

ARNOLD JACOBS DECONSTRUCTED — PART II

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Part I of Arnold Jacobs Deconstructed explores the legacy and oral teaching methods found in the instrumental wind pedagogy of Arnold Jacobs. This can be found in the Summer 2022 issue of the *ITEA Journal* (Volume 49, Part 4). Part II presents a case for locating the conceptual, product-based, musical focus of Mr. Jacobs' musical performance instruction within a contextual framework of Process Philosophy. This article also examines the metaphoric and paradoxical methods employed by Arnold Jacobs as being conceptually resonant with translations of Pre-Socratic traditions of aesthetic philosophy located in recent classical scholarship.

The relevance in suggesting we consider the pre-Socratics' in a deconstructed analysis of Arnold Jacobs' teaching aphorisms represents an appreciation of his pedagogical legacy as an oral teacher. It is a performance teaching transmission rooted within a basic coherent philosophy. Jacobs' oracular teaching is comprised of philosophical notions: *artistry, imagination, imitation, sound, resonance, and strangeness*. These are intellectual concerns harmonious with concepts of process and agency poetically articulated in Pre-Socratic philosophy. It is acknowledged that Mr. Jacobs' adages and maxims possess layered meanings of conceptual power, information, and significance; a consideration that musical studies with Arnold Jacobs took place in part as phenomenological *incantations* tied to an ontological riddle: *Song and Wind*.

Nevertheless, words are not the same as the "things" they describe. We must own their meaning and essence through our own personal experiences. A phenomenology of musical awareness can be experienced from the first-person point of view through the custom of maintaining a music practice journal. The concept and maintenance of an artistic performance journal – for this tuba player – has become a mindful, subjective space away from the instrument to observe and study musical awareness, an offering of our personal witness to one's active, energetic agency directed towards producing musical sound. The performance journal becomes an auto-ethnographic praxis of cognitive observation detailing one's ongoing experiential creation of sounds out of silence. Ideally, it documents one's ongoing method of practicing as being-becoming a process of mindfulness. An engaged, active imagination manifests an authentic instrumental musical resonance, the essence of *Song and Wind*.

“In your mind, you have to be a master musician.”¹

“You have to be a master interpreter of style and phrase as well as one who communicates a message to someone else... The rest is just minor stuff.”

The etymological implications in Arnold Jacobs' language and modes of expression are fundamental in elucidating a performance philosophy of tuba. In doing so, we will consider a significant word employed unfailingly by Mr. Jacobs – *Artistry* – as a quality known as *Arete*.

Arete (Gr.) means “excellence”, containing the sense of being “highly effective”. The English roots of our words *artist* and *artistry* are in late Medieval Latin (*Ars*), meaning a “craft or skill”. The visually similar Greek term *Arete* conveys older implications, a relationship between personal and collective agency within outstanding performance. Today “artist” has primarily become a commercial concept while also recognizing excellence. Originally *Arete* indicated a person displaying purpose, skill, and wit in achieving singular results.²

As a concept, *Arete* precedes recorded history appearing in Homer (c. 800 BCE) and Pre-Socratic philosophy (c. 500 BCE) into the later Roman era. *Arete* principally meant to “be in the flow” of one's personal life force in the moment, performing “in the zone”. It indicated someone engaged in exalted action with supreme agency, as an accomplishment of being the best one can be. In Homeric terms, this was a gloriously supreme, divinely inspired possibility afforded to a “hero” engaged in struggle, evidenced as triumph through contention and strife; a psychological “letting go” (sic.), trusting one's natural skills and trained abilities to destiny while participating within dynamic forces greater than oneself.

Arete is a performance-phenomenon recognized by others. It is a state of being, in present moment consciousness, focused observantly, cunningly, and instinctually on a grand scale of awareness and perspective, and it is related to another notable performance state: *Metis* (Gr.).³

In Greek mythology, *Mentis* was a goddess of counsel, planning, cunning, and wisdom, mother to such abstract concepts as *mental* and *mind*. Peter Kingsley⁴ informs us that as a quality or attribute, *Metis* referred to a state of consciousness, a focused attention of active awareness required of an ancient navigator sailing an open trackless sea. It entails using all of one's senses, being available to every alteration and subtle change that takes place within a prevailing context of wind, sea, currents, tides, storms, season, smells, and time of day. It means being focused, aware, and exclusively available to what IS; wide-open, receptive, and cognizant of shifting panoramas to possibilities.

*"Metis might sound like just another concept. But really, it was the opposite of everything we understand by concepts. It meant a particular quality of intense awareness that always manages to stay focused on the whole: on the lookout for hints, however subtle, for guidance in whatever form it happens to take, for signs of the route to follow, however quickly they might appear or disappear."*⁵

Metis expresses a psychological agency to the transcendent passion, potency, and effectiveness of *Arete*. To conceive of artistry today from within this perspective as a phenomenological episode of manifesting one's idealized best - within conditions of contention and strife - provides a vitalized conceptual framework to imagine musical performance as being "a better game than war"⁶. It is a real-time, expressive contention within mighty forces, seeking resolution while being effectively witnessed and recognized. It is the ultimate play of players playing, the essential musicking element to aesthetic ideals referenced previously in Hesse's *Glass Bead Game*.

*"The boy and the old man ceased to think of anything else; they surrendered themselves to the lovely, congenial lines and figurations they formed as their parts crisscrossed. Caught in the network their music was creating, they swayed gently along with it, obeying an unseen conductor."*⁷

Consider that performing a *fortissimo tutti* within an orchestral brass section can be just such an idealized experience of highly charged white-hot energy passionately engaged in performance. An aesthetic form of contention, it is an assertion of one's vital energy at its very best, a production of total *presence* in *artistic purpose*. The world goes away as all attention and focus collapse into a present-moment gestalt without past or future: *Metis*.

Jacobs intuitively knew and obviously expressed *Arete* through *Metis*. We would expect all performing artists to experience this condition at times and would strive to be so artistically possessed - expressing their music within the moment of performance.

But musicians rarely speak of this ideal themselves. It is a private thing that has few words. We recognize artistic performance in others. Yet, it can be difficult to compliment a performer. Typically, self-consciousness arises for a performer in accepting simple approval, usually offering a mild "thank you" before confessing where they "really" got it wrong.

Nevertheless, active recognition by one's peers has always been a crucial component of a vital psycho-social element expressed through the concept of *Arete*. An appreciation of a "something" being accomplished by "someone(s)" engaged within individual/

collective (ensemble) agency by going beyond normally perceived knowns and perspectives. The meta-cognition conception of "Flow"⁸ as a dynamic, expressive space is *Arete*. Arnold Jacobs inspired generations of musicians to aspire to *Arete* as artistry through his concept of *Song and Wind*.

A foundational philosophic principle is asking *What*; then *How*. *What* reveals a pragmatism of getting the job done by first knowing what you intend to be doing. *How* is discovering efficient, productive methods. As a philosophy of tuba performance, *What* becomes musical communication - "Be a storyteller of sound". In this ephemeral communicative algebra of *What* and *How*. *Why*, *Where*, or *When* come and go while *Who* is always you.

Arnold Jacobs taught through aphorisms, precepts, and stories that have been reiterated many times but are only occasionally inspected for deeper aspects and significances.⁹ Doing so becomes a philosophical process of asking what is meant by these concepts to reveal potentially richer underlying subtexts. What do we think is meant by terms such as *Breath*, *Imagination*, *Imitation*, *Resonance*, *Strangeness*, *Virtuoso*, and *Wind*? These are abstract concepts that Mr. Jacobs talks about recurrently. An apparently basic perception: E.g., "tone" has 24 references in *Song and Wind* and is one of many indexed examples of recurring themes in Jacobs' pedagogy. Here again, however, is the way of an oral tradition, employing gradual discovery through repetition, provoking an evolving comprehension of such experiential and consequential knowledge that is suggested in metaphors and paradoxical insights:

"I play two tubas, one in the head and one in the hands..."

“ The important thing is not what you sound like. It's what you want to sound like. ”

"Imitate great musicians and create your own greatness."

"Analysis is paralysis in performance."

"You should be analytical about the music, but you must not be analytical about how you produce it."

"You will never know how you do it."

This is poetry. To enter into this type of dialogue, we must abandon our superficial expectations of being told *how* to do it and *how* it is done, surrendering instead to knowing *what* there is to be potentially manifested. This is ontology, a philosophical partner to phenomenology, as an aesthetic performative principle: *define or be defined*.

Arnold Jacobs tells us directly:

“ I play two tubas,
one in the head and
one in the hands... ”

Immediately we need to ask what is this “*tuba*” of which there are two; how is there “*one*” in the “*head*” and another “*one*” simultaneously “*in the hands*”? Do we assume that he means this only in a poetic sense when there are richer aspects to contemplate and learn? Jacobs also states: “*think beautifully to play beautifully*”, then implores: “*imitate great artists*”.

These injunctions are riddles, sophisticated pedagogical techniques of gameplay with ancient providence. Oracles, such as Apollo’s temple at Delphi (c. 560 BCE), typically replied to inquiries with riddles, questions within questions, and puzzles. The mythic riddle of the Sphinx was a conundrum, which in answering it, Oedipus became king of Thebes and sealed his doom. Riddles are intended to effectively puncture mental expectations in performing as perplexing cognitive puzzles that can continue to work upon us to evoke and produce intuitive insights.¹⁰

These are not assertions, intentionally or otherwise, that there are any explicit mystical connotations to the aphorisms of Arnold Jacobs or the methods he employed to communicate his pragmatic yet enigmatic teachings. Mr. Jacobs simply never alluded to metaphysical philosophy in his teaching or performance practice. He could rightly claim to be an amateur scientist, a humanist, even an autodidactic polymath, but not a mystic. Yet he did practice his own forms of *reverse-psychology* and verbal-physical misdirection aiming to provoke radical and immediate change leading to excellence.

A particularly insightful technique in this style of teaching was for Jacobs to spontaneously toss an object, such as a pen, towards a student who was actively listening to him. When the thrown object was instinctively caught by the student, Mr. Jacobs would immediately ask: “*How did you do that?*”¹¹ A question to which there is no answer or reply. Reacting instinctually requires no thought. Awareness, focus, attention, and imagination are all required, but not thought. There is no time or space for thought, nor any necessity.

“Order what you want (product) as you cannot tell, or even know, what muscles to use... You will never know how you did it.”

This type of direct insight into a *focused awareness* being employed with *musical imagination* as applied to the concept of *producing product* becomes the two metaphoric tubas: the one in the “*head*” and the one in the “*hand*”. The conceptual “*head tuba*” represents one’s idealized sound of the *product* to be actualized *somatically* (held in the hands) by *sounding* a large analog-acoustical-amplifier – a bugle made of brass – known as the tuba. The embodied relationship of mind-body-tuba becomes a synergetic-symbiotic gestalt in a psycho-somatic relationship. Deductively, a subjective *player* and a material *tuba* must engage to enact any *sound* in being-becoming a hybridized cognitive-instrumental musical whole. Together they become *one thing* – a consequent gestalt of musical sound generation greater than the sum of its individual components; impossible without an embodied, engaged, and enacted bond. The tuba makes no sound, just as no *bass sound* ever imagined by any musician is possible without a tuba to *play*. Such an embodied relationship is both a metaphoric and common-sense, intuitively engaged, “*play-full*” relationship with one’s instrument.¹²

The efficacy of Jacobs’ pedagogical approach lies in its misdirection and paradoxical premises. Using *surprise* and *strangeness* becomes a “*skillful means*”¹³ towards disengaging the mind (Gr. *Nous*). The mind can habitually *think* about *how* to in regressively *thinking about thinking* – while attempting to play a musical instrument – and produce what Jacobs identified as “*paralysis by analysis*”. Paradox diverts our habits and expected reactions. Focusing on *what you want* becomes a creative, inspirational *product* – not a problem to be overcome – which the body-mind already knows instinctively, through practice, how to accomplish – without analytical thinking. The conception of the product incites the stimulus-response required for muscular-motor reactions to produce imagined sounds.¹⁴

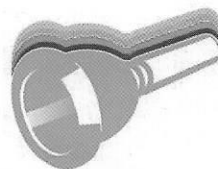
Ultimately, such common-sense philosophy relates to an even more essential concept for a musical artist to consider in appreciating the performance philosophy of Arnold Jacobs:

“ You are a product of the
challenges you overcome...
a product of your past
experiences and development.
The instrument has no brains;
the human does. So, the
development of the person
is our challenge. ”

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Footnotes:

1. All quotations, unless otherwise cited, are transcribed statements of Arnold Jacobs as referenced in the primary sources.
2. Kingsley, *Reality*, p. 131.
3. Kingsley, *Reality*, pp. 90–94.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Houston, *The Possible Human*
7. Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game*, p. 34.
8. Stemple, Brett. (2018). The Concept of "Flow" in Brass Pedagogy: Its History and Interrelationship with the Theories of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi [Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation]. Indiana University.
9. Grose, Tuba People TV. Retrieved from youtube.com/user/TubaPeopleTV
10. Naerebout and Beerden, *Gods Cannot Tell Lies*, pp. 121–47.
11. Arnold Jacobs Masterclass. 2'45": youtube.com/watch?v=-qiXa9B8Zjs
12. Piaget, J. *Play, Dreams and Imitation*, p. 147.
13. Tarthang, T. (1978) *Skillful Means*.
14. Nelson, B. *Also Sprach Arnold Jacobs*. pp. 13–19



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