

Thing (2015)

Neil Luck

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for Enrico Bertelli

For solo percussionist, table, desk-bell, and miscellaneous objects

STAGING:

The performer should be sat at a desk-sized table. On the table, off to the side, there must be a standard reception desk bell, operated by an easily accessible button. Ideally the bell should be secured to the table in some way – perhaps by velcro or gaffa tape. The performer may choose any number (including zero) of other objects and materials to place on the table. These should be things that the performer is not worried about breaking or destroying.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

Thing is written for a one-handed (right-handed) percussionist.

However, throughout the piece the percussionist's hand is subject to a series of 7 different mutations. These mutations are realised by fusing the performer's right hand with their left hand to form strange, clumsy, parasitic aggregate body parts.

The score outlines the physical attributes, as well as musical/performative behaviors of each mutation,

Throughout the piece these mutations gain increasing sentience and strength.

The desk bell, followed by *Gesture 0* act as a kind of clearing gesture, suppressing these mutations.

However, as the piece progresses *Gesture 0* becomes increasingly futile.

The only instruments in the piece are the performer's hands, and the desk. However, the desk may be prepared with other (ideally non-musical) objects, materials and surfaces. During the performance, the mutated hand shapes can interact with these items in a natural, non-conceited, almost accidental way. As the performance becomes more intense and violent, these materials should be treated similarly: toppling, being knocked off the table, broken or smashed.

Much of the material details of the piece are left up to the performer. However, the overall structure, or drama of the piece is divided into 3 clear sections. The sections should not feel separated or discreet, but rather run fluently into one another.

The piece should last no longer than about 4 or 5 minutes.

Sections in the piece:

1. Primer

Teneramente

Each mutation is presented in order.

Each presentation begins with *Gesture 0*. This state is then gently taken over by one mutation at a time.

Mutations are not yet aggressive – they are testing the water, flexing their muscles.

After each mutation, the performer should suddenly return to *Gesture 0*.

2. Possession

Poco a poco furioso

The mutations begin to assume control over the 'neutral' right hand.

Now, rather than a controlled order of presentation, mutations switch from one to the other more uncontrollably and increasingly rapidly. Any regular order is disrupted, and individual mutations may appear multiple times.

The neutral right hand still tries to assume control with *Gesture 0*. However, this has less of a lasting effect, only regaining right hand neutrality for a short amount of time before the next mutation takes over. Indeed, by the end of the section, *Gesture 0* (although present) is completely ineffectual.

3. Final conflict

Molto Stringendo

This section focuses on one particular mutation. This single mutation (chosen by the performer from the seven described) has assumed greater control and suppressed all other mutations.

The chosen mutation is now in a violent and rapid conflict with the neutral hand position (which is still attempting to assert *Gesture 0*). The mutation and neutral hand position should be interchanging extremely quickly. It should be unclear which has the 'upper hand' in the conflict.

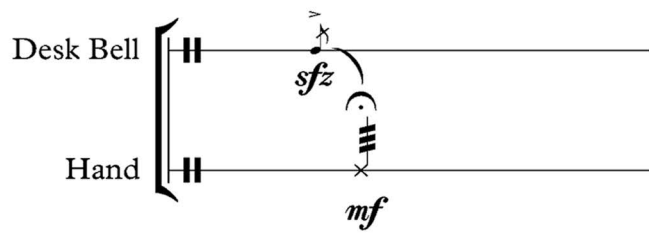
Building towards a climax, this should seem to be an equal match between the mutation, and neutral hand position:

At the height of conflict *Gesture 0* is performed, before BOTH HANDS collapse into the neutral position.

Right, and Left hands are left to vibrate briefly, before together being drawn slowly off, and then under the edge of the table.

Piece ends.

Gesture 0

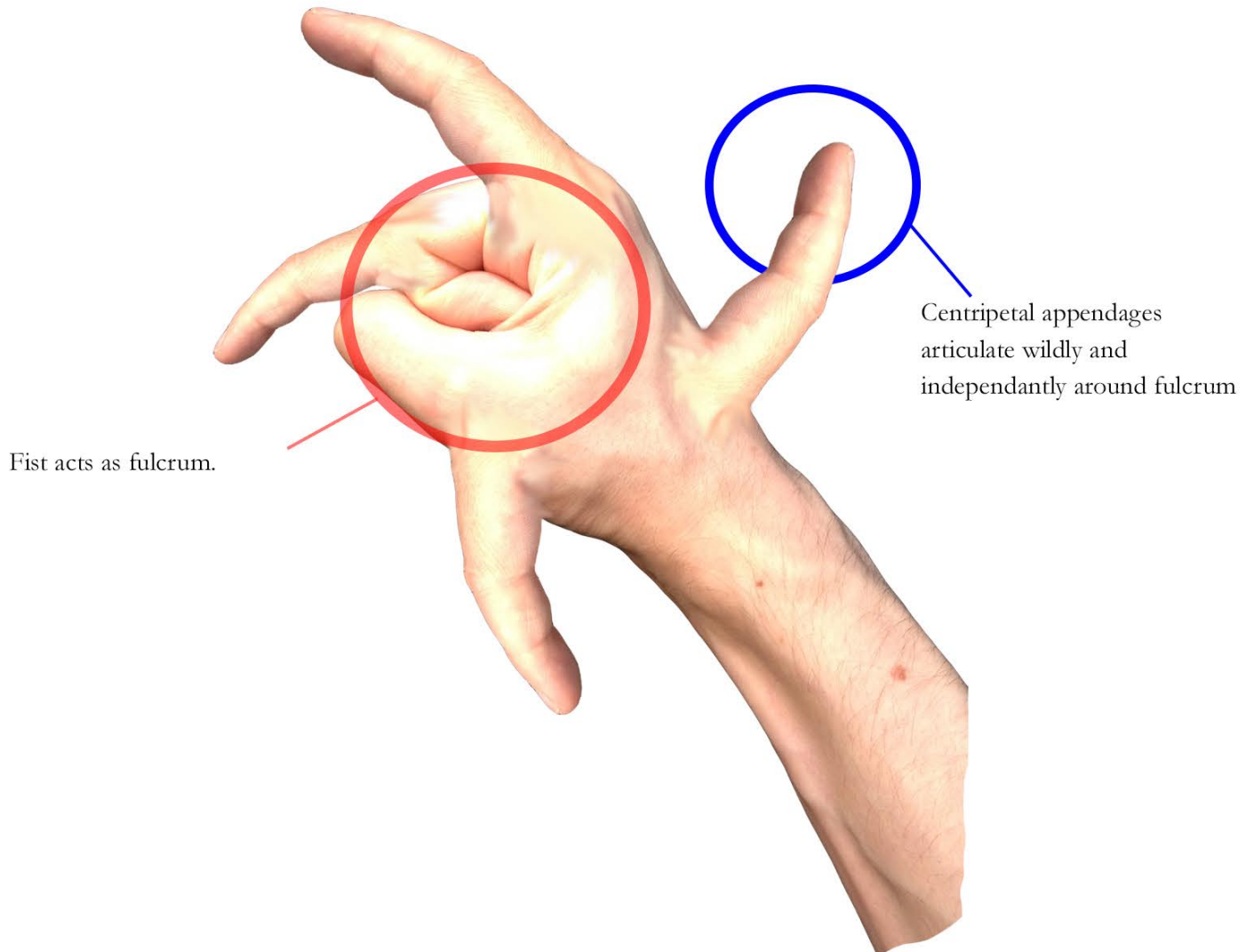


NEUTRAL HAND POSITION =
Small, rapid rubbing or vibrating
of RH palm on table

1st Mutation

This mutation suggests two simultaneous types of articulation. The 'real' right-hand performs discreet impacts with a fist. The left-hand should sit directly over the right-hand fist to create a sort of spiral-finger arrangement. These fingers should articulate attacks around the fist quickly and in a florid manner. This could mean 4-finger tremelandi, trills around, or either side of the fist etc.

In general the LH mutations should play at a lower dynamic than the RH clusters.



2nd Mutation

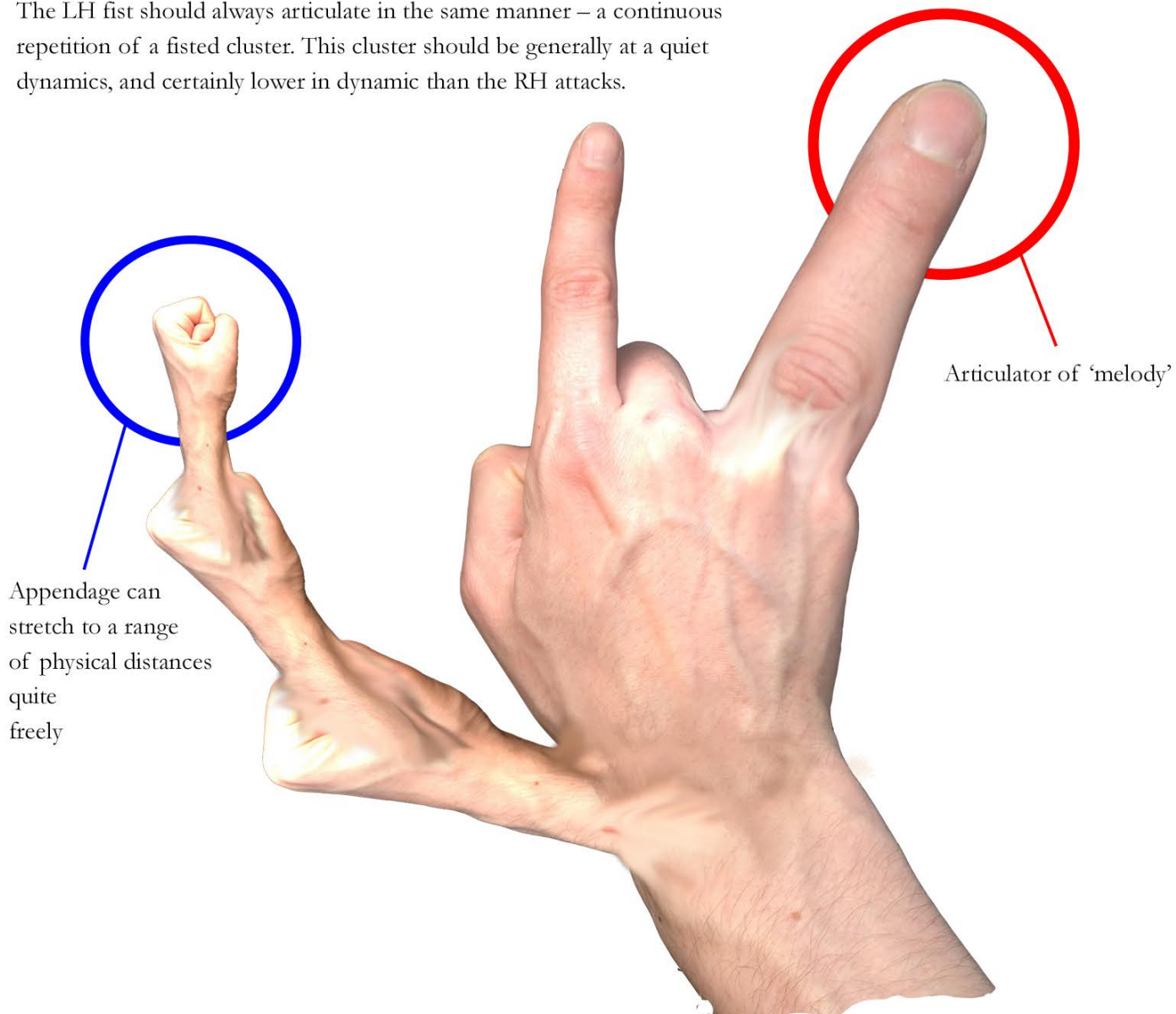
This mutation moves a little like the 'face-hugger' aliens from the Alien movie franchise. The LH fingers should be nestled tightly into the RH palm in a way that allows both sets of digits to drum away independently and simultaneously. In general movement should be frantic, scuttling across the table, skitterish.



3rd Mutation

The two main parts of this mutation: the engorged RH finger, and the tiny fist-outcropping, work essentially in a kind of unison. Imagine you're playing a piano keyboard. The RH articulates a virtual-monophonic melody line on the tabletop. At each change of 'note', the LH fist should also change position. The physical distance between RH and LH is flexible and open to interpretation.

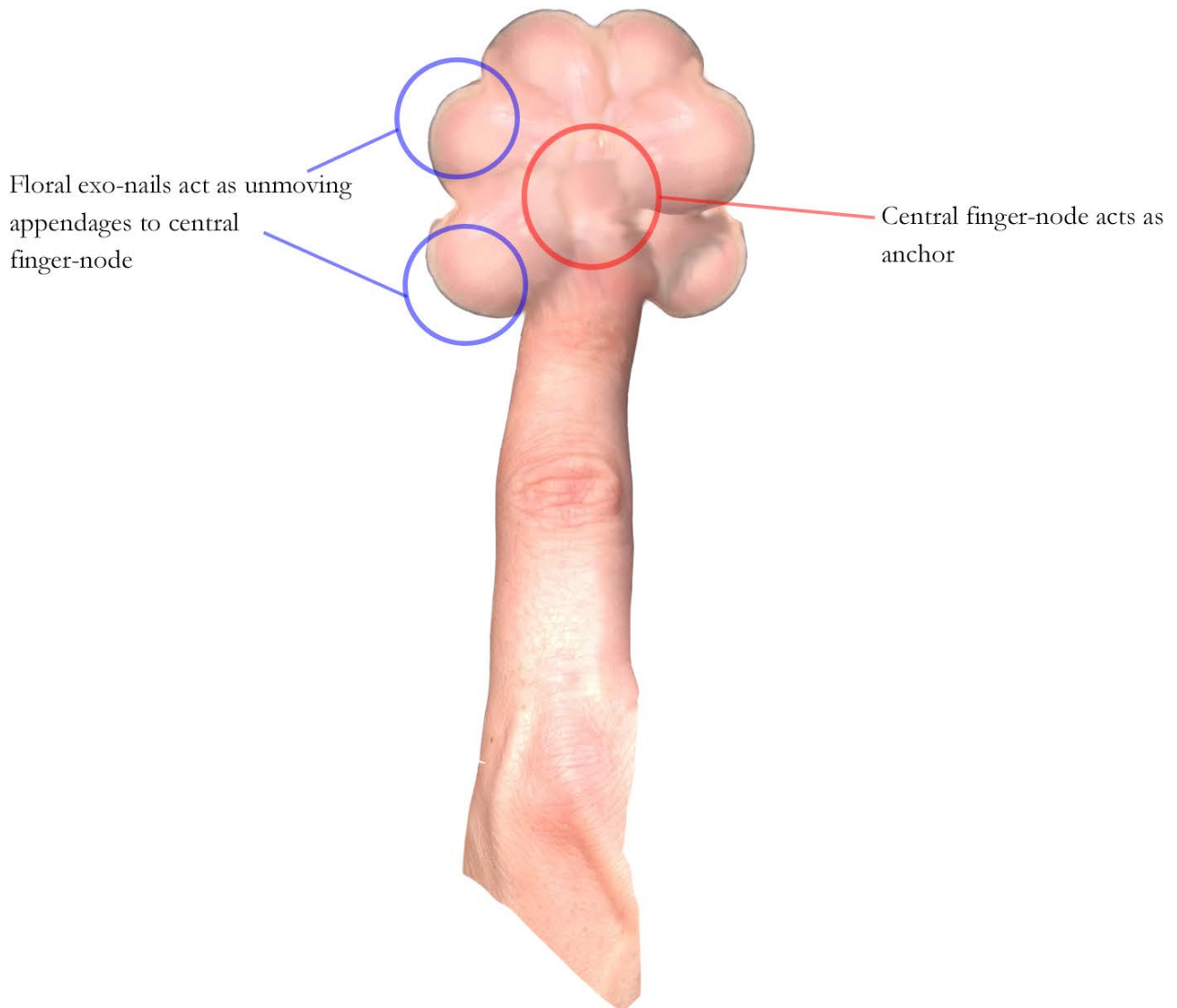
The LH fist should always articulate in the same manner – a continuous repetition of a fist cluster. This cluster should be generally at a quiet dynamics, and certainly lower in dynamic than the RH attacks.



4th Mutation

A single RH finger with a proliferation of finger-nail matter. These excess fingernails should be realised as a cluster of the LH nails overlapping with a single RH nail (middle finger).

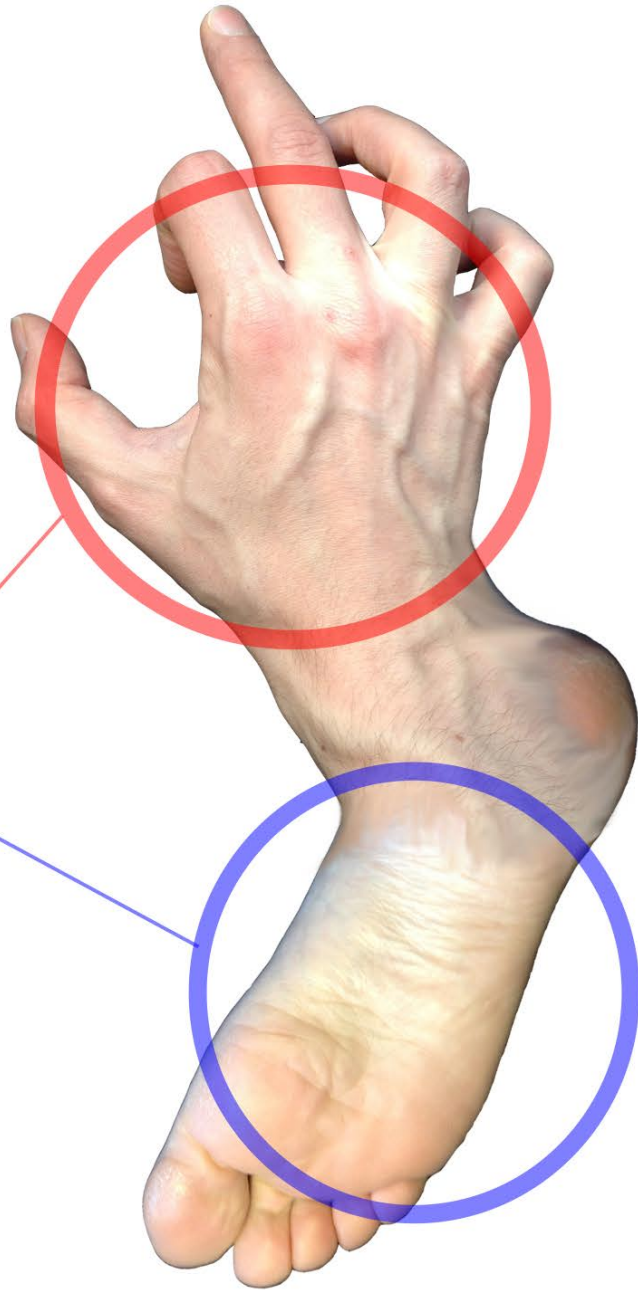
This mutation should be used on the table 'upside-down', that is with the top of the nails in direct contact with the keys. The player should explore a variety of ornaments and articulations – trills, tremelandi etc.



5th Mutation

An ugly impact. The RH could bring the foot onto the table. Indeed, the foot should not simply be 'stamped' onto the table. The gesture may be, and should be laborious, heavy, inelegant.

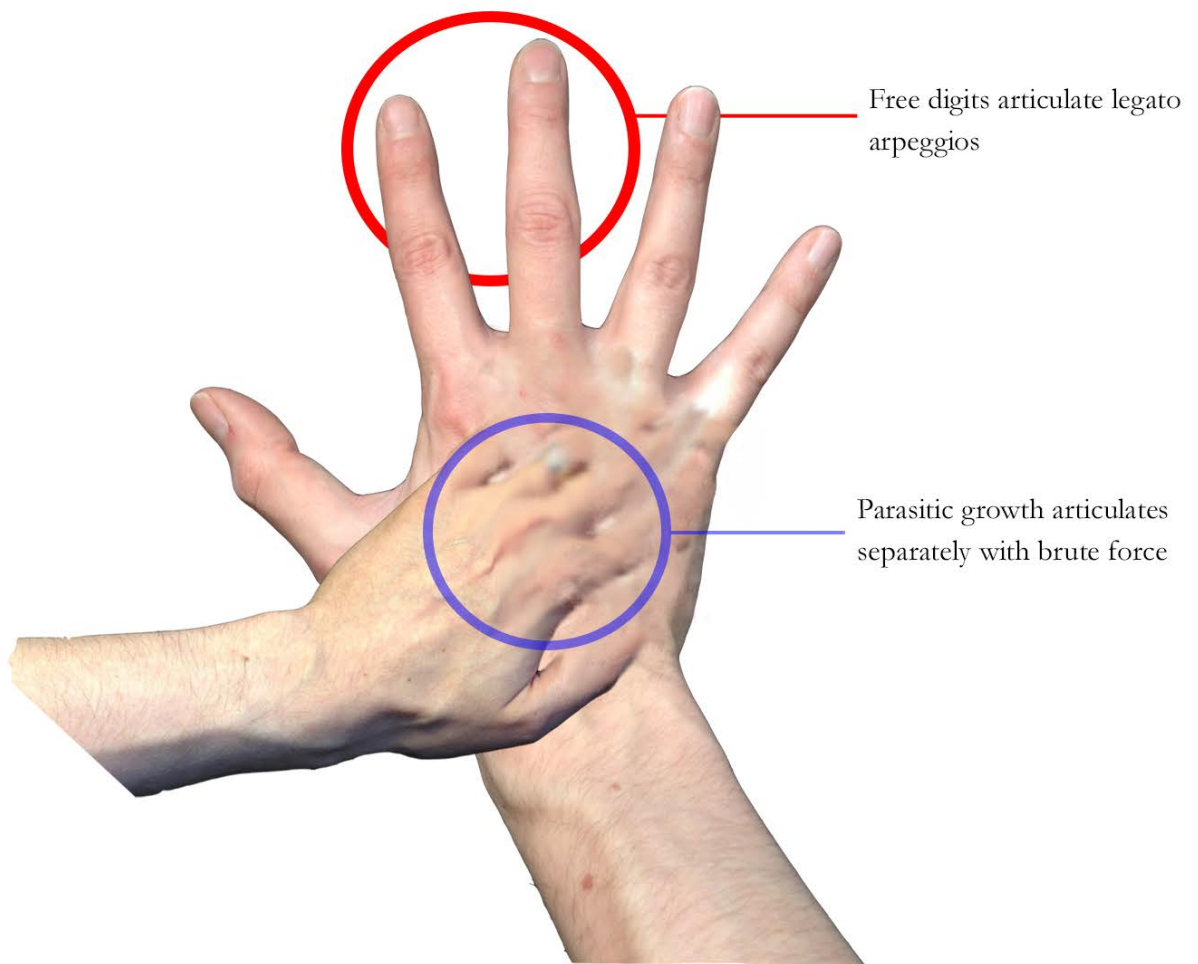
Both halves of appendage have little to no independence.
Can only usefully be used as a fixed object.



6th Mutation

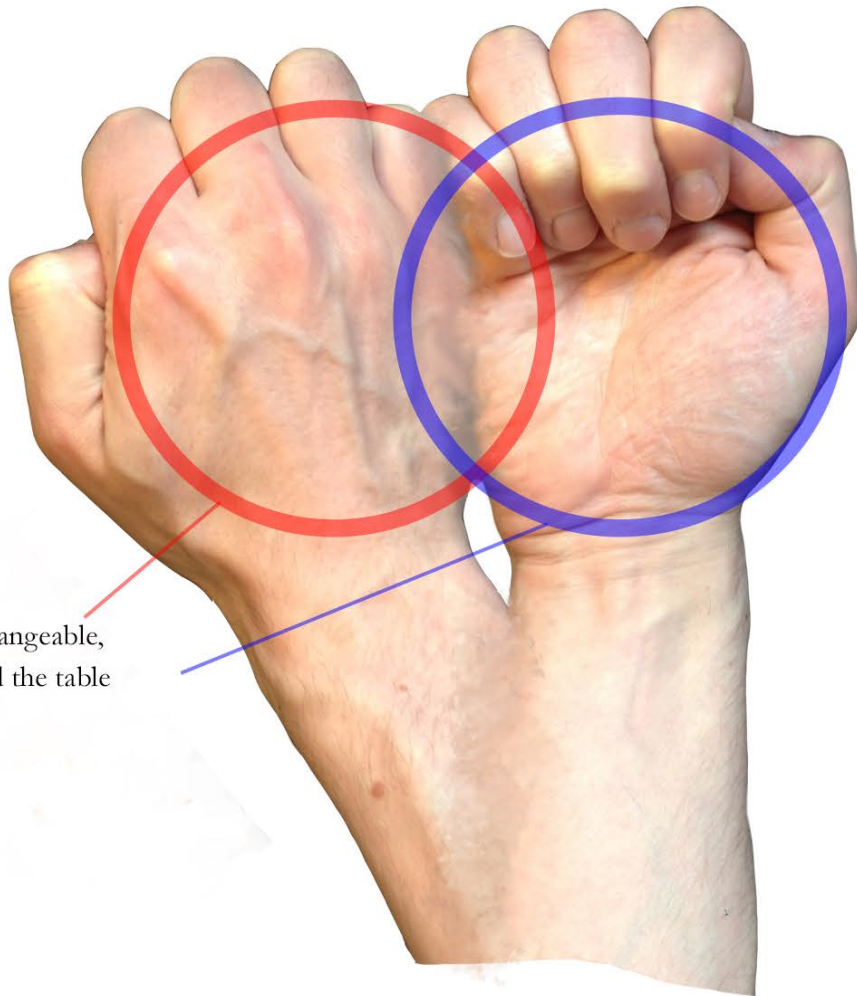
Here, the RH articulates steady streams attacks like scales and arpeggios. The LH should act as a kind of fused parasitic appendage, articulating its own rhythms completely independently.

The LH either presses down, or pulls down the RH to sound 'unintentional' slams with the RH palm. It is important that these clusters are outside of the RH rhythmic patterns.



7th Mutation

Here both RH and LH fists are fused together. They should play by rotating over or around each other across the tabletop. It may be impossible to create an entirely smooth and even passage, but this is fine, and desirable.



Fists connected/interchangeable,
meaning moving around the table
involves 'rolling'