seated, so each is free to move their feet while simultaneously playing their instrument. Soh expands the sonic capacity of the instrumentalists by considering ways of sounding objects without use of hands or arms, which are otherwise occupied by instrumental playing. Placing the objects on the bottoms of the player’s shoes also means that the objects will not be seen. This is a deliberate focus on the sound of an object without consideration of its appearance. The composer is careful to indicate that the motions required to slide and tap the objects on the bottoms of shoes should be “viewed as a physical, complimentary outpouring stemming from the instrumental parts” (Soh, 2015, p. iii). Rather than overt gestural or visual elements, Soh intends the object sounds to fit
organically within the context of ensemble playing and be equal to that of the gestures required to play an instrument. Any resulting instrumental theatre is to be of performative necessity, an example being the feet of multiple performers sliding in unison to achieve a notated rhythm. The sound of the object is central yet hidden; gesture is a natural result rather than deliberate choreography.

**Drawing similarities**

Everyday objects can mimic or resemble the sounds of conventional musical instruments. I recall a time during my research when I was writing at my home desk early in the morning, and I heard a trumpet-like drone wavering around a single pitch. After about 10 seconds, the drone would pause and then start again, sometimes with the addition of a lower pitch that sounded similar to a trombone. It was 6:30am on a weekday, and I thought it was an odd time to be having a music rehearsal. I had also never heard this sound before from my neighbours and I was caught by surprise. I opened my windows to investigate where the sound was coming from, and again I heard the brass sounds. I realised that there was construction work happening a street over from my house and the brass-like sounds were the squawks of large roadwork machinery. The everyday objects, in this case large motorised vehicles, were mimicking the sounds I have learned to identify from my instrumental music training.

Malin Bång’s *Hyperoxic* (2011) explores how object sounds can mimic the sounds of conventional instruments. The objects scored in this work all utilise air in some capacity to create sound: a bike pump, balloon pump, megaphone, two hand fans, and a large balloon. When played alongside the extended techniques of a bass flute, the objects “challenge the flute with their unique sounds, but also seamlessly merge with the palette of air timbres
created by the flute” (Bång, 2011, performance notes). Bång continues in the score’s performance notes:

The focus is air in three different appearances: the communicative air that we use for speaking and whispering; the organic air that we experience as breathing, winds or breezes and finally the mechanic air which is used in several simple tools and machines. (2011, performance notes)

The composer offers a detailed list of Object Specifications in the score (2011). This is provided to assist the object player in sourcing and setting up the objects in a way that reflects the requirements of the work. Bång also suggests the inclusion of light amplification in staged performances. Each detail within the score—object specification, notation, performance notes—are included to help the performers recreate the same set of sounds in each performance. These elements preserve the conventions of concert music while including everyday items not typical to a staged performance.


*Hyperoxic* is another work that I programmed and performed in 2019 with Kupka’s Piano (Video 2). I played the object part, and preparing this work took much time to source
the objects and research their sounding techniques (I discuss this further in Chapter 6). Rather than considering how the audience would perceive the objects, I found myself more concerned with finding the right objects as specified and setting them up in a playable way. Based on my rehearsal venue and what tables, music stands, and chairs were available, I made adjustments to how I fastened my megaphone to a microphone stand, clipped shut the balloon, and taped the balloon pump to the side of a table within reach. I was not concerned with how these adjustments looked from the audience. Listening to the bass flute part helped me to realise better object playing technique. I could hear the subtleties of the extended bass flute, and I adapted my object techniques to mimic or contrast these sounds based on the score indication. While the composer specifies in the program notes that there is some gestural unity between the two performers and their notated music, the objects in the work are explored primarily for their sounds. Similar to Diana Soh’s work *Incantare:take 2* (2015), the theatrical or gestural movements required to sound the objects are simply an inherent result of ensemble playing.

**Category 2: Multisensory Objects**

The Multisensory Object is experienced through two or more senses. A combination of aural, visual, and tactile elements is common, but this category can extend to include taste and smell. Unlike the Sonic Object, a Multisensory Object features at least two sensory elements of equal importance in a work, perhaps similar to what Cage explains as “something which engages both the eye and the ear” (Cage et al., 1965, p. 50). Andy Keep (2009) describes how assessing the multisensory qualities of an object may help performers of object music to better understand an object, stating that “aural feedback focuses on emerging sounds, whilst tactile and visual feedback contribute towards an appreciation of the object’s
playability” (p. 118). Non-aural sensory elements can contribute to an object’s situation within a musical context.

An object’s visual, symbolic, tactile, or other properties beyond sound can become a consideration of its inclusion into a musical work. Palermo (2019) writes of Hugh Davies’s selection of an egg slicer for his musical work:

because although it is an ‘ordinary article of life’ it was not simply chosen for its iconic and symbolic meaning, but also for the actual sound it produced, a sound that another egg slicer would not be able to produce, and one worth preserving in case a manufacturer discontinued or modified the production of the item, as had already happened with egg slicers in Davies’s lifetime. (Palermo, 2019)

Objects can become special or unique for reasons that extend beyond their sonic qualities. Exploring objects in musical work may also be a form of preservation, as exemplified through Davies’s egg slicer. Many human-made objects risk technological or functional obsolescence, which may make locating these items difficult. Their manufacturing can also undergo changes that alter their tactile playability. Mauro Lanza and Andrea Valle’s work Regnum Animal (2013) positions out-of-date electric appliances alongside a string trio. Lanza describes the objects in the work as “a kind of cemetery of recuperated electrical goods of the 1980s … the iconicity of the objects is very much apparent” (Centre de Documentation de la Musique Contemporain, 2017). Although the kitchen and personal electrical appliances are explored for their motorised sounds and not their typical function, their appearance is highlighted. In this example, sound is the “coming after” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 200) of the obsolete objects. Lanza states, “In a way it’s the life of the objects after its use value has gone, and its exchange value has gone also, in a way.” (Centre de Documentation de la Musique Contemporain, 2017). Beyond sound, the multisensory qualities of objects can help to create meaning in music.
Aural and Visual

Multisensory Objects most commonly present as combinations of aural and visual qualities. John Cage describes the dominance of the five different senses, “the two public senses are seeing and hearing; the senses of taste, touch and odour are more proper to intimate, non-public situations” (Cage et al., 1965, p. 50). The co-dependence of sight and sound can add important contextual clues to a musical work that would otherwise be lost if one of the sensory elements was omitted. Examples of this can include storytelling, narrative, comedy, and surprise. Movement and gesture are often included as visual components alongside sound.

Tomi Räisänen’s *Balloon Work* (2011) is an example of how visual and aural elements can combine to create comedy, surprise, and suspense. The work is an exploration of the sounds possible with latex balloons and is scored for five performers: one on guitar and four playing balloons. The four balloon players are to inhale and inflate, squeak, rub, and deflate balloons in rhythmic patterns alongside the sounds of prepared guitar. The guitarist explores extended techniques of the instrument using everyday objects. This includes both percussive tapping and scraping the body of the guitar with a rubber mallet to make singing-like sounds. Räisänen indicates specific points where the balloonists are to breathe together, and each player is given an opportunity to improvise in solo or duo formations throughout the work. Other instrumental conventions, such as vibrato and dynamics, are included in the balloon notation. These effects are to be achieved through techniques that require visibly physical gestures, which take on heightened interest due to simplicity of the objects. The work explores conventions similar to ensemble playing, but latex balloons replace musical instruments.

Balloons are familiar everyday objects, and the presentation of their sounds outside of their function can be fascinating to witness. I identify this fascination as possible through the
exploration of a Multisensory Object. At the beginning of the work the balloon is deflated, but it blossoms into a visual display of the sounding object as it is filled with the vibrancy of pressurised air. The sounds of rhythmic exhaling accompany the changing visual elements of the objects. However, there is also an element of volatility to playing balloons. The piece requires the performers to coordinate inflating the balloon in a rhythmic pattern while simultaneously exhaling enough air into the object so that it can be sounded until the next breath point, similar to a bagpipe. The air must also be contained and methodically released until the next breath point. Surprise and suspense become possible through the sounds of breath and balloon technique as well as their visual representations. The volatility of the inflated objects can present questions: Will the performers run out of contained air as they play their balloon? Might they accidentally drop the balloon? Will it pop?


Balloon Work (2011) was one of the works featured on the Sonic Objects (2019) program with Kupka’s Piano (Video 3). Rehearsing the work revealed multisensory qualities of playing balloons. We realised that sounding the object was contingent on how much air we could put into the balloon in one rhythmic breath. It was immediately apparent if we had not
exhaled enough air into the object to adequately inflate it, so we worked to coordinate our breath consistency. As we rehearsed through the improvised sections, some of the ensemble members had an easier time developing playing techniques based on the tactility of the instrument, and these sections were exciting not only for the aural content but also for the suspense that was created by the deflating object. We decided to each perform with a different colour of balloon, and this added an extra visual layer to the piece. The final sound of the work is a foot stomp and release of the balloon. In the performance, the balloons flew around the stage as they were set free, which added comedy and levity. Each of these multisensory elements added something to Balloon Work that would otherwise be difficult to achieve through sound alone.

_Taste, Touch, Smell_

Multisensory Objects are not limited to being experienced through only visual and aural and senses. While taste, touch, and smell are ordinarily background modes of absorbing musical information, or “non-public” as in Cage’s description (Cage et al., 1965, p. 50), these senses can, in extraordinary circumstances, become primary methods of experiencing music-based performances. In 2016 I attended a percussion concert at the Darmstadt International Summer Course for New Music. This concert was a multi-venue event held at a school, and the audience was meant to experience each work as they continued in a circuit with a group of approximately 15 other viewers. The smaller audience size was to allow for smaller venues: the stairwells, outdoor courtyards, and classrooms of the school were transformed into performance spaces. Simon Löffler’s _c_ (2013) was a work on the program that had limited audience capacity because of its logistical requirements. The work required a large contraption of wooden dowels fastened into a square that lined the inner perimeter of the room. This apparatus was set up in a classroom with enough seats for the small audience size.
The dowels were positioned at head height above a row of chairs. Loeffler’s work is to be heard through a listener’s teeth; it required the audience to bite the wooden dowels and absorb vibration through their mouth.

Each audience member was given a pair of noise-cancelling headphones as the sonic material of the work included three glockenspiels played with brass mallets. The loud volume and high frequencies produced by these instruments travelled well through the wooden apparatus—which was the intended mode of listening—but would be potentially damaging to human ears. As an audience member experiencing the work, I remember the taste of the wooden dowels and the smell of the disinfectant that was wiped on the wood between performances. Listening to the work by absorbing the vibrancy of sound through my mouth was fascinating, but my jaw became sore from being open for the duration of the performance. My teeth are sensitive and experiencing the vibrations was at first a new and unsettling sensation. The chairs were set up along the square frame of dowels, which meant that those sitting on two opposite sides of the room faced each other, so instead of looking at the performers my gaze was forced across the room to other listeners. The conventional ways of hearing and seeing a musical work were challenged, and in their place were tactile, olfactory, and taste methods of experience.

Loeffler’s work required a heightened level of effort by the audience but facilitated an unconventional method of experiencing sound through Multisensory Objects. The dowels, in this example, became objects in the work even though they were not the objects that were to be sounded. Rather, they were the mode of transmitting sound. The percussionists did not play the everyday objects, but they were vital to the presentation of the work. While taste and smell were perhaps not the intended method of observing the sonic material, these multisensory elements impacted my experience.
Games

Multisensory Objects can imitate simple daily activities in a musical setting. Board games and sports games are common activities involving specific objects that can be transformed into a performative activity, and this can be a way to organise musical content. *Rúlletta* (2014) by Halldór Smárason is a work that explores sound as created through game play. The work is scored for baritone, bass clarinet, trombone and trumpet, and each player doubles on everyday objects including coins, dice, ping pong balls, rice, small rocks, screws, sugar, flour, and steel string. These objects are to be thrown onto a bass drum. The score reads like a game; players roll a die, and the resulting numbers determine both the musical content and gestural actions specific to each section. Each player has six different staves of notated music that correspond with a number on the dice, and this is the music that is to be played as the game goes on. The musical content—both instrumental and object—is determined by chance through dice rolls.

There are many visual and theatrical elements of this piece that are crucial to the concept of the work. The score is designed as a circular diagram, which represents the shape of the bass drum, and it is to be placed on top of the drum. When the players stand at indicated spots, the bass drum transforms into a board game table. Smárason indicates different ways of rolling the dice: “Stretch the arm as high as possible in the air and drop the dice straight on the bass drum” and “throw the dice low and fast” (Smárason, 2014, p. 3). These gesture-based methods of rolling the dice result in different sounds, and they also provide visual theatre. In this way, the physical actions required to play the game shape the musical content of the work. Smárason also suggests that performances can include video projection from an aerial view of the drum, which allows the audience to witness the game as it is being played. Further theatrical elements are implied in the score. Other than the dice, the everyday objects in the work are not game-related. They are surprising in the context as they
are thrown onto the drum, which is visible to the audience. The objects add both percussive texture to the work outside of the wind and vocal scoring as well as elements of visual surprise.

*Rúlletta* is an example of the Multisensory Object as the visual and gestural elements cannot be uncoupled from the musical content. Without the visual cues, it would be less apparent that the sounds created in the piece were by chance and as a result of a game played specific to the performance. The game element is unique to the situation; each performance of the work is likely not to be replicated. This is reflective of the inspiration for the work, which was the game Russian Roulette.

**Staged Work**

Multisensory Objects can present as theatrical elements in staged musical works. Opera and music theatre are examples of conventional models of staged music that can engage everyday objects as props, scene settings, and sources of sound. Liza Lim’s *Atlas of the Sky* (2018) features everyday objects as sound-producing items in ways that convey “a richness of meaning … of symbolic relationship” (ABC Classic, *Atlas of the Sky*, 2018). One example includes the stage crowd (similar to an opera chorus) bowing Ikea children’s chairs as violins with sticks, which mimics an orchestra (ABC Classic, 2018, 0:09:13). Instead of conventional instruments, meaning is attempted to be derived from familiar everyday objects. The objects are presented on stage in unconventional visual ways and explored for multisensory qualities. In Ashley Fure’s *The Force of Things* (2017) “aircraft cables, tensioned web-like across the 150-foot performance space, double as infrastructure and instrument when bowed like mammoth double basses” (Fure, n.d.). In this example, everyday objects help create a stage setting that is explored for its visual, aural, and tactile qualities.
Within a reimagined context of opera and music theatre, these works theatrically integrate everyday objects in considering meaning and instrumentality.

Another work that explores the theatricality of everyday objects is *Opera of Objects* (2018) by Erik Griswold, Cathy Milliken, and Vanessa Tomlinson. The three composer-performers collaboratively discover the multisensory qualities of everyday objects in this 50-minute-long work. The premise of the work calls for each performer to choose five objects within a set of guidelines: an unnecessary object, a hollow object, a red object, a transparent object, and a nostalgic object. This compositional element positions the everyday objects at the centre of the work; all multisensory explorations evolve and develop from each performer’s selection. The work features conventions of opera, including instrumental playing, text (or libretto) by poet Craig Foltz, and a score divided into scenes. Overall, the work questions the hierarchy of objects, both human and nonhuman, and throughout the work the objects are developed as characters.

I attended the premiere performance of the work, and a few of the objects selected for this performance included a toy car, a metal bed spring, a paper cone-shaped megaphone, a red balloon, a broken pane of clear glass, and a radio. Some of these objects crossed over into multiple categories. An example is the red balloon, which could also be interpreted as the hollow object. The qualities of the objects—colour, size, material composition—were elements explored through both sound and visual appearance. Some of the objects prompted text. Each performer relayed a memory about their chosen nostalgic object, and this contextual information helped to tell stories amongst Foltz’s libretto. Conventions of instrumental playing sometimes informed the playability of the objects. Milliken, who plays the oboe, chose a paper megaphone as one of her objects, and she sounded it in ways that required an airstream. All theatrical and musical components of the work were driven by the multisensory qualities of the everyday objects. In this work, Multisensory Objects help to
create theatre. Their visual and sentimental qualities helped to determine staging, sound, and trajectory of the work.

**Reflection of Reality**

Imagine the scenario of entering a recital hall to attend a live chamber music concert. A solo instrumentalist steps onto stage and describes the inspiration behind the work they are about to perform, stating that it is soft in volume because it explores the idea of the quiet hero. Intrigued, you prepare to listen to sound at the minimum. Your concentration is mildly disrupted when you begin to hear noise coming from within the audience, recognisable as the zipper of a coat or the shuffling of a paper program. At this point, you consider these sounds normal; perhaps members of the audience are still settling in. Moments later, more disruption occurs, and this time it is impossible to ignore. You glance over to the cause of the noise, another audience member who is busy fussing with items inside a plastic a bag. A minute passes without extraneous noise and you can concentrate on the intricacies of the performance. Then, the crinkling sound of a bag of chips emerges from the audience. *Crunch.* The extra noise continues to build until the unthinkable happens: the performer stops playing, glares at the audience member, and disturbingly walks off stage. This is unexpectedly followed by applause, and both the performer and the noisy audience member—who is actually another performer—step onstage to take a bow. This is Meaghan Burke’s 2018 composition *MD-PhD* (Video 4).

MD-PhD (2018) is an exploration of the multisensory qualities of objects through context and action. Burke creates music at the intersection of pop and experimental disciplines (Daily, 2017), and she brings a comedic attitude to her work in instrumental composition. MD-PhD disrupts the context of a concert situation, turning it into a comical statement on noise, instrumental music practices, and conventions of staged performance. The everyday objects in her work are meant to disrupt an otherwise expected context, and this is achieved through their sounds and strategic placement in the audience. Burke does not specify which disruptive objects are to be sounded from the audience, but she indicates the performative elements that are to arise from their presence within the work. Collective audience concern for the situation and aghast reactions to the disruptive listener adds tension to the experience. MD-PhD is an exploration of performative, symbolic, and contextual elements that are reflective of everyday life.

Category 3: Silent Objects

The Silent Object is aurally absent but visually present in a musical work. Instead of producing sound, it is often a suggestive element that can help shape a musical performance.
Maras’s (2011) explains that the Silent Object does not “need to produce any sounds but still can give away musical allusions” (p. 103). Its presence alone offers artistic ideas. The Silent Object can interact with or influence the musical content of a work, or it can have a presence on stage separate from the aural components of a work. Examples of Silent Objects include scene-setting props, costumes, light, film, puppets, and ideas. While many of these objects already appear in theatrical traditions, defining them as Silent Objects positions these types of objects in a more musical focus. Silent Objects can be found in works that include conventional musical instruments, or they may appear in performances as a way to assist in telling a story without making sound. A Silent Object may be closely related to the visual art tradition of the Readymade, which was popularised in the early twentieth century by visual artists (Parkinson, 2008), and it can also borrow from the traditions of theatre. This category highlights the non-musical properties that objects can bring to musical practices.

David Toop describes the appearance of Silent Objects in his improvisatory practices. In conversation with composer-performer Rie Nakajima, he states how certain objects can become a part of an artistic identity. Simply bringing along certain everyday objects to a concert but choosing not to include them in performance still influences how the direction of his work may unfold:

You don’t go home and pull out your favourite book and read it as soon as you get home. It’s just there but it has a kind of weight and it’s part of your growth as a human being. It’s part of who you are. I feel the same way about taking objects to a performance that you don’t have to play them all and some of them may not be sound-making objects at all but they are part of your ‘thinking and being’ process during performance. (Nakajima & Toop, 2013, p. 6)

Silent Objects can become a part of the creative process. Their presence adds to the architecture or visual design of a musical work even when their sounds may be absent.
**Stage setting**

Charlemagne Palestine is an artist who integrates everyday objects into his multi-faceted performances. He “straddles installation, video, performance and music” (Ryan, 2009, p. 212), and Silent Objects often help to set an installation-like scene in his works. Ryan continues, “atmosphere certainly prevails in his ritualistic approach, with low coloured lighting or ambience, and often with the appearance of fetishized stuffed toys embodying transitional objects in his performances. Sometimes these toys form installations and sculptures in their own right” (2009, p. 212). Video recordings of Palestine’s improvisatory works feature soft toys sitting on and around keyboard instruments. Paired with lighting and his brightly coloured outfits, these Silent Objects simultaneously add levity and depth to his improvisatory musical work that Palestine describes as “maximalist” (15 Questions, n.d.).

In 2018, I attended a performance by Charlemagne Palestine during his visit to Australia. The performance took place in the Cinema at the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane, where there is a 1929 Wurlitzer organ. This organ is often played during weekly screenings of silent films, and for this performance it was placed in front of the cinema screen. Palestine dressed the instrument in a shrine of stuffed toys and colourful fabric (Figure 1). The lighting was a pink wash, and he was wearing two hats. These Silent Objects primed me for what I was about to hear.
Palestine was seated to the right side of the stage with a bottle of spirits, three wine glasses, and a jug of water. In the middle of the stage was the organ that sounded a Perfect fifth drone, and after Palestine sipped his drinks, he began to click two of the glasses together. The organ continued to sound, the uncanniness of the soft toys appearing to control the sound of the instrument as Palestine remained seated offstage. He finally approached the organ and began to improvise as a film started to play on the screen. The images on the film were slow and difficult to make out due to the lighting, but it was clear that he was in a cemetery during daylight hours. He was holding and playing with a toy monkey in the film, perhaps one that was also physically present on the stage. The film showed images of Palestine tipping his hat to tombstones; in the cinema, he mimicked this motion with one of the hats on his head, saluting the screen as he continued to play the organ. It was then that I realised the cemetery in the film was for pets, and the animal-shaped toys immediately took on more significance. Only the instrument sounded, but the work was much more than an improvisation for organ. Silent Objects—film, costume, performative gesture, and scene-setting objects—elevated the musical experience and helped to tell a story of pet farewells.
Halfway through the performance, the sound of the organ suddenly cut out. This was abrupt but given the nature of the performance I assumed it was planned. Palestine casually walked to the side of the stage and continued to sip his drink. The film continued in silence, and all that was left of the performance were the Silent Objects against the motion of the film. After the film credits, Palestine addressed the audience and thanked us for listening. He informed us that the organ unexpectedly blew a fuse, which is why the music cut out, and acknowledged that this happened at a climax during the film and that organs—like people—must be treated well. I questioned: what if the Silent Objects were not on the stage? How would the rest of the performance have worked? In this scenario, the Silent Objects took over when the sound stopped: the film ran silently until its end, and the soft animal toys were symbolic of the story from the film. The drones of the organ were no longer accompanying these Silent Objects, but somehow their presence on stage was audible. The everyday objects in the performance did not make sound; however, the experience would not have been the same without them.

Costumes

Costumes are another example of Silent Objects. Clothing choices in music borrow from traditions of theatre and can help to suggest a scene setting. Their physical design can also influence how performers are able to make sound. Costumes are standard in staged music traditions, such as opera, and their inclusion in instrumental music can be suggestive of theatrical or performative elements. Luciano Berio gives instructions for the soloist to wear white tie in his Sequenza V (1968) for trombone solo, which helps to suggest the piece’s dedication to the clown Grock. The work is described as “a showpiece; performing it includes theatrical elements. This means that the trombonist must not only evince his instrumental skill – he must also have a sense of sorrowful humour” (Universal Edition, n.d.). The
direction to wear a costume is a way for the soloist to further embody the theatricality of the work, and it also provides cues to the audience about the significance of the music beyond the aural content. Another example of costuming as a Silent Object is Jesse Marino’s *Rot Blau* (2009), a piece that the composer describes as “tightly knit rhythmic duo which uses synchronised and mirrored upper body movements to create small vignettes which depict the exercises of two androids” (Rubiks Collective, 2018). Each of the two players wears red or blue colour-coded wigs and gloves, and this heightens the rhythmic choreography as they move their hands and heads. Costumes as Silent Objects do not create sound, but they can influence how sound is made by the performer or interpreted by the audience.

The everyday object of clothing can also become a performance limitation or source that influences how sound is made. Clint McCallum’s *Twinzies* (n.d.) is scored for “1 flautist and 1 singer sharing 1 flute and 1 dress” (p. 1). McCallum indicates in the score performance notes that the piece “is about sharing”, and that the dress attaches the performers “at the hip” to suggest “conjoined twins” (McCallum, n.d). Other suggestions are also indicated to emphasise the togetherness of the performers, such as matching make-up and lighting spots on the stage where the performers are to stand. The performers are required to learn musical material and also dramatic gestural elements. The singer is to assist in playing the flute by holding the instrument as the flutist sounds it with air. The two performers are also meant to coordinate their blinking, and there are moments when they giggle together. In this example, the costume is an overt way of showing the connectedness of the two performers. Coordinating blinking motions and giggling is unusual but performative; sharing a dress is an explicit visual way of bringing the two performers physically together. The composer indicates that the goal of the work is to explore the beauty of a “shared experiential world” (McCallum, Performance Notes, n.d), and costuming as a Silent Object helps to create this sentiment of sharing.
**Ideas**

Certain Silent Objects can help to influence sound without being physically present. When considered through a Object-Oriented Ontological perspective, ideas are intangible objects that can influence the trajectory of a musical work. It could be argued that this type of Silent Object influences all composition, as the creation of most musical works begin with an idea. Ideas can be considered and developed over time; they can be physically manifested into musical notation for a performer to later interpret. In improvisation, ideas can occur and evolve in the moment on stage. These are situations where the idea as a Silent Object emerges.

Vanessa Tomlinson’s *Nostalgia* (2013) is scored for a group of listeners. She describes the work as “a preparation for improvisation – done onstage, in silence, in front of the audience” (2013, p. 1). The score is a set of instructions that guides a group of players through an improvisation scenario that prompts a series of “imaginative listenings” (2013). Each player receives a set of cards with instructions that are unknown to them until the time of performance with clues such as “listen to the sound of your childhood backyard” and “listen to the sound of yourself, crying” (2013, p. 2). Each player is to silently read these cards in a sequence on stage while imagining what the sounds are in their head. This step continues through a stack of up to 6 cards, during which time the reading improviser is to undergo a silent and imagined “aural transformation” (2013) from one idea to the next. One final card reads PLAY, which is the cue to begin aurally improvising based on the imagined experiences. Ideas become Silent Objects in Tomlinson’s work. Physically, the ideas are written on paper cards, which are present on stage, but the content of the cards is not tangible. It manifests in the interpretation of the performer. The process of reading a sequence of ideas on cards and imagining their sounds is personal to the reader. Music eventually grows from
this silent prompt. An idea becomes a Silent Object that is imagined and then interpreted as musical material, and this occurs in real time and in front of an audience.

**Light**

Light can be perceived as a Silent Object when it is an interactive part of a musical work. Lighting design is often an important part of theatrical performance and has already been described as a way to create ambience in the works of Palestine (Ryan, 2009) and McCallum (McCallum, n.d.). Its connection to the production of sound can be further strengthened when it is a cohesive element alongside musical material.

Composer David Bird explores the “clear binary applications of lighting (on or off)” (Bird, *drop*, n.d.) in his chamber works for strings. *drop* (2015) for string octet and strobe lights and *Dark Ethnography* (2020) for 4 modified MIDI flashlights, cello, and electronics are two examples of incorporating light, which is both an intangible and aurally absent object, into a musical work. *drop* includes strobe lights that are “placed in between the string octet giving the performance the flickering look of a small-scale stadium performance” (Bird, *drop*, n.d.). The scale of the strobe lights creates a confronting presence. The string octet performs in darkness, but as the lights flicker the musicians’ presence becomes illuminated. There is an obscurity as to what is happening on the stage, and the strobes offer clues, glimpses at a time, as they unpredictably turn on and off. This foregrounds an on-off binary: sound and light come together and create cohesive experience. When one is off, the other is on. A musical gap is filled with light, and a gap in light is filled with sound. Light as a Silent Object becomes equal to the musical content as it helps to shape the trajectory of sound.

*Dark Ethnography* (2020) includes flashlights, which makes the lighting element mobile on stage and also represents what the composer describes as a “noirish imagery of detectives and investigators” (Bird, *Dark Ethnography*, n.d.). Light as a Silent Object is
physically represented through a flashlight, “In the work, 4 performers are equipped with battery powered flashlights that are modified so that they emit MIDI signals in accordance to the device being turned on or off” (Bird, *Dark Ethnography*, n.d.). The performers holding and managing the flashlights become characters who embody the composer’s concept of detectives, and Bird describes the flashlights as an “object of discovery” (Bird, n.d.) In this example, light can be more easily perceived as the resulting phenomenon of a tangible object (a flashlight), the common function of which may allude to mystery and curiosity. In these examples, light as a Silent Object can strengthen musical content and be suggestive of non-aural elements.

**Gesture**

Silent Objects can also take the form as the process or product of everyday tasks. In this category, music can be an accompaniment to the gestural motions possible with everyday objects. Mark Applebaum’s *Concerto for Florist and Orchestra* (2009) explores Silent Objects through the performance of floral arranging. An improvising florist is instructed to arrange floral projects according to the duration of the notated orchestra score, which is set in three movements. Collaboratively, Applebaum describes of the work that “the spirit is very much akin to the classic Merce Cunningham and John Cage collaborations in which music and dance cohabitate rather than coordinate” (Applebaum, 2009, p. v). There is a choreography inherent to the motions required of floral arranging, and this gestural element becomes a part of the construction of three large flower bouquets, each of which take the form of a Silent Object.

The Silent Objects associated with the task of floral arranging in this work help to create elements of surprise, suspense, and comedy. Applebaum states, “I don’t think this is a comic piece, but it aspires to be witty and whimsical and it delights in its levity alongside its
more sombre qualities and its rigour … seriousness and humour as always being mutually exclusive is ridiculous” (Menier, 2011, 0:04:18). The recording of the premiere performance with the La Jolla Symphony shows florist James DelPrince unveiling an apron before the orchestra begins (Menier, 2011, p. 0:07:16). This is a common action associated with floral arranging but seems out of place on stage, and the audience laughed at the effect. The music begins and Silent Objects are revealed. DelPrince snips the ends of the flowers with shears in line with treacherous sounds of the violin, and brown paper covers some of the flowers before they are revealed throughout each movement. DelPrince states that his choice of certain flowers helped to evoke the sentiment of the music, commenting that some of the material was “really dark” and “had almost a kind of menacing quality” that suggested “dark greens and branches” (Menier, 2011, 00:03:05). It is up to the florist to choose flowers with which to improvise, and DelPrince comments that his impression of certain flowers may be more fitting to different musical styles: “There are certain flowers that you look at that can’t be serious. Like an orange gerbera daisy just can’t be serious. On the other hand, a red rose, in my mind, can’t be funny” (Menier, 2011, 00:05:15). In the second movement, the florist sets up designs on a ladder on the side of the stage (Menier, 2011, 00:10:03). Standing atop the ladder, the task of arranging flowers seems precarious. This is set to curious and suspenseful music, and the treacherousness of the height of the ladder also allows for the arrangement to be seen from a distance. Musical conventions are also explored through the Silent Objects. At the end of the work, the conductor turns to the florist and begins to conduct his motions. Rather than organising sound, the conductor instead organises floral arranging of Silent Objects. Throughout three movements of musical material, three different floral bouquets are created that visually appear to reflect the musical material that accompanied its creation; each seem to reflect the precarity, absurdity, and suspense of the music to which it
was formed. The Silent Object remains on stage as a symbol that harnesses the vibrancy of the sounds that helped to make it.

*Concerto for Florist and Orchestra* is focused on the choreography of a relatable task. Applebaum states in his program notes about the piece that:

An alternative performer of another medium may be substituted. When such a substitution is made, the title is revised accordingly. Some examples include:

*Concerto for Juggler and Orchestra, Concerto for Plumber and Orchestra, Concerto for Contortionist and Orchestra, Concerto for Quilter and Orchestra* … (2009, p. v)

The work is an examination not only of floral arranging but also the choreography and gestures inherent to common occupations or hobbies. Silent Objects can be involved in common activities or be a product of them. On a broader scale, Applebaum is motivated by juxtaposing the theatre of a ritual with musical conventions: “If we attend to things that exist in life in one domain … or in one cultural space and then we think about them by exporting them into another space, I think that’s intrinsically interesting and possibly fertile” (Menier, 2011, p. 00:03:05). His *Concerto for Florist and Orchestra* shows how everyday objects can be silent yet integral to creating a musical experience with theatricality, comedy, and surprise.

**Category 4: Prepared Instruments**

The Prepared Instrument is an alteration to an existing musical instrument that has an established technical method of playing. According to Russell (2016), an instrument preparation can include additions of objects or subtractions of parts that change the resulting sound of the instrument (p. 4). Everyday objects, in this category, work alongside conventional musical instruments and modify their sounds. Preparations often preserve the interface of the instrument but change the aural outcome. The Prepared Instrument can
appear in notated music, where composers often include precise preparation measurements and performance instructions with scores. In improvisation contexts, the Prepared Instrument can become a method through which to experiment. Everyday objects as preparations can redesign the aural capabilities of conventional instruments and add a layer of volatility. They can become a way of organising new sounds that challenge the performer to adjust, react, and respond to a new set of limitations that everyday objects bring to instrumental technique. In both notated and improvised music, instrument preparations can expand or obstruct what is typically possible through conventional playing.

John Cage’s establishment of the prepared piano (*Bacchanale*, 1940) has continued to be developed through composition and performance. Cage’s prepared piano was created out of limitations: the size of the stage where his new work for dancer Syvilla Fort was to be premiered could not fit percussion instruments, so instead he developed a way to transform the piano by placing everyday objects on and in between the strings inside the instrument (Cage, 1979). These objects changed the resonance of the piano and offered a palate of percussive sounds otherwise unachievable through the instrument’s typical capacities. The interface of the piano did not change drastically from the usual way of playing the instrument, so a keyboardist could utilise their technical training to perform with an extended range of sounds. The sound of the instrument was reimagined, but its conventional playability was preserved.

Cage’s resourcefulness turned into a musical invention that provided a foundation to realise the potential to prepare other instruments. The prepared flute is documented as appearing in Peter Eötvös’s 1975 version of his chamber work *Windsequenzen* (Russell, 2016, p. 38), and instrument preparation techniques have evolved through the curiosities of composers and improvisers seeking new sound possibilities. Harpist and composer Anne LeBaron prepares the strings of her harp with paper clips, metal clamps, and other objects to
alter the sound of their resonance, and she also experiments with striking and plucking the strings with mallet-like metal objects (J. Rottle, personal communication November 3, 2020). Recordings of her work with the Re-ensemble shows some of these explorations at a performance in New York in 1989 (Dust & Fire - Re-Ensemble 1989, 2015). Mike Svoboda’s Druck (1994) connects trombones, trumpets and horns with plastic tubing, which creates a sharable airstream between multiple players. With this preparation, the trombone can be played with the valves of a trumpet. Composer Ida Lundén’s Dadodado (2003) for solo guitar and object explores the sounds of a small resonant food tin, similar to a sardine can, on the neck and strings of the guitar. The tin modifies the sound of the instrument as it is slapped and slid along the strings, sometimes accompanied by conventional guitar plucking and strumming techniques. Vocalist Ute Wassermann works with objects in ways that mask her voice. In her work voiceXtensions (Wassermann, 2013) she electronically processes her voice together with paper, plastics, and large obstructive objects placed inside of her mouth. Damien Barbeler’s Piece for Violin and Ball of Wool (2018) explores the sounds of the violin as interrupted by another player with a ball of wool. The violinist bows and fingers the instrument in conventional ways, and the other player explores the wool as a bow on the strings; as a leash that limits the violinist’s bowing space; and as a theatrical Silent Object that is wound into a ball to the sounds of the violin. In both notated and improvised scenarios, everyday objects as preparations continue to stretch the aural and visual possibilities of conventional instruments.

Prepared Instruments in Notated Works

Composer, improviser, and performance artist Elena Rykova includes everyday objects into her musical and interdisciplinary works. Her composition 101% Mind Uploading (2015) explores how instrument preparations can help performers to “create a sounding
reality by interacting with an object and listening to it” (Rykova, n.d.). Her work in performance art influences this composition as it includes multisensory and theatrical elements. Performers are to wear medical masks, caps, and gowns to suggest their playing technique is executed “with a surgical precision” (Rykova, n.d.). Rykova acknowledges this visual element and notes that the intended effect of the costumes is to “amplify the situation itself” (Rykova, n.d.). Surgical attire helps make the inside of the piano become a metaphor for the inside of a body. The performers seem to conduct a surgical procedure on the piano as they cower over its open frame to play it as a Prepared Instrument.

Rykova offers detailed performance notes, an instruction video, and a six-page performance rider containing the objects and instruments needed to play the piece, complete with photos. Her instructions do not stop at the objects that are required for the piece, as she also includes the non-musical items necessary for logistical purposes, such as masking tape, Blu Tac, and felt. These functional objects pertain to the everyday objects meant to sound the inside of the instrument. The level of detail in the notes and score are evidence that instrument preparations are a meticulous task. She warns, “if you decide to play it, make sure you prepare all necessary objects in advance”, and that “preparation might change according to the piano models and you will have to adjust yourself to the new conditions” (Rykova, n.d.). Her language is a striking call to attention that preparing an instrument is a tedious task. As different pianos have contrasting interiors, the performer is responsible for adapting to the conditions. The everyday objects are not fixed to the instrument, and this creates variables from each performance. Rykova acknowledges this in her performance notes, saying that “there isn’t just one possible outcome, there is an infinity of possibilities, so only with the determined intention, meticulousness and focused listening to the sounds and to each other they [performers] will be able to get the instrument to respond” (Rykova, n.d.). Her language is respectful of the piano as an object. While the performers are to call upon their technical
training and follow notated directions, Rykova’s work connects back to a discussion of nonhuman collaboration through her acknowledgement of the volatility of the preparations. It is as though the everyday objects that prepare the piano become mediators between humans and instrument.

**Prepared Instruments in Improvised Music**

Jim Denley is an improviser who uses “breath to make sounds” (Brand X, 2020). Everyday objects help him to expand the range of sounds that are possible to be produced by a single woodwind player. In his improvisations, he explores the Prepared Instrument by adding everyday objects on or inside his saxophone and modifying the set-up of his bass flute. Some of his instrument preparations include adding a balloon to the mouthpiece of a saxophone, and he describes of the volatility of this technique that “there's never a fundamental, there is no certainty. The sound is never atomized into solid things, it is always ephemeral and always chaotic” (Ronsen, 2011). Denley’s comments suggest that preparing an instrument requires constant adjustment and response to a conventional instrument, and this echoes Rykova’s commentary on the likelihood of adjustment when preparing a piano. Preparing an instrument can be understood as a relearning of the stability that instrumentalists work to develop in their technical training.

I had the opportunity to hear Denley perform on multiple occasions during this research, and I offer analysis of his live explorations of instrument preparations from his performances as a soloist and collaborator in 2018 and 2019. Denley joined Erik Griswold and Vanessa Tomlinson of Clocked Out in presenting a concert of improvised music at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University in April 2018 (The Essential Gesture Is the Breath, 2018). The trio of musicians each performed a range of wind, piano, and percussion instruments in addition to everyday objects. With his saxophone, Denley included a
cylindrical potato chip can made of cardboard and metal, a ping pong ball, and the lid of a metal teapot. He inserted the chip canister into the bell of his saxophone, which channelled the resonance into the cylinder as well as out of the bell to create a muted sound. The plastic ping pong ball was placed on top of the canister, and the vibration of sound through the cylinder made the ball bounce and rattle. The teapot lid was included in two ways: it covered the bell to muffle the sound of the saxophone, and it was also struck against the neck of the instrument while playing to produce a resonating tone. Denley altered the sound of his bass flute with latex bands and a motorised spinning Dremel rotary tool. He also modified the setup his bass flute by attaching the footjoint directly to the headjoint, which limited the possibilities of pitched sound. He placed the Dremel on a microphone stand suspended to the height of his playing position and attached a small amount of latex to its spinning mechanism. When it was switched on, it spun and hit the end of the latex balloon on the flute footjoint. This added a soft percussive effect, which interacted with his exploration of wind sounds on the modified bass flute. Denley was able to achieve multiple layers of wind and percussive sounds as a solo player through instrument preparations, and combined with Griswold and Tomlinson’s explorations, the trio expanded the possibilities of sounding conventional musical instruments.

In May 2019, Denley returned to Brisbane and performed a set on a show presented by Made Now Music (Juncture, Brisbane, May 2019). In this solo performance he played with the same bass flute set-up as his concert with Clocked Out. As I listened and watched, I considered the differences between his explorations as a solo performer and as a collaborator. His instrument preparations were similar to what I had already witnessed in 2018, but this time he created layers of sound on his own. Hearing his work with the same modifications to the bass flute made me consider an artist’s development of the Prepared Instrument. Similar to learning conventional playing technique, discovering more about how a preparation works
with an instrument may create expectations of replicability. Positioning nonhuman objects as collaborators is perhaps a method to avoiding the expected in improvisatory situations. Denley hints at this concept as evidenced by his statement on the chaotic volatility of improvising (Ronsen, 2011). Just as performers may embrace the stability of their technical proficiency, the unexpected can be invited into performance through instrument preparations. Respecting objects as nonhuman collaborators may assist this artistic perspective. Denley’s live performances with Prepared Instruments created a level of unpredictability to conventional playing methods, and he responded and reacted as a collaborator with the unexpected sounds of modified instruments.

**Obstructing Playability**

An instrument preparation can take the form of a deliberate limitation of playability. Everyday objects can become obstructions that alter the accessibility of typical playing function of a conventional instrument. Composer Michaela Davies explores limitations of playability as instrumental preparations in her ongoing series titled *Obstructed Recitals* (2013- ). She writes that “the series explores the ways in which struggle, effort, and even failure shape a performance by incorporating a variety of obstructions as a generative strategy” (Davies, 2019). Davies created the concept for the series and discussed with the performing instrumentalists that they were “to choose a piece of music that had some meaning for them, and then we agreed on the obstruction that would be imposed” (J. Rottle, personal communication, August 1, 2019). There is no music or score for this concept; instead, a performer selects an existing piece that is to be played with an obstruction to the instrument. Videos on Davies’s website of past performances include a guitarist playing with mittens, a trombonist in a shower, a percussionist playing vibraphone behind a pile of boxes,
a violinist playing inside a closet, and a pianist with rubber bands binding his fingers together (Davies, 2019).

I contacted Davies to obtain a score to program the work on the Sonic Objects (2019) concert with Kupka’s Piano. Other than the recording with trombone, Davies had not yet had a wind player perform with an obstruction in the series. We discussed ideas for either a flutist or clarinettist in Kupka’s Piano to play with an obstruction live and on stage. She offered that she “had discussions with a flautist about blowing a very powerful fan in her face while she was playing” but never had the idea recorded (J. Rottle, personal communication, August 1, 2019). We decided to consider more options, and I spoke with the ensemble’s flautist on her opinions about a suitable obstruction. Factors other than the instrument came into consideration; unlike the recorded works in the series, the performance was to take place live, so this eliminated possibilities to find a site-specific obstruction such as a shower or a closet. Eventually, we decided to obstruct the key mechanism of the flute by placing socks on the performer’s hands. When she played Claude Debussy’s *Syrinx* (1913), her fingers could not reach all of the keys and she struggled to hold the transverse instrument as intended (Video 5).
Everyday objects in *Obstructed Recitals* position a barrier between the performer and the instrument. The obstruction is meant to challenge the learned techniques and expected aural outcomes of conventional musical instrument playing, and this is where the concept aligns with the Prepared Instrument. Davies comments that the series:

> speaks to the way discomfort and constraint can determine both musical outcomes as well as the trajectory of an artist’s development. As each performer wrestles to play through their chosen piece, they engage in a strange but not entirely unfamiliar negotiation. (Davies, 2019)

Davies’s choice of language is important. To negotiate is to comply, react, and respectfully press against. The word is suggestive of collaboration. To work with the instrument and the limitations imposed by the obstruction is to find a collaborative middle point where playability meets new sounds. Negotiating with an obstruction, limitation, or barrier may be a way of understanding collaboration with nonhuman objects.
Chapter Summary

The four categorical concepts described in this framework assist in understanding the role of everyday objects in musical practices. Considering the object as aural, multisensory, silent, or an instrument preparation can help to direct the creative work of composers and the interpretive capacity of audience members. Most everyday objects in music have multisensory qualities, and certain sensory elements may be stronger than others. This is where the Framework is practical: it is difficult to completely separate visuals, sounds, tactility, etc. from all works, but this Categorical Framework can provide an approach to analysing how objects can help create elements beyond sound.

Sonic Objects are objects explored primarily for their aural properties, and this can include elements of resonance or reimagine common functionality. They may also be reflective of stylised sound and draw similarities to instrumental music. Multisensory Objects address all five forms of human sensory perception, and objects that fall within this category can be reflective of everyday activities or scenarios. The line between art and life becomes blurry. Silent Objects can shape a musical work without sound. Their appearance alone can support a musical trajectory, and examples include costuming, staging, and light. Prepared Instruments are object modifications or additions that alter the sounds of a conventional musical instrument. They challenge the instrumentalist to negotiate, adjust, and relearn technique, and this is often explored through notated and improvisatory music.

Across each of these categories, relationships are built with nonhuman objects in ways that are unconventional to typical music practices. This Framework is primarily a practical tool, but it can also connect to the theories described in Chapter 2. The volatility of prepared instruments is an example: the in-the-moment adjustments or careful development of new techniques required of the performer can be unexpected. This can be interpreted as collaborating with the nonhuman. The creative concepts of this Categorical Framework can
build alongside the theoretical considerations of everyday objects to strengthen the practices of composers, performers, and improvisers.
Chapter 4: Artistic Portfolio

This chapter is a presentation of the creative content of my artistic research. I describe my processes in composing, performing, and improvising alongside video and photographic documentation. If not yet accessed, the artistic material of this research can be viewed online at www.jodierottle.com/portfolio.

Banana Reveals

In 2018, a friend gave me a plastic carry case designed to transport bananas bruise-free. It is a bright yellow banana-shaped object that opens with a hinge (Figure 2). I found both the concept and intended function of this object delightful as it was simultaneously practical and unnecessary. It presents as a comical object; there is a level of absurdity as to why transporting a single piece of fruit necessitated the invention of a specifically designed carry case. With this object, I saw an opportunity to make the subversion of its functionality more laughable. I wondered: what else could I transport in the banana case besides a banana? I posted a short video on my Instagram account that featured the reveal of an object inside the banana (#bananareveal). I slowly lifted the lid to reveal the contents. Ironically, the first video featured an actual banana as the object inside the case (Video 6). I continued to post videos where I revealed different items that were small enough to fit in the banana but were clearly not the intended objects to be transported in the case, such as a candle and lighter, small toys, and other food items.
The reveal of the object was sometimes accompanied by another surprise in the video related to the object. I placed a dog treat inside the banana and captured my dog entering the video frame to eat it after opening the lid. When I visited the ski slopes in the USA, I buried it in the snow and its yellow colour contrasted against the white brightness as I dug it out with my winter gloves. Placing a party blower inside the banana became a way to say happy birthday to a friend. The comical mystery of what was hidden inside the banana became a journal of surprises that detailed my everyday life, and this made the work adaptable to current events.

The work is a continuing series that exists as a concept of reflecting the unexpected.

Banana Reveals always include the element of surprise, but they do not always include sound. The actual opening of the case creates little aural material, so unless the hidden item is intended to make sound, like the party blower, the banana and object present as Silent Objects, as described in Chapter 3. Instagram is a platform designed to share photos,
videos, and visual content, and it is common for account holders to post silent videos with text subtitles so the content can be viewed without sound. The Banana Reveals project morphed into an exploration of mostly Silent Objects. I began to realise other parameters of Instagram that helped to shape the series, such the platform’s one-minute time limit and the square frame size. The series started as a comical exploration but morphed into a video journal that documented my life through the perspective of surprise a reveal.

Music for a Memory


Music for a Memory (2019) is a part of a larger 25-movement work titled bloodpaths (2019), which was commissioned by pianist Alex Raineri (Video 7). The concept of the commission was to create a short work for solo piano that reflected my identity as an Australian composer, and this would be choreographed and performed by Wakka Wakka and Kombumerri dancer Katina Olsen. I decided to include everyday objects as a way to reflect my compositional style. In the work, Raineri explores simple instrument preparations and Olsen includes an object with her choreography (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Music for a Memory (2019). Alex Raineri and Katina Olsen performing at the Brisbane Music Festival premiere on 30 November 2019; photo: Tangible Media.
Composing the music for this work was simple; however, deciding on the everyday objects and their visual representation for both performers was difficult. The musical content explores conventional piano playing techniques with instrument preparations (see Appendix B). Toward the end of the work, I instructed Raineri to play the inside of the piano with a tennis ball on the strings. This created a loud muddy sound that contrasted the softer opening sections of conventional piano playing. Because this was an instrument preparation, I decided that this object did not need to be visually revealed; rather, the sounds of the object alongside the instrument would be enough of a reveal. To Olsen, I gave a piece of white fabric that she could incorporate into her choreography. This Silent Object was small enough to hide in her hand and pocket but striking enough to be visible on stage. She revealed it halfway through the piece, and it floated alongside her movements before drastically dying inside a wash of bass sound as she slammed her hand onto the piano strings. It’s silent reveal halfway through the work was perhaps just as surprising as its loud disappearance into the piano.
Your Sound Future

Video 8 Your Sound Future performed by Jodie Rattle and Hannah Reardon-Smith. Video: Tangible Media.

My 2018 work Your Sound Future explores the possibilities of surprise through both the performer and audience’s perspective (Video 8). Created for the Listening Museum 3 presented by Clocked Out, Your Sound Future is a one-on-one interaction between a performer and event attendee, where the participant selects three objects from a table of items and then answers a number of questions from a folded paper chatterbox (Figure 4). Final answers in the chatterbox are single-word suggestions for musical improvisation: silent, curious, excited. Based on the three selected objects and final chatterbox answer, the performer is to improvise a sonic fortune.

Figure 4 Your Sound Future (2018). Image from 2021 recording project. photo: Tangible Media.

Both performer and attendee create a musical situation unique to their interaction. Your Sound Future is short but personal. It is a multisensory experience as it allows the participant
to see and touch the objects before hearing them activated in a musical way. Surprise is afforded to the participant by not knowing how the objects may sound as a trio as well as through the unfolding chatterbox questioning system. This surprise is shared with the performer as the participant controls the direction of each interaction. The work requires the performer to quickly respond to the selection of objects and final chatterbox answer to offer a sonic fortune.

When I performed this work, I remember time flying by. The event was set up similar to a school carnival. Each artist had a market stall-like area where their performance took place, and the audience moved on a timed schedule. As each participant visited my table at my stall, I was curious as to which objects they might choose, what answer they would receive, and how I might interpret their fortune. The suspense of the unknown was a thrill. A steady line of people queued for the entire two hours of the event, and the surprise offered from each interaction kept my energy level high. It was as though I programmed surprise for myself as a performer just as I had done for the participant.

**Pete Suite**

*Pete Suite* (2019) is an ongoing collection of short works that features one or two finger puppets (both are named Pete; as a unit, I refer to them as The Petes). These finger puppets fit like a ring and have two googley-style eyes that are each three centimetres in diameter (Figure 5). When worn on my hands, they absorb my motion and agency as I play alto flute (*Pete’s Dance*, 2019); manoeuvre a toy music box and wind-up toys (*Along Came A …*, *Chatter*, 2019); reveal objects through puppetry (*Pete and Pete Meet*, 2019); and tell stories reflective of current events (*PPE*, 2020). Visually, the works revolve around object puppetry and often tell visual or abstract storylines. In some of these works music is perhaps secondary; sound is sometimes the result of the object’s physical motions. While the central
significance of the everyday objects in these pieces explore the uncanny, *Pete Suite* includes many other topics that I will describe throughout this chapter and the next.

**Figure 5** Image of red and yellow Pete finger puppets from 2019 studio recording. Photo: Tangible Media.

### Pete’s Dance

*Pete’s Dance* (2019) is a structured improvisation for prepared alto flute (Video 9). It begins with an exploration of sounds possible on the instrument with only the performer’s left hand.

They are to wear a Pete-type finger puppet on their right hand and keep it out of sight until a reveal point, at which time the object becomes visible. The hand becomes a body with eyes and limbs, and the uncanniness of its motions atop the flute keys emerges through surprise. In this work, Pete is both a Silent Object that is visually engaging and an instrument preparation that directs the structured improvisation.
Exploring the sounds possible with just the left hand as a result of hiding the finger puppet helps to shape the aural content of the work. As the performer, I am challenged to develop a soundscape that is limited to combinations of only five keys of the instrument—the number of keys playable with my left hand—and air techniques. In some of my structured improvisations, I experimented with overblowing air sounds and harmonics while rapidly moving my fingers between conventional pitches and microtones. Pete is slowly revealed with the right hand and lands near the playing position of the flute as I continue to improvise. Object puppetry helps create an uncanny transformation of the finger puppet from toy to life-like figure that gradually begins to dance across the keys. As I begin to play with my right hand, the object seems to sprout limbs and protruding facial features. It appears that Pete is pressing and lifting the keys with arms and a nose, and this helps to direct the aural content of the work. When paired with my left hand and other playing techniques, like articulation and register, Pete appears to collaborate in the music-making process with me.
Chatter


Chatter (2019) features a collection of red coloured items that merge into a collage, revealing uncanny life-like characteristics (Video 10). I started creating this work by experimenting with objects in my collection, in particular a wind-up toy shaped like a set of human teeth that I had recently acquired. The wind-up function sounded gritty and rhythmic, and it made a delightfully loud chattering sound when let free from its wound tension. I had improvised with wind-up toys before and I found it simple to make a range of sounds: the plastic resonating on different surfaces, the sound of the wind-up function, and the release of the toy. Its volatility was especially attractive as it created a sense of suspense. It had the potential to randomly release through operator error if the performer was not careful with its function. Oddly, I had many other teeth-related objects in my collection: tiny containers of dental floss, plaster dental moulds (sourced from an industrial recycle warehouse), tiny tubes of toothpaste, and a small red travel-sized toothbrush. I attempted to incorporate each these themed objects into the piece, and I started by exploring the aural potential of the objects. However, many of the sounds made by the intended functionality of the objects, which preserved the tooth theme, were inaudible. I attempted to play the floss as a chordophone, but
both the plaster cast and plastic wind-up teeth did not offer enough resonance to pluck the string without intricate amplification. Toothpaste was a visually relevant Silent Object, but it was incredibly messy. The red toothbrush, however, had soft bristles that made a subtle sound against the plastic teeth. When I concentrated on the chatter teeth and the toothbrush, the red Pete visually stuck out as another object to add to the collection. I realised more relationships between the objects beyond the theme of teeth: each was the same colour; they were all made of hard plastic; and each suggested a human-like feature or task. An uncanniness emerged through their appearance (Figure 6). When the red Pete was paired with the wind-up toy, an uncanny figure emerged that became personified through the activity of brushing teeth.

**Figure 6** Image of Chatter (2019) from recording session. photo: Tangible Media.

To add surprise to this work I decided to delay the reveal of both the toothbrush and Pete until later in the work. The piece opens with an exploration of the sounds possible with the wind-up function of the chatter teeth. Logistically, I am able to hide Pete behind the chatter teeth without it being seen as I wind the toy with my right hand, and my left hand also secures the toy enough to not allow it to release its wound tension. With this set up, I can rhythmically explore the sounds of the chatter teeth toy until it is at maximum tension, at which point I pick up the red toothbrush and bring it into view. Following typical function of a toothbrush, I begin to scrub the bristles against the plastic teeth. This is a familiar task made
comical by the context. There is an element of absurdity to brushing the teeth of a plastic wind-up toy. After the sounds of the toothbrush are explored, I fit the end of the object into the wind-up toy in a way that levers it shut with tension. This allows me to slowly raise my left hand and reveal the eyes of the red Pete without releasing the wind-up toy. The appearance of the finger puppet above the teeth resembles a face, and the uncanny emerges. Suddenly, I release the toothbrush and the wind-up toy loudly rattles against the surface of the table. Pete’s eyes shift along with its jerky movements.

**Pete and Pete Meet**

*Pete and Pete Meet* (2019) is the first work in the series where the two finger puppets encounter each other, and in this meeting, they further acquire personified features (Video 11). I had four hand-like items in my object collection—two finger puppets in the shape of hands and two tiny hands attached to a handle—so I included these to build upon the assemblage of human-like characteristics. The abundance of hands, including my own, presented absurd personification.

**Video 11** *Pete and Pete Meet (2019) performed by the author. Video: Tangible Media.*

The finger puppets fit underneath two metal cups, and the tiny hands could be hidden beneath my own hands. Lifting the cups was suspenseful, and the finger puppets flopping out
from the cups added more absurdity to the work. Raising my hands to reveal an object identical to my own hands was uncanny even without the glaring eyes of the Pete finger puppets. The sounds of these reveals created further sonic possibilities. When turned upright, the metal cups sounded two different pitches. The plastic of the tiny hands made a scraping noise against the table as I slid them hidden beneath my hands. The tiny hands also had a handle, and I could hold them in a way that looked like a physical feature and also play them like mallets on the empty upright metal cups (Figure 7). Musically, I explored the sounds that the newly personified Petes could make with the combination of hands, the table, and the metal cups. The larger scale of the tiny hands in comparison to the Petes almost resembled wings, and suddenly, the Petes could fly.

*Figure 7 Image of Pete and Pete Meet (2019) from recording session. photo: Tangible Media.*

This movement shows the Petes as curious characters. Unlike *Pete’s Dance* (2019) and *Chatter* (2019), where the human operator is interacting and revealing the uncanniness of the finger puppets, *Pete and Pete Meet* seems to show the finger puppets as the characters who are themselves curious. At the beginning of the piece, the Petes hide behind the metal cups and slowly peer around the edges, almost as if they are looking back at the viewer. As the objects beneath the cups are revealed, the Petes seem puzzled and glare at each other in wonderment of what might be hidden beneath the cup. As they both sprout limbs and features, their motions become more confident as they create louder rhythmic sounds. This is
yet another layer of the uncanny; not only are the Petes a visual personification with eyes and hands, but they also take on emotions.

**Along Came A . . .**

*Video 12* Along Came A ... (2019) performed by the author. Video: Tangible Media.

*Along Came A ...* (2019) features the Petes with a toy music box that plays the nursery rhyme “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” (Video 12). I tied a piece of string to the toy box handle and attached a party blower to the other end that sounded the same pitch as the very last note of the song (Figure 8). As I wound up the music box, the Petes appeared to patiently listen to the tune as the string draws the party blower nearer. It finally appears into the video frame toward the end of the song, at which time I sounded the blower.

*Figure 8* Image of Along Came A ... (2019) from recording project. photo: Tangible Media.
This work features aural content derived from musical toys. I found these objects already in my collection, and I explored their sounds within their intended functionalities. Toys imply a sense of play. Specifically, these toys are all small and are commonly associated with children and parties. The sounds of both objects are often associated with whimsy and celebration. The finger puppets here seem to be within a youthful, playful object environment. The involvement of all these objects becomes clear as the pitch material of the party blower and the toy box align at the end of the nursery rhyme. The simple sound of the party blower creates a comical ending to an otherwise familiar song.

**PPE: Pete Protective Equipment**


On 2 March 2020, I performed one of only a few live shows during the entire year. The Coronavirus Pandemic made public gatherings difficult, and the majority of my live performance work was cancelled due to risk of transmitting Covid-19. However, I presented a short set on a concert that opened the 2020 Creative Music Technologies degree program at Griffith University one week before the World Health Organisation declared the situation a pandemic (WHO, 2020). Routine and the predictability of each day was becoming more and more volatile. Information rapidly flooded the news, and at the time it still seemed as though
proper handwashing and common sense were possible solutions to stopping the spread of the illness. I learned new terms and concepts as they were promoted through public health measures: social distancing, quarantine, self-isolation, and personal protective equipment. Preparing to perform a concert was a welcome distraction during these times of uncertainty, and I embraced the developing changes as musical inspiration.

*PPE: Pete Protective Equipment* (2020) was my first artistic response to the 2020 pandemic, in which I attempted to bring levity to an otherwise dire and alarming situation (Video 13). At home, I found a yellow latex glove in my object collection that immediately struck me as relevant yet somewhat comical. When I wore the glove with the yellow Pete, the puppet suddenly looked as though it was wearing a HAZMAT suit. Other illness-related objects appeared at my house and joined my collection, perhaps as a result of the inundation of news updates. Boxes of tissues, hydration tablets, and blister packets of pain relief pills suddenly were essential items that I acquired in preparation for self-isolation. I decided to involve these objects in a new work that addressed the changing times of the Public Health Emergency. I thought that object puppetry could perhaps help ease the stress of an otherwise serious situation.

The trajectory of the piece shows both Pete finger puppets as one becomes ill and the other offers home remedy medical care. Multisensory Objects help to tell this story. As red Pete begins to sneeze, yellow Pete draws tissues from a box in rhythmic pattern. Red Pete continues to exhibit symptoms, and the yellow Pete persists by fashioning the latex glove suit; offering pills; and submerging a fizzing tablet in water. The sounds of these practical everyday objects were aurally quiet yet visually very significant given the evolving Coronavirus situation. They helped to tell a story that was relevant to audience experience.

Two days after the performance, my local grocery store ran out of all paper goods as people in my city, and all around Australia, began to panic-shop (Carmody, 2020). The tissue
box I purchased for the 2 March 2020 show luckily lasted my household through six weeks of quarantine, a time when paper goods were unexpectedly inaccessible. The objects in *PPE: Pete Protective Equipment* helped to explore the uncanniness of the Petes while telling a relatable and timely story. It is an example of how everyday objects can connect music to everyday life.

**The Feels on the Bus**

*Video 14 The Feels on the Bus (2018) performed at the Piano Mill. Video/photo: Tangible Media.*

For many who live in a densely populated area, riding a bus is a routine method of commuting. Riders often know of their destination and have a reason for taking a bus, perhaps to go to school, a workplace, or around a city. Once a ticket has been purchased, the rider embarks on a commute. Time spent on the bus may be passed by a task meant to ease boredom, such as reading or listening to music. In 2018, I was presented with an opportunity to turn a moving minibus into a performance venue. It was these conventions of riding a bus that I considered and observed in writing a new work for a large motorised moving object.

*The Feels on the Bus* (Rottle, 2018) positions natural and everyday objects alongside each other to explore a multisensory musical experience (Video 14). I created the piece for the 2018 Easter at the Piano Mill events, which is a small annual performance situation that
includes site-specific musical and architectural explorations at a rural New South Wales property (Wolfe et al., 2016). My role was to compose a short work that was meant to be repeated throughout an afternoon and experienced by a small group of viewers at a time. This would occur simultaneously as other musical events took place scattered along the property. The owners of the property, architect Bruce Wolfe and musicologist Jocelyn Wolfe, acquired an 18-seat mini-bus to help transport participants at the annual event. This object was intriguing to me. It traversed the rural Australian bush while sheltering people inside a container of steel and glass. The collective motion of 18 riders became possible inside the bus; everyone on board travelled the same path, looked out the same windows, and heard the same motorised sounds of the bus interior. I decided to create a guided listening tour that challenged the listener to imagine the sounds of the outside world from a protected position inside the bus. Observation would become a key factor on this bus ride, making it an adventurous journey rather than a commute.

The bus became a Multisensory Object as I considered its aural, visual, and tactile possibilities. I realised that I could explore the bus as both an everyday object and a performance venue. As an everyday object, I considered the function of the bus as a method of transportation. The object was capable of moving 15 audience members, two performers, and a driver throughout the bush. The windows on the bus allowed the riders to look out onto the landscape, and I planned a few stops along the journey to mimic how a city bus operates. The bus’s interior became a performance venue that presented aural and visual parameters. It was small, which made the experience quite intimate for the audience, but this also facilitated acoustic instrumental and object music. It was equipped with a loud-speaker system and a headset microphone, and I decided to include this in the piece. Riders experienced the bus in its typical function: they boarded, rode, and disembarked a mode of motorised transportation that included stops along the way. However, the destination was unknown to the audience,
and the journey included sounds and spoken word provocations that were more typical to a performance. What was heard from the inside of the bus became a soundtrack for the landscape viewed through the window. I attempted to preserve the function of the bus while disconnecting the expectations of the object’s intended functions: riders did not purchase a ticket, they did not have a destination, and they did not know where they were travelling. The music and spoken guide that I gave from inside the bus became a catalyst to observe the experience rather than pass time. Sound, motion, and visuals were to be observed alongside each other.

The bus route was a 20-minute circuit that included two stops. During the ride, I provoked the riders to continually observe their surroundings, and this was achieved through surprise and a multisensory exploration of the bus and natural environment. The first stop on the bus occurred shortly after departure. Another performer boards the bus, and this is where the first surprise appears. Performer 1 continues to ask the audience questions and begins to improvise with instruments. Percussionist Rebecca-Lloyd Jones joined me for the premiere performances, and together we sounded flutes and small percussion instruments as the bus swayed along the dirt path. Sound, motion, and visuals combined into a multisensory experience. The second bus stop presented an opportunity for the audience to step off the bus for the first time since departure. By this time, the bus had journeyed to a neighbouring property and emerged from a tree-lined bush path into a cleared field. Birds flew in the open air, and the sun beamed unobstructed by branches and treetops. The landscape changed, and upon the audience’s disembarkation from the bus, so did the aural soundscape. The bus engine was turned off to allow the audience to listen intently to the landscape and walk around an outdoor sculpture titled Arboreal Folly (Head, 2016). The riders find a stillness. The bus stop provides an opportunity to observe a contrast in motion, fresh air, natural
sounds, and unobstructed viewpoint. These differences are again highlighted as the riders board the bus to return to the Piano Mill site.

Hold It In


Hold It In (2019) is scored for one player on piccolo and balloon (Video 15). I developed the concept after experimenting with ideas for instrument preparations on flutes. I first attempted to find way to inflate a balloon placed over the footjoint (end) of my C flute, but I quickly realised that I could not inflate the balloon through the large bore of the instrument. Instead, I experimented with my piccolo. The balloon, which was a common size found easily at most party stores, fit very easily over the end of the piccolo (Figure 9), and the narrow bore of the smaller instrument allowed for my typical airstream to reach the balloon. I could depress all of the keys to make a complete air seal. The piccolo also does not have a footjoint, so there was less opportunity for air to escape from the keys.

Figure 9 A balloon at the end of a piccolo from 2019 recording session. photo: Tangible Media.
Preparing the instrument with an everyday object highlighted new sounds as well as visual features. Playing the piccolo was mostly unchanged from conventional technique, both in sound and fingering. The main difference was the low D pitch, which is a note that requires all of the keys on the instrument to be closed. The balloon flattened the intonation and tone quality of this note compared to the others, and this presented an opportunity to improvise with conventional and extended techniques. The adjustments that the balloon required in order to sound the instrument allowed me to discover new possibilities with my piccolo. The balloon is a visual representation of the air that is required to sound the instrument: it captures the air and is held with tension as I play. I explored the sound of the captured air being released back into the piccolo. Changing my fingering patterns while this air was flowing through the instrument became another layer of sound in the work. The balloon is also a showcase of how the instrument works as it can only be inflated when I place my fingers on specific keys. All of these elements became clear as I rediscovered the possibilities of my piccolo through a single instrument preparation.
Suspension of Disbelief 


Suspension of Disbelief (2019) is a structured improvisation for prepared bass flute (Video 16). This work involves suspending chains and objects from rings that are worn on a bass flutist’s fingers. The bass flutist is to play with conventional technique, and their resulting finger motions on the keys allow the suspended objects to dangle and dance atop glass, ceramic, and metal items that are placed on a table below.

I first considered which sized flute would work best with the concept of suspending objects. Bass flute had the largest gap between keys, which meant that the suspended objects had more space to move without hitting each other. The lower sounds of the instrument also contrasted the other works that I had recently written for prepared instruments and intended to capture in the same recording session (Hold It In 2019; Pete’s Dance, 2019). The everyday objects that I suspended from the bass flute were found around my house and were made of different hard materials: glass ornaments, metal chains, and costume bracelets. Each of these items was fixed to a small chain or string and attached to a ring that fit around the upper digits of my index, middle, and ring fingers on each hand (Figure 10). These suspended items made contact with ceramic bowls, metal cups, and glass vessels that were placed at different heights on a table below. Layers of flute and percussive sounds were simultaneously possible.
with this style of instrument preparation, and the objects swayed and hit each other with unpredictability.

**Figure 10** Image from 2019 recording of Suspension of Disbelief. Photo: Tangible Media.

In *Suspension of Disbelief*, my airstream still sounded bass tones, but the fingering mechanism managed both pitch and percussion: I found a way to simultaneously detach the technical elements of the flute while exploring new meeting points between them. Through experimenting with the instrument preparations, I found that certain notes and fingering patterns resulted in more predictable percussive sounds. For example, a trill with the finger that had the metal chain suspended from it would wobble around the lip of a metal cup, and I could easily change the speed of the trill to alter the speed of the metal sounds. The objects can be set up in any formation on the table, and because this work is a structured improvisation, the flutist can explore the possibilities unique to each performance situation.
Gait Rhythm in Unit 3

Video 17 Gait Rhythm in Unit 3 (2020) performed live by the author. Video: Tangible Media.

Gait Rhythm in Unit 3 (2020) is a staged work for one performer and objects (Video 17). It borrows from conventions of embodied practices and is an examination of domestic sounds as produced by objects both within and outside of intended functionality. I composed this piece through an imagined perspective of what my downstairs neighbours think I am doing when I make noise in my upstairs apartment. I attempt to answer this enquiry by considering the actual objects and sounds from my home as well as aural exaggerations of events that commonly occur in my household. A collection of objects is placed in three rows across the entirety of a stage, including a children’s bowling set, a yoga mat, a tub of water, and rubber sandals. The performer is to traverse through the objects and interact with them in ways that preserve and subvert their intended functionalities (see Appendix D). Some objects are hidden from view until reveal points, such as a skateboard and a vacuum cleaner. The sequence of these events is non-sensical, and this invites elements of absurdity into the work. Through this perspective, I preserve and subvert functionality.

The inspiration for this work came when I visited the beach. As I walked back to my holiday house from a swim, I wore a pair of sandals that rubbed against my wet feet. The
resulting noise was a squeaking sound that I could not control, and I found it comical. I was walking alone and could not share the humour with anyone, but I still laughed at the rhythmic sound. I walked past a few houses where residents sun-baked on their patio or worked in their yard, and I wondered if they could hear my wet feet approaching. If so, could they identify the sound source? What might they imagine when the visual representation is out of view?

Exploring the functionality of objects in *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3*, both intended and subverted, was a way for me to explore those sounds of my own domestic environment which may be imagined, secret, hidden, and speculative.

*Gait Rhythm in Unit 3* examines how a listener can become an unintentional audience member. This is a scenario that can easily occur in a high-density domestic environment. For many who live in a city in close proximity to neighbours, in apartment buildings with shared walls, or in multi-level complexes, sound often transmits from one indoor atmosphere to another. A neighbour can overhear the theatre of domestic life: wearing heels across hardwood floors, dragging a vacuum cleaner between rooms, rearranging furniture, and doing a home exercise workout are all activities that may produce transmittable sound. I questioned: What might those in aural proximity but out of view think is going on through a ceiling, wall, or frosted window? I considered my own home environment and the daily events in my routine, such as playing with my dog, cooking, cleaning, stretching, bathing, working from home, and walking from room to room. What types of sounds might these events make, and how can they be interpreted by my neighbours out of view?
I wrote *Nice Coal Dwan* (2019) for the 2019 Easter at the Piano Mill events at Harrigan’s Lane, which is the same performance location where I presented *The Feels on the Bus* (2018). Because this work was created for a particular outdoor setting, I wanted to preserve the immersive and unique context of the rural Australian bush location. The work was meant to be performed at a clearing spaced along a walking circuit, called the Oxbow, where other artists would also present their original works. Branches, leaves, and stones were natural objects in abundance and specific to the location. However, sounding the natural objects along the walkway seemed too obvious of a choice, and I considered other ways that I could tell a story significant to place and context.

The work is scored for two performers on campfire objects that are unique to the property (Video 18). It is a recreation of a popular Australian social tradition—barbeques—coupled with modern satirical commentary on Australian bush culture. Initially, I enquired with the owners of the property if they had extra empty whiskey bottles that I could
incorporate into my work. Harrigan’s Lane is dotted with small venues and purpose-built sites designed by co-owner Bruce Wolfe, who is an architect by profession. Each of the sites are named after their favourite types of whisky, so I considered the empty bottles as objects tied to the significance of place. The Wolfes instead offered some original campfire objects that predated their ownership of the property (J. Wolfe, personal communication, March 17, 2019). Cast iron pots, a billy tea kettle, iron grill grates, and other metal objects were left in the small hut that was on the land before they purchased the Harrigan’s Lane property (Figure 11). These objects would help to set a site-specific theatrical scene that preserved the context of their current location.

Figure 11 Campfire objects from Harrigan’s Lane. photo: Jocelyn Wolfe.

The title of the work refers to an alter ego created by my friend and colleague Liam Flenady. Coal Dwan is Flenady’s characterisation of an Australian person who enjoys and partakes in caricature Australian culture. Through my friendship with Flenady, I knew about his Coal Dwan alter ego as a joke that he often brought up in ironic situations. I identified his character as fitting with the campfire objects that the Wolfes presented as possible performance objects. Barbeque and bush camping fit well with Coal Dwan’s character, so I designed the work to include Flenady’s participation. His role helped to set a scene, and his character’s spoken word balanced my playing of the campfire objects. I supplemented the site-specific campfire objects with extra whisky bottles, roasting skewers, an ice chest full of beer cans, foldable chairs, a small camping table, and squeaky toys shaped as hot dogs.
(Figure 12). I positioned these objects around a circle of rocks made to resemble a campfire. This was a site-specific work, and I created a score in the style of a structured improvisation to help facilitate the unpredictable outdoor context.

Figure 12 Campfire objects in the performance. Photo: author

Initially, I thought Liam and I would sound the objects together, but he developed his Coal Dwan character with sarcastic text and robotic movements to a point where it became a lead role. The work took on the conventions of an opera, such as libretto, staging, and thematic music. Flenady embodied a lead character; I set a theatrical scene with everyday objects as sound-producing props and created object music that supported the comical slogans and text spoken by Coal Dwan. Liam’s portrayal of Coal Dwan filled the work with irony and was reactive to the specifics of our performance. On that day it was cold and rainy, yet he repeatedly sang in a sarcastically optimistic voice, “It’s a beautiful sunny day” (Clocked Out, 2019, 00:00:52), which reflected a stereotypical positive Australian attitude. Cracking open one of the beers from the ice chest became a hallmark sound amongst his text, which symbolised the easy-going attitude often associated with having a barbeque.
Chris Perren’s Escapement (2019)


During the time of my artistic research, I was asked by my colleague Flora Wong to assist in the premiere of a new work by composer Chris Perren. The work, titled Escapement (2019), was an exploration of changing meters and rhythmic subdivisions between a violin and metronome (Video 19). Wong knew of my work with everyday objects asked me to play the metronome part and perform it live at her recital in October 2019. This work is not my original composition, but I am considering it a part of my research portfolio because learning and performing it as a novice metronome player was an important addition to my investigation of everyday objects in my music practice.

Compared to the violin part, my job was simple. While the violin part explored rhythmically intricate passages amongst metric modulations, the metronome part involved modifying the sound of the metronome with a bucket; making quick tempo changes to coincide on the violin subdivisions; and tampering with the upright symmetry of the metronome by exploring ⅝ meter. Playing the objects was simple but performing them in the context of musical conventions required artistic experience. Because of my flute training, following the score for a treble instrument made learning this piece simple. My familiarity
with subdivisions and metric modulations also made playing the metronome easier as I could listen and anticipate the upcoming passages. While I am familiar with the function of metronomes because of my musical training, learning this piece this was my first encounter with an analogue metronome with a moving hand. I had only worked with digital metronomes since becoming a music student in the late 1990s. Physically, this was a new object to explore despite my familiarity with its sound and intended function. I found putting the piece together in rehearsals to be simple and enjoyable, perhaps amplified by the element of play with an object that was new to me.

In addition to the metronome, Perren incorporated a bucket, tuning fork, and a wooden doorstop to the work. These objects added extra layers of physical action to my part. The bucket was included as a way to dampen the sound of the metronome, so it was to be lifted, lowered, and placed down gently (Figure 13). It also facilitated a reveal of the object at the beginning of the work. Working with the bucket required careful planning so to avoid making extraneous noise or accidentally knocking the metronome over. The doorstop was used hold the metronome in a tilted upright position so that it beat in an uneven pace. As a performer, I developed the techniques for these objects through experimentation and play.

Figure 13 Flora Wong and Jodie Rottle rehearsing Escapement (2019) by Chris Perren. photo: Flora Wong.
BOARD!


BOARD! (2019) for five performers is a composition in two movements that explores play through the sounds of game pieces (Video 20). I wrote this work for the five members of Kupka’s Piano, who each typically play wind, string, and percussion instruments. I decided to write a work that did not require specific conventional musical instruments but could still be played by all participating ensemble members. Board games presented an opportunity to explore play and storytelling through familiar everyday objects. They are often easy to find in many stores and their rules are commonly known, or at least simple to learn, and this meant that the objects would be widely accessible beyond the initial performance. Through preserving and subverting their game function, the game pieces became percussive objects when sounded against a table or game board. Observing the game pieces in their intended function of play also presented theatrical possibilities of character development. I explored the possibilities of personality, competitiveness, and emotion that arise from a potential game scenario amongst friends. I considered the times I have played board games with my family.
and the frustration I experienced when they asserted sneaky or deceitful tactics. The thrill of winning can become a polarising emotion when it is overtly boasted to fellow competitors. Dramatising this situation became an opportunity to add comedy to the work.

To compose the work, I sourced four popular board games: Jenga (stacking/balancing blocks game), Connect Four (four-in-a-row game), Scattergories (alliteration game), and Yatzhee (dice game). Each of these games requires different game pieces, motions, and rules, and I identified potential to preserve and subvert the sounds of the game pieces based on the rules of play. In Movement 1, Certain players are to take on specific characteristics. Two players seem to be competing to win; one is a menace and the other is a sore loser. Two are attempting to mediate the escalating situation between the competitive players, and one is quietly indifferent. The dramatised interactions between the characters influence the sounds and musical material, and the players are to exhibit a wide spectrum of emotions. This is where storytelling became possible. In Movement 2, each of the characters begin to explore their board game pieces in different percussive ways as they sound pencil on paper; drop, spin, and scrape game pieces on the tabletop; and roll dice. The work was not simply an exploration of the sounds of the game pieces through their function; it was also about the personalities, the group dynamics, the competitive nature brought about through a game. Play became a concept through which to explore the sounds of objects.

**Improvising with Objects**

Throughout this research project I had opportunities to improvise with other musicians at the Make It Up Club (Melbourne, July 2018) and the Kin-Makers Series (Brisbane, February 2020). At both of these public performances I chose to work with objects and flutes. The performance at the Make It Up Club (2018) was one of my first attempts to play everyday objects in collaboration with other instrumentalists. The three other musicians
involved in this performance were playing violone, baroque violin, and self-built electronic instruments, and I identified these as being outlier instruments compared to my conventional modern flutes. Objects seemed to fit better within this collection of instruments. This performance was scheduled during my visit to Melbourne to attend a conference, so the objects that I was able to bring with me were small transportable items: finger puppets, small wind-up toys, rubber bouncing balls, and balloons. I added my piccolo and other found items that I sourced in Melbourne. The collection of baroque instruments, electronics, and everyday objects facilitated an unusual soundscape. I noticed that I applied the same conventions of collaboration to both human artists and nonhuman objects. In the performance, I set my objects on a small table with amplification. Musical events unfolded, and I concentrated on the sounds, visuals, and tactility of the objects. The wind-up toys had little room to move on the small table, and this created an element of suspense as they almost shuffled off the table. As we listened and reacted to each other, new ways of playing and sounding the objects emerged, like placing a rubber bouncing ball inside a balloon. When inflated, the balloon became a large resonating object, and the ball inside created a dense, low, and rolling sound. The reactionary environment facilitated through open improvisation helped me to further realise the collaborative potential with both humans and the nonhuman.

Improvising at the Kin-Makers Series (2020) with five other instrumentalists was a similar experience (Figure 14). By this point, I had developed more skill in playing the objects in my collection and created my Categorical Framework, and this assisted my understanding of how my work with objects could musically fit alongside other conventional instruments. While I still expected the unexpected, I had since developed strange comfort within the context of an improvisatory situation with human and nonhuman objects. I decided to conceptualise this situation as an exploration of Sonic Objects.
This performance took place in Brisbane, so I was able to bring along a larger collection of objects. I performed with five other players on saxophone, violin, flutes, recorders, and trombone, and I considered how my objects could both contrast and mimic the sounds of wind and string instruments. My table was set up facing the audience, so I relied mostly on listening to the other performers rather than observation. I was not concerned with the visual representation of my own objects or the gestures of the other players, but we still found language through which to musically communicate.

Chapter Summary

My practice-based research culminated in the creation of a portfolio containing 15 original works, performing a new work by Chris Perren, and improvising with instrumentalists in Melbourne and Brisbane. In this chapter, I detailed the processes and content of the work as I reference my Categorical Framework. Video documentation, photos, and scores supplement the written material. Presenting the entirety of my work in this chapter revealed my experimental process and compositional style, and through the descriptions of my work I am able to identify different themes that stretch across my creative practice.
Chapter 5: Findings | Reflections

In the preceding chapters of this thesis, I have examined object-focused theoretical concepts, presented a Categorical Framework that assesses the sensory qualities of everyday objects, and detailed my artistic portfolio of works that include everyday objects. In this chapter, I connect each of these elements to discuss and reflect on the main themes that emerged through the creation, performance, and documentation of my artistic research with everyday objects.

Certain words continued to appear as I analysed artistic work through the Categorical Framework and described my own portfolio: surprise, reveal, the uncanny, context, function, and play. Here, as I reflect on my own creative processes, I consider potential discussions of these ideas. Three major themes emerge: the unexpected, collaboration, and function. I identify that elements of surprise, reveal, secrets, and the uncanny are ways of capturing the unexpected in my work. I collaborate with objects through observation and the concept of assemblage. I question the functionality and context of everyday objects, and I examine the technical skills required to be a composer, performer, and improviser of everyday objects. Some of these themes were deliberately explored in the artistic practice; others emerged as a “coming after” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 200) as I reflected and analysed my work against theory. In certain cases, a theme that I chose to explore aligned with key theoretical concepts. Theory informed my work, and my work informed theoretical investigations: there was a loop of influence. Many of my works could fit under multiple headings. Each of the themes I discuss here recurred and built upon each other as I composed, performed, and improvised in my artistic research. These themes are not exclusive to my own work and I identify these topics as ways that can expand music practices with everyday objects. Harman states that “art is not the production of knowledge about things, but that it creates new things-in-themselves” (Harman, 2018, p. 105). The art produced from my music practice became new objects.
created from interaction and relationship. Music became a mediator through which I began to understand objects, and the findings discussed in this chapter are my reflections of working with the nonhuman.

**The Unexpected**

Elements of the unexpected were a significant source of inspiration in my music practice. Working with objects through my musical training was a relatable way to reflect everyday life. However, like everyday life, working with everyday objects in music can be curious and unpredictable. Many themes emerged from this enquiry: surprise, secrets, reveal, the uncanny, personification, and metaphor. Discovering more about the objects in my environment and working with their unexpected qualities in music composition became a thrill. I found myself surprised through experimentation as I worked to create the same sense of the unexpected for audiences. The following analyses are examples of how these themes appeared in my work.

**Surprise, Secrets, and Reveal**

The element of surprise is one of the most common themes in my work with everyday objects. I explore the possibilities of surprise as a planned experience for audiences in my composed works, and I also accept surprise as a part of my creative process as a performer and improviser. As a composer, I often incorporate elements of surprise for the audience through reveals. I attempt to recreate the surprises I encounter in my creative processes of experimentation, and I identified this as a way to organise musical material in a composition or structured improvisation. As an improviser and performer, I often put myself in situations where I may experience surprise; this becomes a method of artistic research. Brinkmann (2014) suggests how this can be possible:
If we allow ourselves to be sensitive to the strangeness of the world, there are numerous things to stumble upon: in conversations, media, books, advertising, consumer objects, architecture, and everyday episodes and situations. Usually, these are not simply given, as 'data,' but, at certain times, they may cause us to stumble—and thereby become data. (p. 724)

I realised the richness of experiencing this sense of stumbling and the unexpected in my creative work. When I compose and perform, many of the decisions I make are informed by how a surprise may unfold or pivot around a point of reveal. Surprise can help to determine musical form, sonic material, and visual events.

I recognise the opportunity to include surprise in a music practice with everyday objects because they are often not expected within many musical conventions. Simply, their appearance can still be surprising in a musical context. Preserving or subverting their functionalities is often surprising. Musical instruments can provide this suspense; they can subvert expectations through extended techniques or unconventional playing methods.

However, in many performance contexts, musical instruments are commonplace and do not always include elements of visual surprise outside of their sounding capabilities. Everyday objects present a juxtaposition within a realm where musical instruments are standard, and how they are aurally or visually explored can be surprising.

In OOO, Harman (2018) states that objects never truly reveal themselves to another object (p. 34). On a basic level, all human and nonhuman objects withhold secrets. How an object is perceived by another object is perhaps a reflection of their own concept of their surroundings. While one can attempt to understand an object, there is a depth to all objects—both human and nonhuman—that can never fully be realised by another. In a music practice, this concept creates room for surprise. This is an optimistic perspective: one object will never become exhausted by another. Krzysztof Fijalkowski (2020) describes how secrets can
become a form of communication, “secrecy and collaboration are both forms of communication incorporating objects and organizing or constructing knowledge; they prioritize negotiation, coding and decoding, dancing around points of non-knowledge, or where meaning slips and must be re-aligned” (p. 5). Accepting that full knowledge of an object will never be revealed is a commitment to continued enquiry, learning, discovering, unlearning, and questioning. The unexpected becomes a constant when space is created for it to emerge; opportunities for surprise become endless.

Surprise is not reserved for audience reaction. I often find myself surprised through my creative processes of composing and performing. Experimentation facilitates surprise, and many of my works grow from the moments when I discover something new about an everyday object. One example includes the *Banana Reveals* (2018–) project. As I searched for objects small enough to fit into the banana carry case, I realised the surprising qualities of Silent Objects. My motivation to make this series comical helped me further realise the multisensory qualities of objects in a musical practice: objects did not need to produce sound in order to be featured as a revealed item. I also included the element of surprise in *Music for a Memory* (2019), and during the process surprise was turned back onto me. The brief of this commission was to reflect my identity as a recent Australian citizen. I moved to Australia in 2013 during a tumultuous time when the Abbott government began restricting asylum seekers who came by boat (Medhora, 2015), and I was compelled to reflect my feelings of uncertainty about relocating to a new country that enforced this appalling policy. Incorporating surprise through the reveal of an object halfway through the work became a way to portray these emotions in non-literal ways. I intended to have dancer Katina Olsen interact with a Multisensory Object in her choreography, but after trialling objects of different aural materials—wood, paper, and rubber—I instead decided on a small piece of white fabric. Although it was a Silent Object, she could easily hide it in her hand, and it
flowed with her dancing motions. I am attracted to surprise as a compositional approach because it keeps me curious, and I attempt to relay this wonder on to the listener.

Sometimes secrets are shared between performer and participant or revealed in musical improvisation. In many of my works, the element of surprise was built into the structure, and a point of reveal was something that I was responsible for creating as the composer-performer. I correlate the personalised musical interaction of *Your Sound Future* (2018) with sharing and revealing secrets. The sounds of the objects on the table were not always immediately offered to the participating audience member through their visual appearances. Some objects did suggest a sound tied to their common or utilitarian functionality, like a spray bottle. Others presented as quite comical, like animal nose masks in the shape of an elephant trunk. Some were Silent Objects, such as a small pillow. Considering the design of the piece, where both performer and participant experienced surprise, the sounds of the objects were secrets that were shared and revealed when activated in a sonic fortune. In *Your Sound Future*, the secrets shared had little meaning beyond the chatterbox prompts. Rather, the point of the work was a private artistic experience and element of surprise revealed through participation. Together, the performer and participant communicate by building something strange, secret, and unique together.

*Uncanny, Personification, and Metaphor*

The uncanny appears when an inanimate object takes on life-like qualities. The nonhuman, which may have once seemed lifeless, is suddenly and unexpectedly transformed into an active object. Experiencing uncanniness can be surprising. Associating human-like physical or gestural features to an everyday object creates a visual uncanniness that makes one question “the presence of life within an animate being, or the lifelessness of a still object” (Diels, 2014, p. 75). The uncanny can be represented through personification, or the
association of human-like features to still objects, such as eyes, legs, or hands. Danish artists Randi & Katrine (2014) explored the uncanny and personification as a concept through their exhibition at the 19th Sydney Biennale. Their architectural work featuring houses with what appear to be faces is described as employing:

tactics of enchantment … Creating houses with human features – roofing resembling hair, windows as eyes, and a door representative of a mouth – Randi & Katrine explore architecture as a mental space, intending the audience’s experience of the work to alter the way they perceive their everyday surroundings. (Google Arts & Culture, 2014).

Diels and Randi & Katrine explain how the uncanny is represented through visual appearance. In my own work I attempt to discover ways of including sound alongside this visual representation.

The uncanny and personification can be perceived as a metaphor through which the human operator attempts to relate to the nonhuman. Rebecca Solnit (2019) discusses how attributing human-like qualities to the nonhuman is often effortlessly woven into language and that metaphors are “bridges across categories and differences” (p. 103). She continues:

Through them we connect the abstract and the concrete, the small and the large, the live and the inanimate, the human and nonhuman. Sometimes the metaphors are built so deeply into language that we hardly notice the bodily anatomy that gives mountains foothills, rivers headwaters and mouths (curiously, at opposite ends), vases necks, chairs arms, and tables legs. We think through our bodies, and that includes seeing bodies elsewhere, making bodies the terms of understanding how animate and inanimate, tiny and huge objects and systems work. Both needles and storms have eyes. (pp.130-131)
Even the scale of objects, from Morton’s (2013) concept of a storm as a hyperobject to Solnit’s (2019) minuscule sewing needle, assume human-like qualities. Solnit points out that the body becomes a physical and tactile vessel through which humans conceptualise the surrounding world, and this further supports Harman’s (2018) concept that the human experience is all a human can every fully understand (p. 34). The uncanny can be a portal into discovering the distributed vibrancy and agency between human and nonhuman. Sound can be uncanny: the wind howls, a door hinge croaks. What is otherwise attributed to sentient beings is now possible with the nonhuman. WTJ Mitchell writes the uncanniness of things appear “when the sardine can looks back, when the mute idol speaks” (Mitchell, 2005, in Bennett, 2010, p. 2). The uncanny becomes a familiar language through which humans can attempt to respond and interact with the nonhuman.

Personification becomes a metaphor through which humans can relate, interact, and collaborate with a perceived world. If the uncanny is a sudden transformation of the nonhuman into lifeliness, then personification is a form of accepting this relatability to the nonhuman. Metaphor is the fine boundary between the two: while the uncanny jumps out unexpectedly, personification is the often-unnoticed projection of human life onto the nonhuman. The artistic representation of metaphor is perhaps the closest an object can come to understanding another. Harman (2018) writes, “a work of art affords the peculiar pleasure we call aesthetic by making it seem that the inward-ness of things, their executant reality, is opened to us” (p. 71), and that “aesthetic experience is crucial to OOO as a form on non-literal access to the object” (p. 260). Through this perspective, the uncanny is a metaphor. It is the artistic transformation of when a nonhuman object entices a response that reflects a human understanding of the world. Harman supports this real-time connection between objects through the perspective of OOO in his description of events as the outcome of object interactions (p. 125). Musical collaboration between the human and the nonhuman creates an
event, or a sensual object (Harman, 2018, p. 9). The interaction between entities can include a personified interpretation of a nonhuman object, spurring the uncanniness of an object. If an object speaks, it communicates in a language perceivable and relatable to a human. Sounding an object becomes a method for humans to attempt to understand and communicate with the nonhuman, and the sounds of this communication can be interpreted as musical material.

What does the uncanny bring to a music practice with everyday objects? I question: what sounds of everyday objects may hide within the uncanniness of their appearance? What may be overlooked and what might emerge through uncanniness? Musical exploration of the uncanny can be a surprising assessment of agency of the still object. When an object is personified, it is perceived as having agency. Perhaps this is a realisation of the agency distributed amongst both human and nonhuman objects as suggested by Bennett (2010, p. 21). Andrew Pickering (2001) connects agency to artistic practice: “We need to think about agency—performance, doing things” (p. 1). This transferal of agency can be art. In a music practice, sound becomes a medium of communication. A musical exploration of the uncanny makes distributed agency louder, closer, and more visible.

Object puppetry relies on the uncanny to unexpectedly transform an everyday object into a theatrical character (Foley, 2014). Object Puppetry preserves an object in its current visual state and personifies its features through physical motion. It is through this lens that I created *Pete Suite* (2019), an ongoing collection of short works through which I visually and aurally explore the uncanniness of everyday objects.

*Pete’s Dance* (2019) and *Chatter* (2019) introduce the yellow and red Petes through uncanny surprise. Each of these works reveal the Petes individually, and the remaining movements of the series further build on the personification they acquire. The everyday object is silent in *Pete’s Dance*; however, the visual appearance of the object is quite uncanny. Without seeing the work, *Pete’s Dance* is simply an exploration of extended alto
flute techniques. Adding the visual element to experiencing the work allows the compositional inspiration to become clearer: the object’s dancing on the instrument results in sound, and this is determined by the visual and physical motions of object puppetry. The aural component of this work is secondary, perhaps a “coming after” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 200). In addition to its uncanniness, *Pete’s Dance* includes an element of surprise for the audience, and I am similarly surprised at how simple and effective this work is each time I perform it. *Chatter* is also meant to be experienced both visually and aurally. Many of the elements of the work—uncanniness, surprise, and reveal—rely on viewing the work from a specific angle, and this became a compositional consideration as I planned to perform this live and as a video recording. Preserving the uncanniness relied on a direct and enlarged viewing angle that required video and aural amplification. Video was a medium that helped to facilitate the uncanniness of the work. Again, the element of surprise in this work was not exclusive to the listener. I received comments from my friends and colleagues, who viewed *Chatter* online, that their children or music students were engaged by the work. I was surprised by how much young people enjoyed watching this piece. This positive feedback was both inspiring and confirming that the absurdness of the uncanny is a possible method through which to musically explore objects.

In many of the other movements of *Pete Suite*, the visual uncanniness of the objects revealed new sonic possibilities: each informed the other. *Pete and Pete Meet* (2019) built on the personification of the objects through the addition of hands. The sounds that the hands could make—including my own as the operator—made the Petes appear to grow limbs and digits that could sound the other objects. Uncanniness also appeared through physical gesture in *Along Came A ...* (2019), which showed the Petes winding a music box handle and reacting to the reveal of another object. Another layer of personification is revealed as the Petes exhibit the personified acts of listening and responding. The Petes appear to be listening
to the same work that the audience is also viewing. As they participate in a human activity, they take another step closer to human relatability. The progression of uncanniness in the entire suite stretches across with physical features, emotions, and human activity. Originally, I intended *Along Came A …* to be the final movement of *Pete Suite*, but as I was continually inspired by the possibilities for surprise, reveal, and layers of uncanniness, I decided to turn *Pete Suite* into an ongoing work. Out of this concept of an ongoing series grew *PPE: Pete Protective Equipment* (2020). This work emerged as a statement reflective of what many populations of people were currently experiencing during the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic. Uncanniness in this work was perhaps the relatability of the scenario: the finger puppets experienced a troubling issue similar to what was happening around the World and interacted with items associated with illness. I am curious as to how much deeper I can explore the levels of uncanniness with the two puppets in *Pete Suite*.

**Collaboration**

How can collaboration with the nonhuman become possible? In Chapter 2, I explained the ethical considerations of working with the nonhuman through different theoretical concepts, and the principles of OOO, vibrancy, and language of use informed my own attempts to collaborate with the nonhuman. In my creative processes of composing, performing, and improvising, collaboration existed in a mutual space, or assemblage, where two or more equal participants listen, observe, react, respect, and respond to each other. Music became a sensory object through which I could communicate with nonhuman objects, and I identified observation and assemblage (Bennett, 2010) as two crucial perspectives through which nonhuman collaboration could be cultivated.
Observation

My artistic research of composing, performing, and improvising with everyday objects confirmed the importance of observation. Rather than listening, which can suggest the exclusion of visual, tactile, and other sensory components, observation is a form of actively absorbing information through visual, aural, and other potential multisensory cues. Pisaro (2015) describes sound artist Toshiya Tsunoda’s preference of the word for his work in field recordings:

Observation is Toshiya Tsunoda’s word for listening, and that shade of difference between the two words (observation/listening) is important. Observation carries an echo of object and objectivity. It places itself between object and subject, in a continuum where the fog of our senses operates. (Pisaro, 2015)

Observation implies a multisensory consumption, and this can be unique to individual perspective. The fog that Pisaro describes blurs the lines between modes of receiving information; it blends listening with viewing and feeling to suggest multisensory reception. Subjectivity of the observer is balanced with objectivity. Observation requires an elimination of bias.

Observation is a fluid and continued process that builds a foundation for ongoing analysis and learning. When working with everyday objects, observation can create possibilities for artistic expression. Ryöppy et al. (2018) explain how observing the multisensory qualities of objects prompted avenues for telling stories through an object puppetry perspective:

We sensitised ourselves to multiple qualities of the objects, like size, texture, colour, shape, as well as our interpretations of the functionality, use, and symbolic meaning of the object…This exercise not only sensitised us to explore object attributes and to
attach symbolic meaning to the objects, but also triggered to ponder what could be recognisable ‘frames for storytelling’. (p. 288)

Symbolism, storytelling, and other artistic elements can grow from observation of the multisensory qualities of objects. As a performer or improviser, observation may assist in realising the playability of an object. Realising an object as multisensory is not only a method of understanding playability, but it is also vital to relate to an object as a collaborator.

In relation to listening, observation is an acknowledgement that sound is physical—manifested through vibration (although this vibration is often invisible)—and contextual, as it physically reflects within space and specific environments. Understanding these components can inform how to absorb information and interpret sound. Pisaro continues:

Sounds are intensities: successive compressions and rarefactions of air molecules. Our ears are extremely acute sensors of these movements, with a complex and very highly developed system for translating these vibrations into ‘sound.’ Who or what ordained that these vibrations would be ‘heard’ as opposed to felt (on the skin)? Our ancestors must have relied on this apparatus to sense danger and food, to determine whether the animal met was predator or prey. How else to account for the sensitivity that lets us hear sounds from miles away (i.e., from distances we can hardly see in any detail, let alone touch)? At some point we no longer need to see to believe: hearing is believing. (Pisaro, 2015)

Listening requires the development of contextual clues, awareness, and experience that observation affords; each informs the other. When working with everyday objects in a music practice, I question how I rely on observation to also listen, especially in an improvisation scenario. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, vibrancy and concepts of use are multisensory; these elements are place-based, contextual, and often physical. To ignore these important non-aural elements is to deny sincere collaboration. Multisensory cues contribute
contextual information to musical work, and observation is a way of including multiple senses in absorbing musical details to collaborate with the nonhuman.

Observation also applies to audiences. As Pisaro points out, skills of hearing or listening are to be cultivated over time. “At some point we no longer need to see to believe: hearing is believing” (2015). This statement is optimistic, but belief is not knowing. In a OOO perspective, no object ever truly reveals itself to another (Harman, 2018, p. 34). The perspectives of both Pisaro and Harman suggest that collaborating with the nonhuman requires persistent learning and continuous curiosity. Complete knowledge of another object—human or nonhuman—is likely to never be understood. Perhaps listening can occur in isolation but not provide full information; it may be difficult to uncouple listening and other multisensory qualities from observation. It is through this view that I compose, perform, and improvise in ways that facilitate multisensory experiences for audiences, such as video documentation, site-specific works, and live performance.

I connect the theme of observation to my work The Feels on the Bus (2018). Observation began as a compositional tool but became the main artistic theme of the piece. The audience viewed the natural world from a window; listened to the motor and guide inside the bus; watched as events unfolded; and felt the motions of the bus traversing a rough dirt pathway. Each of these elements were to be observed in multisensory ways. Halfway through the piece, the riders disembark the bus at Arboreal Folly (Head, 2016), and this facilitated an aural reveal of new sounds different to the soundscape from inside the noisy mortised bus. This reveal could be observed in multisensory ways: aural, visual, physical, and olfactory. What seemed at first to be a simple bus ride—an otherwise mundane and everyday task—was transformed into an experience that highlighted specific events to be observed.
Assemblage

One of the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter 2 through which musical collaboration with the nonhuman can be considered is Jane Bennett’s (2010) idea of assemblage. The vibrancy of all objects—human and nonhuman—come together to create unique and site-specific environments. Agency, in this perspective, is shared by humans with the nonhuman, and this occurs through a transfer of human agency amongst an assemblage that includes nonhuman objects. Collaboration emerges as objects react and respond to the impression of human agency. Vibrancy is a physical manifestation of this transfer, and this is reflected back into an assemblage. A cycle is created where humans can observe, listen, and react to the nonhuman and pass on new energy. Musical collaboration with the nonhuman can become possible as this symbiosis blossoms.

Assemblage led me to adopt a collaborative approach to composing and performing with everyday objects. Understanding distributed agency helped me realise objects as collaborators, and I continued this approach by considering what constitutes collaboration between human artists, such as respect, listening, communication, and observation. In collaboration, each participant releases personal control to the outcome of a work. I attempted to achieve this through respectful language and honouring chance with everyday objects. Through this lens, mistakes are embraced as opportunities, and I found that I let go of a binary that offered only right or wrong outcomes. Rather, collaboration with an assemblage of everyday objects is an opportunity to learn and shift perspective of what is already believed to be known. It is a commitment to unlearning, relearning, and discovery.

I recognise that all of my work with everyday objects—compositions, performances, and improvisations—require a consideration of my environment as an assemblage. Two of my works in particular explore this idea, Hold It In (2019) and Suspension of Disbelief (2019). Both of these works are for prepared flutes and require a collaboration of forces: air
pressure and gravity. Everyday objects become extensions to my flutes, and my human agency is transferred through my breath and finger motions. In *Hold It In*, vibrancy became apparent through the visual containment of air pressure. I typically do not consider the amount of air that I use to play my piccolo, but the physical and visual representation of my air being captured in the balloon made my human agency more apparent. Figuring out how to play the instrument, blow up the balloon, and find new sounds between the two elements was like fitting pieces of a puzzle together. I became an equal factor among the nonhuman; the assemblage emerged. I was a member of a collective who reacted and responded to the various elements of the prepared instrument.

I have played piccolo for many years but developing *Hold It In* (2019) I discovered new possibilities with the instrument. The balloon helped me to realise the collaborative potential of working with the nonhuman that I may have otherwise overlooked without the inclusion of an everyday object alongside my piccolo. Perhaps this is similar to Timothy Morton’s (2013) concept of the prepared piano as a liberation of the instrument. Through this practice, he suggests that “the piano freed itself from embodying the inner life of the human being”, and the objects placed inside the instrument have “their own anarchic autonomy … as if they were allowed to occupy the inner space of the piano” (p. 166). While the typical function of the balloon and the piccolo were preserved, they both worked together to create a completely new Prepared Instrument that stretched beyond convention. This extended to my own perspective as the performer, and I grew curious of the aural, visual, and tactile possibilities of the prepared piccolo. In *Hold It In*, performer, instrument, and everyday objects share vibrancy within an assemblage.

An assemblage relies on the distribution of human agency amongst the nonhuman. This implies that the human is an active participant within the assemblage, reacting and responding to the vibrancy absorbed by the nonhuman. Including the term ‘participation’ as a
component of assemblage draws the concept even closer to musical collaboration. My structured improvisation *Suspension of Disbelief* (2019) further examines human participation in an assemblage. My position within an assemblage of everyday objects was a factor during the compositional process. In writing this piece, I realised that factors beyond the technicalities of instrument preparations to be a part of the assemblage. Suspending the objects from my fingers required me to measure the length of the chain at a height that facilitated the objects to make contact with the items placed on the table below. This was dependent on the table available at the performance venue, and I realised that my own standing height was a factor in this assemblage. I noticed that practicing this work was different in my space at home than at the performance or recording venues. In this work, both the musical and physical factors rely on the specifics of performer and space.

An assemblage can be surprising. Improvisation is a situation where both performer and listener can experience surprise through participating and collaborating within an assemblage. I experienced similar moments as I collaborated with other instrumentalists at the Make it Up Club in 2018. At the performance, I remember being very nervous to improvise with both human and nonhuman objects. I often consider the visual elements of my objects, but this is typically a compositional element that requires planning. This could not be forced in improvisation. I found relief in considering the performance sphere as an assemblage and shifted my focus to working with Sonic Objects. In the performance, I was surprised that I was able to still conceptualise the objects in visual ways. As I sounded the wind-up toys they scattered across the small performing table and almost walked off its end, which created suspense as I caught them mid-air. I inflated a balloon to maximum capacity, and after the show a few audience members told me they covered their ears in anticipation of it popping. These elements of visual suspense and surprise were organic. The choices I made
in sounding Sonic Objects had wider influence, in this case visual, among human and nonhuman objects.

**Function**

I have already discussed concepts of function through theoretical considerations in Chapter 2, and I connect this to my own artistic practice. Function is a human-made concept that serves the object operator, and I define it as an object’s most commonly accepted form of use within a context. This definition is informed by Palermo’s description of the subversion of function as a “process of displacement and resignification” (Palermo, 2019). Subverting functionality is a deliberate process of examining new possibilities. Neither function nor subversion is a mistake. In my music practice, function can determine sound, visual, or other multisensory aspects of working with everyday objects, and the subversion of function presented me with opportunities to explore ideas such as comedy, surprise, and the uncanny.

In my work as a composer, performer, and improviser, I began to notice common binaries that bisected function/subversion, useful/useless, and object/thing, and that each of these dualities are related. Typically, an object has an intended function, which may determine its usefulness. Conversely, an object becomes a thing when its function no longer works. It can become useless.

Ahmed’s (2019) discussion of use is an important perspective in understanding how function becomes a factor in creating music with everyday objects. To Ahmed, use can be helpful or reciprocal, or it can be exploitative (2019, p. 22). She describes her concept of subverting function as Queer Use, which challenges each of these binaries. Queer Use is a provocation to discover new possibilities of objects that stretch beyond a predefined or common function. Discovering alternative possibilities for everyday objects in a musical setting can reveal the vibrancy of objects, and it is the unlearning of what constitutes a
standard where creativity begins. The usefulness of an object no longer ends with an intended function. Working with everyday objects can be a form of Queer Use. An example is Lanza and Valle’s work *Regnum Animale* (2013), as described earlier in Chapter 3, which is a repurposing of outdated or obsolete objects. Queer Use can offer a new life and new value, and this challenges the function/subversion and useful/useless binaries.

Bill Brown’s *Thing Theory* (2001) is an examination of the binary between objects and things. Brown states that Thing Theory is concerned with “questions that ask not whether things are but what work they perform … not about things themselves but about the subject-object relation in particular temporal and spatial contexts” (p. 7). It is a perspective through which to explain the transformation of an object when its intended function disappears. This is the point when an object, which was once assigned a descriptive and specific purpose, takes on new meaning. Brown writes:

> We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks. When the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. (2001, p. 4)

The thingness of objects exists in human perception. Much like the function/subversion and use/useless binaries, the object/thing duality addresses a relationship. Humans consider “how inanimate objects constitute human subjects, how they move them, how they threaten them, how they facilitate or threaten their relation to other subjects” (Brown, 2001, p. 7). Thing Theory is a method of looking beyond the human as central subject and realising that the
object/thing binary exists as a relationship with the nonhuman. Functionality can be just one factor of this relationship.

Reflecting on my discussion of theoretical considerations of the nonhuman, Thing Theory, along with Queer Use and vibrancy, may be solutions to the troublesome object/thing binary. If an object is rendered useless when it loses function, then what is to become of its thingness? Brown considers art as the place for things to become new, stating that an:

abandoned object attains a new stature precisely because it has no life outside the boundary of art—no life, that is, within our everyday lives. Released from the bond of being equipment, sustained outside the irreversibility of technological history, the object becomes something else. (2001, p. 15)

Including objects into music practices is perhaps a method of forming new relationships with obsolete, outdated, or broken objects. Art is a corner where the object/thing binary begins to fade.

Working with everyday objects can be precarious if the functionality of an object or its subversion is unreliable, especially in a live performance context. This unpredictability can present fresh opportunities for improvisation. In an interview with artist Rie Nakajima, David Toop discusses how the sounds of the unintended function of objects can be a welcome performance element: “I like that idea to be in the scary situation where you are working with objects that maybe they can’t function at all” (Nakajima & Toop, 2013, p. 6). To Toop, the volatility of function is embraced as an opportunity, despite the element of fear and the pressure of live performance. Malfunction and subversion become workable concepts within musical improvisation. Nakajima adds her perspective of the function of objects in live performance:

I try to add new things each time just to keep my curiosity but also something might happen or may not happen, it’s an option. Bringing something which doesn’t make
any sound because the point is more about my thinking than to make sound. I think function is not really the point, dysfunction or function, you think it may not function because it’s supposed to be functioning if you want to make sound but it doesn’t matter. (Nakajima & Toop, 2013, p. 6)

Like Toop, Nakajima embraces the volatility of function and connects this to her considerations of sound. She accepts that an object may be present but silent, visible but not functioning, and that these are valid components of musical exploration. Together, Silent Objects can be understood through the subversion of an object’s function, Ahmed’s Queer Use, and Nakajima’s concept of dysfunction. The volatility of an object can provoke an artist’s curiosity in the context of performance. As both Toop and Nakajima point out, this can be both surprising and frightening but lead to new discoveries.

**Context**

Context can help to determine the functionality of an everyday object. The appearance of everyday objects in a musical setting can be an immediate subversion of function as this is a situation where objects are placed in an unexpected context. Further to functionality, context itself can also be subverted. The work of Hugh Davies, an artist who built instruments and incorporated everyday objects into a musical context, is an example of this idea: “the subversive power of displacement, resignification, and also parody in Davies’s musical instruments is predicated on their enactment within a musical domain” (Palermo, 2019). Palermo discusses Davies’s musical exploration of an egg slicer, which is an object that is often expected in a kitchen rather than on a concert stage. Within the context of a kitchen, the egg slicer can be thought to function in a useful way. An object’s unexpected locale is what consolidates the subversion of function, and this relies on context. Comedy or surprise, which I have outlined in the descriptions of my Portfolio, can be a result of
subverting a performance context that is typically reserved for conventional musical instruments.

Placing objects and instruments into new contexts can help to examine what may otherwise seem mundane through new perspectives. Jennie Gottshalk (2016) discusses this subversion of context as a way to rethink value:

There is something subversive about performance that involves no standard musical instrument. One direction to go is toward rarefaction—creating a new instrument, modifying an existing one, or using one so rare as to be unfamiliar. The opposite direction is to make sound through the use of materials so common that they can hardly be avoided in daily life. Through careful and creative attention, an object normally used in an office or a kitchen is valued for its properties and behaviours, rather than just for its function. (Gottschalk, 2016, p. 96)

Context can be influenced by visual cues. I identify context as perceivable through multisensory engagement, and this can inform the subversion or preservation of function of an object. Percussionist Jess Tsang (2017) describes how modern percussion playing is a physical, visual, and aural practice, which contrasts other aural traditions of objects in music. She investigates the origins of Foley, or sound design in film:

The best Foley is, in essence, invisible to its audience. Appearance has absolutely no factor – if the sounds of a rifle can be created with a can opener, there is no reason to use an actual gun. In contrast, the performing percussionist is usually quite visible to his or her audience. This visual element elevates the significance of the objects creating the sounds – in a way, they become as important as the sounds themselves. (Tsang, 2017, p. 5)

Foley may subvert the function and context of objects, but the sound sources are only heard and not seen. However, the visual performance of everyday objects in contemporary music
practices—in Tsang’s case, percussion—can help to create new visual contexts for everyday objects. Both sound and visuals become of equal importance. Objects can help to create a scene setting or give information that would otherwise not be offered through sound alone, and this can present new ways of valuing the objects in an environment.

I consider the works in my Portfolio that both preserve and subvert context. *Nice Coal Dwan* (2019) was created specifically for the Easter at the Piano Mill events. The campfire objects that I included in the work were significant to the place, and the ways in which Flenady and I explored their sounds mimicked their intended functions. We scraped spoons at the bottom of a pot and struck other eating utensils onto the crockery. As we popped open beer cans, we appeared to be two mates hanging out enjoying a bush campfire. To erase the significance of the place and the history of the campfire objects would have ignored a crucial element of the work. What would otherwise have been a random and sarcastic theatrical work on a stage became significant through the objects’ connection to place. In this scenario, context was an important site-specific element. Conversely, *The Feels on the Bus* (2018) and *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3* (2020) explore the opposite. In *The Feels on the Bus*, I take instruments outside and transform a moving minibus into a performance venue. In *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3*, I bring items from my domestic environment and perform with them on a stage. In both cases, subverting the contexts of performance and conventionality are important compositional factors that facilitated opportunities to work with everyday objects in creative ways.

In *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3* (2020), I consider the functionality of objects in relation to that which may be imagined and absurd. I was influenced by the work of my mentor and colleague Vanessa Tomlinson. Her work *Sonic Dreams – Extinction* (Tomlinson & Ferguson, 2017) provokes a performer to improvise a scenario of extinct animals. One specific instruction of Tomlinson’s text-based work suggests the performer is to improvise with the
“imagination of the sound world from the turtle’s perspective” (Tomlinson & Ferguson, 2017). The performer becomes a medium through which to interpret sounds that are no longer a part of their sonic environment; the sounds are imagined, secret, hidden, and speculative. *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3* explores a similar concept through an examination of function and context. This work was composed through the imagined perspective of my downstairs neighbours. Many of the objects explored in the work represented a sound that did not match the actual object from my domestic environment. Rather, they visually represented an absurd event that may be imagined if the sound is only heard and not seen. Playing with a large children’s bowling set represented my clumsiness in dropping items on my wood floors. In this example, I subvert the function and the context of the objects. I consider the sounds of a domestic environment to be widely relatable, but despite the exploration of intended use, the objects on the stage were still removed from the context of the home. For example, a vacuum is an actual sound of my home environment and not necessarily a laughable matter in a cleaning context. The vacuum sequence in *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3* followed the same actions and functionality as a home cleaning routine, but it brought about laughter when this was recreated in a staged context. It even sparked questions beyond the performance. I took a rideshare to the venue, and upon looking at the items I was loading into the car (vacuum, large bowling set, duffle bags) the driver questioned if I was moving to a new house. There wasn’t much conversation after I told him I was on my way to perform a music concert. While the functionality of this particular object was preserved, the context of the vacuum had been subverted.

Experimenting with everyday objects for *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3* began with the objects already in my home, and preserving or subverting functionality relied partly on the feasibility of recreating certain sounds. Some of the actual events from my routine were portrayed on stage by exploring the sounds as created through the intended functionality of
an object. These actions and their related sounds were suggestive of domestic events: cleaning, stretching on a yoga mat (a Silent Object), and running out the door. Other activities from my home could not be recreated on stage, and this helped me determine which sounds could be represented with the actual objects from my home and which events would need to be exaggerated. An example is the sound of frying food in oil, the popping sound of which is transmitted through my open kitchen window. I could not fry oil on stage for logistical reasons, so this sound needed to be represented with a different object. Bubble wrap became an object that aurally mimicked this activity. I purposely included the sounds of objects that were not visually representative of my home sounds, and this was a tipping point into the absurd. Ahmed describes this subversion of function as humorous: “When things are used by those for whom they were not intended, the effect can be queer. We can laugh at the effect” (2017, p. 209). The sounds of domestic objects on a stage can be a laughable situation. Comedy becomes possible through both the subversion of function and context.

I created *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3* in January 2020 and premiered the work the following month on February 21. Nineteen days later, the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a pandemic (WHO, 2020). Suddenly, the work took on unexpected relevance. Quarantine restrictions began to limit travel, business, and daily life in Australia and around the world. Many populations of people became confined to their homes. Staying at home for extended periods of time out of necessity offered a new perspective on working with objects and, in particular, this piece. I gained a new awareness of my own domestic sounds as well as those of my neighbours: we left the house less, thus we made more sound indoors and our adjacent outdoor spaces. I became more considerate of how much noise I was making during the day knowing that my neighbours were now working from home. New noises emerged. My dog barked more at delivery persons who walked up our stairs to drop off essential items. The sound of gardening tools in the yard became normal as we picked up
new hobbies. As I noticed new sounds, I reflected on those were once regular to our domestic
soundscapes but began to go missing. Front doors were opened and shut less frequently; the
laughter of visiting friends ceased. These sounds were lost and only accessible through the
imagination, similar to Tomlinson’s (2017) concept. I realised that subverting function was a
catalyst for surprise and excitement, and the humour and levity that accompanies the absurd
began to fade as our domestic lives changed. The message and performance of *Gait Rhythm
in Unit 3* was perhaps prescient to these times of social distancing.

**Play and Playability**

Everyday objects in a musical context are often found, repurposed, and ordinary items
with common functions. It is this element of relatability that makes me question the level of
technical skill required to include them in a music practice. To better understand the
playability of everyday objects, I reflect on the practices of percussionists. Percussionists are
trained to sound multiple instruments that require different technical skills, and within this
training they develop skills auxiliary to instrumental technique, such as efficient set-up,
planning ahead, and multi-tasking. Many everyday objects can be easily sounded as
idiophones, and the techniques of playing percussion often translates to sounding objects.
However, this does not mean that object playing is reserved for the trained percussionist.
Steven Schick (2006) states that, on average, a percussionist has only minimal time with the
specific instruments for a piece, “a contemporary percussionist is usually faced with a large
set of uncomplicated objects, many of which have a short history as musical instruments” (p.
8). It is also not common for a percussionist to own all of the instruments that they may
perform on, such as the considerably large timpani, chimes, and marimba, and this may
restrict their practice time. The instruments available at each venue may also be different in
scope, developing a level of instrumental adaptability is inherent to a percussionist’s training.
I question what wind or string players may be able to contribute to playing and working with everyday objects in a musical setting. If specific object playing technique is uncomplicated to learn (Schick, 2006) and it is rather the conventions and experience of performing that equips a musician with important playing skills, then objects are accessible to performers of other instruments or musical traditions. I identify the potential of my technical training as a flutist to transfer into a realm of object music. More important than object-specific technical ability is the awareness of the objects and the musical concepts they are capable of, such as rhythm, dynamic spectra, blend, and balance. These are elements that performers of many instruments learn in their training and can apply in creating music with everyday objects of simple technical requirement. Maras (2011) suggests how play can be a method of organising sound, “the composers from the past have controlled music with the use of score, and experimental musicians today control it with the use of objects that they play with” (p. 102). Play can be a musical way of embracing the physicality and tactility of everyday objects; it is an artistic recognition of their multisensory qualities. A difference between playing and performing begins to become apparent. Experience with performance conventions, rather than specific playing techniques or training, may be a more important factor when including everyday objects into a music practice.

Simple playing techniques can be achieved by a novice object learner. Everyday objects avoid the traditions and conventions associated with musical instruments, and there are limited existing standardisations to the playing techniques of objects. Even the word everyday as a qualifier for objects implies the ritual, the ordinary, and the accessible. Playability may be more related to the function—or subversion of—an everyday object. In my work as a composer, performer, and improviser, I embrace a concept of playing rather than performing. Play can joyful, experimental, and interactive where performing implies a more serious or high-pressure situation. The concept of an unskilled learner playing with
objects echoes assemblage, where a human is responsive and adaptive to the nonhuman objects in their environment. This can present opportunities to curiously linger and mingle, as described in Chapter 2 through Bennett (2010) and Ahmed’s (2019) theoretical perspectives, which may invite elements of the unexpected. Playing with objects, as opposed to performing, can unearth the humour, uncanniness, or repurposing of an object. In my practice, developing simple playing technique became a form of respecting, participating, and interacting with my environment. Play has the potential to uncover ideas that can be later developed into a performance, but it can be first understood as an accessible starting point to working with everyday objects.

When I work with everyday objects, I build upon my years of musical training, but I often do not call upon the technical facility that I have developed as a flutist. Instead of technique, musical ideas become the premises through which artistry can be perceived with everyday objects. John Roberts’s (2010) concept of deskilling centrally positions meaning over technical conventions of an artistic practice: “we need to see how the relationship between skill, deskilling and re-skilling is driven by the need for art to assert and define its autonomy as art” (p. 93). Musicians of any discipline have the potential to unlearn the reliance on technique and accept play, relatability, and the unexpected as viable artistic outcomes. I see the goal of this practice as a way of creating stronger relationships between performer, object, and observer. If a trained performer can realise a new relationship with objects through musical interaction, what might be possible if non-performers began to listen to everyday objects? Unlearning technique in favour of play may connect artists closer to their environments.

As a composer-performer, I invite play into my working method. I mentioned earlier in this chapter that surprise became an artistic research method, and play was a tool through which this could be realised. I consider myself a novice player but an experienced performer.
Performing objects has challenged my training as a flutist, but it is this same training that allowed me to realise the artistic potential of working with everyday objects. Writing music as a composer-performer means I am able to cater to my own playing abilities, but I am also aware of how my work may eventually be reproduced by another player or performer. Many of the works in my portfolio that I have already discussed consider the novice player, such as certain movements of *Pete Suite* that do not require conventional instruments. I consider the line that separates music that can be played by a novice learner or requires performance by an experienced artist.

Two works from my portfolio where I explored play as a part of the learning, composing, and performing processes include *Escapement* (Perren, 2019) and *BOARD!* (Rottle, 2019). In presenting *Escapement*, I collaborated with Violinist Flora Wong, who commissioned the new work by Chris Perren. I approached the learning process through a performer’s perspective as this was not an original work of mine. In my practice I needed to learn the object-sounding techniques of a metronome and as well as notated music. Play was a method of discovery. Although I consider myself a professional musician, this was my first encounter with an analogue metronome as I had only owned a digital metronome in my years of training. Wong offered me a practice metronome, which was a smaller version than what I would eventually be performing with. As I worked with the new but familiar object, I realised a learning curve in figuring out its intricacies through play and experimentation. The work required changing the metronome markings to new tempi—sometimes rapidly—in time with the violin part. Quickly moving the dial was a tricky manoeuvre, and there was also a delicate precision to restarting the metronome in time with the violin part. I found this ironic given that the object is typically used as a practice tool for musicians to follow along with. In this instance, the roles were reversed. Play helped me to understand the tension and sensitivities of the dial, and I discovered certain gestural movements as playing techniques. To assist the
rapid changes, I placed different coloured pieces of tape at each metronome marking that served as visual cues as to where to switch the dial. When I eventually received the larger performance model, I found that I needed to make slight adjustments to the technique I developed on the smaller metronome. The performance model had a larger base and longer dial, and I spent time assessing the differences between it and the smaller metronome. Through play, I developed simple skills for each of the metronomes and made adjustments based on size and context.

In rehearsals, Wong commented that it was a reversal of roles for the metronome to be coming in with the instrumentalist, rather than the instrumentalist following with the tempo of the metronome (J. Rottle, personal communication, October 25, 2019). She said it was unsettling keeping a tempo and waiting to hear the metronome enter because she has trained to react in the opposite way, and I found this charming about the piece. Her remarks addressed how the context of the metronome was subverted in this work, and I realise this as playful. Its function was preserved but it required the performer to shift perspective of its conventional context; play was possible through subversion. We both developed a new relationship with the metronome. Wong assumed a collaborative role with the object, rather than following the ticking sounds for practice reasons, and I developed skill in the delicateness of its tactile qualities rather than its sound. In this sense, we both experienced a familiar object as novice learners.

My work BOARD! (2020) is closely connected to play as it features the sounds of board game pieces. Play literally informed my compositional processes. I wrote this work for five members of Kupka’s Piano, and I sourced four different board games in my experimentation process. I considered the typical functions of the game pieces and their sounds according to the game rules, such as pencil on paper, rolling dice, and buzzing timers. I then subverted their functionality through play. I slid plastic pieces on a tabletop in circular
motions and created rhythms by shaking dice in a cup. Play helped me to realise the
multisensory possibilities of the game pieces. Again, I was familiar with these objects but
discovering them in new contexts through play expanded my knowledge, and this was
incorporated into my music practice.

Play as a group concept also informed the musical trajectory of BOARD!. Movement
1 features the five players in a typical game situation, and each performer assumes a
character. The players take turns rolling dice and recording their scores and elements of game
play are exhibited through their reactions, including laughter, sympathy, and competition.
This explored the group dynamics of play. In rehearsals, Kupka’s Piano member Angus
Wilson questioned some elements of the piece against the reality of playing a game, an
example being when the ensemble is to cheer for one of the player’s high score roll. Wilson
asked, “Why would we be happy that he’s getting a good roll?” (Rottle, BOARD! Rehearsal
video 3, 00:05:46). My reaction was that, at this point, the players are excited to be involved
a game together and are getting along. This was an important concept of group dynamics that
I wanted to highlight in BOARD!.

Each player was assigned with a board game that they would play for the entire piece,
as well as a character. The skill of playing the game pieces required a level of simple
technical development. At the beginning of the first rehearsal, I had to quiet the members of
the ensemble from experimenting with their game pieces, saying “if you could all pause your
game piece practicing at the moment so I could talk through a few things…” (J. Rottle,
BOARD! Rehearsal video 1, Sept. 8, 2019, 00:08:12). It was as though the tactility of the
pieces enticed the performers to play and experiment with their sounds. The ensemble took
their games home to practice, and by the next rehearsal they had developed enough skill with
the objects so that we could rehearse. We then moved beyond technical skill of playing the
objects and began to discuss the performative elements required to perform the work. We
talked about where to place our gaze and interact with each other so that our sound production seemed genuine, just as if it would when we play our instruments. The delineation between novice player and skilled performer became clear in this scenario. While playing a board game may seem intuitive, to effectively perform the board game within the parameters of my notation required similar discipline and technique as playing our instruments. In rehearsal, Wilson commented that he wanted to continue rehearsing the piece because he felt that there were “a fair bit of … acting elements to it” that needed to be practiced (J. Rottle, BOARD! rehearsal video 4, Sept. 8, 2019, 00:00:50).

Developing technique of game pieces is not an inherently musical task, and assuming a character is also not solely a musical skill. Yet, these are the foundations of playing BOARD!. In this work, sounding everyday objects and personifying a character become accessible to a novice player. However, what may separate performance from play is artistic experience. Both the familiarity of board games and the emotional responses associated with game play made this work quite relatable. Upon listening and watching the premiere recording, laughter trickled through the audience in the opening movement, and this was a sign that the objects and the recreation of their context was relatable. In BOARD!, play became an entry point through which music with everyday objects could be explored. Much can be learned about everyday objects with little musical skill.

Chapter Summary

In analysing my artistic work as a composer, performer, and improviser, I realised reoccurring themes of my work. With everyday objects I often explored concepts of the unexpected: surprise, reveal, and the uncanny. This was perhaps driven by the desire to include comedy and levity in my work, which also presented discussions around the subversion or preservation of functionality. Context, relatability, and playability became
important elements as I reflect on my artistic choices. I recognise that I was not alone in these
decisions; I participated in assemblages as a collaborator with the nonhuman. These
reflections are an explanation of how I created music with everyday objects in my artistic
practice by connecting theoretical considerations and the Categorical Framework.
Chapter 6: Findings | Practical Considerations

This chapter is a continuation of my findings through a practical lens. Chapter 5 was a reflection of the themes surrounding my artistic work, but here I offer insight to the pragmatic considerations of working with everyday objects. My work stretched between composing and performing music written by both myself and other artists. This frequently included structured and open improvisation, especially in my work as a composer-performer.

I have chosen to divide the content of this chapter between the two main roles of composer and performer. Through the perspective of a composer, I discuss topics of choosing objects, special objects, novelty, and notation. I offer my perspectives on the differences between writing work for myself and for other instrumentalists. As a performer and improviser, I discuss topics concerning logistical considerations, scale, programming, and building technique. My work with ensemble Kupka’s Piano is detailed in this chapter and builds upon the artistic material presented as part of the Sonic Objects (2019) concert program presented in Chapter 3. Along with the reflections in Chapter 5, these practical findings culminate each of the theoretical, analytical, and artistic components of my work in consideration of my research question: How can everyday objects expand the practices of performers, composers, and improvisers?

Perspective: Composer

Choosing Objects

One of the first considerations I realised in my work as a composer-performer was the difficulty of choosing everyday objects to feature in new works. When I write for other instrumentalists, I typically work within parameters decided by the performers such as instrumentation, duration, and intended venue. These boundaries seem more distant when writing work for myself. I have discussed how my compositional process typically begins
with experimentation and improvisation, but I realised that, in my attempts to invite the unexpected through this approach, I often have difficulty making decisions.

One method of establishing clearer limitations in my writing process included developing the Categorical Framework, which helped to structure my own writing as well as analyse the compositions of others. However, creative inspiration did not always begin with the object and its sensory qualities. Sometimes, I composed within pre-determined structures; at other times, the objects presented multisensory inspiration. Certain objects became special to me in ways similar to building a friendship, and my efforts to find specific objects felt forced. I realised that the objects and I often found each other, and that this was perhaps an element of our collaboration.

Selecting objects became easier through defining the limitations or capacities of a performance context. In 2019 I began to compose new work with the intentions of both premiering it live and creating video documentation at a recording studio. At the time, I did not realise that these methods of delivery would inform my creative work. The *Pete Suite* (2019) series developed from exploring objects that could be captured through live projection and video recording. Initially, the compositional process was difficult due to a lack of constraints. My creative process began only with the limitations of a live performance date and venue. Other than these factors, I had an entire collection of everyday objects and flutes to work with and I was overwhelmed by the number of choices I could make. I needed more structure to my compositional process. Improvising with my instruments and objects was my initial approach and I noticed I relied too much on playing flutes, likely because of my comfort level with my instrumental technique. This realisation helped to create a boundary: I could play my flutes in the new work, but I tasked myself with finding other objects that could interact with the instruments. Considering my intention to video document the new
compositions, small objects became a focus of experimentation as they worked well with the sizes of my flutes.

I consulted my Categorical Framework as another structural element to composing. The Prepared Instrument became a starting point for what would eventually develop into Pete Suite (2019). Pete’s Dance (2019) features a solo alto flutist wearing a finger puppet on their right hand. This object is slowly revealed as the flutist plays, and it appears to dance atop the keys of the instrument with specific fingering patterns. As I created this work, the object’s multisensory qualities helped me to make further musical decisions. The visual appearance of the puppet dancing on the keys determined the pitch material. Considering Bennett’s (2010) concept of assemblage, my human agency was transferred to the puppet and illuminated its uncanny personification. Observing the object and listening to the results of our collective collaboration became a method of composition, and I decided to further explore the uncanniness of finger puppets for this new collection of work. Other small objects, including wind-up toys and tiny plastic hands, helped tell comedic stories of the two googley-eyed Pete finger puppets. Chatter (2019) grouped objects together by colour. Three red objects—a finger puppet, a wind-up toy shaped as a set of teeth, and a travel-sized toothbrush—were assembled to create an uncanny collage-like figure with a mouth and two eyes. Pete and Pete Meet (2019) developed the two red and yellow finger puppets into further personified characters with plastic hands. In each of these works, I considered how the aural value of the objects equally related to their visual storytelling capacity and how this may translate within the confines of live performance and video documentation. The multisensory qualities of the everyday objects in the context of presentation and delivery drove my compositional process.

The limitations for the Pete Suite project were loose. While this was difficult at times, it did allow for freer creativity that resulted in an abstract, uncanny, and comedic collection of works. The live and online platforms through which I intended to present these works
directed the development of performance methods that I had not realised before. Video projection and recording could easily capture the small objects in a tight frame, and this further amplified the uncanniness of the finger puppets and toys. Improvisation and experimentation helped me to overcome the obstacle of choosing objects, and the multisensory qualities of the objects influenced how new work unfolded based on practical and thematic content.

Objects can be an immediate source of artistic possibility based on their sensory qualities or significance. I have been involved as a performer at the Piano Mill events since its public beginnings in 2016, and for my 2018 and 2019 works I attempted to explore objects that were significant to the location of the Harrigan’s Lane property in rural NSW. Inspiration for *The Feels on the Bus* (2018) began with the 18-seat minibus, and out of the aural and visual potential of the large moving object grew a work that explored the landscape and concept of travel. In this work, the object was my starting point out of which musical material grew. In 2019 I wrote *Nice Coal Dwan*, and the inspiration for this work began with a collection of campfire objects specific to the property. With the foundation of the campfire objects from Harrigan’s Lane—a billy tea kettle, metal grates, and pots—I could create a theatrical piece with my colleague Liam Flenady as the comical character Coal Dwan. Incorporating objects significant to the location made the work relatable and strengthened the site-specific elements of the work. The objects were the initial source of inspiration for both *The Feels on the Bus* and *Nice Coal Dwan*.

Artistic inspiration does not always begin with the sensory qualities of an object, and the structure or limitations of performance can further complicate the process of choosing objects. When composing *Music for a Memory* (2019) for pianist Alex Raineri, I encountered difficulty in selecting everyday objects to include in the piano and dancer parts because of the performance specifications. This work was to be a part of a larger collection of works titled
There were many structural factors about the commission regarding scale and production, which included the following considerations:

- **Duration**: the piece could only be between 1-4 minutes.
- **Interdisciplinary**: it included both music and dance.
- **Staging**: any theatrical or other musical elements needed to not obstruct the space as it was to be a part of a larger suite of works.
- **Instrument**: the objects needed to not damage the piano.

In *Music for a Memory*, specific everyday objects were not the primary consideration in the initial creation of this work. My process began with composing the piano music, and I later considered how to aurally include an everyday object based on the logistical limitations. Since this piece would be performed with a dancer, it was already an inherently visual work. I thought of my Categorical Framework and how the multisensory classification of objects might direct the flow of the piece. In workshops with Raineri and Olsen, we tested different options that adhered to the limitations of the commission. Since my work was a smaller part of a larger piece, the piano could not be easily prepared as this was a task that took time to set up. He intended the work to flow as seamlessly as possible, so adding objects inside of the piano wouldn’t be possible in the middle of the program. The object also needed to be small enough to hide on stage, perhaps in a pocket or just inside the piano lid, so that it did not become a distraction during the other works. Amplification was also not possible with the intended stage set-up. This proved to be the crux of my decision making. Smaller objects often make quiet sounds unless they interact with some resonating chamber, like the inside of the piano. Consulting my Categorical Framework, I realised I had the options to include either a Silent Object or a simple and removable instrument preparation. I decided to offer Olsen a Silent Object—a white piece of fabric—that she could incorporate as a visual tool.
with her choreography. For Raineri I suggested a ball that could be hit on the strings inside of the piano. Choosing a ball of the right size, weight, and material took a few trials. I had to question what sound I was after; what would be less damaging to the piano; and what might work best with the quick tempo of music. Raineri’s existing knowledge of preparing the piano helped to narrow our decision to a tennis ball. This didn’t have any visual significance, but it was to be played inside the piano and would likely not be seen by the audience. While I initially decided to include everyday objects into *Music for a Memory*, the specific objects that ended up in the piece were not the primary consideration. The objects, in this case, came last, and fit around the logistical limitations of the commission.

When the object comes last, the compositional agenda of the object shifts to the background. Within the process of writing this piece I noticed that my typical way of working—experimenting with the object—changed significantly because of the logistical limitations. The objects became less significant to the work, and while it created visual stimulation in this specific piece I questioned if they needed to be incorporated at all since the choreography in the work already made it a visual experience. The fabric was perhaps an auxiliary Silent Object, but I appreciated that it offered the element of reveal, which is a central theme from my Portfolio. The sounds of the tennis ball were not the focal point of the musical content, but the inclusion of the object added new timbral layers to the rhythmic material. I realised that the musical material could exist from the piece well enough alone without the objects, but I decided to keep it in the work because I liked what it brought to the piece as a whole. The objects helped define my compositional voice amongst 24 other short compositions, and their multisensory qualities elevated the visual elements of the work. In *Music for a Memory*, the objects were sourced and added last but were an important stylistic element to the composition.
Objects can become special or achieve status within a composer or composer-performer’s perspective. Through OOO, all human and nonhuman objects are equalised (Harman, 2018), but artists may realise unique relationships with specific objects through a music practice based on their multisensory qualities that concern playability, appearance, symbolic significance, and sound, among others. Harman (2018) explains that “aesthetic experience is crucial to OOO as a form of non-literal access to the object” and the “object is replaced by the aesthetic beholder herself or himself as the new real object that supports the sensual qualities” (p. 260). The specialness of an object is held within the perception of the artist. Through this relationship, musical or performative meaning can be conveyed to audiences, but it is important to understand that this relationship or symbiosis (Harman, 2018) may not be reciprocal: “Thing A can relate to Thing B without the reverse being true” (p. 260). Humans may gather meaning from an object or assemblage, but this meaning may only be significant to one entity within a relationship. Perspective is key. Music becomes the sensual object (Harman, 2018) created through communicating with the nonhuman.

The elevated status of certain objects is evident in the practices of composers and performers, and I also realised similar favouritism in my own work. Toy pianist Margaret Leng Tan remarks on the specialness of objects within her music practice. She suggests that when toys become involved as instruments in a work, she wraps them in bubble wrap; they are no longer toys (E. Griswold, personal communication, Nov 18, 2019). As I prepared to perform *The Feels on the Bus* (2018), I experienced a similar feeling of object specialness. My collaborator’s young daughter accompanied us on one of the practice bus trips, and she saw my box of small squeaky toys and objects that we had considered including in the work. Her delight of the toys was soured by my preciousness as I told her she could not play with them because, to me, they were special objects and not toys. I now realise that my reaction
was ridiculous but given Leng Tan’s comments I am perhaps not the only one who recognises a unique relationship with everyday objects.

The status or importance of an object may not be realised until it is lost. Composer Alvin Lucier is another artist who is described as favouring certain objects for their resonant qualities in his work *Opera for Objects* (1997):

One of the great surprises at many performances was a very small matchbox, one of Lucier’s favorite objects (from an oyster bar near his home). It turned out to be one of the loudest ‘amplifiers’ and could have easily been the ‘leading voice’ in this opera with (ordinary) objects. Sadly enough, it was stolen together with other objects on one of Lucier’s numerous concert travels… (No Ideas But In Things, 2012)

During this research I experienced a similar situation. I misplaced the small red toothbrush that features in *Chatter* (2019), and performing the work became impossible. Finding a replica of the object was difficult; ironically, this toothbrush was one that was offered to me on an international flight as a single-use travel amenity and had very little monetary value. I attempted to replace it with another toothbrush. However, the materials, appearance, and sounds of a new store-bought toothbrush were not right for the piece. I realised how special the object was to the delivery and significance of the work. It eventually reappeared within my collection, and I was relieved to be able to perform *Chatter* again.

The special status of objects made me think about where everyday objects are acquired and how this can become a part of the selection process for their inclusion in a music practice. This may also be a consideration of whether the object is the starting point for a work or if the limitations of a composition help to determine which objects end up in a music context — two topics as previously discussed. I can recall times when I searched for specific objects based on their aural classification as an aerophone, idiophone, or chordophone. Something about this process seemed forced; it was as though I stopped
listening and observing objects and instead concentrated on their playability. Objects become special through relationships, and this was difficult to build when deliberately purchasing objects in a store. I realised that meaning and sentimentality were important elements in assessing objects for my music practice. Over the course of my research, many friends and family members began to give me objects based on our personal relationships. These were objects I may not have considered in my compositional process, but because of the significance of the gift, and my relationship to the giver, I found inspiration to include them in new work. I even began to consider Ahmed’s (2019) concept of Queer Use as forming creative relationships with the objects that subverted functionality. Examples include the hand-shaped finger puppets and toys in *Pete and Pete Meet* (2019) and the banana case featured in my *Banana Reveals* (2017-) project. Relationships are built and cannot be purchased, and this principle may cross into the realm of collaborating with the nonhuman.

Additionally, viewing my environment as an assemblage helped me to understand otherwise common objects through different perspectives, which made finding objects less of a task and more of a realisation. Significance did not necessarily rest within the object on its own; rather, it was in the collective situation where the objects and I intersected. I no longer needed to hunt or track down an object and I could instead explore the objects within my surroundings. This was a reflection of space and context in addition to the physical object itself. I found simple to apply this to the artistic conventions of embodied practices, as in *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3* (2020), and in performance art-based works such as *Your Sound Future* (2018).

Some of the objects in my collection repeatedly appear in multiple works but are explored in different multisensory ways, and I became conscious of specific objects becoming fads or oversaturated if they continually featured in my work. *Pete Suite* (2019-) is an ongoing series where I explored each of the categories within my Framework, but I began
to question if the finger puppets in this series might become less interesting if they continued to appear in my work. I considered the same question with my Banana Reveals (2017-) project. How far could I expand my musical practice as a composer-performer with these specific objects, and was there a point where might I reach my creative limits? This questioning brought forth the issues of fads, novelty, and overuse. Neal (2014) suggests that beyond the “cool factor” of objects lies their potential for a “deep and lasting impact” (pp. 23-24). Judy Dunaway’s extensive work with balloons is an example of how continuing to build technique on a singular object can expand artistic possibilities (Dunaway, n.d). The continual appearance of singular object in music with objects can imply a consistency of practice, and this avoids the risk of an object being a faddish item. Through lasting engagement, a relationship is built between the human and the nonhuman.

Objects in music can be accompanied by a sense of novelty. This may be related to their subversion of function or simply because their presence within a music context is unconventional. In my artistic research I attempted to explore how this novelty can add positive elements to a musical work, such as surprise, comedy, and visual storytelling. Despite these practice-expanding possibilities, everyday objects may still seem faddish or be suggestive of surface-level novelty within musical contexts. Everyday objects are not typically designed to explore dynamics, timbre, and pitch in ways as musical instruments. This may mean that an object has fewer dimensions of aural capability, which may render it more limited in producing sound. While some objects have become accepted parts of percussion or instrument preparation set ups, many composers may write for different objects that are unique to their creative aesthetic. This can be significant to an artist’s style, but it may not facilitate the same type of uniform design development that standard musical instruments have undergone. The short-lived appearance of an object in music can also be at risk of being labelled a trend.
Neal (2014) presents the possibility of objects becoming fads, which may occur if a specific object is not developed or established within an artist’s music practice:

A major weakness of many composer-builders is that they often build instruments just because they enjoy the activity. Much of the music they make with these new instruments is heard only once. The music is an excuse, not a reason, for the objects’ existence … The thrill of the chase—whether tracking down toys in thrift stores or tracking down glitch points on their circuit boards—is the most important part of the practice. Finding a way to use the objects in a compelling musical context is frequently secondary. (Neal, p. 15)

While I do identify the artistic benefits of experimentation and the process of finding objects, Neal points out their risk of kitsch within a music practice. Process is a vital part of composing, but the process of making or sourcing an object cannot overshadow how it is included in a work. This is where relationship becomes key. Preserving the symbolic relationship with or context of an object may help artists avoid novelty. Relationships can be continuously built and strengthened, and this growth can be portrayed in new work. Perhaps it is the case that objects may never seem conventional on a stage the way that musical instruments do, but this may be the point. Objects expand a music practice by stretching that which constitutes convention. I embrace this concept in my work as a composer-performer.

**Notation**

Including everyday objects in musical work can expand concepts of notation. As I composed, I noticed that documenting my work changed based upon who I was writing for and what objects were to be featured. Conventional and graphic notation became more practical methods when I composed work for other instrumentalists, but as a composer-performer, I preferred to document my work through film and text. Different methods of
notation reflected performance context, instrumentation, and ways of exploring everyday objects.

I began composing *Music for a Memory* (2019) with conventional music notation. As I have described earlier in this chapter, the work is scored for solo piano and dancer, and I initially thought that staved notation would best suit the conventional instrumentation. I intended to add objects to the work, but these were to sparsely appear late in the score and in the dancer’s choreography, which was not notated. In this situation, conventional notation fit both the instrument and object. My process began with pencil, staff paper, and a piano. As I experimented with sounds, my handwritten calligraphy represented conventional and common extended techniques. This was a short piece, and the finished draft was only two pages in length (see Appendix C). It all seemed too simple.

I workshopped the piece with Raineri and Olsen, and during our first meeting we worked out intricacies of dynamics, inflection, and character. The music sounded as I anticipated; the notation accurately translated how I wanted the piece to sound. It was rhythmic, somewhat repetitive, and grew in intensity. However, Raineri asked me if I would consider making the score into graphic notation. We had worked together before, and this is perhaps how he was most familiar with my work. From his perspective, graphic notation seemed simpler to conceptualise the arc of the work in its short but complete entirety. Since *Music for a Memory* was meant to be a movement within a larger collection, a graphic score presented better as a map of the work among many other pieces. I often write in graphic notation, so changing this piece was easy for me but it meant that I would lose the element of precise replication. This was a compromise I was willing to make. I added in small portions of conventional notation to the score to preserve some of the pitched material ideas. Hearing the work again in a second workshop made me consider how it had changed, and I wondered if I noticed the changes at all. I realised that my intention for this work was less in the
precision and more about convincing delivery. Changing from conventional to graphic notation created a vivid design representation of the work, like a map, while still translating the aural content. Adding in the everyday objects was also straightforward through graphic notation: pictures, instead of note heads and text, easily represented how and when they were to be played (see Appendix B). Conventional notation firstly informed my concept of the piece as the composer, but graphic scoring was more intuitive for the performer. Notating this work for instruments and objects was a multi-faceted approach.

I composed BOARD! (2019) for Kupka’s Piano knowing that I would also be rehearsing and performing the work with the ensemble. Although I anticipated giving aural directions in our rehearsals, I attempted to compose the score so that it could be interpreted without my guidance. This made me consider which method of notation would work best for the ensemble size and the objects. The work is scored for five players on board games, and since the game pieces were familiar objects, and that much of the aural content was rhythmic, I decided to design part of the score through graphic notation (see Appendix E).

BOARD! is organised into two movements, the second of which is organised in graphic notation. Much of the aural content of this movement lines up rhythmically, and I found that this was easier to capture with spatially organised graphics. Each player is to read a line from a score that has colour-coded images of the game objects. In this way, the visuals of the graphics and their placement on the score assists with player coordination. I also offer explanations of playing techniques for some of the objects, and these descriptions are conveyed through a picture and short text instructions directly in the score. Examples include the speed and volume at which to shake the dice in a plastic cup, as represented by a picture of dice; how to scribble pencil on paper to make it audible for a close microphone, with a blank space in the score given for the pencil marks; and the coordination of parts within a fluctuating tempo, detailed by different sized graphics. For this particular movement, graphic
notation was the most logical way to represent the appearance of the game pieces in ways that described their playability and the coordination required of the ensemble.

Text-based instructions often helped to explain the intricacies of performing with everyday objects that otherwise would be vague through conventional and graphic notation. The first movement of BOARD! is a text-based score that presents similar to the instruction booklets commonly included in board games. Unlike the second movement of the work, Movement 1 mimics a real-life game scenario with all of the members playing the same game pieces. The musical content is theatrically performative but improvisatory, so I did not feel a need to indicate specific and replicable aural material. Instead, the text-based instructions gave directions as to the flow of the musical context and player events. Text-based instructions offered flexibility, and I wanted future performers of the work to have the space to discuss and adapt the piece as specific to their unique performance scenario. In rehearsing this movement with Kupka’s Piano, we discussed how to coordinate our vocal sounds, dynamics, and the timings of our game-related reactions (J. Rottle, BOARD! Rehearsal Video 3, 2019, 00:03:03). Sometimes decisions were made by what worked easiest with the game pieces, and at other times the comedic elements of the work helped to shape our performative decisions. This reflected our personal adaptability to the score. Although more descriptive instruction was possible through text-based notation, in the process of rehearsing I noticed that I left out many details in my notation that I unknowingly included in my verbal directions to the ensemble. An example was an instance of a collective cheer amongst the players in Movement 1. In the written instructions, I failed to describe the length and volume of the cheer. Flutist Hannah Reardon-Smith also questioned what type of laughter I desired in her part, asking: “light-hearted laughter, the kind that you laugh with someone, or laughing at?” (J. Rottle, BOARD! Rehearsal Video 1, 2019, 00:03:43). This made me consider the nuances that I had left out of the text, and I began to consider if my verbal directions were an
even better way to relay the performance instructions. The experience strengthened my skills in composing text-based scores as it reminded me of the non-musical elements of everyday objects that can go unnoticed.

Text-based works can help reflect versatile objects and performance contexts. *The Feels on the Bus* (2018) is another work of mine where I employ text-based notation. The work is site-specific, event-based, and includes spoken word, and the combination of these elements were most easily represented through a script-like set of instructions. The concept of a script also is suggestive of the theatricality inherent of the work. Like Movement 1 of *BOARD!*, which mimicked written game instructions, the physical appearance of the text score was representative of the performance medium, and I identify this as a method of immersing the performers into unconventional contexts presented by everyday objects. In *The Feels on the Bus*, two performers guide a minibus filled with audience members on a tour of rural Australian bush. Verbal commentary from Player 1 provokes the audience to consider their surroundings, and Player 2 adds improvisatory musical content to the text. Each player part is represented as characters in the score, which follows the conventions of a script. For this site-specific work, the text-based score allows for improvisatory and event-based elements. Exact aural replication was not a concern of mine; rather, the work existed as a concept, and I did not need to be pedantic with written details. The physical and spatial process of journeying on the bus was the most important element of the work, and it seemed that the text and musical sounds—both object and instrumental—accompanied the process. In *The Feels on the Bus*, the text-based score brought a focus to the theatricality of the work.

Video recording began as a form of capturing my work for online dissemination, but as I continued to write as a composer-performer I realised the possibilities of documenting my scores through film. (*Pete Suite*, 2019- ), *Hold It In* (2019), *Chatter* (2019), and *Suspension of Disbelief* (2019) each began as ideas that I wrote down in text form. These
were informal lists of the objects required for the work and descriptions of how the musical content was to unfold. This was enough information for me to remember each work, and the list of objects helped me to pack my gig bag as I presented the works live. I recorded each of these works in a studio, and I realised after the recording process that the videos could exist as a score.

Video as notation is also a way of preserving that which is lost between instruction and artistic interpretation. I realised this after going through the process of recording my works. In *Chatter* (2019), video notation helped to facilitate the uncanniness of the work. Revealing the red toothbrush and finger puppet alongside the wind up-toy was perhaps simpler to understand through watching the events unfold, rather than reading a list of timed instructions. In another scenario, I attempted to notate two of my works, *Pete’s Dance* and *Hold It In*, to submit for competitions and calls for scores. This was an element I identified as lacking in my compositional practice: when I found potential outlets to submit my work for external review, a notated score was most often required. There were certain instances where the score needed to be submitted without identification, which made my video examples as a composer-performer ineligible. I did not have paper scores to submit. I considered audio-only examples, but I thought that my work would not translate well through this media as it was quite visual (and I still hold this belief). Still, I decided to see if notating the compositions in a more traditional form was possible. I considered graphic and conventional notation, and I decided to mix the two so that I could represent pitched material but also provide pictures and descriptions of the objects (see Appendix F). Notating both *Pete’s Dance* and *Hold It In* in this method was a very long and tedious process. It was completely unenjoyable, and I was not happy with the result because the objects and the musical material did not suit the written notation. I submitted it for review anyway, and I still have it stored in my portfolio, but I know I will not be making this score publicly available. Instead, the process taught me that
other methods are possible, and that to sacrifice notational style is to compromise the artistic product.

Video documentation also presented as an opportunity to relay detailed information that would otherwise be tedious to describe through other forms of notation. I reflect on the BOARD! rehearsal scenario with Kupka’s Piano when I realised all of the detail I left out regarding volume and duration of the collective cheer (as earlier described). Other instances like this arose that signalled the need for more detail in my instructions. In the text-based Movement 1 of BOARD!, percussionist Angus Wilson suggested that, in a typical board game scenario, players often roll quickly, and events happen fast. He thought that the audience would understand the premise of the piece, and that our actions should be faster (J. Rottle, BOARD! Rehearsal Video 3, 2019, 00:06:48). Despite my effort to notate each of these elements, I still relied on oral instruction in rehearsals. This helped to inform both practical and theatrical elements about the piece, and I consider how the work may be interpreted without my presence. Because the everyday objects are being explored outside of their typical context, a video tutorial may provide technical advice on how the objects can be musically and theatrically sounded.

**Perspective: Performer**

Performing my own works revealed logistical considerations and theoretical concepts that I did not fully realise during the compositional phase. While I do typically experiment with my flutes and everyday objects in my compositional process, I realised that many of the non-musical elements specific to performance such as rehearsals, technical details, scale, and venue location were informative to my music practice. Presenting my own work became an important part of developing my compositional skills and revealed fine details that were otherwise missed in the writing process. Performing with everyday objects helped me realise
that logistical considerations can greatly inform or direct musical content. Non-aural elements became musical. Through my work as a composer-performer, I was able to return the discoveries learned through performance back into my work as a composer.

**Logistical Considerations**

I reflect on certain performances of my compositions where logistical, practical, or venue-specific limitations emerged after I completed the writing process. In preparing to present *The Feels on the Bus* (2018), I arrived at the site a day before the performance, and this was the first time that I was able to rehearse the music on the moving bus (Figure 15). I had anticipated that the ride would be uneven and jerky, and this was confirmed as I attempted to play my flute while the bus was moving. The journey also took longer than I anticipated because the path was an unpaved bush trail, and this required further adjustments to the work. In my attempts to play my flute on the moving bus, I realised my position within an assemblage (Bennett, 2010). A human driver conducted the large vehicle across uneven terrain, and the riders bounced in their seats as the tires moved over rocks and uneven earth. I swayed in my seat and so did the sounds from my flute. It became difficult to disconnect the inflection of sound from the collective motion of the bus. In this experience, much more was revealed about my own original composition through the process of performing.
Video recording my work in a studio also revealed how logistical considerations can determine the discrepancies between a compositional idea and the feasibility of performance. *Suspension of Disbelief* (2019) is a work that I have recorded and performed live only once because of the difficulty of coordinating the objects. When I recorded the work, the glass and metal objects that were suspended from my hands often became caught in the key mechanism of my bass flute. It also required careful preparation to align the length of the chains to the height of the tables available in the studio so that the suspended objects could interact with other items on top of the table. I consider similar obstacles that may arise in live performance or situations in which a camera or recording device cannot be stopped and started for my logistical needs. The concept of the work is something I am proud of. However, the execution needs more finesse if I intend to continue to perform this work live.

*Along Came A…* (2019) is another work that required simple but precise technical preparation during the studio recording, and I noticed factors about the work through the process that informed how I needed to prepare for a live performance. The toy music box that features in the work needs to be stabilised on the table so it would not move around in the video frame and disrupt the reveal of the party blower, which needs to be kept out of sight.
until an exact time. When I prepared to perform this work live, I considered how I could block the sides of the performance table, similar to wings on a stage, so that the reveal would be preserved. The two finger puppets need to be shown at a head-on and tight camera angle, and this altered the technique of how I wound the toy music box handle. Last, the party blower must be attached to the handle with piece of string thin enough to allow it to wind without obstructing the function of the music box. In the recording I knew that I needed to manage the string length, and I developed the technique of holding the string with my thumb so that it wound properly while still showing the uncanny life-likeness of the finger puppets. In each of these examples, I recognised the flexibility that being a composer-performer afforded my music practice. I was able to adjust to situations, and this strengthened my resilience in both artistic roles.

The size or scale of everyday objects can inform modes of musical delivery, such as video recording or live performance, and this can also influence the artistic content in a work. In my music practice as a composer-performer, I identified benefits to working with both small and large objects. Small objects were easy to transport and simple to incorporate as instrument preparations, as they worked with the delicate mechanisms of my flutes, but they often required aural amplification and video projection to capture their sounds and appearance. Large objects facilitated embodied practices and did not always require amplification, but they necessitated adequate rehearsal and performance space. Working with different sized objects helped me consider different factors concerning performance platforms, logistics, and artistic delivery.

The topics of size, scale, and amplification of everyday objects reoccurred as I researched the work of other artists. Björn Heile (2010) states the logistical difficulties of reproducing large-scale works. He describes of Kagel’s *Der Schall* (1968), which is a large-scale work for conventional, purpose-built, found, and other sound producing items:
For obvious reasons, performances of the work are difficult to arrange and require extraordinary amounts of preparation. The instruments have to be organized (and in many cases built), the performers have to learn to play them to a reasonable standard, and so forth, before the normal rehearsal process can even begin. (Heile, 2010, p. 131)

Heile highlights the extensive preparation that may be needed to present large-scale works with everyday objects. This type of work often requires performers to learn new playing techniques, and this may present unusual situations regarding access to rehearsal space, large objects, and purpose-built instruments. Mediating these obstacles may seem insurmountable within conventional parameters of music performance. Working with large everyday objects may require an openness to adaptability. Nakajima describes her process of approaching such limitations in presenting improvisatory work with an optimistic perspective. She states:

I think I am limited. That’s the first place I always start. You know I’m limited especially for performance, my body is limited. If I start to use amplification or lots of different things it expands a bit more, like technology. (Nakajima & Toop, 2013)

Nakajima details how amplification allows her to extend her practice with objects despite their aural or visual limitations. Her recognition of her body within a performance space also draws a connection to embodied practices and performance art, and this consideration of her own physical limitations within a space connects to Bennett’s (2010) concept of an assemblage. Nakajima’s comment suggests that the identification and acknowledgment of a scale-based obstacle may actually present new opportunities rather than restrict an artistic practice. To her, limitations facilitate negotiation and resourcefulness. Amplification is a response to the limitations of everyday objects within live performance, and it can expand a music practice by presenting new artistic possibilities.

In my own work, the location, size, and technical capacity of venues became important elements in deciding where to perform works for both small and large objects.
In addition to the practical considerations regarding size, scale became an element that could be subverted or explored as an artistic statement in my artistic practice. Solnit (2019) describes how shifting scale can “render the familiar unfamiliar; cities, the whole planet, are reduced to the scale of small, two-dimensional cartographic representations, to maps; domestic objects—a grater, an egg slicer—become menacing when they are enlarged to the size of furniture” (p. 134). In my work with objects, I realised that out of the necessity to amplify small objects blossomed opportunities to explore new concepts, such as surprise and the uncanny, as in my ongoing series Pete Suite (2019- ). Likewise, the notation of a musical score helped to represent large objects onto a single sheet of A4 paper, but the practical and logistical considerations of the objects were only realised through performance experience, as with my work Gait Rhythm in Unit 3 (2020).

Pete Suite (Rottle, 2019- ) explores small objects in multisensory ways. The collection of works in Pete Suite require both aural and video amplification to capture their quiet sounds and small visual appearances, and during the compositional process I knew that I would need to perform the works at a venue with access to a video projector. Despite this technical requirement, Pete Suite is the work from my collection that I most often perform. I attribute this to the small size of the objects: they are easily transportable and flexible to work with in small spaces. I have presented Pete Suite on a small stage at an experimental music venue (Made Now Music, 2019) as well as at a venue where a large stage was available but zoned and pre-set for four different performers (Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, 2020). Because of the video projection, Pete Suite fit the specifications of both stage sizes.

While I wrote Pete Suite (2019- ) with the intention of performing it live, I realised through the process of performing that it worked well as a video recording in its final form. This also unlocked new opportunities to express surprise, the uncanny, and the unexpected.
Capturing the small objects in video recording required a tight camera angle, which meant that many factors external to the objects were hidden from view. This is where surprise became possible. In *Pete’s Dance* (2019), a small yellow finger puppet emerges from out of view after the piece has begun. In live performance, I preserve the surprise of the reveal by hiding my hand behind my back, and this often makes me struggle to bring my alto flute into playing position with only my left hand. I have also hidden the finger puppet in my pocket and slipped it on just before playing, but I am always worried that I might accidentally put the puppet on backward and ruin the uncanniness of the reveal. With a video recording, these practical elements occur out of sight and do not need to be coordinated in a way that hides the object. The tight camera frame perhaps acts as a veil; it focuses on only the portion of the instrument where the object is to appear. This amplifies both the reveal of the object as well as the uncanniness of its life-like qualities as it appears to dance and play the flute. Through video, small objects are simpler to coordinate logistically and better represented artistically. The scale of the objects helps to determine the most suitable performance platform.

Small objects can also be simple to handle and interact with as instrument preparations. The mechanisms of many conventional instruments are intricate and designed to fit to the sizes of human hands, and everyday objects as instrument preparations often align with the specifications of their keys, strings, and valves. My own explorations with prepared instruments include *Hold It In* (2019) for piccolo player and balloon. I described in Chapter 4 how the size of the object helped to determine which sized flute I was able to perform with, as I was only able to inflate and play with the balloon at the end of my piccolo and not my C flute as I originally intended. The object presented limitations within the scope of my instrument, but when this was negotiated I was able to explore new concepts in instrument preparations. The small instrument preparations impacted the conventional sounds and
appearance of the piccolo, and I adjusted to the new possibilities that emerged as I interacted with the object.

Working with large objects expanded concepts of logistics, genre, and context in my artistic practice. Logistically, large objects presented opportunity to work without amplification but were more difficult to transport and rehearse with. I wrote *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3* (2020) as a reflection of the sounds that I make in my domestic environment, and I included actual large objects, such as a vacuum, from my home in the composition (see Chapter 4). Since I interacted with many of the large objects on a daily basis, I knew of their acoustic sound capacities and that amplification may not be necessary in large spaces. I began rehearsing the work and realised the other limitations of large objects. Their portability was more difficult than the small objects I was accustomed to working with, and moving a collection of large objects from my home to a rehearsal studio by myself became a challenge. Ironically, I also could not rehearse the work in my house as I needed to practice in a space that was of similar size to the performance venue. I scheduled time at a large rehearsal space, but I ended up not bringing many of the large items to the rehearsal site because of the difficulty of their transportation. Instead, I practiced the physical movements across a stage-sized floor. This is when I began to realise how large objects could facilitate embodied practices.

*Gait Rhythm in Unit 3* easily translated to a work exploring an embodied practice. The work was an exploration sound and motion encompassing the entirety of a stage. As I performed the work, my body made contact with everyday objects in ways that were more overt than in my works that explore smaller objects. I hid certain objects from view in the wings of the stage, and to access the objects I needed to physically traverse the stage. This presented an opportunity to make contact with the objects and space. Jessica Aszodi describes that an embodied performative approach may strengthen musical presentations:
“One of the strengths of this way of working is its flexibility. This is a music that can create situations for performers and audiences that utilize both immediate experience and signification in ways absolute music cannot” (Aszodi, 2017). Considering the body and visual components of sound is not just for audience interpretation; performers may be able to reach a new understanding of methods of delivering a performance, one that utilises the tools learned in musical training. I applied this concept when working with large objects in *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3*, and I followed Aszodi’s direction of how an embodied practice required a prioritization of “the body, body language, and visual communication, alongside the musical values we’ve been schooled in” (2017). Creating and performing *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3* was one of the first times I had considered working in an embodied approach, and large everyday objects helped to facilitate my physical participation. I also began to realise that I was subverting the context of a conventional performance situation, and this presented opportunity to explore comedy. Portraying clumsiness, humour, and satire became possible when working with large objects in a staged and embodied context; the performance space, large objects, and the motion of my body combined to create an abstract musical work.

What began as a comedic work exploring large objects from my domestic environment developed into a recognition of my body within an assemblage, and this realisation combined both logistical and contextual considerations. I noticed how the sounds of my domestic objects changed based on the performance location. The wood floors and concrete coated walls of my home reflected sound differently than in the large rehearsal space. Running through the piece at the performance venue required further adjustments. On the performance day, I realised there was a power point on the opposite side of the stage of where I intended the vacuum to be hidden, and this required me to make minor adjustment to how I set up all of the large objects on stage. This logistical factor was an important reminder that working with objects—even within their intended functionality—can be volatile and
unpredictable when they are explored within the context of a conventional performance venue. These were concepts specific to working with large objects that I initially did not consider in the compositional process. Performing my own work unlocked a deeper understanding of my writing, creating a connection between the artistic idea, and effective delivery. Given the domestic inspiration of the work, I consider *Gait Rhythm in Unit 3* a method of reflecting on the assemblages of everyday life.

An unexpected finding from my work with everyday objects was the importance of the performing table. Initially, this was not a major consideration, but as I performed at different venues and developed work for small objects, I realised the many unpredictable factors of such a simple piece of furniture. Logistically, I needed the table to be a specific size and height, and this often depended on my intentions to perform seated or standing. I reflect on the logistical considerations associated with *Suspension of Disbelief* (2019), as described earlier. The material of the tabletop also influenced the sounds or ease of playability of certain objects. An example is my work *Chatter* (2019), a work in which I fix a loud plastic windup toy to the tabletop playing surface with sticking putty. The sound of the windup toy was variable based on wood, plastic, or metal tabletops, and fixing it to the table was only possible without a tablecloth. The table became an unpredictable factor, so I purchased one of my own, but this was also accompanied by compromise. I elected to buy a folding table so that I could easily bring it to performances. It was portable and made of lighter materials, but this meant that it is not as durable or resonant. Its utilitarian design also does not often match the brightly coloured objects that I typically work with.

The table became a primary consideration when I planned performances at different venues. At the Glasshouse (Made Now Music, 2019), the Listening Museum 3 (Clocked Out, 2018), and Kin-Makers (Kupka’s Piano, 2020) performances, I elected to bring my own portable table, even though there were tables available at these venues. This was because I
wanted to avoid the unpredictability of material, height, resonance, availability, and sturdiness. In preparing for the Easter at the Piano Mill events in 2019, I requested a table for my performance. Bruce Wolfe, a co-owner of the property, offered me a wooden top, folding, portable table that was very sleek and stylish, and I later found out that it was custom-made by his father. This table was incredible. It was this experience that made me realise the importance of such a common piece of furniture. Unfortunately, there was no way for me to acquire a similar table to Wolfe’s unless I organised a custom replica. A few months later I had a recording session in the studio at the Queensland Conservatorium, and I chose not to bring my own table as I knew there were many at the site. I eventually found a large heavy table and dragged it across the building and into the studio. It was sturdy but not as resonant, and its top was a light blue colour. Videographer Greg Harm commented that it looked like a typical primary school table and perhaps coordinated well with the toys that I was recording with during the session (J. Rottle, personal communication, June 10, 2019). Emma Harm, who was assisting with production, noticed some dirt spots and gave it a cleaning before capturing video footage. I did not notice any of these details from my perspective as a performer, but realising these factors helped make it apparent that the table was also an object that influenced my work. I began to observe its aural, visual, and tactile qualities that I also attribute to the everyday objects within my music practice. The table became a part of my performances; it was an object within an assemblage, and through a OOO perspective I could consider it as an equally important nonhuman object alongside my windup toys and finger puppets. I began to write and improvise based on the resonance and specifications of my own folding table, and it became a reliable element amongst the unpredictability of collaborating with the nonhuman. My otherwise ugly table became a special object.

Working with everyday objects expanded how I perceived my artistic identity as an instrumentalist. The task of learning new techniques and assessing playability reflected my
position as a novice object performer. The majority of my musical training has centred around flute performance. I have never formally studied composition, and everyday objects began as an addition to my professional life as a musician. I can read and interpret music for objects, and I also have many creative ideas as a composer that involve sounds other than those of flutes, but performing objects is an area of my practice that I identify as still in development. I recognise that the concept of being a novice learner is an opportunity to linger and mingle (Ahmed, 2019; Bennett, 2010). The space created through novice play invites experimentation, the unexpected, and collaboration with everyday objects. This is a key area where everyday objects expanded my music practice. Skill can be built, but technical proficiency is perhaps not necessary with everyday objects. I consider how I have come to expect certain sounds from my flutes. My expectations have perhaps closed my perception to new possibilities in favour of sounds that can be precisely replicated according to musical conventions. Even with extended techniques, which are meant to expand instrumental practice, I often feel pressure to produce sounds that adhere to a standard of correctness.

With everyday objects, I can set boundaries and build technique at my own pace without the pressures of standardised musical conventions. Creating the Categorical Framework helped to set parameters through which I could better understand an object, and this informed methods of playability and technical development. I identified practice methods for the different sensory qualities of objects, an example of which was practicing with a mirror to better view and react to the appearances of objects. I think about times when I have improvised with other instrumentalists and closed my eyes so I could concentrate on our collective sounds, like at the Make it Up Club (2018) and Kin-Makers (2020) performances. Practicing with a mirror became a similar tool with which to concentrate on different elements, and it was so helpful that I began to include it in my performances. It is not
something that is seen or experienced by the audience; rather, it assists my delivery of multisensory music.

Many of the objects that I choose to work with can be considered toys. Finger puppets, wind-up toys, small party favours, games, and balloons invite experimentation through play. Technique is not a requirement of play, but perhaps there is no requirement at all. This is where the unexpected can enter a practice with everyday objects. By dismissing the need for technical proficiency or virtuosity, and instead focusing on multisensory experimentation, music with everyday objects can avoid the need to adhere to standard musical conventions. Play exists within a realm that is both established and maintained by the players. Music can be an outcome of this interaction, which can exist on its own as improvisation, be formalised through composition, or developed with special techniques, such as with a mirror. Through performing my own works, I realised that at the centre of my music practice with everyday objects is an aversion to standardisation. It is a practice that welcomes the novice learner, the unskilled, and the curious, and this sometimes means that some of the practicalities of performance are also unexpected.

Improvising

Part of my research question includes how everyday objects can expand the practice of improvisers. I acknowledge that much of the work in my research portfolio is composition or performance-focused; however, improvisation was an important part of both my writing and performance processes. Collaborating with the nonhuman became most apparent in my work as an improvisor. I attempt to have tactile engagement with the objects and instruments that I work with to better listen, observe, and witness how they may be included in my practice. This required in-the-moment reactions to unpredictable factors, and as I realised a practice with everyday objects, I became more aware of my environments as an assemblage.
This type of observation often informed and directed my compositions, but foremost, it was a practice of improvisation. As Harman points out, “communication between objects is neither easy nor impossible, but both possible and difficult” (Harman, 2018, p. 259). Given this stark information, how might nonhuman collaboration be possible? I identify improvisation practices as ones that create space for nonhuman collaboration.

This improvisatory approach often transfers to my compositions. My compositional approach has always begun with experimentation regardless if I am writing a piece for myself as a composer-performer or for another instrumentalist. Your Sound Future (2019) is one example of my notated work that invites collaboration across human and nonhuman participants. I have described how the work is contingent upon spontaneous interactions that are specific to each the participant, performer, and everyday objects. The work unfolds based on situation-specific events and invites improvisatory collaboration among human and nonhuman objects.

Collaborating with the nonhuman is a multifaceted practice in communication. In Chapter 3, I detailed the different multisensory ways that objects can be understood in a music practice. Earlier in this chapter, I described how I created relationships with everyday objects through their location, symbolic, or sentimental associations. Similar to collaborating with other humans, relationships with everyday objects are built and developed. I accept Harman’s statement that collaboration with other artists is “both possible and difficult” (2018, p. 259); it may only seem easier because of established forms of language and communication. Collaboration is a fluid process, and I see the possibility of facilitating nonhuman collaboration through observation and relationship. These two concepts can be realised within an assemblage where agency is shared. Morton (2013) states that “humans are not the conductors of meaning, not the pianists of the real” (p. 164). Realising agency as a shared vibrant energy may distribute equal control amongst the human and nonhuman.
Improvising presents an opportunity to react and respond to this distributed agency as music unfolds in the moment. Collaboration becomes possible, and artistic expression is a resultant form of communication; it is a language that can be spoken between human and nonhuman.

**Kupka’s Piano: Sonic Objects**

Performing the work of other composers offered an important perspective to my own compositional processes with everyday objects. With ensemble Kupka’s Piano I presented a concert program of six chamber works that explored everyday objects according to my Categorical Framework (Kupka’s Piano, 2019, see Appendix A). I have already discussed these works in Chapter 3 through the perspective of my Categorical Framework, but here I present the findings as result of the experience of performing these works in the context of this concert. This process illuminated issues that I otherwise did not consider in my practice as a composer-performer, including topics of programming, production logistics, locating scores, and building technique.

**Programming**

I began programming Sonic Objects a year after beginning this research. During that time, I surveyed and documented the work of composers making music with everyday objects, and despite the time I devoted to investigating chamber works within this field I found it difficult to program Sonic Objects. I needed to find works that each fit the ensemble instrumentation, demonstrated my Categorical Framework, and fit within the logistical possibilities of the concert venue. I found it was easier to find small chamber ensemble works for duo and trio formation instead of works for the full quintet-sized ensemble, and this was a result of a few factors. The instrumentation of Kupka’s Piano was unconventional: the players involved in the concert performed on flutes, clarinet, percussion and guitar. The occurrence of this instrumentation was rare compared to an established ensemble formation,
such as a string quartet or Pierrot ensemble. Additionally, many of the works I researched explored objects in ways that extended beyond staged concert music or included objects that required logistical considerations above the technical capacity of the performance venue. Lastly, I needed to consider how much rehearsal would be needed and to consider the reality of the ensemble member’s time commitment to prepare for this concert as they would each need to develop new object playing techniques. In retrospect, I can now identify the obstacles encountered in programming as a way that everyday objects expand a music practice.

One example of the obstacle of programming was my intention to perform Elena Rykova’s *Subito Dodo* (2017). This work was scored for five object players, so it fit the number of musicians that were performing in the concert. I was drawn to the different objects included in the piece, which were to be played around a single table, and I initially thought this would logistically work well for a compact stage set-up. However, I realised that the technical requirements to amplify the many objects would be difficult within the context of the concert. I first considered how the work might fit within the flow of the program: It would require a significant reset of microphones, and I did not have enough time with the technical support team provided by the venue to manage it correctly. Another consideration was rehearsing the piece. Kupka’s Piano does not have a dedicated studio where the ensemble could leave the table of objects set and given the limited rehearsal time it would have been impractical to re-assemble the table of objects for each meeting. It became unreasonable to attempt this piece on this particular concert.

Finalising the program for *Sonic Objects* required creative compromise, and I decided to highlight the unconventional instrumentation of the ensemble. I programmed six works that demonstrated the ensemble in different small configurations (see Appendix A). Munakata’s *Buckle in the Air* (2011) showcased the ensemble playing instruments alongside smaller objects. This work included the most instrumental playing, and, oddly, fit a quartet of
Kupka’s Piano’s instrumentation. I programmed two other quintets scored for object players, which avoided the issue of conventional instrumentation altogether (Räisänen, *Balloon Work*, 2011; Rottle, *BOARD!*, 2019), as well as each a solo, duo and trio work. (Davies, *Obstructed Recital*, 2013-; Bång, *Hyperoxic*, 2011; Burke, *MD-PhD*, 2018). Programming this concert made me realise the reach of music for everyday objects across artistic disciplines, and that stage music is only one part of what is possible with everyday objects in a music practice. I consider the reasons why I was not able to program many other works because of site-specific or location-based requirements; logistical or technical capacity; objects that were difficult to source; and instrumentation. Working around these limitations stretched my concept of making music with everyday objects, and, ironically, my practice expanded.

Finding chamber music with everyday objects, regardless of instrumentation, required a multifaceted approach. One major realisation was that styles of cataloguing works for everyday objects were often not uniform between composers or publishers, and this included variation of terminology. Audio examples were sometimes not informative enough as to which objects were included in a work and how they may be distributed or played by performers, and this elevated the importance of video documentation. My process of finding scores included watching videos, researching programs from other ensembles, and reviewing the works lists of composers either directly on their personal website or through their representing publisher. Video-recordings, works lists, photos, and program notes became essential research materials: these were multisensory ways of investigating works with everyday objects. This would often lead to other sources, and my process continued to build.

Programming the *Sonic Objects* concert illuminated the discrepancies in methods of labelling scores and organising the titles of works for everyday objects. Some composers wrote the object parts exclusively for a percussionist while others indicated “Object Player”, “Musician”, or “Performers with Objects”, each of which does not indicate instrument-
specific requirements. This terminology affected the ways in which many compositions were
catalogued on a works list. Some composers listed their works for objects under the heading
of percussion music, an example being Alvin Lucier’s *Opera for Objects* (Lucier, n.d.),
despite the fact that the work does not include any conventional percussion instruments.
Some composers listed the object parts in their instrumentation subtitles, while others simply
listed that their work was for nondescript “Players”. Composer Mauro Lanza easily displays
his object-focused works on both his publisher’s site and through his own documentation
streams. His publisher, Ricordi, denotes the object-doubling required by musicians in the
short heading of the work. For example, his piece *Mare* (2004) calls for:

Fl. (also Fl.b and Ott), Cl., Tbn., Perc., Pf., Vn, Vc. Cb., - 5 musicians for toy
instruments: I: recorder, II: toy piano, schoenhut, 2 rubber puppets with a whistle, III:
Flexaton, Siren Whistle, Toy Trumpet, Bontempi Toy Piano, Bellow Box, IV slide
whistle, 2 rubber puppets with a whistle, Toy Guitar, V: Pan Flute, Toy Vibraphone,
Crotale, Squeaking Puppets, Pedal Cow Bell, Bellow Boxes. (Ricordi, 2020)

In my concert programming efforts, I realised the importance of clearly labelling the
inclusion of everyday objects in a work for accessibility and transparency. I also began to
question: Who plays the object part? How might attributing the object part to percussionists
or nondescriptive performers limit the object-playing potential of other instrumentalists? I
have already discussed the traditions of found object percussion and argued for the viability
of objects to appear in other instrumental parts, and I consider if these discrepancies in
cataloguing may contribute to a misleading stereotype that object music is reserved for
percussionists. The terminology of cataloguing may be a simple step to expanding the
practice of everyday objects into the work of instrumentalists outside of percussion.
Video recordings also assisted the discovery of artists and compositions featuring everyday objects. Video immediately showed what objects were featured in a work, and it also was informative of playability and performance technique. In a practical sense, it may also provide information that cannot be transmitted through a score alone, similar to the tutorial concept as I described earlier in this chapter. Sean Griffin’s *Pattycake* (2001) is a work that explores two performers clapping hands in different rhythmic formations. In a blog post that detailed learning this work, a member of new music ensemble Eighth Blackbird stated that, “I struggled with deciphering the notation for a long time before I discovered it was much easier to just watch the YouTube video to learn my part. (*shhh, don’t tell*)” (Eighth Blackbird, 2014). This statement expresses shame or guilt in learning through video instead of written notation, but video may simply be another form of mapping information. I reflect on my preferred methods of notation as a composer. Platforms such as YouTube and social media also made sharing and finding videos simple. During this research, many of my friends graciously sent me posts of other artists who displayed their work with objects through Instagram. Many artist profiles featured videos and pictures of their work, and I found this to be an easy way to access, watch, and save information. These video media platforms became a starting point from which I continued to research specific publisher and personal websites.

Repertoire lists and past programs from music ensembles were other helpful resources in discovering works for everyday objects. Viewing an ensemble’s video recordings was often a starting point, and through further investigation on their websites I could locate their repertoire catalogues. This led me to finding more names of artists and composers who work in this field. The entire process built upon pieces of information, like a puzzle. I did, however, encounter an awkward situation in my *Sonic Objects* programming efforts through this method. Three of the works that ended up on the program were all connected to one ensemble in Sweden, the Curious Chamber Players. This was not known to me until after I
finalised the program and contacted the composers with information about the concert. One of the composers kindly pointed out that three of the works, *Buckle in the Air* (Munakata, 2011), *Hyperoxic* (Bång, 2011), and *Balloon Work* (Räisänen, 2011), were each commissioned or programmed by the ensemble for a tour. This was embarrassing but also logical. The instrumentation of the touring ensemble fit our exact quintet formation, and since they were programmed for a tour the objects included in the works were compact and easily transportable. Although I found only one of the works through their website, I discovered the ensemble because I had performed a work by one its members a few years before beginning this research. The situation was ironic but not coincidental: the programming limitations of instrumentation and technical feasibility perhaps lead me to these works within the sphere of my investigation. I did not intend to copy the programming work of another ensemble, but this experience also made me realise that I perhaps had too narrow of a focus in my research so far. This was a point when I began to question what I might be ignoring or leaving out of my research, and I was reminded of my intentions to investigate how everyday objects can expand musical practices. Fitting these puzzle pieces together recalibrated my research, and as I progressed I noticed I focused less on staged music. Again, my music practice with everyday objects expanded.

**Sourcing Objects**

Finding objects as a composer presented concepts of status, relationship, and reason as to why and how particular objects may be included in musical work. Sourcing everyday objects as a performer was a more routine and practical task. I programmed Bång’s *Hyperoxic* (2011) on the *Sonic Objects* concert. This work called for a megaphone, balloon, bicycle pump, and handheld fans, which mimic the sounds of extended techniques on the flute. The composer gave instructions in her performance notes as to which objects were
required for the work. Her specifications included practical advice, such as hand-held fans that can stand up on their own, and she offered advice of how to clamp or attach objects to the legs of the performing table. However, locating the exact objects which allowed for these simplifications was an obstacle that I did not end up overcoming in time for the performance. I already owned some of the objects required to perform the work, such as the bicycle pump and the megaphone, but the handle of my bicycle pump did not release on its own as indicated in the score. Rather, it needed to be pushed downward to make the desired releasing air sound. This meant that one of my hands was not free during this notated technique. The model of megaphone that I owned was as specified in the score, but its volume dial began to malfunction and make extraneous noises when it was adjusted. I was not able to work around this problem without purchasing a new megaphone. Other objects were difficult to locate. I found an extra-large balloon and performed with it easily, but I received feedback from the composer that the balloon in my video recording was perhaps not as big as intended (J. Rottle, personal communication, December 3, 2019). While I did not have any difficulty performing with the balloon I that I sourced, the composer had a different concept of an ideal size of the object. I also searched for hand-held fans that could stand on their own. It was winter in Australia, and I was informed at the shops that these items were out of season and not available until the warmer summer months.

The process of sourcing objects to present this piece was informative to my work as both a performer and a composer. As a performer, I adapted to the objects I could reasonably find and made my best effort to sound the objects as indicated in the score. I practiced the technique and transitions and figured out adjustments to my set up as needed. Once I learned the music, I began to focus more on the set-up and transitions. The choreography of my movements became more of a struggle than the actual sounds that I could make with the objects, perhaps as a result of the objects not fitting to Bång’s specifications. In performing
her piece, I realised the importance of providing object and logistical specifications in performance notes. Bång’s detailed notes on the objects and their placements made me realise the importance of this type of specificity in my own compositions. Unlike conventional instruments, it is perhaps more difficult to standardise objects and their accessibility. The variations in style, size, location, and seasonal availability can make a difference in the playability of a notated object work. The experience made me reflect on the concept of a video tutorial as performance notes as this method of delivering information may be more thorough than text. This strengthened how I relay information in a score as a composer.

Building Technique

Forming technique with everyday objects presented as a greater task when learning and performing works by other composers. I have already discussed the topic of playability in Chapter 5, but it became necessary to understand how to replicate the sounds as notated in a score by a composer other than myself. This contrasted my usual working method of building technique through experimentation. Interpreting the intentions of other composers was not difficult, but I found that, with everyday objects, there was often little consistency between different compositional styles, and there were sometimes limitations in playability based on logistical or technical reasons.

One experience from the Sonic Objects concert was the realisation that elements of performance can compromise the playability or technical facility of everyday objects and instruments. A few examples of this occurred when preparing Munakata’s Buckle in the Air (2011). Initially, I was not involved as a performer in this work and instead assisted with conducting and sourcing the objects. As we progressed with rehearsing notes and rhythms, some of the players found it challenging to switch between the objects and instruments.
While the specific techniques to sound the objects were not difficult, adding them alongside instruments—sometimes in quick succession—was challenging for logistical reasons. The clarinettist had difficulty swinging the long plastic tubing fully around his head, as was indicated in the score, because of his close proximity to the other seated players. Additionally, the flutist was meant to chew almonds midway through the piece and finishing chewing in time became a problem as she needed to quickly begin playing without any food in her mouth. In email correspondence with the composer, he offered the solution of adding a fifth player dedicated specifically as the almond eater, so I joined in the performance of the work to fulfill this role (J. Rottle, personal communication, August 19, 2019). The composer acknowledged that there were elements of the work that were difficult in past performances and made amendments accordingly. While the technique of chewing almonds is likely not difficult for a trained flutist, connecting the two techniques of chewing and playing in quick succession was impractical. Object-specific technique may often need to be developed, but it is also dependent on logistical and practical factors.

**Chapter Summary**

In my previous chapters, I have already discussed that working with everyday objects does expand a music practice through theory (Chapter 2), categorisation (Chapter 3), and themes (Chapter 5). The task presented in this chapter outlining my findings was to articulate the practicalities of how. When I first began my artistic research, I remember thinking that some of the issues I encountered were difficult obstacles in my investigations. Sourcing objects, assessing playability, discovering scores, and navigating different concepts of notation were, to me, problems that required a solution. I now see how this was a negative perspective, and that these obstacles presented opportunities to negotiate with the nonhuman within my assemblages. As I analysed my work and made theoretical connections within my
practices as a composer, performer, and improviser I remembered the optimistic language with which I crafted my research question, a key word being *expand*. Concentrating on my findings as obstacles and trying to find definitive answers to a question was a narrowing task, and I began to realise that there were many possible ways of responding to my research question. What I initially perceived to be obstacles I began to realise as opportunities. Much of my work explores elements of the unexpected, and by embracing the unknown I was able to perceive my research as a puzzle. Slowly, my findings emerged. These practical elements are an important part of the process.

As a composer, choosing objects to work with helped me to consider performance limitations and logistics. Objects became inspirational based on their multisensory, sentimental, musical, and stylistic qualities, and I realised that I formed relationships with everyday objects often through connections outside of artistic practice. Some objects were gifts or were tied to fond memories, and this was an opportunity to reflect on the relationships that were built through and with the objects. Choosing the objects to feature in my work became a balance between logistical and relational factors. Building the relationships with objects was a method of collaborating with the nonhuman, and I did this by listening to, observing, witnessing, their multisensory qualities, as well as respecting the surprise or unexpectedness that they presented.

Musical notation can take multi-modal forms with everyday objects. The multisensory qualities of objects often helped to determine the different styles and methods, and I found that varied concepts of notation helped to represent the interdisciplinary potential of everyday objects across theatre, performance art, and embodied practices. Notation became a map or a set of directions, and this could reflect the diversity of everyday objects through graphic, text, conventional, and video notation. Graphic notation can offer visual, pictorial, and spatial context to a work, which may work well for embodied or theatrical practices. Text-based
notation can present like a script in which objects can become the props and characters of theatrical situations. Conventional notation may best suit works that include objects alongside instruments. Scores can also exist as video documentation, and this platform may also be a helpful tool in relaying information on object playability or specific instructions about a work. In my work, I realised that forms of notation were not rigid: some pieces included multiple types of notation, and this is because the objects necessitated different types of visual instructions.

Performing my own work illuminated elements of working with everyday objects that were not as obvious through my compositional practice. Through performing, I realised the importance of considering logistics, scale, and other non-aural elements that were otherwise not obvious in my writing process. As I performed and recorded my works, I realised small changes that I could make to better suit the logistical factors presented by the performance space. Performing with both large and small objects helped me to realise the impact of scale in my compositional practice, and I learned to consider logistical and theatrical elements more closely. This was a benefit of working as a composer-performer: I responded to the multisensory qualities of everyday objects and adjusted my compositions based on their cues. Other technical considerations include venue capacity and equipment, such as the size of a stage or the material construction of a performing table. These non-aural elements seeped into my musical work, and I begin to question where artistic considerations stop and logistical factors begin. Similar to my loop of influence between performing and composing, perhaps there is a stronger connection between the musical and logistical.

Performing the works of other composers illuminated new concepts of working with everyday objects, including programming, score cataloguing, finding objects, and building skill. Programming was similar to a puzzle; elements of instrumentation, venue logistics, and sourcing objects needed to fit together, and at times it appeared as though the pieces to the
puzzle were hidden. Finding them felt spontaneous, and I realised that there are many different contexts in which music with everyday objects can occur. Stage music is only one facet, and this is one way that a music practice can be expanded with everyday objects. Cataloguing and finding scores was a similarly obscure task, but different online resources assisted my investigations. Many composers indicate different terminology or have contrasting methods of labelling their music with everyday objects, and this can make locating scores more difficult. I am encouraged by those composers who describe their object parts for Musicians, Players, or Performers, which is language that suggests any person can approach this type of music in their artistic practice. The expansion continues.

Improvisation expanded my music practice with everyday objects by presenting opportunities where nonhuman collaboration became most clear. It was a tool that assisted my compositional method that facilitated many crucial parts of my practice, including experimentation, play, and curiosity. Improvisation existed in a dedicated space where I committed to listening, observing, and responding to the nonhuman.

I realised I needed to take a multifaceted approach to creating, performing, programming, and presenting work with everyday objects. This practice seems elusive; working with everyday objects avoids standardisations of notation, cataloguing, and programming. Spontaneity seems inherent to a practice with objects, and perhaps this unpredictability is a metaphor for the unexpectedness of the medium. I identify this lack of uniformity as creating optimal space to collaborate with the nonhuman. It necessitates adaptability, negotiation, and resourcefulness. I reflect on how I made choices in my artistic practice, and I understand this process to be nonhuman collaboration. I listened to, witnessed, observed, absorbed, reacted, responded, and reciprocated to the objects within my environment as a collective process.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

I began this research with the curiosity to explore how everyday objects can expand the music practices of composers, performers, and improvisers. Theoretical and analytical perspectives informed my music practice, and artistic research helped to connect these elements into my creative work. There was a loop of influence in my practice that helped to answer my research question. By assessing each of these methods, I discovered that everyday objects can expand the music practices of composers, performers, and improvisers by broadening the concept of what constitutes a music practice.

The Context Scan examined the historical and current appearances of everyday objects in music practices that stretch across genres, and I showed that this practice is not new but is evolving. Many musical artists can be identified as working across different mediums with everyday objects, such as concert music, performance art, sound art, embodied practices, and object puppetry. Everyday objects are not limited to one type of musical delivery, and I identify the connections that objects can make between artforms. Everyday objects in staged music began as instrument preparations and found object percussion in the early twentieth century, and this practice has since grown to reflect the object as a primary sound source without the accompaniment of conventional musical instruments. Performance art and embodied practices centre the physical body alongside everyday objects, and this can create opportunities for theatre and other non-aural elements. Sound art with objects examines the spatial environments in which music is created, and this can draw relatable connections to art and the everyday. Merging object puppetry with music presents opportunities to explore personification, the uncanny, and storytelling. Everyday objects can help to merge music practices with elements from other artistic mediums, and this expands the potential of artistic expression.
Chapter 2 was a discussion of object-focused theories. I attempted to understand the ethical considerations of working with the nonhuman and how this could be applied to my creative practice. Object-Oriented Ontology (Harman, 2018) helped me to realise everything as an object, and Bennett’s (2010) concept of an assemblage helped me view the distribution of my human agency amongst the nonhuman objects in my surroundings. Vibrancy is the physical manifestation of this shared agency (Cusick, 2013), and the human experience of this is multisensory. Through these perspectives, objects expand a music practice through the possibility for nonhuman collaboration. As with collaboration with other human artists, this requires respect in addition to listening and observation skills. Ahmed (2019) offered insight on how to respect the nonhuman through language of use, and this is a word that I have now limited to positive contexts in my music practice. I instead have replaced use with working with, collaborate, and include as these terms create space for reciprocity. Harman (2018) addresses that no two objects can every fully understand each other (p. 34), but music becomes a sensory object created from the communication between two objects. Art is the product of nonhuman collaboration and I realise the potential of this practice to connect further with the objects within an immediate environment. Creating music with everyday objects may be a mediating step toward understanding interactions with the nonhuman in the larger context of daily life.

I presented a Categorical Framework in Chapter 3 as an analytical tool through which to approach the ways that objects may appear in music. This Framework revealed how everyday objects can expand a practice through multisensory experiences and highlighted how some senses may be deliberately explored in musical work. Sonic Objects, Multisensory Objects, Silent Objects, and Prepared Instruments create the parameters through which I analyse my own creative work and that of other composers. I acknowledge the difficulty of removing one sensory experience, for example, visual appearance may not be a focal point in
a work with everyday objects, but it is difficult to ignore. Rather than removing this completely, I consider this a way of expanding a practice. Everyday objects present opportunities of multisensory exploration in music practices and embracing these qualities of the nonhuman into the realm of music making proactively creates space for nonhuman collaboration. In this perspective, listening becomes insufficient: Working with everyday objects in a music practice requires multisensory absorption that can include observation, listening, witnessing, and tactile engagement.

In Chapter 4, I presented and discussed the works in my portfolio as a composer, performer, and improviser. This was a discussion of 15 original works that included everyday objects; my perspectives on performing the works of other artists; and improvising. Here, I offered the artistic examples and short descriptions of the work. This chapter outlined the creative products of my Practice-based research.

The findings in Chapter 5 provided reflections on my portfolio through the lens of three major themes that appeared throughout my work: the unexpected, collaboration, and function. The unexpected qualities of objects revealed space to explore surprise and the uncanny. I explored collaboration with the nonhuman in my own work and recognised how my artistic explorations created assemblages. Considering the intended or subverted functions of everyday objects also pointed to the preservation or subversion of context. I discovered the potential to explore new meaning through reversing the roles of context and function, and the influence of theoretical concepts, such as Queer Use (Ahmed, 2019) became clearer. Each of these themes also led me to realise that my own music practice stretched into other artistic realms, such as performance art and embodied practice, that I had not yet considered as a part of my creative identity.

My findings in Chapter 6 were the discoveries of how everyday objects expanded my practice. As a composer, I realised the relationships I made with objects through the different
ways that I included or sourced objects for my work. The specialness of objects or their multisensory qualities inspired my work, and I realised that I often connected personal associations to certain objects. These relationships facilitated collaboration with the nonhuman, and sometimes, it felt as though the objects found me. Notation was also a variable amongst my practice and did not take one singular form, and I realised that different objects were best represented through contrasting styles of conventional, graphic, text-based, and video notation. As a performer, I recognised other details that I missed in the process of composing, including logistical considerations, scale, programming, and building skill. Practice-based research was a method through which I realised how everyday objects expand my own music practice. I realised that many of these factors helped me to step into realms of artistic practice that I would otherwise not identify with, such as performance art and object puppetry. My role as a musician (composer, performer, improviser) was expanded through the inclusion and exploration of everyday objects in my practice.

With everyday objects, elements that may be considered non-aural become musical. The multisensory qualities of everyday objects beyond sound can influence the trajectory of a work through notation, genre, live performance location, and documentation platform. Analysing my work through the lens as a composer illuminated concepts that I otherwise did not consider when performing, and likewise, performing my own works as well as those by other composers offered new insights on how to work with everyday objects. The roles of composer, performer, and improviser were equally informative to each other.

An Elusive Practice

Throughout this research I was struck by the elusiveness of everyday objects in music practices, but I eventually realised that this curiousness is the essence of how everyday objects help to expand a music practice. Working with everyday objects in music is
multisensory, and this is what lends to elusiveness. I found it difficult to classify objects within a singular artform or musical medium, and I realised that this practice is scattered across different disciplines. This was the first inclination of the elusiveness of everyday objects. I was also continually surprised by the unexpectedness of objects and their multisensory potential, but this was not a realisation that I could force. It seemed as though my creative processes became more difficult as I searched for answers. Rather, I needed to develop the patience and allow the objects to reveal themselves to me. This was collaborating with the nonhuman.

Working with the nonhuman presented even more mystery through theories. Harman (2018) confirmed through a OOO perspective that this was neither easy nor impossible but was both possible and difficult. I developed a Categorical Framework through which to better understand the curiousness of everyday objects in a music practice, and as I applied this tool to my own artistic analysis, I realised how the multisensory qualities of objects helped to create unexpected situations. I was surprised by the uncanniness of objects; they revealed new possibilities for expression in my work as a composer, performer, and improviser. Likewise, the logistical elements of working with objects often seemed hidden or obscure as they most often did not follow established conventions. I navigated different concepts of cataloguing, notation, locating objects, building skill, playability, and function through each role of my creative practice. What first presented as mysteries became opportunities to stretch my practice. I credit the elusiveness of everyday objects to their unconventional presence in music, and it is perhaps this mysteriousness that expands the artistic potential of composers, performers, and improvisers.

I consider an alternative: What if music with everyday objects was easy to control logistically, technically, and performatively, and if they were simple to locate, catalogue, and classify? What if there was a uniform way of notating works for objects? What if the answers
were presented easily through the establishment of a tradition? I consider the meaning behind the elusiveness of working with everyday objects, and through this I realise the opportunity to collaborate with the nonhuman. I continue to return to Harman’s statement that one object never truly reveals itself to another (Harman, 2018, p. 34). Working with objects throughout this research required me to build relationships with objects; to question and investigate; to observe, listen, and witness; to linger and mingle. While these concepts may not be exclusive to music with everyday objects, they are perhaps more apparent because of the lack of convention, uniformity, and expectations within a musical realm. Working with everyday objects invites the unexpected into a music practice, and perhaps it is a Queer Use of objects, one that creates new possibilities. Researching everyday objects through theory, analysis, and artistic practice was like putting together pieces of a puzzle. I acknowledge that I am still discovering pieces of the puzzle as I continue my artistic practice.

**Limitations of the study**

I conducted this research through the lens of an Australian-American perspective and did not engage fully with practitioners based in other parts of the world who also work with everyday objects. Given that objects are difficult to uncouple from cultural and contextual elements, the music that I created through this project is a slice of what may be possible with objects.

**Questions for further research**

The process and outcomes of this research showed me ways in which everyday objects can expand my own music practices as a composer, performer, and improviser. I anticipate that the findings from my own work can assist other musicians in their pursuits of working with everyday objects. Outside of this realm, however, I suggest new avenues of exploration from which this research can be a starting point. Concerning audiences: What is
the audience perception of everyday objects in new music, and how might this influence the future direction of creative work within this field? Can everyday objects help to reimagine typical conventions of experiencing new music? Other areas of investigation may include play, practicality, and the novice: What are some techniques that can assist in learning to play, listen to, observe, and understand an assemblage for non-musicians? What are the possible environmental effects of this music-based practice? The multisensory qualities of objects call into question that which may be considered non-musical. Given the concept of collaborating with the nonhuman and the multisensory qualities of objects, what might be considered non-musical in a music practice with everyday objects? What is considered extra-musical in a practice with everyday objects? Throughout the Context Scan, I identified other artforms that crossed into musical territories. Perhaps this research can inform or inspire how everyday objects can be interpreted in other artforms not exclusive to music, such as the visual arts. I question: How can everyday objects expand the practices of artists working in disciplines outside of music? Last, I believe this research can facilitate closer examinations of the nonhuman in relation to race, gender, or political studies. Collaborating with the nonhuman in a music practice can inform discussions outside of art, and perhaps the principles from this type of artistic practice can transfer to everyday contexts. It is anticipated that this Practice-based project and these areas for continued consideration will contribute to future knowledge in working with objects in new music practice.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Kupka’s Piano – Sonic Objects program

Original program and notes from the Kupka’s Piano performance on 13 September 2019.

Sonic Objects

Kupka’s Piano
13 September 2019
6pm | Ian Hanger Recital Hall

Performers:
Hannah Reardon-Smith, flutes and objects
Jodie Rottle, objects
MacArthur Clough, clarinet and objects
Liam Flenady, guitar and objects
Angus Wilson, percussion and objects

-- Program --

Meaghan Burke: MD-PhD (2018)
Rei Munakata: Buckle in the Air (2011)
Malin Bång: Hyperoxic (2011)
Michaela Davies: Obstructed Recital
Tomi Räisänen: Balloon Work (2011)

This concert was organised by Kupka’s Piano member Jodie Rottle as part of her PhD research topic investigating everyday objects in new music. Each of the works on the program reflect different uses of objects, including the object-as-instrument, objects alongside instruments and the silent object. Just as any work can be inspired by an idea, sound, or historical event, many of the pieces on the program are inspired by an object’s sound, appearance or theatrical qualities. Don’t hold back your laughter if you find some of the works comical, but also allow yourself to be surprised by the beauty of the simple sounds that you may encounter through everyday objects.

-- Program Notes --

By Jodie Rottle

Meaghan Burke: MD-PhD (2018)
Meaghan Burke is a New York based cellist, singer and composer. She composed MD-PhD as a reaction to an ironic concert situation when she was on stage performing. The work calls for a very soft improvisation by a solo musician, indicating on her text-based score ideas for the performer to use as inspiration: “Fade to nothing. Wait a while. Leave”. The “Quiet Hero” of the work is slowly revealed. A sketch for MD-PhD was premiered in by Burke’s trio Dead Language (of which Jodie Rottle is a member) in 2013 and was later updated for violin in 2018. The composer has kindly allowed the work to be adapted for clarinet for this performance. 

This work explores the object-as-instrument in both aural and theatrical ways.

Rei Munakata: Buckle in the Air (2011)
The composer writes: “Please take your seat comfortably and enjoy your relaxation time.” Sweden-based Japanese composer Rei Munakata wrote Buckle in the Air for his ensemble Curious Chamber Players. This work explores extended techniques of the instruments and blends them with sounds of objects. There is no dedicated percussion part, rather the part is described as “sound objects”. Some of the instrumental performers double on objects, and this weaves together the expected sounds of wind instruments with the surprising sounds of paper, whirling tubes, and almonds. The version presented this evening was later expanded for a larger ensemble and included more objects in each of the player’s parts, further blurring the lines between object and instrument sounds. Munakata is explicit in stating that sound is the most important element and that the work should not be theatrical. 

This work explores objects alongside instruments.

Malin Bång: Hyperoxic (2011)
Swedish composer Malin Bång frequently composes instrumental music involving objects. Her duo Hyperoxic categorises objects according to their method of sound production: air. She writes: “Hyperoxic celebrates the oxygen as a human necessity and foundation for wind instruments, and explores different means of letting air pour through the bass flute; either with massive air pressure, or as gentle gusts, or using the smallest amount of air possible. There are many everyday objects that use air in their basic functions and I have chosen a collection of objects that can challenge the flute with their unique sounds, but also seamlessly merge with the palette of air timbres created by the flute. The focus is air in three different appearances: the communicative air that we use for speaking and whispering; the organic air that we experience as breathing, winds or breezes and finally the mechanic air which is used in several simple tools and machines. These three prototypes have influenced the music on different levels such as the many shades of air timbres, the specific characters of the different gestures, the interaction between the performers as well as the form being based on a gradual movement from the communicative and organic air to a noisier, loop-based mechanic air.”

This work explores objects as instruments.

Michaela Davies: Obstructed Recital
Michaela Davies’ (AUS) Obstructed Recital is a series based on the concept of involving a physical limitation to performance. The requirements for work are to choose a piece of existing music that a performer knows how to play well, but then add an obstacle into how one would normally make sound. Previous performances of her work have included a percussionist placing large boxes in between her and her vibraphone; a pianist fastening rubber bands around his fingers and playing Satie; and a vocalist singing in a closed closet. Flutist Hannah Reardon-Smith has chosen to perform Debussy’s Syrinx with the obstacle of playing with socks on her hands. 

This work explores silent objects in a theatrical way.

Jodie Rottle: BOARD! (2019)
From the composer:
“BOARD! is a work for five players on board games. It explores the sounds related to the action of playing the games and also the game pieces as objects. I wanted to find a way to explore the sounds of the games through both their intended functions and as simple noise makers. Inherent to playing a game are physical gestures and emotions. This is explored in Movement I of the piece, which I notated as text-based instructions. Movement II is a graphic score that explores the sounds of the game pieces in detail: pencil on paper, dice rolling, the bouncing of game pieces. Each Player is assigned a character and must use this as a theatrical and aural tool. For example, the character of Player 5 is “too cool for games” and thus silently explores a stacking tower game...until it all falls.”

This work explores the object as instrument and the silent object in theatrical and aural ways.

Tomi Räisänen: Balloon Work (2011)
Tomi Räisänen’s Balloon Work is an exploration of the different sounds of balloons. Four balloon players inhale, inflate, squeak, rub, and deflate a balloon in a rhythmic pattern. Musical elements like vibrato (possible by pulsating the air opening while squeaking), dynamics and improvisatory sections elevate the simple sounds of a balloon to a substantial ensemble work. Acoustic guitar is played with a superball mallet, which is one of the only appearances of the prepared instrument on this program. No indication is made by the composer as to what colour the balloons need to be, nor are there any notes on potential theatrical elements. Perhaps these impressions are to be left to the audience to decide.

This work explores prepared instruments and the object as instrument.
Appendix B: *Music for a Memory* score

*Music for a Memory* (2019) by Jodie Rottle
Performance notes and final score. Commissioned by Alex Raineri for the *bloodpaths* project with dancer and choreographer Katina Olsen. Premiered on 30 November 2019 at the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts, Brisbane.

**Performance notes**

The duration of the work can last up to three minutes. Each line of music can be up to 45°. The notation is not spatial.

This work was composed for a collaboration between a pianist and a dancer and contributes to a larger work.

The pianist will need a large, soft, bouncing ball such as a tennis ball. The dancer will improvise as desired but incorporate a paper boat folded out of newspaper. The dancer is to crush the paper boat with the palm hit on the piano strings.

The piece should be as quiet as possible at the beginning and gradually grow in volume. The repeated F throughout the work should be continuous.

The piece can be adapted for solo pianist if desired. The palm hit at the end of the piece can instead be played by the pianist with the ball.
Appendix C: *Music for a Memory* first draft

First sketch of *Music for a Memory* (2019) by Jodie Rottle. Commissioned by Alex Raineri for the *bloodpaths* project with dancer and choreographer Katina Olsen.
Appendix D: Gait Rhythm in Unit 3 (2020) score

Gait Rhythm in Unit 3 (2020) by Jodie Rottle. Text-based score with performance map.

1. Walk on, bow, walk to P
2. Walk to OP
3. Put clogs on, walk to P in a rhythm
4. Take off clogs, walk barefoot through free space to OP
5. Walk on bubble wrap (20s), sneak onto yoga mat
6. Yoga something silent, jump, hum, scurry to P
7. Turn on vacuum, let sound for 10s, start to clean up tie
8. Walk on squeaky toys, pause, make it awkward, tiptoe onto bubble wrap
9. Wait in the wings 10s, walk slowly to water & get in
10. Exit water & put on flops; wet, squeak across stage to OP
11. Shake board in FS to P
12. Bowl offstage @ P until you knock them down
13. Walk back onto stage and bow in center, then leave.
Appendix E: *BOARD!* score


Jodie Rottle

**BOARD!**

The hilarious game for five performers on board games

First performance by Kupka’s Piano at the Queensland Conservatorium (Brisbane)
13 September 2019

Performance Notes

- All gestures should be made as convincing as possible. Each player should embody the attributed character.
- Strive for rhythmic unison unless otherwise noted. Tempo [quarter note = 60] is a suggestion only.
- The piece should be performed at four different small tables. Each table set up should be amplified with a condenser microphone.
- Suggested set up:

```
  1 & 2  3  4  5  
   [ Audience ]
```

**Player 1 & 2:** Four in a Row game with game pieces and vertical board. Character is “congenial to each other”.
**Player 3:** Alliteration game with timer, alphabet dice, notepad, and pencil. Character is “trying really hard to win”.
**Player 4:** Five dice game with cup, score pad, and pencil. Character is “a menace”.
**Player 5:** Stacking tower game with wooden tiles. Character is “too good for games”.

INSTRUCTIONS

Movement 1

Duration: around 3.30" or however long it takes.

All players begin seated at Player 4’s table.

Set stopwatch.

The performers begin play the Player 4 dice game. The game begins with everyone getting along. This continues for 1 minute. Players take turns rolling dice and making audible chuckling/sprited/excitement noises along to the game. No actual words should be spoken just vocal inflections reflecting enjoyment and excitement according to the following Players’ dice-rolling outcomes:

- Player 1: mf laughter
- Player 2: mf “Oooooooohh!”
- Player 3: mp “meh” sound
- Player 4: f “Eeeeeeeaaaaah!”
- Player 5: mp “nervous laugh

Each player must be in character as according to the Player assignments.

The Players write down a “score” after each turn. This will be an audible scribble.

The Players take another turn on the game. The reactions are as follows

- Player 1 says “oooh!” and everyone else is silent.
- Player 2 says “Wahoooo!” and everyone else groans a little.
- Player 3 says a nervous noise and everyone else does a mp encouraging noise.
- Player 4 mimics what would otherwise be the work “Yahtzee!” and everyone immediately goes into outrage.

Player 3 and Player 4 become especially mad at each other and make “niener-niener” noises to each other.

Player 2 breaks up the dispute and suggests Player 3 goes to her table.

Everyone leaves in a huff characteristic to their Player and goes to their tables.

For 1 minute, everyone gets seated, explores their new game, and occasionally glances at everyone else setting up their games.

Movement 2 begins when Players 1 and 2 make eye contact with the rest of the group and begin dropping game pieces into the game board (as in graphic score).

Everyone should restart their stopwatch at this time.
**Movement II**

1. Drop game pieces into board in rhythm.
2. 1 2 1 2 oz.
3. Scribble for 6''
4. ROLL DIE
5. Continue until dice cue ...
6. Pause - 12''
7. Scribble loud and furious - 12''
8. When ready, shake the dice in the cup in rhythm.
9. As fast as possible - 12''
10. Begin to unstack game tiles very carefully. Do not allow the oven to fall. Continue to unstack silently through the piece unless instructed to pause. Make every movement appear as careful as possible.
11. Look at Players 3 and 4
RELEASE PIECES

1. Improvise: Shuffling game pieces on the table - total 15"
   1) one by one
   2) in large swinging piles

Scribble in rhythm with players 1 & 2

Wait for players 1 & 2 - 15'

Set cup down quietly

Continue...

In unison with player 1

Outline the oval on table with 2 game pieces = 5 beats length

In unison with players 1 & 2

Draw an oval on paper in unison with other players.
1 oval = 5'
Tap in unison with Player 3 - hard and short

Tap with pencil in unison with Player 182 - hard and short

As before

Continue ...

Spin pieces like tops in a steady flow

Free starbrite solo - 8"

Interject

ROLL
DICE

Continue ...

3

2. Gather dice into cup, loudly one by one with extreme attitude = 15".
   Shake dice in cup with hand covering the cup. Slow build for 20".

3. Continue ...


5. Suddenly stop shaking dice. Set timer for 1 minute. Let timer sound for 30". Don't move. Cue next section. Scribble wild - 45". Pause - 15".


7. Continue ...
As before - 20". Pause - 15". 5". 5". 10".

As before - 20". Pause - 15". 5". 5". 10".

Shuffle dice as before - 20". Pause - 15". 5". 5". 10".

Drop pieces one at a time, alternating in rhythm.

Let timer sound fully before going on.

Timer sounds.

Dramatically drop one die in the cup. Dramatically drop another in the cup.

Continue ...
1
2

3

4

5

Dramatically drop remaining dice in the cup, one at a time.

Store at tower when it falls.

Let tower fall all over. Look at fallen pieces.
Appendix F: *Pete’s Dance* and *Hold It In* scores

**HOLD IT IN**

NOTES

**A**
- Eventually expand pitch range to indicated notes
- Transitions smoothly into **B**
- Whole section **A** pumps up to 60

**B**
- Building tension
- "IMPROVISE on **A** and **C** section motion"
- Gradually expand pitch range to indicated notes
- Transition: "inflated" "Build on** **D**" section motion
- Introduce elements of **A**
- Cover up plate + in facet on low D

**C**
- "IMPROVISE with air + fingers only"
- Inflate continuously. "breathy"
- Transition to ending
  - Let air out

**D**
- Inflate. "in **B**"
- Expand range
- Introduce elements of **A**
- Transition to ending
  - Up to 46"