

## 17 Manipulate the Key

*The biggest illusion is that the key goes down*

The perception of what we're doing has a great influence on how we do it. If we think we are pressing the key down, inevitably something in us drops as well, compressing the key. This is worst in **forte**. The drop can be almost anywhere in the body: the MCP joint, the wrist, the forearm, or even somewhere in the torso – the neck or upper back. The resulting compression blocks movement, hence all the 'relaxation moves' we see that aim to restore agility; hence the stilted, note-by-note melodies we hear. Why not just make all those relaxation moves unnecessary? Why not just change the perception? Does the key really go down? What if it were a lever to be manipulated? What if we could move from one manipulation to the next in an unbroken, floating line of continuous motion?

*Maintaining equilibrium*

As you play, let the fingertip descend with the key, but let almost everything else in the body rise. "For every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction." Cultivate the equal and opposite reaction, balancing the down and the up forces, maintaining equilibrium. Don't fall; there'll be no need to catch yourself. Create no tension, from which you must free yourself with a relaxation move that tends to pull you further off-balance.

*The key is a lever*

This exercise changes the way we move a key by changing the way we perceive it. The weight of a lever to be manipulated doesn't pull it down: its mass may be moved up or down with equal ease. In this new sensorial world we can actually hold the key and wiggle it any way we want. Gravity becomes irrelevant. The very nature of the action forces us to equalize the down and up forces. It's the first step in freeing ourselves from the disease of 'down.'

**Step 1: Grab the key** – Use a thumb and 2<sup>nd</sup> bird beak to grab the edge of a key. Pinch the key edge – the little part of its flat surface that sticks out – with thumb tip and fingertip .

**Step 2: Wiggle the key** up and down, so gently that no note sounds. Sense the hammer jiggling inside.

**Step 3: Wiggle it enough to sound a note lightly** – just a little more vigorously. Imagine that you are holding the hammer itself. Jiggle the key to throw the hammer lightly onto the string (*Termite Temerity*).

**Step 4: Sense the hammer's weight** – Jiggle more gently again, making no sound. Sense how heavy the hammer is. Feel its weight. Is it 10 grams... 20 grams... 50 grams? Bounce the hammer lightly on the inner end of the key – feel hammer and key losing and regaining contact. Does this improve your control of step 3?

**Step 5:** Lay the flat of the finger, all three phalanges if possible, entirely in the keybed. **'Tunnel' the finger into the key** like a termite, then jog the key to sense the weight of the hammer (*Squirming Worm*). Which technique gives you a more exact sense of its weight?

Falling actually divorces you from gravity: there's no control, no relationship. Don't press the key down but manipulate it, eliminating the sense of falling altogether. Moving it directly, instead of falling into it, establishes relationship to the key– and begins the process of establishing relationship to the field of gravity in which we will eventually stand.

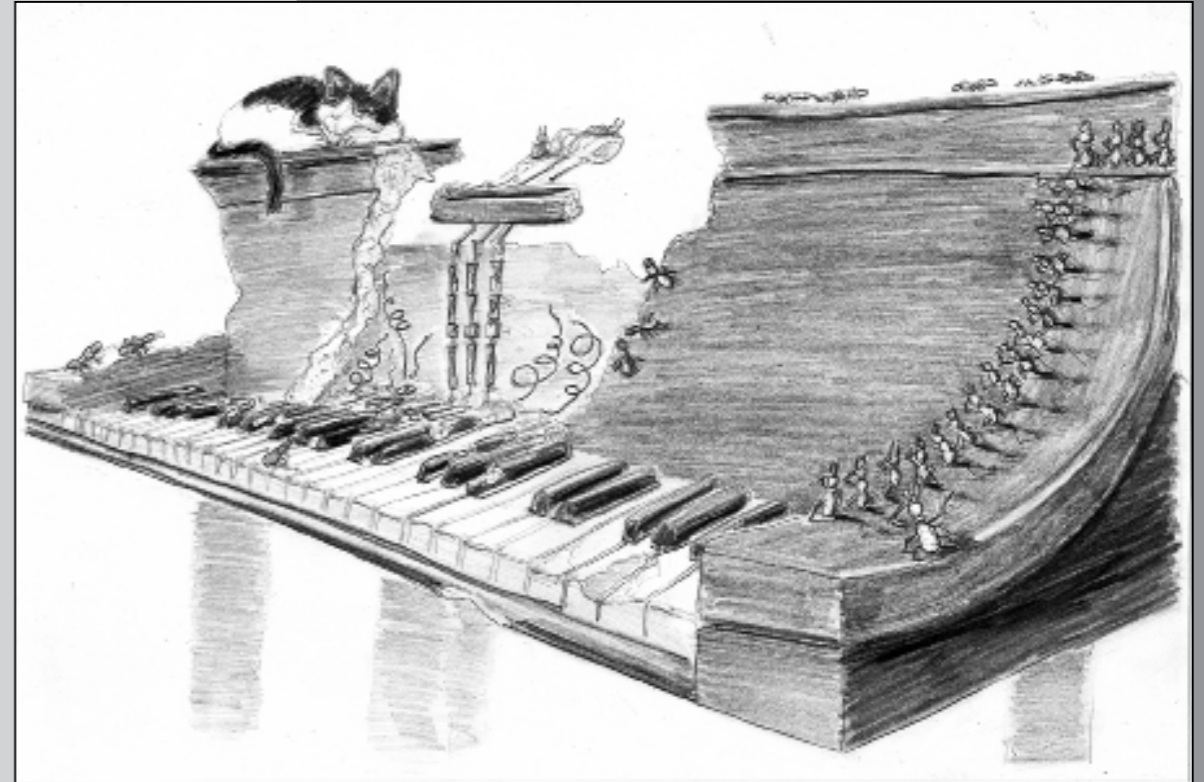
### Purpose:

- experience the key as a lever: sense the difference between pressing a key down and manipulating it.
- replace the sense of falling into a key with the sense of manipulating it.

### Potential errors:

- over-clamping the key, falling into it or compressing it instead of moving it up and down equally, wiggling it
- failing to keep the 'up' just as important as the 'down.'

## Termite Temerity



These termites had the temerity to eat the piano! They're lining up like soldier ants planning what to devour next. At least they left a place for Lucky to snooze... Can your fingers tunnel through the keys the way the termites tunnel through the piano's wood?

Grab the **Key Edges (KE)**; feel the keys with the fingers like termites trying to get inside them. Play the stems up notes with the right hand, stems down with the left. Play this basic version **forte** the first time, **pianissimo** the second.

### Improvisation & Variation

- 🐾 Create other melodies and rhythms, always grabbing the key edges.
- 🐾 Play **staccato**, or play almost **legato** – can you make the piano sing while repeating notes?
- 🐾 'Tunnel,' use a bird beak, or play with a more normal touch creating the same 'pinched' sound.
- 🐾 Play the extended version in appendix two.