Vol 15, No 1 (2022)

Improvisation and Emergence, For Frédérique Arroyas

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1.

As I start to draft this editorial, again, in early April on the West Coast, at the turning of the third year of a global pandemic, I'm haunted by lines from the American poet Charles Wright, who frequently returns in his 1995 collection *Chickamauga* to a fraught temporality at the intersections of words and music. He opens his brief elegy for Miles Davis—dated "Sunday, the twenty-ninth of September, 1991," the morning after the trumpeter's passing—with a difficult call to start over, to write something more: "Those two dark syllables, *begin*, / offer no sustenance" (59). Finding the means to craft anything of substance in the wake of such an ending, anything that might sustain his voice in the aftermath of loss, means for Wright to return to the anaformative impulse[1] within those vestigial syllables, to the nascent musical textures of inception, even if that return offers no guarantees, no obvious sustenance. He concludes the poem by starting over:

> From the top . . . Beginning in ignorance, we stick to the melody—
> Knowledge, however, is elsewhere,
>   a tune we've yet to turn to,
> Its syllables scrubbed in light, its vestibules empty.

Wright's poem is autumnal, mournful, and valedictory, not exactly the hopeful stuff of spring, but it resonates with me nonetheless at this moment because of how it wants to begin (and to re-begin) to map the risk of unknowing, of opening ourselves up to an extemporaneity, to an unfixing of time—potentially gesturing emptily and elsewhere, if not scrubbed with syllable-sized glimmers of hope, toward a yet-to-be composed line that's often deeply challenging to access—and to nurture our capacity to turn our co-creative intelligence in uncharted and other "directions" (Miles Davis's term): to let ourselves go, and go on. To get started, again. And maybe to emerge with something sustained and sustaining to sound, and to say.

2.

Frédérique Arroyas is a founding editor of *Critical Studies in Improvisation / Études critiques en improvisation*, together with Ellen Waterman and Ajay Heble. In the editorial for the first issue of this open-access journal, published in 2004, they set in motion the critical, creative, and scholarly mapping of an emergent, uncharted interdisciplinary field, Critical Studies in Improvisation:

> CSI/ÉCI's goals are to promote inquiries into how improvisation expresses notions of race, culture, ethnicity, class, nation, and gender, as well as how improvisation might prompt new or revitalized understandings of history, community, memory, agency, and difference. In an effort to understand how improvisation produces its social effects, CSI/ÉCI will give voice to investigations examining practice and grounding theory in site-specific contexts, assess the (often utopian) claims made for the social and cultural impact of improvisation, and, finally, promote an awareness of intercultural and transnational discourses on improvisation. We are committed to providing a forum for voices that are all-too-often unheard in discourses on improvisational music, and we encourage diversity of expression.

The editorial is offered as a welcome, as an opening into the development of diversely committed and engaged critical thinking around "the social and cultural impact" of an

improvisational practice, its relevance. It's important, I think, to return at this moment to the journal's beginnings, to our on-going project, poised with rigorous uncertainty at the brink of hope and unknowing.

Threaded throughout Frédérique Arroyas's writing and thinking around improvisation, over the past two decades, is a careful and necessary critical interrogation of this utopianism, an imperative to "question the limits of improvisation as an ideal" as she writes, together with Ellen Waterman, in "Reaching Out: Improvisation's Potential and Limitations," the editorial for issue 4.1, from 2008. Two years earlier, in the editorial for issue 2.1, "Vers une parité de participation et de representation," she had already scrutinized this exact question by nuancing the tensions between the semiotic and the material, between the aesthetic and the political, between representation and enactment:

> S'il est vrai que de cette vision découle un certain optimisme approchant l'utopie, il faut toutefois se rappeler qu'une fonction importante des utopies est d'aborder une réflexion critique sur le réel. Les pratiques de l'improvisation musicale collective constituent des actes qui seraient une amorce, un point d'entrée dans la sphère politique et sociale. [. . .] C'est dans ce sens que pourrait se concevoir le fléchissement des oppressions hiérarchiques, permettant la coopération et la contribution d'individus, la possibilité d'une parité de participation et de représentation.

Borrowing from work by Ernst Bloch, Michel de Certeau, and Nancy Fraser, she notes the fundamentally critical impetus of utopian idealism, that utopian thinking disrupts as much as it affirms. Improvisational practices gather possibility into a divergent *amorce*, a calling into being or a point of entry that signals a weakening of hierarchical and oppressive socialities and allows for a nascent parity of access, of being seen and heard. (An *amorce* can also refer to an angler's bait, or to the primer in a cartridge or shell—a first, explosive bite—resonances rooted in the Latin verb *mordēre*, to bite, which suggest an English homophone that shares its etymology: a morsel, a bit.) This potential moment of opening in and out, as a material means of initiating participatory, isonomic space, lies at the heart of what improvisational work wants to do.

This Barthes-influenced politicizing of the participant reader-listener is already in play in Frédérique Arroyas's 2001 monograph, *La lecture musico-littéraire: à l'écoute de Passacaille de Robert Pinget et de Fugue de Roger Laporte*. To be *à l'écoute*—anticipating, perhaps, Jean-Luc Nancy's theorizing of inter-embodied listening—is to be actively, corporeally attentive to the co-creative, readerly music of the text, the dehiscent weave of fleshed resonance and responsive sounding:

> Puisque, en fin de compte, c'est aux lecteurs que revient la tâche d'actualiser les ressources aurales du langage écrit, l'acte de lecture est en effet beaucoup plus qu'un simple décodage menant à la compréhension d'un texte : la lecture fait intervenir le corps, l'imagination, la mémoire. La « pureté » de l'enclos linguistique qui est le texte est pour ainsi dire envahie par la subjectivité de l'individu ou, pour dire cela autrement, c'est à la lecture que le texte devient un objet dynamique, qu'il devient signifiant et que son potentiel est actualisé. Ainsi en est-il pour la lecture nommée ici « musico-littéraire » — celle qui permet une interaction entre texte et musique dans la mesure où elle est amenée à considérer, à faire résonner, dans le texte littéraire, des composantes musicales jugées pertinentes pour l'interprétation du texte. (10)

Reading—as a practice of listening, of being *à l'écoute*—means disturbing the forced enclosures of the well-crafted artifact (whether book or poem or composition), upsetting its hypostatized utopian purity, and actualizing instead the dynamic, interactive potential (that is to say, the critical valences of the utopian) in the situated body, imagination, and memory of the attentive auditor: to turn listener into co-creative agent. While at this moment in her thinking she tends still to mark this actualizing of disruptive potential as a kind of phenomenological ideal, heard as hopeful kinetic resonance between text and reader, she also begins to test the limits of such resonances, what she calls *présences musicales*, as they register in the physiology of a performative body. She brings into audibility here a version of what Vladimir Jankélévitch, meditating on the *composantes musicales* of Franz Liszt, calls improvisation, the performative materializing in a text or score of its "fact of doing" (qtd. in Gallope 152).

She opens [her editorial to issue 9.2](#) (2013), "Improvisation's Ebb and Flow," by charting the emergent dialectics at those nascent *amorces*, the catch-and-release of craft and risk that subtends the commitment to spontaneity, the nascent politics of that doing:

> Spontaneity relies on a discipline of readiness and an awareness of one's environment. Hard work and commitment underlie the seemingly impulsive spontaneity of a performer's gestures. Consider improvisation as ebb and flow between internalized skills and extemporaneous utterances, a continuous probing of acquired knowledge to pursue an adapted, and adaptable, form of expression.

A participatory politics emerges in the gestural give-and-take between disciplined self-expression and irruptive encounter, a politics that marks a foundational re-thinking of what and how we come to know ourselves, an ongoing re-imagining of adaptive community, of living and working together. "On le sait," she writes in 2015 with her colleague Stéphanie Nutting on the pedagogical potential of improvisation,

> l'improvisation permet de travailler la présence, l'engagement, l'énergie et la prise de risques. [. . .] L'improvisation développe également le rapport à l'autre, l'écoute et l'échange.

Improvisational presence, manifest in *présences musicales*, offers the willing collaborator a glimpse of risky but hopeful possibility, to begin to create a more just, inclusive, and open kind of community, as we foster our attentive rapport with others, our emergent divergences.

After 18 years serving as an editor for this journal—as a vital collaborator and crucial intellectual presence—Frédérique Arroyas is moving in new directions. Her deep wisdom and her commitment to the often unseen but demanding work of editing will be missed, but the influence of her thinking on improvisation and of her engagement with the transformative possibilities of spontaneous art will endure as a dynamic presence in these pages. I'm profoundly grateful for her collegiality and her friendship, and wish her nothing but bright moments—as Rahsaan Roland Kirk might say—in the days to come.

<div align="center">3.</div>

The articles gathered in this issue of *Critical Studies in Improvisation / Études critiques en improvisation* chart aspects of emergence—a nascent sociality—in improvisational musicking. Garrett Michaelsen amplifies and extends a pedagogy of interconnectivity close to what Frédérique Arroyas has developed, a practice that "opens a space for change that, like any collaborative and creative activity, involves risk and conflict, but has the potential to better represent the interests and identities of all those involved." Nuancing tactics for this work of

opening offers us the basis of a method for negotiating risk and unfolding community. Peter J. Woods also describes the "matrix of interactions" in an improvisational pedagogy, aiming to develop "new ways of interacting as social actors and making meaning through emergent performance practices." Kathryn Ladano, too, in a carefully attentive autoethnography, describes how free improvisation has "broken down barriers," and allowed her "to form closer connections with others," as she sounds the textures and valences of alterity, of intersecting divergences.

Sam McAuliffe, through an encounter with the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, re-conceives improvisation as a particular kind of conversation, not as "intersubjective dialogue" between discrete performers, but as a close attending to the dynamic, fleeting matter of those interstices themselves, of what exactly moves between us as the stuff of process: "To improvise is to engage with that which is beyond oneself and allow that thing to direct our thinking and doing, that is, we allow the world to elucidate the culture of our epoch." Lauren Levesque's lyrical meditation on the temporalities of intergenerational listening attends to the "feelings of instability, fragility, and vulnerability" in such conversations across the generational differences, pursuing on situated instance of that elucidation. And Jeremy Rose assesses the "healthy tension" between expressive coherence and individual autonomy in the extended performances of the Australian improvising trio The Necks—Chris Abrahams, Lloyd Swanton, and Tony Buck—whose work is also featured on the splash page of this issue. Their co-creative playing, Rose contends, overlaps "musical processes and social interaction," offering "strategies for implementing change and innovation," and sounding "a long arc of possibilities." We hear not only their music, but also the unfolding emergent process of shared intention. That is, in the unclosed recurrences that their coming together sounds, we start again into—and out of—that resonant *amorce*.

Notes

[1] The phrase "anaformative impulse" is the late Richard Iton's, which I'm adapting from a recent talk by Katherine McKittrick. See Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, Oxford UP, 2010.

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Improvising a Music-Theory Curriculum

Garrett Michaelsen

Music theory is a curious subject. On the one hand, it claims to describe elemental objects—the pitches, intervals, scales, chords, durations, rhythms, and meters that make up musical sounds. On the other, it describes cultural objects—the common progressions, melodic formulas, and forms of specific musical styles and genres. But does this distinction actually exist? How objective are those fundamental objects? Even a musical aspect as seemingly universal as pitch is in fact defined in cultural terms which music theorists tend to adopt axiomatically and unthinkingly. While the predominant Western conception of pitch relies on a spatial metaphor, in which pitches lie on a spectrum of low to high, this metaphor is far from ubiquitous. Other cultures discuss pitch as being big or small, male or female, young or old.[1] A rejoinder to this observation might be: of course, music theory, if taught in the West, is of the West. Why would this even need to be stated?

One reason for questioning the assumptions surrounding how a subject is defined is that those assumptions have far-reaching ramifications. Cora Palfy has raised the issue of music theory's "'hidden curriculum': a concept or idea that, though not explicitly taught to students, is communicated by the classroom or curricular design" (8). Palfy reveals the results of a survey (analyzed with the help of statistician Eric Gilson) showing the extent to which students have internalized the message that many of their music-theory classes gives them: namely, that music of the Western common-practice tradition is the most valuable. While she does find that many students have been exposed to works by non-male, non-Western, and non-white composers, the quantity of such works pales in comparison to those by, typically, white-male Germans of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Philip Ewell has furthered this critique by shining a bright light on music theory's "white racial frame" (1.3). Indeed, Ewell rightfully calls what is commonly termed "music theory" as "white music theory," and reveals the extent to which the entire discipline—in both its pedagogies and research interests—promotes the value of white music and theories over all others (1.1). He draws attention to the explicit racism in influential German theorist Heinrich Schenker's writings and connects this racism to notions of hierarchy in music, ultimately arguing that "race, racism, and white supremacy are, in fact, a significant part of Schenker's music theories, and a part that we should consider in how we approach the man and his ideas" (4.5.5). By resting on a particular edifice—one in which a low-to-high pitch metaphor builds to chords, progressions, cadences, forms, and the like—music theory reinforces a conception of value in music that underlines the hegemony of the common-practice period and white men.

Calls for more diversity in education are omnipresent. What I would like to advocate for in this article, however, is diversity in instructional methods and methodologies. In particular, I would like to discuss the use of improvisation to teach music theory. This is not a new idea. Calls to use improvisation in aural curricula stem back at least to Kate Covington's discussion of how improvisation is a complex, real-world activity that ultimately leads to deeper and more integrated student learning. And these calls have been heeded: most large-publisher music-theory texts adopted by American music departments include improvisation activities, none more so than Nancy Rogers's "structured improvisations" in her recent editions of Robert Ottman's classic text *Music for Sight Singing*. What these approaches lack, however, is a sense that being able to fluently speak in music—whether using Western or non-Western musical structures—is an essential aspect of students' musical training. Tacking improvisation onto conservatory programs focused on molding orchestral performers, who may never be asked to

improvise professionally, will always feel extraneous. While I am aware of no study exploring the degree to which instructors use improvisation in contemporary music-theory classrooms, I expect that improvisation has not yet broken apart the "holy tetralogy" of most curricula: four-part chorale-style part writing, Roman-numeral analysis, sight singing, and dictation. Many additions have been made to this tetralogy over the years, including counterpoint, model composition, analytical writing, and even improvisation, but these curricular extensions often act as appetizers preceding, or desserts following, the main course.

Defining a Modern Music-Theory Curriculum

What would a music-theory curriculum look like with improvisation placed at or nearer to its center? In the remainder of this article, I will explore this idea and recount my experiences attempting to do so in a music-theory program at a public university in the United States. My approach has not been to substantially reduce the tetralogy and focus extensively on improvisation, an approach taken by Ed Sarath in his book *Music Theory through Improvisation*.[2] While I am drawn to his all-in approach, several factors have pulled me in other directions. The strongest of these factors is the weight of tradition and the expectation of what "knowing music theory" means. The edifice that makes up "music theory of the common-practice era" has evolved over hundreds of years. It has its roots in the teachings of "great" composers like J.S. Bach, Mozart, and Haydn, and has reached a remarkably mature state today. Students who work diligently through this material will emerge with an ability to understand this music in broad terms. They may not be able to explain the differences in tonal syntax among composers like Corelli, C.P.E. Bach, and Chopin, but they will possess the tools to understand their work at a general level. Notably, they will not become fluent speakers of this musical language since they are rarely asked to improvise with it, something that was very common amongst musicians of those eras. But chipping away at this pedagogical monument creates a dilemma: with each stroke of the chisel, what will happen to the structure overall? Which stroke will cause it to topple, and which will open up space for something new? As a music theorist trained in orthodox approaches, the logical progression and clearly defined goals of a conventional theory curriculum appeal to me. But the courageous voices of theorists such as Palfy and Ewell have shown the degree to which this curriculum is not only reductive but also supportive of ideologies that can lead to ethnocentrism at best and white supremacy at worst.

The question of what a music education should contain today is very much unanswered. One of the documents which has catalyzed calls for change is the College Music Society's 2014 "Transforming Music Study from Its Foundations: A Manifesto for Progressive Change in the Undergraduate Preparation of Music Majors." This document (with Ed Sarath as its lead author) has henceforth (and forebodingly) been referred to as the "Manifesto" by many, and has resulted in countless discussions, conference panels, and papers in response.[3] Its "three key pillars" are "creativity, diversity, and integration," which, as Campbell et al. contend, should be emphasized over the Euro-classical values of interpretation, specialization, and separation (4–6). The authors argue that these changes are necessary to prepare contemporary music students for the broader, global musical culture they will encounter in their careers. They even go so far as to claim that, by shifting from the backwards-looking focus of prior curricula to a present-and-future orientation, these changes can help return music education to a more central place in Western culture. Whether or not this can be achieved, the overall goal of making musical training more relevant to students' needs today reverberates strongly in my department. Our signature programs are audio engineering and music education, with smaller programs in music business and performance, as well as a new program on composition for new media. The students that complete our program are unlikely to perform with orchestras, but are very likely to write their own music, produce and record others' music, or educate students about the nearly

infinite spectrum of music available to listeners today. Even though we began our curriculum transformation a few years before the Manifesto appeared, we came to similar conclusions: our students need to be able to create in our pluralistic musical present.

Jazz Improvisation and the Theory Classroom

As a jazz musician myself, I have drawn on many of the techniques developed in jazz pedagogy to foster the creative impulse amongst my music-theory students. Foremost among these techniques is the ability to improvise while soloing over chord changes. The process of getting students to be able to do this is valuable on its own: we begin by listening to a recording of a tune and discussing its general features (such as timbres, meters, and forms). Next, we analyze the lead sheet, making sense of the chord symbols as harmonic progressions through Roman-numeral analysis. These lead-sheet examples serve dual-duty as opportunities for students to realize keyboard harmonizations. With a firm understanding of the chord structures in place, students then pick up their instruments and work through chordal arpeggiations and scalar representations informed by chord-scale theory. Having students use their primary instruments or voices offers them a more comfortable environment for their exploration of the theoretical concepts contained in any given lead sheet, as well as ingraining those concepts in their fingers and ears experientially. As an example, I have discussed elsewhere the use of rhythm changes to introduce secondary-dominant chords ("Rhythm Changes, Improvisation, and Chromaticism"). Through playing the chords and gaining sufficient mastery to be able to melodically improvise over them, students inhabit the abstract harmonic concept far more fully than they would by merely analyzing it in scores or notating it in four-part chorales.

Another benefit of using jazz improvisation in theory classrooms is that, by requiring students to learn solo improvisation, mastering music-theoretical concepts, and handling these concepts aurally becomes a necessity. As I have written before, "improvisation is music theory and ear training with immediacy" ("Improvising to Learn/Learning to Improvise"). The degree of fluency required to be able to fit into a complex musical moment far surpasses what students typically achieve when sitting passively in class. Their improvisations create a powerful feedback loop in which they conceive musical utterances based on their knowledge of music-theoretical concepts, perform those utterances, aurally process how those utterances fit with the emerging flow surrounding them, and then use those perceptions to inform their next utterances. Anecdotally, jazz musicians are some of the top performers in my theory classes, which I believe stems from the much higher standard of mastery required for them to be able to handle music-theoretical concepts in the moment. While I don't expect all my students to achieve the level of stylistic proficiency that students who specifically study jazz improvisation do, I do expect everyone to demonstrate their knowledge of music-theoretical topics using such improvisations.

Idiomatic and Non-Idiomatic Improvisational Pedagogies

To riff on Derek Bailey's concept of "idiomatic" and "non-idiomatic" improvisation, my use of jazz improvisation in the theory classroom might be called idiomatic. It is obviously idiomatic in that they are improvising using the jazz idiom and I am using the term here to refer to the idiomatic nature of the improvisation itself. I also use it—in contrast to Bailey—to describe the ways in which these classroom improvisations connect to pedagogical traditions in jazz: when performing these activities, students are essentially in a jazz improvisation class learning to improvise in ways idiomatic to jazz. While my goals are ultimately to deepen their understanding of some music-theoretical topic, the improvisations are rooted in an actual musical tradition. Other such pedagogically idiomatic approaches have been explored: Peter Schubert teaches

improvised vocal counterpoint from the Renaissance, Michael Callahan explores Baroque counterpoint through keyboard improvisations, and Gilad Rabinovitch and Johnandrew Slominski use Galant *partimenti* to teach eighteenth century improvisation. All of these examples stem from real improvisatory practices of the past, many of which have only recently been resuscitated. They are also valuable ways to revive improvisation as an essential aspect of musical training in common-practice traditions after its languishing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

There are ways of using improvisation pedagogically that may be called "non-idiomatic" in that the improvisation activities are not linked to pedagogies of a particular idiom. When I ask students to improvise a melody using a scale in any style they like, I do so in this non-idiomatic sense. It is not that the resulting music will have no idiom, but rather that students are not confined within a specific idiom when asked to engage with the exercise. Improvisation in this sense offers an exploratory environment with fewer rules and limits. Other examples of this approach in the theory classroom include constructing and shifting between meters by layering improvised rhythmic articulations; creating graphic representations of musical contours or textures and then performing them; and composing a twelve-tone row and then using its subsets and sequences for harmonic and melodic improvisations. Some of these tasks can express musical idioms (as in modernist graphic scores) but they often don't connect to the instructional methods of a performance tradition. As a result, I have found non-idiomatic improvisational pedagogies to be useful in introducing students to a concept but not as educationally enriching as idiomatically oriented tasks. Students understand when they are being asked to do something which rests on a historical foundation and will develop a real-world skill, and consequently they value that skill more highly.

Curricular Change *as* Improvisation

In any attempt at large-scale curricular change, battles inevitably ensue. While most of the heated arguments between the old and new guards at my institution preceded my arrival, I could still sense many of the scars those clashes left. The deepest of these scars came from a sense among non-theory faculty that the subject of music theory had become utterly unresponsive to the current needs of students. On one side, the music theorists guarded their turf and felt that, as subject-area experts, their opinions should hold greater weight. On the other, the faculty at large—consisting of educators, recording engineers, historians, composers, and performers—had outlined a vision for the department that necessitated broad change that the music theorists were unwilling to consider. My most vivid memory of one such internecine debate involves the augmented-sixth chord. From the perspective of some of my non-theorist colleagues, the complexity of the topic and its opaque nomenclature made its study seem unnecessary if our goals were to expose students to a broader array of musical traditions. We ended up deciding to keep it, though discussed in fewer class sessions than is typical, as a way of highlighting the differences between "Eurological" and "Afrological" approaches to harmony, to use George Lewis's terms. From a Eurological perspective, the chord offered a chance to explore the apotheosis of a contrapuntal understanding of harmony, with chromatic lines pushing the very identity of the chord as a "chord" to its breaking point. From an Afrological point of view, the chord can be compared with the tritone substitution, a seemingly similar chord that originated in jazz as a process of substituting one chord for another in a repeating form— what Henry Louis Gates Jr. might call "signifyin(g) on" a tune. While the augmented sixth chord and the tritone substitution can result in similar chordal structures, their distinct originations— one through counterpoint and the other through chordal substitution—makes them ideal opportunities for discussing with students how similar concepts can rest on very different foundations.

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As I have reflected on the process by which our peculiar (in both senses of the term) music-theory curriculum came to be, it occurs to me that this process was fundamentally improvisational. Instead of being controlled by a single person or single disciplinary tradition, it was open to the perspectives of the whole department, incorporating the contributions of many. Like an improvisation, not every idea made a lasting impact on the direction the curriculum ultimately took, but the lateral airing of these ideas established a tenor of openness that helped make it what it became. Like an improvisation, the curriculum continues to change over time, constantly adapting to the needs of the students and expertise of the instructors. And like an improvisation, the curriculum is unique to its place and time but open to disciplinary nomadism, which is a key aspect of improvisatory sounding.

Constructing a curriculum in this way has not been easy. No text exists that we can easily adopt, and no established pedagogical path shows us the way forward. Our procedure has been to search for materials widely, borrowing concepts from Sarath and others, and writing many of our own documents. One of the challenges of making improvisation fundamental to music theory is a chicken-egg problem: if the instructors teaching music theory are trained without having to improvise, will they be able to teach students using improvisation? And which idiomatic improvisations should be used—jazz, Renaissance, Baroque, Galant, Indian, Arabic, or any combinations of these and other systems? The answer to these questions and conundrums is to be improvisational: teach the students you have using the expertise and willingness of your instructors, while pushing everyone to have a more expansive worldview. Don't expect the needs of one place and group of people to be the same as any other. Just as the term "common-practice period" covers a diverse panoply of musicking practices, no single curriculum-for-all exists. Improvising the curriculum opens a space for change which, like any collaborative and creative activity, involves risk and conflict, but has the potential to better represent the interests and identities of all involved. Every path towards change can and should be different, and improvisation—as both activity and philosophy—can guide the way.

Notes

[1] See Zbikowski, "Metaphor and Music Theory," for more on the topic of music and cultural metaphors.

[2] While Sarath covers four-part chorales in chapter 10 (158–67) as well as the related concept of species counterpoint in appendix 1 (293–307), the proportional time spent on these topics compared to others is an order of magnitude less than a conventional music-theory text. Much of his text frames typical music-theory topics in terms of jazz and its related pedagogies, with a focus on performance and improvisation of concepts using voice, instrument, or keyboard.

[3] See, for instance: Seaton, "Reconsidering Undergraduate Music History"; Snodgrass, "Integration, Diversity, and Creativity"; and Campbell, "The Manifesto in Motion."

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The Collaborative Pedagogies of Solo Improvisation: Learning through Performance in Noise Music

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Introduction

Within empirical studies centered on free improvisation pedagogies in music education, scholars have found a multitude of benefits. These include improved music performance abilities and sociocultural developments (Hickey 440), reduced performance anxiety (Allen 113), improved confidence (Hickey et al. 135), and increased student agency (Wright and Kanellopoulous 82). Theoretical investigations have also positioned this music making practice as a valuable educational technology, with authors framing improvisation pedagogies as an inherently democratic educational praxis (Kanellopoulos 116; Niknafs, "Free Improvisation" 30) and liberatory form of knowledge construction (Fischlin et al. 56; Niknafs, "Khas-o-Khâshâk" 32). To this end, scholars have established the foundational role free improvisation can and should play within the process of learning through making music. Yet despite these insights, extant research has largely failed to consider the mechanisms through which individuals learn while engaged in the process of free improvisation. Stated differently, previous studies have shown that musicians develop their musical and sociocultural knowledges by freely improvising, but *how* free improvisation leads to that knowledge construction remains largely unexamined.

Although multiple musical contexts can serve as sites of research for exploring mechanisms for knowledge construction through free improvisation, I use this paper to examine the pedagogical nature of noise music, a caustic hybrid of industrial, punk, and electronic music (Bailey 31) that regularly employs practices connected to freely improvised music making (Klett and Gerber 277; Novak 159) and has largely been overlooked in music education literature. Drawing on Thomson's notion of performance as classroom, as well as my own process model of artistic practice in noise music, I explore the pedagogical interactions of one exemplary noise performance: a video of longstanding US noise artist Crank Sturgeon performing at the Sorority House venue in Portland, OR (Bellerue). Through the analysis of this video, I contend that a distributed and non-anthropocentric understanding of collaboration at the heart of noise music expands the borders of performance as classroom to engage not only the performer on stage but the audience and the music making technologies involved in the process of developing a supposedly individual artistic practice. In doing so, I challenge previous anthropocentric framings of collaboration within improvisation and push future researchers to consider non-human contributions within free improvisation pedagogies.

Exploring the Classrooms of Noise Music

Before analyzing the video of Crank Sturgeon, however, it will help to situate noise music and its emergent pedagogies within a broader historical context. Although noise music draws influence from a wide array of sources—including punk, industrial, mid-century experimental music, and free jazz—the foundations for this abrasive and highly caustic genre primarily rest within two music communities from the late 1970s and early 1980s: the Japanese harsh noise scene and the European power electronics scene (Novak; Taylor). Music from these two communities then traveled to North America as US artists blended influences from both (Candey 43–4). But, as

many scholars have argued, defining noise music through this simplified, aesthetic lineage ignores the multitude of entry points into noise from other music traditions (Novak 7). Additionally, the existence of groups like the Nihilist Spasm Band point to a North American noise music tradition that emerged before the genre was defined (Hadfield).

For Atton, the construction of noise music as a genre must therefore be understood discursively as musicians and listeners constantly engage in the pedagogical process of constructing genre boundaries and musical knowledge through performances and interpersonal interactions (327). The performance by the Art Ensemble of Chicago at Trip Metal Fest (Histamine), a noise-centric festival organized by members of noise group Wolf Eyes, gestures towards this border work: despite being commonly defined outside of the genre, noise musicians and fans embraced the creative music group as both influential precursors and contemporary practitioners of the genre (Basu 67). As for musical knowledge, Klett and Gerber locate the emergence of musical skills and ideologies within the interaction between performer, audience, and instrumentation, an interaction that relies on indeterminant and improvisatory approaches to music making (287). Through this framing, noise becomes an "alternative pedagogical institution" (Fischlin et al. 36) aligned with and emergent from the educative space created by free improvisation and its surrounding community.

To better understand what those pedagogies entail, Thomson's dual formulations of performance as classroom and scene as classroom provide a valuable framework. Starting with performance as classroom, Thomson contends that the performative moment within freely improvised music provides a space for musicians to not only develop musical techniques but socio-cultural skills and interpersonal relationships (4). This conception aligns with Lewis' autodidactic framing of improvisational pedagogies where people develop highly situated musical practices, cultural identities, and ideologies through the creation of music (1). Thomson also asserts that the spontaneous nature of free improvisation requires a non-hierarchical and communal approach to pedagogy during which "musical authority circulates" (4). Instead of one person directing the group, performers follow and lead at various moments throughout the performance. In this sense, free improvisation as a pedagogical interaction involves "inventing new codes, inventing the message at the same time as language" (Attali 134). Musical knowledge emerges from a communal process of listening and responding to one another such that meaning and music making take place with individual developments of personal technique following suit.

Adjacent to the performance as classroom, Thomson positions the scene as classroom as another pedagogical space (7), referring to the individuals that form a given music community and "engage in a system of subtle mentorship" (8). As Niknafs points out in her study of Iranian "anarcho-improv" scenes, this learning ecology intermingles musical practices with cultural ideologies to produce a broadly encompassing sociocultural curriculum that mirrors the performance as classroom ("Khas-o-Khâshâk" 40). In my previous research, I utilized the scene as classroom as a frame to investigate the Milwaukee noise scene and produce what I define as a process model of artistic practice (see fig. 1) (Woods, "Process Model" 755). To explain: as individuals construct their practice as musicians, they largely develop knowledge about and understandings of five distinct categories: (1) composition and performance techniques, (2) musical technologies/instruments, (3) dispositions towards music, (4) music scenes, and (5) musical artifacts such as performances, recordings, or compositions. Their practice also emerges through three highly iterative steps. First, the "blown mind moment," a formative encounter with one or more of the five categories listed above, causes a disruptive shift in the

now emergent musician. Seeing one's first freely improvised performance, for example, can produce a blown mind moment if that encounter changes that individual's personal definition of music. Second, musicians enter an extended exploration phase where they independently (or, to use Lewis' term, autodidactically) experiment with the affordances of their new understanding of music and identity. Pedagogically, this stage involves listening to large amounts of new music and tinkering with performance techniques or technologies, leading to an understanding of extant music and the development of an artistic practice. Finally, musicians produce a finished composition or performance that they then share with an audience. Despite this linear description, this process model remains both emergent and iterative as musicians constantly move back and forth between the different phases.
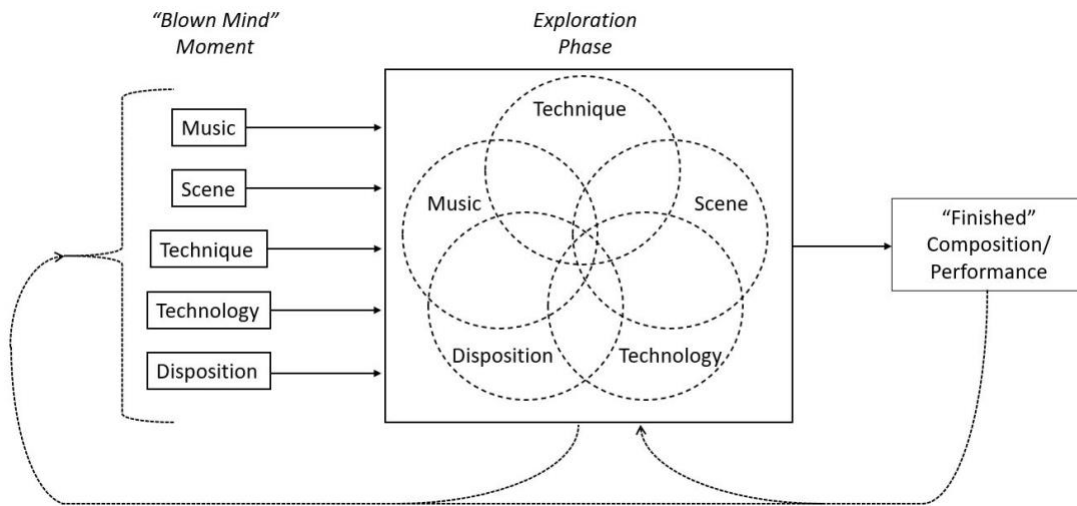

Fig 1. Process Model of Artistic Practice (Woods, "Process Model" 755)

In developing this process model, I built on Thomson's framing of the scene as classroom to consider other mechanisms of learning that occur within music scenes. However, the mechanisms of learning within the performance as classroom remain largely unexamined beyond a general sense of shifting authority. To better understand how individuals learn through performing, I now consider how this process model of artistic practice might operate within the performance as classroom (as opposed to just the scene as classroom). Before doing so, however, I turn towards extant literature to more fully explore the notion of performance as classroom within noise music.

Towards a Noisier Form of Collaborative Learning

In his original formulation, Thomson specifically defines the enactment of performance as classroom as a communal endeavor wherein pedagogies rely on interacting with other people (4). In doing so, he reinforces the widely accepted assumption that free improvisation thrives in collaborative, ensemble settings. Fischlin et al. reinforce this framing by defining free improvisation as a spontaneous form of cocreation (not simply creation) in which a musical form or language emerges through the act of performing (36). Although the boundary of who contributes to this collective process of creation can extend outwards to include the audience (Attali 141), Fischlin et al. almost exclusively discuss free improvisation as a collective activity distributed across performers. This becomes especially clear when the authors discuss "the

ethics of collective free improvisation," reframing music making as an enacted form of human rights precisely because of the negotiation that happens between musicians onstage (19). Bailey's earlier assertions extend this argument by critiquing free improvisation within solo settings, claiming that solo improvisations lose a certain amount of unpredictability as musicians rely on pre-determined vocabularies while jettisoning exploration or discovery (260). This furthers the idea that the performance as classroom exists as a communal space, one in which the classroom has to form around a group of performers and not a soloist.

Returning to the context of noise music, this distinction between the pedagogical possibilities of collective and solo improvisation becomes vitally important for a very simple reason: a lot of noise artists perform solo. This aspect of the genre positions noise music as one valuable site to explore solo improv pedagogies. If Thomson's assertion that the performance as classroom relies on collective forms of improvisation proves correct, though, a good portion of noise performances would not count as pedagogical experiences. However, freely improvising musicians have routinely pushed back on this communal framing of free improvisation. Aligning with Lewis' notion of autodidacticism (1), Fred Anderson's *Exercises for the Creative Musician* illustrates how individuals can learn through solo, private improvisational practices by guiding individual performers through an engagement with various elements of creative music (Anderson and Steinbeck). In doing so, musicians learn through encounters with specific modalities of music making as opposed to other performers. Similarly, Matana Roberts' practice as an improviser often involves creatively responding to non-musical, inanimate objects (Roberts). Even in collaborative contexts, Roscoe Mitchell routinely positions free improvisation as a solo endeavor, a process of "getting people to function as individuals inside of the improvisation" (Mitchell). Mitchell goes on to argue for the value of performing and learning within both solo and collaborative contexts, producing a more holistic understanding of free improvisation and its pedagogies.

Although the link may not be intentional, the emphasis on the collaborative nature of free improvisation within academic literature aligns itself with the related notion of distributed creativity developed by Sawyer and DeZutter (90). Under this notion, the locus of creativity rests not in the individual but in the interactions, responses, and relationships between collaborators. Moreover, the broadened definition of distributed creativity proposed by Glăveanu addresses the challenge posed by solo improvisers such as Roberts. Instead of distributing creativity between individuals, his expanded definition distributes creativity between artists, audiences, artifacts/performances, technologies (i.e. instruments), and time as musicians develop their craft (Glăveanu 27). Importantly, this challenges the anthropocentrism at the heart of the original definition and allows solo noise music performances to be understood as being collaborative. But, rather than completely decentering the human subject, free improvisation engages a dialectic process where the human performer is de- and re-centered at different times to create space for the agentic contribution of non-human actors, such as instruments, to exist alongside human contributions (Petitfils 34; Woods, "Reimagining Collaboration"). Solo performances within this framing still exist as collaborations and, as Moten contends, amplify an inherent challenge to the distinction between individuality and collectivity (129).

Moreover, the accusation made by Bailey that solo improvisations lack the spontaneity of group improvisations relies on a specific understanding of the relationship between a performer and an instrument. Within a traditional approach to performance, musicians develop techniques in which they enact full control over an instrument by reproducing predicted sounds in performance. While Keep expands on this concept within the context of creative music, shifting

towards a model of "instrumentalizing" in which a musician's perspective of their instrument transforms performance into "an act that explores an object for its inherent sonic qualities" (113), he still relies on notions of skill defined by control and reproduction. Although some indeterminacy does exist within this model, a musician's skill rests in their ability to shift from indeterminant sounds back to controlled techniques and vice versa.

Noise music, however, produces a different type of relationship. According to Novak, noise musicians "deliberately attempt to keep themselves from naturalizing . . . instrumental self-expression. To perform their own loss of control as authoritative human subjects, they cannot fully learn the system[s]" (159) of electronic devices that form their instruments. In this framing, noise music instrumentation provides a constantly evolving and spontaneous set of sounds and gestures to which the human performer can respond, and noise musicians embrace that spontaneity. This relationship aligns with Glăveanu's notion that distributed creativity can emerge through the interaction between artist and artifact, and it challenges Bailey's assertion that solo free improvisation loses the spontaneity of ensemble performances. While traditional approaches to technique may limit the spontaneity of some improvisations, a non-anthropocentric framing of music making reintroduces unexpected sonic prompts. This framing positions technology as an agentic contributor within the performance as classroom and aligns with noise music's distributed notion of pedagogy (Woods, "Conceptions of Teaching"; "Reimagining Collaboration"). If free improvisers construct situated knowledge and meaning by listening and responding to the choices of others in the performance as classroom, then solo noise musicians do the same by listening and responding to the sonic contributions of their instruments without asserting their authority. Rather than forcing their instruments to make a specific set of sounds, musician and technology together craft meaning and musical languages as they speak with and to each other.

Noise musicians also extend notions of authorship beyond that of the performer to include the audience and the larger social context. Within Novak's ethnographic study of the Japanese harsh noise scene, for example, the author asserts that noise music "can be deeply evocative of personal emotion, but noise is not 'my sound,' or even 'this sound I make,' but 'a noise that surrounds me and becomes my world'" (159–60). This aligns noise music, at least on a theoretical level, with Glăveanu's assertion that distributed creativity can also emerge through the interaction between audience and artist, an interaction that Klett and Gerber see as foundational to the genre (327). Additionally, noise music evokes the longstanding tradition within experimental music of challenging the hierarchical divide between performer and audience. As Nyman notes, mid-century experimental composers often utilized indeterminacy to amplify the agency of "listeners" by inviting audience members to contribute new sounds to the performance and, further, by reimagining performance structures that removed the agency of the audience (such as dispersing musicians throughout a physical environment and inviting audiences to move freely around the space) (6). To this end, experimental music mirrors participatory forms of music, such as the musical practices of Zimbabwean communities described by Turino where the notion of an audience fails to hold significance since everyone contributes to the performance in meaningful ways (123). In doing so, experimental music challenges the presentational nature of Western music by inviting audiences to contribute to a collective performance and craft their own individualized listening experience (while non-Western, participatory musical forms begin from the assumption of fully agentic collaboration).

All told, this collection of texts expands on Thomson's original formulation of performance as classroom in two directions. First, the classroom no longer has to include an ensemble but can

emerge through a solo performer with the various human and non-human actors that performer engages. Second, audience members can join the classroom through the cultural practices of non-Western, experimental, and noise music. To further explore both extensions, I now turn to the work of Crank Sturgeon as one example of how noise music practitioners conceive of performance as classroom in situ.

The Pedagogy of Crank Sturgeon

Performing since 1992, Crank Sturgeon has become one of the most influential and prolific noise artists within the US noise scene (Bruyninckx; DeRaadt). Through his thirty-year run, Crank Sturgeon has developed into a unique project by "incorporating elements of improvisational comedy, homemade electronics, and jarring junk noise" and drawing from "Dadaist sound poetry, Viennese Actionist confrontation of art/non-art boundaries, and good old-fashioned screaming noise dysfunction" (DeRaadt). In doing so, Crank Sturgeon has constructed a practice that sits at the intersection of free improvisation and composition (or, at the very least, pre-determined musical gesture). As Crank Sturgeon explains, "when I'm doing a live show it's kind of operating on trusted elements. The big unknown is what's going to happen in the show and how it responds to the audience or whatever circumstances are at the venue" (as cited in DeRaadt). Combined with the fact that "all of [Crank Sturgeon's] work tends to combine improvisation with drawing, assemblage, and electronic media" (Space), Crank Sturgeon's work emerges within a matrix of improvised gestures, predetermined performative elements, agentic technologies (in the form of instruments, costumes, etc.), spaces, and audiences. Although Crank Sturgeon remains the sole performer on stage, the project engages creative collaboration across all of the elements described by Glăveanu and produces a unique enactment of performance as classroom through noise.

It is for all of these reasons that I have chosen to focus on Crank Sturgeon's 2007 performance at the Sorority House venue in Portland, OR (Bellerue). I have conducted a close reading (or, more accurately, viewing) of the video, paying particular attention to moments that align conceptually with the process model of artistic practice (Woods, "Process Model" 755) discussed previously. Since the video captures a finished performance, I have specifically sought out evidence of blown mind moments and subsequent phases of exploration. Because I was analyzing video and could watch the performance outside of a linear unfolding of time, I have positioned myself outside of the temporal space in which both Crank Sturgeon and the audience found themselves. While my perspective as analyzer of a recording may have produced a certain distance between my own meaning making and any meaning the audience may have ascribed to the performance in real time—in that, for example, their experiencing a moment only once provides a significantly different context than my being able watch and rewatch things repeatedly—relying on the mediated nature of video has also allowed me to draw on what Halverson and Magnifico define as bidirectional artifact analysis. In this methodology, researchers can "trace core ideas and tools present in the final product back through their development" (Halverson and Magnifico 409), creating an opportunity not to recreate the experience of those in the video but to examine learning more deeply as a process of meaning making distributed across multiple (human and non-human) participants and time. Being able to conduct repeated viewings and temporally move through the recording in different ways therefore provides an affordance for unearthing learning praxes within this performance.

Crank Sturgeon as Learner and Performer

The set starts with a brief moment of absurdist spoken word, with Crank Sturgeon repeating the phrase "get your fish eyeballs here" multiple times before quickly transitioning into a wall of distorted static. The performer head bangs violently enough to throw his fish mask off of his head, revealing the main instrument for the performance: an amplified helmet-type device that includes a small tin can attached to the end of a rope. Crank Sturgeon then plays the instrument by spinning the can around his head and distorting the electrical signal generated by an attached contact microphone with effects pedals. Although quieter passages emerge when Crank Sturgeon turns off his distortion pedals, allowing listeners to hear vocal tirades over the noise, the performance mostly continues at full volume as the artist switches between auxiliary instruments (a guitar, various metal objects, an unplugged cable, and a circuit-bent effects pedal).

Crank Sturgeon's insistence that he primarily relies on trusted or known elements would seem to restrict the pedagogical possibilities of his performances, thus limiting my ability to examine how this performance might provide space for an educational praxis via the performance as classroom: if he already knows what he will do and how his instrumentation will respond, Crank Sturgeon does not leave a lot of space to explore unknown ideas or respond to new sounds. However, about one minute and forty seconds into the video, Crank Sturgeon's equipment suddenly turns off and you can hear him shout "what the fuck" multiple times over silence. This dynamic shift and surprisingly lucid commentary allow for the assumption that a piece of equipment suddenly and unexpectedly broke. Although this may have merely been a performative gesture, Crank Sturgeon admits that he often finds himself in these situations: "My shit is so riddled with accidents that perhaps what you might interpret as tension is actually me improvising my way out of something that isn't working!" (as quoted in Bruyninckx). The instrumentation therefore produces a gesture and Crank Sturgeon needs to respond.

Considered through a pedagogical frame, this moment aligns itself with the process model of artistic practice as Crank Sturgeon moves from blown mind moment to exploration phase within the finished (or, more accurately, finishing) performance. First, Crank Sturgeon experiences an admittedly mild blown moment where his gear suddenly operates in a different way. This alters his understanding of not only his equipment, but also the structure of the performance. To use Thomson's wording, the gear asserts its authority over the performer and invites a response (6). Second, Crank Sturgeon takes this opportunity to immediately shift into an exploratory process, using the broken gear and his attempts to fix it as a new means of making music and reclaiming authority. Structurally, this shift produces a quieter passage, filled with buzzes and synth-like squeals intermingled with sound poetry. Although the knowledge of how to work with his malfunctioning gear may only prove temporarily useful, this moment of problem solving still produces new musical knowledge through a highly truncated version of the process model. Finally, as this sonic exploration begins, the performance continues to unfold. Since noise and free improvisation evoke a pedagogy of constructing musical languages in the performance itself (Attali 134), the act of developing musical knowledge and creating music from that knowledge co-exist in the same temporal moment. It then follows that free improvisation would collapse the process of developing an artistic practice, using this model or another, temporally within an unfolding finished work. In other words, the finished performance contains the entire process model of artistic practice within itself.

Engaging the Audience as Learner and Performer

Within the video, one other clear moment of educational praxis expands on the previous example by inviting the audience into the performance as classroom. Around the seven-minute mark, the performance takes another dramatic shift as Crank Sturgeon introduces a new instrument: a roll of plastic wrap. He instructs the audience to, first, grab on to the sheet as he unravels a continuous (and incredibly long) piece of plastic for the entire audience to use and, second, blow on it in a specific way to make a high-pitched squeaking sound. From within his familiar improvised sound poetry, Crank Sturgeon instructs those audience members who cannot reach the plastic wrap to "ohm" or hum. As he unravels the plastic, the audience immediately begins making sounds, both vocally and with their new instrument, that fall far outside of Crank Sturgeon's original directions: audience members shout, mash their faces into the plastic, etc. Crank Sturgeon wrangles them back in swiftly, inviting them to join a vocal call-and-response. Although the audience tries to follow along, the structure quickly falls apart and Crank Sturgeon starts laughing as the audience resumes independently exploring the plastic and various vocal techniques. Crank Sturgeon then regains his composure, looks at one audience member working with the plastic wrap, and says "that's pretty good." He then brings a contact mic over to the audience member and amplifies his portion of the plastic wrap before moving on to another audience member to do the same. The video cuts off at this point, despite the performance continuing beyond what the viewer sees in the recording.

Because noise builds on participatory notions of the audience as an agentic contributor (Turino), the performance as classroom expands to include not only Crank Sturgeon but the audience as well. The performance aids in this pedagogical extension by once again reinscribing the process model within the performative moment. This expansion begins with an initial blown mind moment as the audience sees the plastic wrap. Although some people in attendance may have seen plastic wrap being used as an instrument before, I believe it is safe to assume that some have never considered the sonic affordances of this particular material. Moreover, the audience also has to navigate a shift in identity away from listeners to more active performers. Audience members then build on this moment by exploring the possibilities of their new instrument, their own voices, and their unique positions as performers.

A pedagogical praxis emerges in this process from Crank Sturgeon's perspective as well. For him, the blown mind moment comes from the technique used by an audience member, as illustrated by his use of the phrase "that's pretty good" after hearing a particular sound coming from the plastic wrap. Crank Sturgeon must be familiar with the material, given that he instructs the audience on how to use it, but for whatever reason this audience member sonically stands out for him. Crank Sturgeon takes the opportunity to explore alongside this audience member, combining the technologies of the contact mic and the plastic wrap with the audience member's technique to create a new sound. As he moves on to the next performer, Crank Sturgeon solidifies this collaborative approach and commits to embracing the audience and the amplified plastic sheet as an extended part of his performance. In doing so, Crank Sturgeon touches on all three phases of the process model and the model once again temporally collapses.

Conclusion

As an examination of my process model of artistic practice through the lens of performance as classroom, this analysis of Crank Sturgeon's 2007 performance at the Sorority House in Portland, OR not only builds on the communal framing of free improvisation from extant literature but reimagines the temporal assumptions within the model itself. Although the two-dimensional nature of the original visualization of the model reinforces a progression (albeit an

iterative one) across time, the performance as classroom collapses the stages of the model within a finalized practice. In other words, Thomson's work provides an understanding that the blown mind moment and exploration phase do not precede a finalized practice or finished performance but in fact *are* the performance. Additionally, this temporal collapsing of my process model relies on the transfer of authority within Thomson's original conception of the performance as classroom: observing others and exploring new techniques for or conceptual spaces within music making, creating a set of pedagogical maneuvers where participants recognize blown mind moments that invite autodidactic explorations and collaborative meaning construction.

My analysis of the Crank Sturgeon video adds to the emphasis on shifting pedagogical authority by recognizing how individuals respond to the pedagogical authority of the artist. When the audience breaks from Crank Sturgeon's performance instructions, for example, he responds by not only relinquishing his own authority as the performer (eventually) but by exploring the affordances of the new sonic landscape that emerges. His choice challenges the constructed nature of the audience/artist binary at the foundation of Western musical forms and aligns this learning ecology with the distributed and relational practices that participatory musical forms inherently amplify (Turino 52). Yet, in amplifying certain performers over others, Crank Sturgeon continues to assert his agency and shape the performance without reclaiming full authority. The shift in authority does not act as a pedagogy in and of itself. Instead, the performance produces both blown mind moments and subsequent spaces for exploration that serve as the mechanism for learning.

This article also raises questions as to who—or, more accurately, what—contributes to the co-constructive nature of free improvisation. The process of collaboration within noise music specifically does not only occur between performers, but between performers, audiences, instruments, spaces, and sound itself (Woods, "Reimagining Collaboration"). In turn, this non-anthropocentric framing of collaboration moves beyond extant understandings of free improvisation that solely rely on collaborations between humans and instead posits collaborative practices between any number of technologies, spaces, and knowledges without ignoring the role of human contributions. In its use of that framing, this analysis also implies that free improvisation itself changes within different contexts. When Bailey critiqued solo forms of improvisation, claiming that performers often fall back on familiar musical gestures instead of finding new forms of expression in the moment, he relied on certain assumptions about instrumentation. Specifically, he took a humanist stance that conceptualized the performer as holding full control over the instrument. But, as Novak attests, this framing of both the instrument and the performer dissolves within noise music as artists intentionally create instrumentation systems they cannot control (156). Free improvisation within noise therefore breaks from Bailey's conception. The co-creative nature at the heart of improv expands as human and technology (in the form of the instrument) work together as agentic actors to produce both music and meaning, again blurring the line between individuality and collectivity (Moten 129) at the level of techno-human relations. This holds significant importance for understanding free improvisation as a pedagogical or cultural technology. Rather than only acting as a discursive medium for performers, the free improvisation of noise creates a medium for new knowledges to emerge in dialogue between human and machine. As scholars continue to explore how different forms of free improvisation interact and intersect, I suspect the borders of this technology will continue to expand.

Crank Sturgeon's facilitation of a process of intertwined identity and musical development for the audience within the moment of performance exemplifies a crucial component of free improvisation and creative music (Basu; Niknafs, "Khas-o-Khâshâk") that simultaneously created space for his own development as a performer. His performance put a highly complicated and entangled pedagogical practice on display that mirrors the tensions described by Mitchell and remains both fully contained within the performance in one sense and is far more expansive in another. On one hand, the identity of the audience as participant ends as soon as the set does. On the other, Crank Sturgeon and the audience can easily replicate the new techniques in subsequent performances. The cultural specificity of knowledge associated with noise music therefore remains situated not only within the context of this musical tradition but within a specific performance context as well. In turn, future research into noise and free improvisation pedagogies (and music education more broadly) should consider how these shifting contexts reimagine not only pedagogical practices but musical knowledge itself.

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The Inseparability of Player(s) and Artwork in Improvised Musical Performance

Sam McAuliffe

It is commonly understood that the dominant mode of conceptualising the practice of improvised musical performance betrays a certain preoccupation with the subject. Improvisation is largely theorised as something *subjects do*, thus discussions tend to focus on themes such as intersubjectivity, agency, interaction, collaboration, and so forth. Such a view separates the player(s) from the work, as if it were pertinent to discuss one *or* the other. The turn toward the subject is not new. Benson writes of art in general: "I think it's safe to say that making art—somewhere between the Renaissance and romanticism—became such that it was less about the *object* depicted than the *subject* depicting it" (*Liturgy as a Way of Life* 154–5). But this thinking obscures an essential characteristic of art highlighted by Heidegger when he writes that "The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other" ("The Origin" 143). It also obscures the idea that, as Gadamer put it, "every performance is an event, but not one in any way separate from the work—the work itself is what 'takes place' . . . in the event . . . or performance" (*Truth and Method* 147). That is, both Heidegger and Gadamer highlight the essential interconnectedness or inseparability of subject and object—artist and artwork. In this paper I strive to (re-)connect artist and artwork—improviser and emergent outcome—by focussing on what one might describe as the transcendental nature of improvisation, where the event goes *beyond* the subjective intentions of the performers and the emergent work *draws out*, as it were, particular responses from the players.

I

Recent scholarship on improvisation places a great deal of emphasis on the intent of the subject (Bertinetto, "Paganini Does Not Repeat"; Cobussen and Nielsen, "Interaction"; Lewis, *Intents and Purposes*). This is not necessarily problematic, insofar as the activity of improvisation is understood as providing insight into certain social or psychological issues: for instance, improvisation as form of social practice (Fischlin, et al.) or improvising as a form of music therapy (Sutton). But intent and purposiveness can only take us so far with respect to the actions of the players and the outcomes of the event. For instance, Benson offers the following account of how film director Andrew Stanton arrived at a particular creative insight: "It was at a baseball game, when someone handed him a pair of binoculars, that Andrew Stanton . . . suddenly got the idea for what the character WALL-E should look like" ("In the Beginning" 158). No one denies that Stanton intended to create a particular character for his film—Benson asserts that Stanton had been thinking about the idea of a lone robot left to clean up Earth for years prior to the baseball game. No doubt the years thinking about the character had primed Stanton for that particular encounter at the baseball game, but we can hardly say that Stanton intended, in that encounter, to come up with how the robot WALL-E would look. It would be more accurate to say the idea arrived and took him by surprise, beyond his intending it.

Of course, as Bertinetto states, "improvisers *do* ideate some aspects of their performance *while* performing" (107); thus, it would be a mistake to undermine the intentionality of players. But insofar as intention is concerned, perhaps its real significance for improvising musicians is that which occurs before or between performances. Peters, from an explicitly Kantian perspective, argues that it is precisely the cultivation of "taste" that occurs across the "*life* of the artist" ("Certainty, Contingency, and Improvisation" 1) that structures the actions of the player in the event, suggesting that the possible outcomes of the performance may be significantly narrower than improvising musicians often care to admit. The result of intentionally cultivating their particular aesthetic *between* performances—it is outside of the

performance event itself that Peters suggests the *real* improvising occurs—assures a degree of certainty in performance: "nothing could be more certain: there *will* be a work, and on this occasion it's going to be like *this* (usually pretty much as expected)" (*The Philosophy of Improvisation* 2). A result of such thinking—that the performance outcomes of improvisation are more or less pre-determined by the prior decisions of the performer(s)—is that it undermines (which Peters suggests is a good thing) the commonly held understanding of improvised musical performance as dialogical or conversational (Berliner; Monson; Sawyer). That is, it undermines the idea that performers are open to the alterity of the world and the broader situation in which they find themselves.

Peters quotes Kant's example of the "youthful poet" to highlight his non-dialogical perspective:

> [I]t is that a youthful poet refuses to allow himself to be dissuaded from the conviction that his poem is beautiful, either by the judgement of the public or of his friends. And even if he lends them an ear, he does so, not because he has now come to a different judgement, but because, though the whole public, at least so far as his work is concerned, should have false taste . . . It is only later, when his judgement has been sharpened by exercise, that of his own free will and accord he deserts his former judgements. (*Critique of Judgement* 112)

Peters suggests that there is far less input from others during improvised musical performance than is commonly suggested. I agree with the basic premise of Peters' argument, insofar as the refinement of one's approach largely structures their improvising. However, what about those instances where, as noted above with respect to Stanton, certain encounters draw something out of us that was not entirely cultivated by one's reason?

McMullen seemingly meets Peters halfway. Like Peters, McMullen suggests "contemporary cultural theory is too beholden . . . to the Other" (115). However, "the Other" that is McMullen's focus is not necessarily the ensemble of which the players are a part, but the judgemental other, which may refer to players and/or the audience. Arguing against Butler's idea of "the performative," where the subject is defined by their desire for recognition by the other, McMullen presents the idea of "the improvisative." The key difference between the performative and the improvisative, McMullen contends, is that the former is concerned with "recognition," whereas the latter is concerned with "generosity":

> When we change our relationship to the other from looking for its recognition to giving, the lean is actually in the other direction: toward the emptiness of the self that can nonetheless *give*, rather than toward the emptiness of the other that we imagine can nonetheless take (by not recognising us). (120)

One similarity between Peters and McMullen, then, is their assertion that the individual *already* has something to offer. Their performance is not beholden to the Other, either in the sense of dialogue or recognition. However, whereas Peters suggests a lack of engagement with the other because players are largely uninterested in what the other may think of their aesthetic taste, McMullen notes that "ideas about self and other are too slow to be able to take place while responding to the singular moment" (122). Such a statement calls into question not only the relationship between player and audience, but, equally, inter-player relationships within the ensemble. Just as thoughts about self and the judgemental other are too slow in performance, surely the dialogical, intersubjective nature of improvisation as Peters describes it is also too slow, especially with respect to large ensembles.

But equally, contra Peters, there *is* a certain responsiveness at issue in improvised musical performance. The classic example comes from Monson's conversation with jazz drummer

Ralph Peterson, where they discuss a particular section of a performance where Peterson "trades ideas" with pianist Geri Allen. Whilst listening to a recording of the performance with Peterson, Monson remarked "'Salt Peanuts!' since Geri Allen's piano figure . . . reminded me of Gillespie's famous riff" (77). Peterson responds:

> Yeah! "Salt Peanuts" and "Looney Tunes"—kind of a combination of the two. Art Blakey has a thing he plays. It's like: [he sings . . . musical example]. And Geri played: [he sings . . . musical example]. So I played the second half of the Art Blakey phrase. (77)

Examples such as this that highlight the interactive nature of improvising are commonly employed to suggest that improvisation is inherently dialogical and intersubjective. The spanner in the works, however, which would side more with Peters, are those musicians who explicitly state they make every effort *not* to interact with other ensemble members, whilst still creating interesting and coherent music. For example, Cobussen describes guitarist Keith Rowe's approach as follows:

> Non-listening as an alternative prerequisite for music-making; deliberately not paying attention to the performance of your fellow musician in order to arrive at an aesthetically satisfying result; consciously obstructing the possibility of letting yourself be influenced by the other's input and/or by (certain) memories: Rowe's playing seems permeated by an attitude of *de*-listening, an endeavour *not* to listen since the other might affect his actions negatively, an intentional secluding oneself from the other in order to pay more attention to certain elements in one's own playing. (60–1)

McMullen provides a hint as to how we might reconcile the differences between Peterson and Allen on the one hand, and Rowe on the other, when she offers an example of a performer embodying her idea of the improvisative: describing a live performance at Girls' Jazz and Blues Camp in Berkeley, California, McMullen observed a vibraphone player's mallet grazed "the microphone stand enough that it was clear she wasn't going to get to the next note of the melody" (122). McMullen continues:

> I saw her face register the "mistake" . . . But in the next fraction of that second, she regained her composure and instead of hitting the "proper" note of the melody she repeated the note she had just played. [. . .] Rather than placing the experience of the mallet hitting the stand in terms of a failure, an obeisance to rules that characterises that phenomenon as a mistake, the young student approached that "mistake" as an event that necessitated a response. [. . .] She turned back to the music, to the event, and offered a response to that event. That is, she generously turned her full attention back to the music. (122)

That is, there *is* responsiveness at issue in improvised musical performances, but perhaps not so much an intersubjective responsiveness as a responsiveness between player and event, between player and emergent work. Players attend to certain aspects of the broader event—Peterson could attend to Allen's contributions, and Rowe could attend to his own, for they are each a part of the broader event. Thus, players can attend to the singular unity of the event, broadly construed, without succumbing to the "slowness" alluded to by McMullen that would come about from a large ensemble attempting to intersubjectively "converse" with a collection of individuals.

It is important here to begin qualifying what is meant by the unity of the event, particularly with respect to ensemble interaction. For when we interrogate the dominant theories of ensemble interaction, we quickly come up against the influence of what is often considered a Cartesian problem.[1] That is, appealing to the Cartesian self—where the consciousness of

the player is hermetically sealed and therefore only indirectly related to any external thing (other players, for example)—often results in understandings of ensemble performance and interaction in terms of a social contract model. Such a model is implicit when practitioners and scholars discuss ways in which individual players selectively choose to interact with certain aspects of the performance and not others. This presents a picture of autonomous selfhood where the individual is just that: one individual amongst other individuals. The ensemble, then, represents a certain structure where individuals opt for a slight reduction in personal freedom in favour of the benefits that arise from collaborating with others.

Hagberg is critical of the social contract model of ensemble interaction:

> [I]n the ensemble variant of the social contract model, the individual, *as individual* (in political and ontological terms), is present and intact from start to finish. If the collective authority, or Hobbes's Leviathan, turns and starts working against the individual's interests, the individual—always present as one atom in a collective organisation—counters that turn by resisting, rebelling, or removing. And on this model, the entire content of the collective is simply the sum of the individuals combined. And there—exactly there—lies the rub. (481)

The "rub" comes down to the idea of intent. Intention, from a Cartesian perspective, is "mentally private to the intender. There could be no such thing as an intention that transcended, or was external to, any given single individual" (Hagberg 482). Consequently, according to the social contract model, improvised musical performance is merely additive in nature.

Hagberg counters the social contract model by appealing to performances by the likes of Cecil Taylor, John Coltrane, and Ornette Coleman. Indeed, commenting on one of Coltrane's performances he writes that

> . . . the churning, thrashing, intense, seemingly gravity-defying and time-bending character of an ensemble like this—collective jazz improvisation at its best—lives and breathes in a place beyond what [the social contract model] can accommodate. [. . .] The self beneath all this has become a relationally intertwined entity, the referent of the "me" is not in this context autonomous, and Coltrane knew it. (488)

Rather than speak of an ensemble as a collection of individuals, Hagberg asserts that we should think in terms of a unity, reinforcing McMullen's claim that players direct their attention not so much to the other as individuals, but to the event itself: to the music.

II

Highlighting the importance of attending to the work, Borgo makes the claim that improvisation should be less about what the individual can do and more about what the music wants: "I encourage them [Borgo's students] to hear themselves not only *in* the ensemble, but literally *as* the ensemble" ("What the Music Wants" 33). Such a conception of improvisation calls into question the intentionality of the individual subjects who improvise. For Borgo's assertion is that "the music somehow emerges on its own" (34), and he is quick to add that this is not mere "fanciful talk" or "poetic language."

Borgo explores ideas of "adaptation, contingency, and inevitability," where the idea of "inevitability" is perhaps the most controversial: "few would subscribe to the pejorative notion that *anything goes* in improvisation, but many hold dear to the notion that *anything can happen*" (39). To ascribe a certain inevitability to improvisation is not so far removed from the "certainty" mentioned above with respect to Peters. But Borgo is clearly not siding with

Peters' "solitary genius" perspective, writing that we should "temper the hyper-individualist discourse on free improvisation with a little socio-cultural-technological reality" (40). For Borgo, performances are directed not only by the individual players, but also by the broader structures of "the art system," as well as "the program that the performance develops for itself" (45). That is, as the work progresses and establishes itself as a work, it begins to *narrow* the possibilities available to the performer(s). The work itself generates certain limitations and parameters that structure the actions of the players, such that there is an inevitability to the performance.

Borgo's account is instructive. It highlights a certain relationship between player and event that draws us closer to Heidegger and Gadamer's account mentioned at the beginning of this paper. However, Borgo's neocybernetic approach ("Openness from Closure"), while insightful in the way in which it situates the subject within a broad social context, maintains a view of improvised music that both Heidegger and Gadamer would likely suggest is still too subjective.

III

Like Peters, I contend there is a fair amount of certainty in most performances of improvised music. Players such as the ones mentioned in this paper have generally spent a considerable amount of time honing their approach. Indeed, it is precisely this preparation that results in Borgo's claim, mentioned above, that "anything can happen" in improvised music is misguided. There is a certain predictability in most performances of improvised music, insofar as players have typically honed a particular approach or "musical voice" before the event that will structure their playing; but this should not necessarily be viewed negatively. Indeed, it is precisely because spectators often have certain anticipations of what a performance will be that is the impetus for them to part with their hard-earned cash in exchange for attending the performance event. Unlike Peters, however, rather than conceive of this refinement or preparation in Kantian terms, I evoke the Gadamerian notion of "prejudice."

The term "prejudice," as Gadamer employs it, should be understood positively; that is, Gadamer invokes an older understanding of prejudice, an understanding that predates the Enlightenment. Conceived in such a way, one's prejudices do not distort or blind them from the truth so much as they "constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience" (*Philosophical Hermeneutics* 9). That is, it is because of one's prejudice that they become curious about some topics and not others—that they, as musicians, selectively develop certain skillsets. Thus, it is one's prejudice that largely structures their approach to performance. By swapping out Kant for Gadamer, if I can put it so crudely, we do not merely swap the terminology we use to describe the preparedness of the player, rather we encounter a significantly different relationship between the player and the event.

If we recall, by following Kant's conception genius where the player cultivates their aesthetics of taste before or between performances and presents their aesthetic decisions to the other with a degree of disinterestedness as to what the other thinks of their aesthetic, Peters is led to argue against the responsiveness inherent in much improvised music. A Gadamerian perspective however, with his conception of "play" or "game" and his emphasis on "conversation" (each discussed below), offers certain advantages. Firstly, via the notion of prejudice, we can maintain that the individual's approach to performance is largely pre-structured. Secondly, by appealing to Gadamer's notion of "play," we gain insight into the transcendental unity at issue in performance, a unity not evident in the social contract model of ensemble performance. Finally, Gadamer's account of "conversation" highlights a certain back and forth or to-and-fro that is evident in much improvised music, whether it be the jazz of Peterson and Allen or the art music of Rowe, which points to the responsiveness of improvised musical performance.

IV

Gadamer employs the concept of "play" (*Spiel*) to describe aesthetic experience (*Truth and Method* 106–34). While he does not predominately employ the concept with respect to creating art, his thinking on this topic is nonetheless instructive. It is important to note that the German word *Spiel*, employed by Gadamer, can be translated as either "play" or "game," and in many ways they should be thought together. What is important for Gadamer is the way in which, for those who play, as in playing a game, play contains "its own, even sacred, seriousness" (107). Even something that from the outside may seem inconsequential, such as children playing with a ball or musicians improvising, bears within it this seriousness. Indeed, while the players may know that what they are engaging in is "only a game," it is precisely the inherent seriousness of playing that draws them into play, as Gadamer notes, "someone who doesn't take the game seriously is a spoilsport" (107).

But Gadamer's concern is less the players and more the concept of "play" itself. Considering the behaviour of the player leads us to the subjectivity of their behaviour, whereas the concept of "play" as a mode of being implicates the player while also indicating the way in which play goes beyond the purposiveness and subjectivities of the player. What is important for our thinking on improvisation is Gadamer's assertion that "the mode of being of play does not allow the player to behave toward play as if toward an object" (107). A great deal of scholarship on improvised musical performance, particularly that which separates players from the work, presents improvisation as an activity where performers engage with objects. That is, performers engage with "x" idea here and "y" idea there, as if the performance itself is a collection of divisible events. Gadamer suggests that we have become so accustomed to understanding activities such as playing from the perspective of subjectivity that we "remain closed" to the idea that "the actual subject of play is obviously not the subjectivity of an individual who, among other activities, also plays but is instead the play itself" (108). It is from this perspective I contend we should approach improvised music; not from the subjectivities of the performers, but from the nature of improvisation itself.

The nature of "play" or "game" in Gadamer's work, as already mentioned, relates to one's experience of artworks. Thus, for Gadamer, contra Kant and Schiller, aesthetic experience is not subjective. Instead, just like the player who is drawn into the game and "played by" the game just as much as they play the game—that is, they are caught up in the to-and-fro of the movement of the game such that their subjectivities are suspended—so too is the person experiencing an artwork swept up, or "played by," the artwork; aesthetic experience is not a subject regarding an object but a transformative event. Davey observes, "the game analogy implies that the act of spectatorship contributes to bringing what is at play within the artwork into fuller being" (*Unfinished Worlds* 48). From the perspective of improvisation, this could be conceived as a radicalisation of Borgo's idea of "what the music wants," mentioned above. The Gadamerian position suggests that the role of the player is to draw out, or illuminate, what is *already there* in the performance event itself. On such an account, the "outcome" of improvised musical performance is not the subjective self-expression of the players in response to "what the music wants," but the presentation of a musical event, an event where the emergent work and the players comprise a single unity.

To understand the unity at issue here, we might briefly consider Heidegger's notion of "*belonging* together" (*Identity and Difference*), where the emphasis is explicitly placed on the "*belonging*" rather than the "together." If the emphasis is reversed, i.e. belonging *together*, we encounter a form of ensemble interaction where the ensemble is said to belong simply because they are *represented* in a unity; they happen to be working in a particular relation to one another. In this sense, we may say that the distinct elements of the social contract model of ensemble interaction "belong *together*." Putting the emphasis on the word "*belong,*"

however, suggests that things are "together" because they *belong*; things are *already* placed in relation to one another. Thus, the ensemble members and the outcome of their performance do not merely stand together as individual and autonomous parts. Instead, in the happening of the event, these different elements *are* the improvisation. Improvisation *is* essentially this *belonging* together of players and emergent work. Any attempt to represent the players as distinct individuals, or to separate the players from the outcome, is to lose sight of improvisation as such.

Of course, the unity at issue here is comprised of different elements and we can speak about them individually to a certain extent without undermining that unity. But any discussion of the different elements—player(s) and work—must not lose sight of the fact that neither the players or the work is reducible to the other or can be separated from one another. The question remains, however, how we discuss the responsiveness of improvised musical performances without disrupting the unity of the event, that is, without reducing that responsiveness to the players alone. The solution, I suggest, is to conceive of improvisation as a conversation. But not the sense of an intersubjective "dialogue" between players, but in a sense more akin to Gadamer's conception of "conversation," where to converse is to attend to the subject matter *between* interlocutors rather than attend to the other person directly.

V

The "conversation" at issue in improvised musical performance, I suggest, does not occur directly between players. For if we conceive of improvisation as a purely intersubjective dialogue, we struggle to account for both the speed and spontaneity that is so important for McMullen's account of the improvisative as well as those instances where players are decidedly not interacting with the other. Further, we also struggle to account for solo improvisation. Rather than being intersubjective, I contend that the conversation occurs between the player(s) and the work.[2] This relationship always exists, whether it is a large ensemble or a solo performance. With only one "interlocutor"—the work—we can account for the speed and spontaneity often necessary for improvised musical performances and we can understand how performances can be responsive and indeterminate even when players are not necessarily listening to their ensemble partners. Further, such an understanding points to the essential unity between players and (emergent) work.

This idea of conversation is sometimes discussed in the hermeneutic literature with respect to the idea of the "in-between" (Davey; Gadamer; Malpas). That is, interlocutors direct their attention to the subject matter that exists between them as opposed to directly attending to one another. The work, in improvised musical performance, equally exists in this "in-between." As Borgo recognises, the players must attend to what the *work* wants, and the work is not attributable to any single individual within the ensemble, rather it exists independently *between* them. The players, in their attending to the work, understand the work in the sense of call and response: the work calls for a certain 'something,' and the players respond. Perhaps what the work calls for is a reference to "Salt Peanuts," as in the case of Peterson and Allen, or perhaps it calls for one to attend only to a specific aspect of the work and not another, in the case of Rowe. Of course, the player's understanding of precisely what the work "calls for" will be mediated by their prejudice.

As suggested by Landgraf, the progression of the improvisation results in a "narrowing of possible choices" (192), and as Benson notes, "what was the play of experimentation starts to become more 'stable' as a structure," for instance, "a piece of stone moves from being a square block to an increasingly defined shape" ("In the Beginning" 159). Thus, not only does the work itself call on the players for particular responses, therefore narrowing the possibilities available for the player(s) to respond to, but further, by virtue of their prejudice,

players are predisposed to notice and attend to *select* possibilities offered by the work as it becomes increasingly more structured.

The emergent work itself transcends the players—they can never experience it as a *whole*; instead, they attend to aspects of it. In this sense, we can better understand the above from Davey in the context of improvised musical performance, re-quoted here: "the game analogy implies that the act of spectatorship contributes to bringing what is at play within the artwork into fuller being" (*Unfinished Worlds* 48). There are countless possibilities inherent in the emergent work that call for a response from the player(s). It is the responsibility of the player(s) who "play" in an improvisational sense to illuminate a certain aspect of that emergent work. Those aspects of the work that they bring into "fuller being" are those that they respond to. Thus, the work itself cannot come forth without the players, but neither can the players "play" improvisation as such without attending to and responding to the emergent work itself.

VI

I have attempted to conceptualise improvised musical performance in a way that does justice to Heidegger and Gadamer's convictions that artists and artworks *belong* together. This account results in what might be called a hermeneutic account of improvised musical performance, insofar as I took several cues from Gadamer's hermeneutics. My account argues that improvisation is the unity between player(s) and emergent work, where the players, guided by their prejudice, respond to possibilities that arise from the emergent work itself. Thus, improvisation *is* dialogical, but in the sense that players converse with the work, following a structure of call and response. Consequently, improvised musical performance is not merely a subjective act of self-expression or intentionality, for one's actions are always mediated by the emergent work. The work transcends the performers and "draws out" certain responses such that neither the players nor the work is reducible to the other.

Aside from arguably providing a more accurate account of improvisation with respect to its phenomenology, this view of improvisation is suggestive of a broader re-consideration of both the way in which we understand improvised art and its role/significance in broader society. Indeed, if we cannot understand the activity or process of improvisation as separate from its outcomes, neither can we understand the outcomes as separate to the process. Any ontology of improvised art, or art in general, must account for the performativity inherent in its coming into being. The essentially contingent nature of improvisation (Peters; DiPiero; Sawyer) in the context of the argument presented in this paper calls into question any metaphysical approach that seeks to identify a certain enduring character or essence of the work as distinct from its instantiation in the performance event. However, this is not the place to work through what such an ontology may look like; it is deserving of a paper unto itself.

With respect to the role or significance of improvisation, the account given above appears at least in part to affirm Benson's call (echoing Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Gadamer) to reinstate art as essential to our lives. Benson summaries the dominant contemporary Christian view of art and artists in the form of the following question: "in a world in which there is hunger and suffering, isn't it simply too frivolous to create art? Shouldn't artists be doing something that is more valuable to society?" (*Liturgy as a Way of Life* 70). While Benson presents this within a Christian framework, I do not think it is particularly different to the dominant conception of art and artists in (post)modernity. That is, if art is merely the subjective self-expression of the artist, to what extent should it be valued by the rest of society? Indeed, as Benson writes, "If art is really only something one does for oneself, then it is rather solipsistic in nature—which is to say it is purely about oneself" (140–41). From a specifically improvisational perspective, such a view of art seems to have a direct correlation to accounts of improvisation that focus heavily on the intent and purposiveness (i.e. the subjectivities) of the performers.

With respect to why improvisation may be important, Borgo highlights both an "emancipatory" and an "anticipatory" quality of improvisation, where the former refers to improvisation as liberating and the latter refers to improvisation as a model that might be projected onto political or social problems yet to be solved ("Openness from Closure"). Certainly, the anticipatory quality of improvisation points to a consequence of improvisation that tentatively goes beyond the subjectivities of those who improvise. But Benson is more focussed on the significance of art itself. Improvisation undoubtedly figures in innumerable facets of people's lives (DiPiero; Toop), artistic and otherwise, but what does improvisation in music, as it relates to the generation of *art*, offer society more broadly?

Heidegger and Gadamer certainly recognised not only art's claim to truth, but equally the objectivity of one's aesthetic experience. Indeed, it is precisely in his concepts of "play" and "conversation" that Gadamer locates the objectivity of interpretation (although "objective" and "subjective" are somewhat clumsy terms in a Gadamerian context). I suggest, then, we can equally locate a degree of objectivity in improvised musical performance, too. The objectivity of improvised musical performance lies in the conversation between player and work. The player, as described above, is not an autonomous agent contributing their subjective ideas upon the performance but is rather "called" to respond. In their attending to and responding to the work, the work draws out, as it were, certain responses from the players. Just as Stanton "received" a particular insight that he was not intending during the baseball game, as discussed in the opening paragraphs of this paper, players receive "calls" to contribute from the situation in which they find themselves. Thus, it would be inaccurate to label genuine improvisation as merely solipsistic in nature. Certainly, the prejudice of the players is integral to the performance, but these prejudices are mediated by the emergent work such that the work and the players are inseparable and mutually irreducible.

The way in which we each are the inheritors of tradition and culture, and the way in which this inheritance gives rise to our prejudice, means that our thinking and doing is necessarily social. We always operate within the cultural and historical structures of the day. By engaging with the emergent work, players *live* and *encounter* their prejudice. They elucidate themselves to themselves and to the audience. And so, improvisation is a way of unveiling a certain character of oneself and, given the historically situated nature of humankind, improvisation unveils truths about our broader historical situation. To improvise is to engage with that which is beyond oneself and allow that thing to direct our thinking and doing, that is, we allow the world to elucidate the culture of our epoch. Therefore, perhaps a hermeneutic account of improvisation offers a way forward, in solidarity with Benson, to (re)position improvised art forms as meaningful and significant to the broader society, for it shows us who and what we are.

Notes

[1] "Cartesianism" is often used as placeholder for a larger story in philosophy where one is preoccupied with the "self"; a story that arguably begins with Augustine and continues with Luther, Descartes, and Locke.

[2] There is a broader tension at issue here, which I cannot address in this paper, that has to do with the way in which the subject-object relationship—the conversation between subject and work—is actually essential to the subject-subject relationship that is so often discussed in the literature with respect to intersubjectivity. For it is the object itself that brings about the subject-subject relationship. Such an idea is central in Gadamer's philosophy as well as in Davidson's notion of "triangulation."

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The Clock in the Living Room: Re-imagining Social Connection through Intergenerational Listening in the COVID-19 Crisis

Lauren Michelle Levesque and J.F.R. Levesque

On February 18, 2020, at 10:13 a.m., I took a picture of the clock that hangs on the wall in my parents' living room. The clock has presided over family activities in my parents' home for over forty years. It has been a cornerstone of our family sound-space, a constant buzz in the chorus of everyday life. The photo was taken a few weeks before the COVID-19 lockdown was initiated across the province of Ontario. Reflecting on the picture later, as regions in the province begin to emerge from lockdown, I consider the final pre-pandemic visit with my parents in the intimate sound-space of our family home. I was not spending time with them but taking a rather mundane picture and recording the buzz of the living room clock. (Lauren, COVID Reflection)

Author's Personal Photo, February 18, 2020

Introduction: The Instability of Crisis

The pandemic has been deeply unsettling.   Unsettling: as in "upset,

          disturb, discompose,

                              throw off balance, confuse,   perturb,

discomfit, disconcert, trouble,

                    bother, agitate,

ruffle,   shake" ("Unsettling").

Pondering his experience of aging and time, Ronald J. Pelias writes: "Time is, to call upon the cliché that rings true to me more now than ever before, all we have" (xiii). In his early seventies, Pelias contemplates the impact of the current contexts of "crisis" framing his experience of aging:

> Perhaps because I'm aging at a time of such political and environmental chaos, I struggle to keep myself in order. When I was younger, though, I never imagined my senior years would be such an emotional hot tub. I always thought I would be much less of a human mess. (100)

With regard to the word "crisis," Mary Zournazi states: "Crisis as the word is now applied has left no space for discernment, and is regarded as catastrophe and disaster that tends to incite a reaction that is often unreflexive, rather than a response that is a more careful consideration of the condition of crisis" (59). Although I, Lauren, am in my early forties, the pandemic has exacerbated my sense of being an "emotional hot tub" and/or "human mess." More specifically, as the pandemic has turned from weeks into months into years of self-isolation, lockdowns, and re-openings, time and the connections it fosters have begun to feel unstable, fragile, vulnerable.

A significant aspect of these feelings of instability, fragility, and vulnerability is the experience of profoundly missing the sound of my mother's laughter and of my father's voice. This experience has exacerbated the sensation of being shaken, thrown off balance by their physical and sonic absence. In his work *The Memory of Sound*, Seán Street speaks to the power of sound to pull at emotion and memory: "Sound, be it (frequently) music and song, the spoken word or the raw audio of the world around us provides direct entry to a lost or forgotten experience, and can be almost devastatingly potent because of this" (10). With Street's quote in mind, I have found myself grappling with the question: How do we search for grounding in a context wherein everything feels unstable? In an effort to create a space in which to discern some of the current conditions of crisis in my own life and that of my family, I invited my father, Reg, also in his seventies, into conversation. This article explores insights and questions that emerged from our discussion, including the idea of intergenerational listening as an intimate, intersubjective, and improvisatory practice.

COVID-19: Making Sense of Crisis Conditions

Given the crisis conditions of COVID-19—which included quarantine, social distancing, risk to one's health and that of others—scholars such as Aliki Nicolaides and Ahreum Lim have characterized their pandemic experiences as "ruptures" leading to a reconsideration of action and responsibility. In their dialogue on reflective practice, civil society, and building inclusive spaces in a time of pandemic, Nicolaides and Lim note: "We feel our own interior sense-making as part of a mind-heart-body inquiry into what is *right action* in this moment, and the next, and the next, without censoring the creativity of our responses" (855, emphasis in original). With these ideas of absence, rupture, creativity, and action in mind, how can intergenerational listening provide space for discernment, possibility, and new ways to think about time, aging, and musical connection during the COVID-19 crisis? What insights can be gleaned from understanding intergenerational listening as an intimate, intersubjective, improvisatory practice?[1]

The present article is an initial foray into these questions. It is a container for grappling with the "devastating potency" of the sonic and physical absence of family during the COVID-19

pandemic. The notion that intergenerational listening can act as an improvisatory practice is rooted, as scholar and improviser Catherine Ryan argues, in conceptualizations of the family itself as an "improvisational ensemble" (38–54). For example, in her chapter "Improvising Care," Ryan explores this understanding of family through her relationship with her young daughter. She explains that improvisation can "nurture relationality by continuously supporting the interdependent flow of connections and power between [her and her daughter]" (39). Drawing on the recent work of Daniel Fischlin, Eric Porter, and Vijay Iyer, Ryan cautions that the word "improvisation" cannot be an empty signifier, standing in for all that is considered good, meaningful, and/or "ungraspable" about life (47). The word, she suggests, needs to say something beyond that, which for Ryan includes "the links between improvisation and life sustaining care" (47).

Ryan's understanding of family and improvisation provide a starting point for us—Lauren and Reg—to explore intergenerational listening as an improvised practice. As it does for Ryan, improvisation means something specific for us in the context of this article. Its meaning is shaped not only by our own family relationship but also by our experiences of living through the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Composer and improviser, Pauline Oliveros, captures some of the meaning we are engaging with here and in later sections of this article in a Deep Listening meditation included in the volume *The Improvisation Studies Reader: Spontaneous Acts* ("Deep Listening Meditations"). She writes:

> Listening all day to your footsteps. Where does the sound come from?

> . . . Imaginary improvisation: You are holding the possibility of making the first sound. (53)

Stated differently, this is improvisation understood as "a key feature of interpersonal communication and social practice" and as "vital life-force"; one that, as Ajay Heble and Rebecca Caines note, "has much to teach us about listening—*really listening*—to what's going on around us" ("Prologue" 2–3, emphasis in original).

As a whole, the article is divided into four sections. In the first, we contextualize our collaboration and discuss further understandings of improvisation that underpin our work. The second section delves into the practice of intergenerational listening and connects this listening to imagination and sound, particularly as these relate to renewing thinking on the marginalization, underrepresentation, and undervaluing of aging in North American society (Lanphier). This section is followed by an examination of "home" as a springboard for creative action. Here, we outline some of the insights that we gleaned from recognizing the improvisatory practices that shape our own daily lives at "home" (Duffy and Waitt). In the concluding section, some performative pathways are suggested for engaging with improvisation, listening, and musical connectivities post-pandemic. Examples of our collaborative and creative responses to COVID-19 are interspersed throughout the article in the form of images, reflective journal entries (e.g., Reflections), snippets of email exchanges, and poetry. We end the article in this spirit, with a poetic CODA.

Section 1: Pulling at Sound, Music, Space, and Subjectivities—Listening Well?

> *Pulling at the word "academic"—purposefully experimenting*

> *I have had to pull to allow insights to emerge.*

More difficult, emotions amplified by listening.

I end up questioning my own understanding of this deeply embodied and spatial practice. Can we really render an experience of radical openness into academic writing?

How do you put into words moments lived in one relationship?

The rhythm of your father's voice, the sound of his memories, the stories of the ways music has shaped his life.

The chorus of swishing leaves on the maple tree just outside the boundaries of the screen.

The internal sound of the question: How well have I been listening? Maybe I haven't been listening well at all.

(Lauren, COVID Reflection)

As noted in the introduction, this article emerged in response to the unexpected constriction of physical space and the sudden absence of particular sounds and connections—familial and musical—that resulted from a COVID-19 lockdown. It brings together two perspectives: a daughter and arts-based researcher and her father, a retired judge. It leverages Gillian Siddall and Ellen Waterman's conceptualization of improvisation as "a complex site of negotiation" (9), one which is deeply embodied, and which has implications for how improvisers experience their sense of self or their "subjectivities" (8). For Siddall and Waterman, subjectivities are themselves "a complex negotiation of lived embodied experience and social forces that work to regulate behavior and therefore shape that experience" (3). They go on to explain that, with regard to the shaping of subjectivities, improvisation can not only be understood as a complex site of negotiation but also as a "form of recollection and repetition" (3), a means of weaving together past narratives and repertoires of sounds and gestures into the present moment (3–9).

These understandings speak to the possibilities of improvising with past narratives as well as sonic and gestural repertoires that make up a particular relationship, in this case that of a father and daughter. To create a new or different sense of connection in the context of COVID-19, we initiated a series of conversations that took place between May and July 2020 during a lockdown in Phase 3 of Ontario's COVID-19 measures. As a "complex site of negotiation," improvisation acted as a lens to frame these conversations and to manage individual ruminations, whether these consisted of writing poetry, a quick phone chat to share an emerging insight, or momentarily listening to the sounds that drifted through an apartment window or reverberated during a morning walk.

For both of us, the use of video-conferencing platforms was relatively new and required an openness to adapt, such as figuring out accounts; coordinating schedules; negotiating weak internet connections; and, at times, uncooperative laptops. While we sought to give our virtual exchanges some initial structure—meeting once a week, for instance—the goal was to allow our time to flow as needed. Writing about an improvised performance with Barre Phillips in a piece titled "Improvising Composition: How to Listen in the Time Between," Oliveros describes "flow" in that context as a kind of consensus: "Consensus arrived with our bodily interactions with our instruments. This consensus is the confluence of openness to histories, embodied musical knowledge, bodily action resulting in sound, musical give and take, and agreement to continue the flow or stop and start again" (84). While complicated by physical distancing and mediated

through technology, we engaged in instances of flow to "pull," as Street emphasizes, at our experiences of sound, music, space, and subjectivity: opening to individual and collective stories, embodying musical and sonic knowledge through listening and conversation, and starting and stopping our exchanges, with some lasting five minutes and others two hours.

As we progressed through the project, our exchanges began to feel like a "composition," one that mapped a particular relationship responding to a particular set of unexpected life conditions in a particular time and space. By composition, we mean what Marcel Cobussen described in his article "Sonic Cards: Improvising (with) Sounds," when reflecting on the experience of listening to sounds while drinking coffee at a bar in the city of Belgrade: "Closing my eyes for a moment, all these sounds together become the music, an improvised soundscape composition, just for me" (270). Thus, through the flow of our improvised practices, we wove together familiar sounds and gestures along with narratives of the past into the present moment of specific home-spaces during the COVID-19 crisis. As for the actual weaving of our composition, I, Lauren, recorded sounds, snapped photos on my cellphone, and kept a reflective journal. Outside of our Zoom exchanges, Reg read, shared ideas via email and phone, and contributed to the conceptualization and mapping of the current article.

It is important to note that, in leveraging the understandings of improvisation discussed above, we do not consider the practice to be a universal remedy for the myriad economic, ecological, social, and political challenges that individuals and communities face at this time (Tomlinson and Lipstiz). Given that I study the dynamics of music as a space for building peace (Levesque and Ferguson), this is a critical insight that provides a check against overly optimistic views of what creative practices such as improvisation and music can contribute to constructive social change (Levesque). The recognition of the limits and multiple applications of these practices in different contexts (Fischlin and Porter) is, therefore, a horizon that has influenced the ideas and questions shared herein. Given this recognition, in the following section we explore in greater depth our understanding of intergenerational listening as an improvised approach in COVID times.

Section II: Intergenerational Listening as an Improvised Approach

> *The wisdom of the years has brought me to this point. After years of dealing with balancing the rights of the individual with the security of the collective in courtroom legal debates, I came upon Joseph Campbell's* The Power of Myth *on Netflix on a particularly nothing retirement day. Time had erased the memory of its original viewing. I came to understand viscerally, probably for the first time, that the myths by which societies conduct themselves were inventions of the human mind. More importantly, we had long surpassed their purpose. More critically, we had not invented relevant myths to deal with the mess we find ourselves in today (e.g., climate change, partisan politics, consumerism). I found liberation in the idea that established myths and structures could be reinvented. What is needed now is action to overcome the stagnant thoughtless compliance to these myths and structures. (Reg, personal communication, June 8, 2020)*

In her chapter "Aging and Aesthetic Responsibility," Elizabeth Lanphier suggests that aged bodies and scenes of aging are often overlooked or kept hidden in North American visual landscapes (99–124). She writes: "The lack of a variety of aged bodies and experiences in art and film reflects and reproduces the marginalization and lack of valuing older people and lives within society" (107). The acknowledgement that older people and their lives are often marginalized, underrepresented, and undervalued in society remains a difficult focus and key challenge of the COVID-19 crisis (Pedersen et al.). Lanphier's statements, however, underscore

that this reality is not new. The 2019 volume titled *Aging in an Aging Society*, of which Lanphier's chapter is a part, demonstrates the need to renew thinking on such marginalizing, underrepresenting, and undervaluing. The editors of the volume, Iva Apostolova and Monique Lanoix, urge readers toward this renewal, stating:

> Although we fully realize the impossibility of the task of presenting a comprehensive analysis of the topic [of aging], we hope that the chapters featured in this volume offer an alternative interpretation, and will stir the readers' imagination in the direction of questioning the current discourses on aging. (2)

For her part, Lanphier proposes that artists can contribute to an "aesthetic responsibility," or the generation of alternative modes of reflection and action that can bring older people and their lives into view (102–3).

> *I am a captain surrounded by ghosts.*
>
> *I hear every word they whisper:*
>
> *Navigate, Negotiate, MANAGE THIS WELL.*
>
> *There is a path to be followed:*
>
> *All I see is the rope leading up.*
>
> *And the drowning that will be deep.*
>
> *(Lauren, June 15, 2020).*

Echoing Lanphier's proposition in interesting ways, the arts became loci of alternative ideas and actions from the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdowns. For example, the title of an article posted on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) website on March 16, 2020, asks: "What is the role of art in helping us better understand coronavirus?" (Collins). Also ubiquitous at this time was the phenomenon of spontaneous outdoor performances on peoples' balconies (Ditmars). Although COVID-19 lockdowns presented us—individuals and communities across Ontario and Canada—with the unexpected constriction of physical space and the sudden absence of familiar connections, social media and online news outlets showcased the arts as a means to resist these conditions of crisis. In light of these demonstrations of artistic resistance, our own conversations turned to the questions: How can music and improvisation contribute to a sense of responsibility toward others at this particular time? How can intergenerational, socially-distanced listeners engage with sound and space to improvise new forms of social connectivity?

For the purposes of this article, we define intergenerational listening as the act of two individuals from different generations intentionally listening to each other. While more complex understandings of this particular listening practice surely exist, we have chosen to ground our approach in the work of scholars, such as Street in *The Sound Inside the Silence*, who explicitly associate listening with sound and imagination. Taking up this idea, Ella Finer remarks, for example: "Experiences of listening will never be as neat as a composed paragraph of sequential sensations. The sonic world makes its own punctuation and [is] rarely bound by rules" (135). Speaking of the impact of distance on such experiences, she offers: "The performance of sound is apprehended in its wake at varying proximities, from the very close to the far distant, to the furthest limits of imagination" (137). These comments underscore the ways in which proximity

and distance shape the experience of listening as well as how this experience can be an unpredictable yet fundamental dimension of everyday life.

We also draw on the notion of linking the practices of improvisation and accompaniment, as articulated by Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz in their book, *Insubordinate Spaces* (23–44). They describe accompaniment as "a commitment based on a cultivated capacity for making connections with others, identifying with them, and helping them" (23). Of particular import to our understanding of intergenerational listening, Tomlinson and Lipsitz stress that accompaniment is not something that can be learned in the abstract (30). It is a commitment manifested through action, risk, encounter, and failure. Given that we have not previously worked on a creative project together, Tomlinson's and Lipsitz's application of accompaniment suggests we can frame our own intimate, intersubjective listening practice as a commitment to accompany each other through potential experiences of action, risk, encounter, and failure.

In this regard, Street's conceptualization of sound as a "poignant link," expressed in his chapter "Audio Inside the Mind: The Poetics of Sound," is significant (407). He explains: "Because sound is always present as it happens, always fading as it passes, it is a poignant link between ourselves as we are and ourselves as we once were, as well as a metaphor for our own transience" (407–8). In a setting of COVID-19 lockdown, sound became a poignant link that connected us as authors, as improvisers, and as father and daughter. Here, imagination was key due to the requirements of social distancing and the fact that technology was our only interface. Connecting these ideas to the act of listening, Cobussen argues that: "listening somehow cannot occur without imagination" ("Listening" 126). It is, in his estimation, a "necessary quality when listening" (116), most meaningfully in its capacity to "fill in certain gaps" (126). As we discuss in the following section, the space that we ended up listening to and imagining the most during the COVID-19 crisis was home.

Section III: Listening to and Improvising "Home"

> *The home has become the focal point of the pandemic. As much as the public domain was influenced by the sound of the exchange of information and ideas, the home has become the centre where sound provides the platform of comfort upon which creativity is deployed to deal with whatever is required. (Reg, personal communication, June 8, 2020)*

> *I was reading Street's* The Sound Inside the Silence *and couldn't stop thinking about how to describe "intimacy" in relation to sound, imagination, and home. I suddenly had a vivid mental image of one of my older sisters sitting on the floor of our childhood bedroom. She was in her pajamas and was holding a small tape recorder. The cassette playing was one my mother recorded of herself before my parents left for a short trip. My older sister was crying, listening to my mother singing lullabies. I closed the book and picked up the phone to ask my sister: "Do you remember this?" (Lauren, COVID Reflection)*

For many of us, the experience of COVID-19 has shifted our relationship with "home." As an academic, I, Lauren, experienced the swift pivot to online learning in March 2020 that has continued throughout the writing of this article.[2] In these circumstances, "home" has become a blur between work and my personal life, at different times of the day or week acting as an office, a classroom, a library, a movie theatre, and as a singing studio every Wednesday at 9:30 a.m.

While this blurring may be a new experience for some of us, scholarly examinations of home underscore that, as an object of study and as a human experience, "home" is both complex and paradoxical (Bahun and Petrić 1–13). It is at once rooted in the dynamics of individual lives and profoundly implicated in the formation of community, politics, and social policy. Acknowledging this relationship, Sanja Bahun and Bojana Petrić observe: "Home thus straddles a paradoxical territory. It forms who we are, as individuals and collectives, but it also ferments political action and reaction, and has generated, from the very beginnings of organized societies, public policymaking" (1). This understanding of home as a focal point of individual meaning-making and a basis for collective action is core to Bahun and Petrić's edited volume, *Thinking Home: Interdisciplinary Dialogues*. It is also echoed in a collection of "Home's Accounts" (*Stories of Home* xv) put together by Devika Chawla and Stacy Holman Jones. They write:

> Home is quite possibly one of the most definable and undefinable ideas that litter the landscape of our contemporary cultural lives. Beyond being experienced as a place, a space, and a structure, home is also memory, feeling, and affect. Home can be an idea and a hope, thereby becoming both anticipation and promise. (xi)

Ideas and experiences of "home," however, were variously impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as Janine Certo and Alecia Beymer observe in their article, "Home as Poem." They argue that the pandemic not only led to quarantine and self-isolation at home for many but also to barriers in the way of reaching home due to travel restrictions (243). The article goes on to explain that, in these circumstances, poetry became a medium through which they "stayed connected and engaged" during their own periods of self-isolation (243). Similar to some of the improvised practices used in our own exchanges, Certo and Beymer suggest that an exploration of what constitutes home can include "jot[ting] down images, sounds and silences, tastes and smells" (248). Such jotting down, done "without censorship or judgement" (248), can provide a creative foundation for the composition of poems about memories of a loved one, a childhood neighborhood, or particular rooms in a family home (249–50). Pertinent to our own exchanges during the COVID-19 lockdown is the realization that a sense of comfort and/or wellbeing generated by the sounds and spaces of home could act as a springboard for creative action.

Affirming these ideas, Bahun and Petrić incorporate several projects by artists and/or community organizations exploring "home" in their aforementioned volume (Green 91–5; Golubovic and Dragin 143–51). To give one example: English artist Lily Hunter Green describes the development of her project, "Harvest," a community-led installation based on the Jewish tradition of building a Sukkah, a temporary house or hut (91–2). Commissioned as part of a broader cultural diversity initiative in Essex, Green notes that, while she is not a member of the Jewish community, she envisioned Harvest as a way to engage with unfamiliar notions and practices of home. The spark for this engagement, she comments (92), is an argument put forward by Renos Papadopoulous in his chapter, "Home: Paradoxes, Complexities and Vital Dynamism." Papadopoulous' original quote is worth citing here in full. Contextualized by his work with refugees and asylum seekers, he writes: "It is precisely in the ability to recognize our homes in others' lost and prospective homes and to treat the world as a home that the healthy relationship towards one's own home resides" (66; see also Pons, "Performing Home").

In sharing insights that bubbled to the surface during a COVID-19 lockdown, we acknowledge that the spaces and sounds of family and home cannot be considered unanimously safe, positive, or comforting (Weinberg and Nwosu 39–51). Alongside Papadopoulous' remarks, however, and in line with Green's application of his idea, we wish to highlight how the notion of home can inform broader discourses on diversity, community engagement, and belonging. Papadopoulous explains: "Home refers *both* to the actual physical shelter of a house embedded

within a certain locality as well as to the cultural construction of a space that belongs to the collective structures of meaning" (66, emphasis in original). In essence, home is a multi-dimensional space that can enable individuals as well as communities to situate themselves meaningfully in the world.[3] Certo and Beymer conclude their COVID-19 poetic inquiry of home thus: "We imagine with the current pandemic more people, as they turn inward, as they stay home, will be exploring the connections to and histories of their families, as well as the ways all beings are interconnected on our planet home" (254).

Resonating with these ideas of family and interconnectedness, Michelle Duffy and Gordon Waitt argue that sound is a fundamental factor in the shaping of a home-space ("Home sounds" 466–81). Discussing interviews with members of a coastal Australian community, they comment: "Home can, therefore, be understood as a serendipitous collection of things, including bodies, buildings, technologies, plants and landforms" (469). The surf, for example, was a prominent sound in this "serendipitous collection," one that helped members of the community to both feel and perform a sense of belonging to that particular place (473). From Duffy's and Waitt's analysis, we take this understanding of sound as deeply implicated in the feeling and performance of a home. Within the COVID-19 conditions of self-isolation and social distancing, the acts of listening, reflecting, and talking about sound made it a "poignant link," to use Street's phrase, that allowed us to meaningfully resituate ourselves in a context of crisis.

Particular sounds became the foci of our exchanges, including the buzz of the clock in the family living room, the creaks of the door to the screened-in porch, or the thump and bark of the dog rushing down the stairs to greet someone at the backdoor—all sounds mediated through time, space, and technology. Our conversations also revealed the sounds of a small plane pulling a glider, the breeze rustling the leaves, the rattling spinning washer and tumbling dryer. Contemplating these sounds, Reg commented: "All contribute to being aware of the moment. It's part of the realization that living is the now" (personal communication).

Memory and music also featured in our conversations. Memories of the records that played during the preparation of meals—records that often drowned out the buzz of the family clock—turned to memories of the sounds of childhood: moments of solace as a parent hummed along in the car to Louis Armstrong or Edith Piaf or Charles Aznavour; the distinctive sound of a maternal grandmother's singing voice; the clop of the milkman's horse and the rumble of his cart up a village street. Everyday sounds of past "homes" echoed in the lockdown spaces of the present, heard through the speakers of an iPad and laptop: hints of the sounds that accompanied my father's sense of time, connection, and his daily life. Speaking of the evocative capacity of everyday sounds, Street writes: "The song of a particular bird or the sound of water gently lapping on a shoreline at morning can have the same effect, and often strikes home with the most emotional power in the shadow of change or uncertainty" (*The Memory of Sound* 81).

The COVID-19 lockdown did feel as though we were both experiencing and performing a moment shadowed by change and uncertainty. In efforts to connect and navigate these conditions, laptops and cellphones became the medium through which we experienced, negotiated, and performed daily life. At least for me, Lauren, who has spent the COVID-19 lockdowns in a small urban apartment, the experience created a shift in how "performing home" (Andrews) can be an intimate, generative, and daily artistic practice. Thus, our exchanges emphasized how intergenerational listening, as well as conversation on what constitutes "home," can create space to discern the conditions of crisis, the roles of sound, memory, and music in shaping the individual self and the relationships in a particular family unit.

Summarizing some of the broader implications of these ideas, Reg emphasized that what was taking place in the daily COVID-19 decision making processes on behalf of communities is well described in the prelude to *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights and the Ethics of Co-creation*, where Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz write:

> In a world filled with paths we can or must take, improvisation compels us to think about the paths we can make. It requires an open attitude toward other people as well as a creative disposition toward art. Improvisation is a manner of speaking that requires listening, a collective conversation that turns great risks into splendid rewards. By definition, it invokes collective interchange that is potentially transformative. (xii–xiii)

Fischlin at al. go on to argue: "Improvisers need to counterpoise imagination with discipline, ego with empathy, and self-assertion with self-effacement" (xiii). Reflecting on these words, my father continued: "The world is not unidimensional. It is multifaceted. Faced with a problem that needs to be addressed with little time, given the accelerating viral spread, the interface of these improvisational factors came into play not only on a societal scale but also on a household level" (personal communication). What are some implications associated with these ideas? How does improvisation at the level of the household help us to mobilize our responsibilities toward others? In what ways can improvisation contribute to treating the wider world as a home? We turn to these questions in our concluding section.

Conclusion: Reimagining Musical Connectivities as Human Connectivities

> *COVID-19 has exposed the societal impulse to warehouse some of our most vulnerable, the elderly. How did we get here and what have we lost? (Reg, personal communication, July 28, 2020)*

In *The Memory of Sound*, Street observes: "[w]e are all archivists; it is part of human instinct to collect the material evidence of existence, be it books, records and CDs, photographs or letters" (74). He argues throughout his book that cherished objects can shape our individual and collective lives, and that we are not only archivists but also "recording devices, absorbing and preserving our personal witness of the world through the senses" (155). As we have discussed in previous sections of this article, sound and music are some of the "material evidence of existence"—a clock, CDs listened to during family meals, a mother's steps on the staircase— that we record in the individual and communal spaces of everyday life. They shape how we imagine, listen to, and perform our connections to others.

In the context of COVID-19 lockdowns, improvisation and listening emerged as daily, embodied, and intimate practices that could bring past narratives, memories, sounds, and gestures into the present moment: voices at a distance, past listening sessions in a family living room, the gallery view of faces on our computer screens. In a time of pandemic, our individual archives were on display in new and different ways. This included music that forms what Lauren Istvandity calls the "lifetime soundtrack". Lifetime soundtracks, she affirms, are "dynamic and are refreshed over time with the addition of new musical memories and through the influence of life and sense of self" (2).

In these ways, an improvised approach to intergenerational listening and conversation suggested that our imagining and performing of "home" could be a refuge, a space of hope, and a focal point for discernment and making sense in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. The performances shaping our home-spaces also became an opportunity to consider pathways that can help to reimagine musical connectivities in the context of a global pandemic. They

underscored the need to explore one overarching insight in particular: reimagining musical connectivities calls for reimagining the meanings and performances of "home" that can support wider human connectivities, whether these are economic, ecological, social, and/or political. Echoing Certo and Beymer's reflections on home as a source of interconnectedness, perhaps sound and music will continue to act as poignant links that can generate such reimaginings post-pandemic (Marcus et al. 11–28).

In one of our final conversations, we spoke of our hope that experiences of the pandemic—as complex, difficult, and varied as they are—might act as a collective springboard to imagine, listen, and connect differently. As part of our own COVID-19 contexts, the sounds, performances, and spaces of home have acted as a thread of hope, one to creatively compose our daily lives around. In the preface to *The Sound Inside the Silence*, Street writes: "We all carry our own sonic rainbow, and it is ours, because we made it out of the raw materials of listening" (xi). In many ways, the pandemic has left us with a range of questions, including: How can we use listening, and specifically intergenerational listening, to make the sonic rainbows of our entire communities heard?

Our answer: creatively engaging with "home" in all its complex, paradoxical, performative, definable, and undefinable manifestations. Below are some possible pathways with which to conduct these engagements, pathways that return to Tomlinson's and Lipsitz's notion of accompaniment discussed in section II of this article: "a commitment based on a cultivated capacity for making connections with others, identifying with them, and helping them" (23).

Performative Pathway 1: Listen well.

Listening well is a profoundly embodied, emplaced, and emotional experience (Rice; Waters). It is also a relational practice, one that can help us to recognize our own homes in the lost and prospective homes of others, as Papadopoulous suggests. In the context of COVID-19, Lanphier's arguments emphasize that this recognition includes the homes, physical and imagined, of aging members of our communities.

Performative Pathway 2: "Home" as a Site of Daily Improvisation.

Understanding the home as a platform for discernment and making sense can generate creative possibilities and actions (Golubovic and Dragin 143–51). This understanding can be brought into dialogue with the notion, in the works of Street and Istvandity, that each individual is an archivist and has a "lifetime soundtrack" to be listened to. These ideas can be leveraged to create, amplify, and/or sustain complex and multifaceted meanings and performances of "home" along with the insight that improvisation is itself a daily activity and way to connect. As Sarah Pink and Kerstin Leder Mackley underscore, even our nightly routines of turning on and turning off lights in our household spaces can be characterized by improvised movement and making (171–87).

Performative Pathway 3: Imagine Responsibility as Rooted in the Interplay of Individual and Collective Action.

In the midst of COVID-19, this third pathway includes the knowledge that individual action does make a difference and has collective implications such as flattening the curve of the virus to support collective well-being. Music has helped individuals and communities express and build on this knowledge ("Soundtrack for the Soul"; Kinsgley). While experiences of music contributing to collective change is not new, those experiences raise the questions: What will

our post-pandemic soundtracks consist of? What new musical and human connectivities will these soundtracks help us to imagine and enact together?

Perhaps the image of the living room clock can provide further insight into these final questions. The image is static, suspended at 10:13 a.m. on a particular day. The process of aging, however, as Pelias notes in his reflections and poetry, is dynamic, ever-changing. Time itself may be all we have but, unlike the static image, our experiences of it are never really the same.

Similar to the artistic resistance and spontaneous performances that emerged during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, we discovered different ways of shaping and sounding our relationship through the recognition and engagement with improvisatory practices including listening, conversation, poetry and reflection. Embracing this opportunity underscored that, notwithstanding their complexities and paradoxes, the spaces of home can help to make visible sonic and musical connectivities that accompany the process of aging and other individual experiences of time.

These are likely not new or innovative ideas, but they stress the importance of considering the dynamic and ever-changing lives of the older members of our communities (Demecs and Miller). In this way, the questions posed about post-pandemic soundtracks intersect with a significant dimension of the field of critical improvisation studies itself: the imperative of sounding "other possible futures" (Fischlin, Heble and Lipsitz 49). How can soundtracks of home, for example, help individuals and communities, sound other possible futures where the process of aging is visible, valued, and creatively represented? As Street reminds us, our subjective and intersubjective worlds, including our homes, are vital to such soundings "because *we* are the listening devices through which time speaks" (*The Sound of a Room* 19, emphasis in original).

CODA: A Memory of a Room at Night

"The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the sorry state of the warehoused elderly. The occasion is present for reimagining the reintegration of these stores of lived wisdom. For too long, we have ignored the benefit of their knowledge. Do we have the will to act?" (Reg, personal correspondence, May 26, 2021)

A hallway and muffled voices.

Lamplight, the edge of shadow.

A page crinkles. Turn once:

Set the book aside.

A distant glow and soft footsteps.

Racket of pillows and blankets.

On the left side, a face illuminated by time:

A window slightly cracked.

On the right side, a face with glasses perched:

A plastic cup and the sound of the daily news.

I click to silence the late-night chorus. Dim the lights.

Parents, asleep.

This: a memory of a room at night.

(Lauren, October 8, 2020)

Notes

[1] See also McCartney "How am I to Listen to You?" for a discussion of intimacy and improvisational listening.

[2] See Metcalfe, "Visualizing" and Persky, "Higher Education and the Ethic of Care."

[3] For further explorations on the complexity of home and belonging, see Yomtoob, "How is Home" and Neumark "Drawn to Beauty."

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Our Instruments Are Our Masks: Developing Communication Skills and Confidence Through Collective Free Improvisation

Kathryn Ladano

Introduction

As a performer and teacher of freely improvised music, I have always been fascinated by the ways in which musicians seem to have the ability to transform themselves when performing. On many occasions I have witnessed musicians who appear withdrawn, passive, and reluctant to draw attention to themselves transform into confident personalities, becoming musical leaders who other players are drawn to follow, accompany, or emulate. Transformations like these are fascinating to observe because the individuals who achieve them appear unable to do so without their instruments. As a performer myself, I have also experienced this kind of transformation. In fact, performing in this way has broken down barriers for me and has allowed me to form closer connections with others. When I have witnessed and experienced these phenomena, it has always been in the context of free improvisation.

While free improvisation, which is the basis of this study, has historically been quite difficult to define, it is perhaps best explained in simple and open terms. Free improvisation is music that tends to lack specific rules, relying on aural cues and individual expression rather than fitting into a specific harmonic, rhythmic, or formal framework—though it is certainly possible for freely improvised music to contain these elements (Ladano 2). In this type of music, the self-expression of the musicians participating is of greater importance, as is the musician's connection to the other players and their audience. It stands to reason that if there is a musical practice that can allow players to transcend their social limitations, better connect with others, and access self-confidence, it would be free improvisation. While it has not been studied extensively, there is some scientific evidence that demonstrates these benefits. Robert G. Allen, for example, has shown that the practice of free improvisation offers psychological benefits such as aiding musicians with performance anxiety (v).

My study examined the complex relationship between improvising musicians and their instruments and sought to better understand the transformative process referenced above. I hypothesized that, in the context of free improvisation, musical instruments function in the same way masks do in dramatic and cultural performances. I examined the ability of instruments to aid in a deeper expression of the self, provide a sense of security for performers, or allow for a deeper or different type of connection with others. While these were my primary areas of exploration, my study yielded a variety of unexpected results that offer greater insight into the improviser's relationship with her instrument.

Masks, Masking, and Free Improvisation

In order to discover if and how instruments function like masks in collective free improvisation, I consulted a variety of mask theories in disciplines such as drama, psychology, and anthropology. While there are few sources that have broached the subject of masks and improvising musicians, there are many concepts in masking theories that recur across disciplines that are applicable to free improvisation.

In the field of drama, mask improvisation is commonly used as a creative exercise for actors. Mask improvisation is not routinely used in music, but actors use this method to learn how to perform more effectively when unmasked. Theatre and Dance scholar Sears Eldredge has explored this type of improvisation and has stated that it is meant to help individuals better understand the self, the persona, and characterization, which can all be applied to non-masked performance (143). Eldredge has theorized that there are five different functions of masks. These include Mask as Frame (masks are used to highlight what is placed within them, focusing attention inward), Mask as Mirror (masks allow one to see a surface reflection of themselves and see through to another reality), Mask as Mediator (masks mediate between opposing worlds or mediate the flow of power or transition of the self), Mask as Catalyst (the mask stimulates change or transformation), and Mask as Transformer (the mask transforms and unites) (Eldredge 5). Of all these functions, Mask as Transformer is the most recognized and discussed in the literature and is also the most applicable to this study. Like masks, instruments can allow musicians to reveal themselves in new and different ways. In essence, instruments allow musicians to communicate and express themselves in ways that are unachievable through any other mechanism.

Before exploring mask theories further, it is important to address the notion of "the self," a concept whose meaning is not universally agreed upon. Some theorists speculate that the self is an abstract entity that is really a narrative self and nothing more. Others suggest that the self simply does not exist. My study relates most closely to Albert Newen's concept of the embodied self. In this theory, "the self is the embodied human being, while the self-model is an integrative pattern of characteristic features which is anchored in the body and which determines the body as the anchoring unit for self-conscious experiences" (Newen 5). Newen's embodied self is not abstract—it is rooted in and expressed by the human body. In other words, the body and the mind (including one's sense of self) are one. Newen's theory relates to different mask theories because the act of wearing a mask distorts the look of the face (part of the body), which in return can change how individuals express themselves.

In addition to the concept of Mask as Transformer, another aspect of mask theory that appears regularly in sources on theatre and anthropology is Masks as Power, where the mask has power over the person wearing it, and that power gives the wearer power over her audience. Here, masks provide their wearers with defense and protection as well as being a means of offense and intimidation (Eldredge 7). The concept of both concealing and revealing is also common in mask scholarship. Phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard explores the need for humans to mask in his book, *The Right to Dream*. He notes that masks represent duplicity: they allow people to appear other than they are, yet they also result in people revealing more of themselves (187). Efrat Tseëlon has also written about the duplicitous role of masks, noting that their real role is to present truth in the shape of deception (5). In collective free improvisation, instruments serve a similar role. While they are unable to conceal a person in the traditional sense (the musician will always be clearly visible when performing on any instrument), the instrument, like a mask, acts as a channel to reveal different parts of an individual's identity.

Mask theories also broach the subject of the social implications of masking. In her article, "Masks and Powers," Elizabeth Tonkin argues that masks are social phenomena acting as operators in communicative events between people (239). While she echoes assertions about the transformative ability of masks and the idea that they do not really hide an individual but rather reveal them, she also notes the important role of audience. She believes that the observers of masks (the audience) are not passive, but caught up in the performance and able to be changed by it (236). This concept echoes the work of Derek Bailey (1930–2005), who believed audiences can have a significant impact on performances of live improvisation. For

Bailey, "the effect of the audience's approval or disapproval is immediate and, because its effect is on the creator at the time of making the music, its influence is not only on the performance but also on the forming and choice of the stuff used" (44).

The psychologist Carl Jung (1875–1961) is perhaps the most renowned figure to write about masking and the concept of the persona. He describes the persona, which is derived from Latin and refers to a theatrical mask, as the hypothetical mask people wear in order to adapt to and deal with the world (*Volume 9* 122). Jung posits that it is essentially an exaggerated version of ourselves that we present to others, hoping to make a more favourable impression. He believed that every profession has its own characteristic persona which, while it isn't real, acts as a compromise between an individual and a societal understanding of how a person should appear (*Volume 7* 156). For Jung, one's public persona is a type of mask, but the wearer's "real individuality is always present and makes itself felt indirectly if not directly" (*Volume 7* 156). While it differs somewhat from the other masking theories discussed, a number of participants in this study strongly identified with Jung's concept of the persona, noting that their instruments allow them to create one when performing, which happened on several occasions throughout the study. For example, when interviewed, some of my study subjects noted that they found themselves musically expressing themselves as if they were someone else. In some cases, this simply meant that the musicians imagined themselves as someone with more confidence, which allowed them to perform better. In other cases, the musicians were imagining and spontaneously creating a character that they resonated with in the moment of performance. In addition, some imagined they were emulating a specific composer whose style resonated with them while they were performing.

There are many musical artists that have built masks and mask-wearing into their live performances, from Björk to the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Several researchers have analyzed the use of masks by the Art Ensemble of Chicago, many attempting to discover the purpose and the intention behind their mask wearing. Allan M. Gordon, for example, looked at the band's use of masks and face paint, noting that these transform the bodies of the performers who use masking as support, creating a symbiotic relationship between visual and performance art (57). Once again, the concept of transformation of the performer is highlighted, a key concept in masking.

There are many parallels between free improvisation and masking. Literature on both subjects routinely discusses the importance of self-expression, the role of audience, the forging of social connections, the presentation of a different face to the world and the revelation of different parts of oneself, the experience of transformation. While I have found little literature beyond my own research that draws parallels between these fields of research, there is much common ground suitable for exploration.

Methodology

This study involved thirty participants and employed both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Information was gathered via interviews and questionnaires as well as performance observation and analysis. The subjects used in this study were all under the age of thirty, had some experience with improvisation but did not self-identify as professional players, and were currently or formerly registered in a university music program. These parameters (such as the age limitation) were put in place to ensure that subjects would be experienced enough to complete the performance exercises without any guidance or direction while avoiding participants with too much confidence or experience performing. By limiting the age, my goal

was to ensure that all participants had roughly the same levels of experience, resulting in them performing in similar ways throughout the study and ideally not "taking over" or "showing off."

The study took place in three different cities in Canada: Waterloo, Ontario; Toronto, Ontario; and Lethbridge, Alberta. These locations were chosen because each city has a university with students and alumni currently or formerly involved in the study of improvised music. These schools included Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, York University in Toronto, and the University of Lethbridge in Alberta. Lethbridge was chosen as a location specifically because of the university's Integra Contemporary and Electroacoustics (ICE) ensemble directed by D. Andrew Stewart, which is focused on electronic sounds and instruments. Because my intention was to discover as much as possible about an improvising musician's relationship with their instrument, I aimed to include as many different types of instruments as possible. Instruments involved in the study included voice, piano, electric and acoustic guitar, keyboard, percussion, violin, trombone, synthesizer, saxophone, trumpet, clarinet, and both double bass and electric bass guitar.

Two limitations of this study are the fact that the subject pool was not gender balanced and that there was not greater diversity amongst the participants. While I had strived to include an equal number of men and women as participants, it proved difficult to find participants in each of the research locations that matched the study parameters. As a result, ten of the participants were cisgender women and twenty were cisgender men. In terms of ethnic diversity, approximately 15% of the research subjects were Indigenous, Black, or People of Colour.

The study design required each participant to improvise according to a variety of parameters, engage in two one-on-one interviews, and complete seven questionnaires. The interviews took place both at the very beginning and at the end of each session. The first interview was intended to determine each participant's subjective understanding of certain terminologies used in the study. For example, participants were asked what they thought it meant to feel connected or inhibited when improvising, how they recognize when they are communicating with other players, what it means when people describe their instruments as extensions of themselves, etc. The second interview was significantly more detailed, aiming to get at a better understanding of each subject's relationship with their instrument and to encourage participants to expand upon feelings measured in the subject questionnaires.

Questionnaires were given to each participant immediately after completing each performance exercise in order to document and assess their impressions and feelings, which were later compared against one another. A final questionnaire, significantly longer in length, was given once all performance exercises had been completed. It gathered more information from the subjects but also measured consistency of responses by repeating questions that had been asked earlier in the process.

The primary element of the study was a series of performance exercises. There were six of these in total and they were presented in a specific order with the ones deemed to be the easiest occurring earlier in the study. Each of the performances and interviews were recorded and took place in a controlled environment featuring only me and the other participants.

The performance exercises designed for this study were largely influenced by my own experiences teaching improvisation. I had noticed that when I gave my students different parameters in which to perform not only did their musical output change, but their body language and the way they presented themselves changed as well. For example, I had previously asked students to play in the dark, improvise using only their voices, and improvise

wearing a facial mask. When playing in the dark, my students often appeared less inhibited, more willing to take musical risks, and more comfortable overall. When using only their voices, most students found performing to be very liberating because they enjoyed having everyone in the class perform on the same instrument, having the same tools for musical expression. The creation of these exercises, interview questions, and questionnaires was also influenced in part by masking theories such as the concepts of Mask as Power and Mask as Transformer. Specifically, the concepts of masks allowing for both transformation and access to power were worked into the questions participants were asked. This enabled me to see how the experience of participants changed from exercise to exercise and how different types of masking provided different experiences for the participants.

The six performance exercises were carefully designed in terms of what order they were presented in, with most providing a different type of masking environment. The first performance exercise was simply called "The Warm-Up." As the name implies, it was meant to give participants an opportunity to get comfortable with being filmed and familiarize themselves with the instruments and sounds created by the other participants in the study. There were both structured and unstructured versions of this exercise, the structured version simply dictating an order in which each participant would start and stop playing. This was the only exercise in the study that did not specifically involve any type of masking.

The second performance exercise, "The Dark Room," required the participants to perform a group improvisation in a darkened space without the ability to see one another. The intention was to create a mask of darkness to perform in, ideally enabling participants to feel more confident taking risks since no one was able to see them. This exercise was presented second because it helped musicians to open up and feel more comfortable expressing themselves in my previous experience.

The third exercise was called "Instrument Switch." It involved having participants improvise as a group without using the instruments they brought with them. They were permitted to switch instruments with other participants or to perform using objects in the room. The intention of this exercise was to see how participants would respond when the connection to their primary instrument, their mask, was disrupted, forcing them to improvise with something less familiar. This exercise was introduced third, after participants already had a chance to feel comfortable playing their primary instruments for the first two exercises.

The fourth exercise of the study, "Voice Alone," required participants to improvise as a group using only their voices. Like "The Warm-Up," this exercise was performed in two parts with both a structured and unstructured component (with the structured version dictating an order of entrances and exits). The intention was to, again, disrupt the connection between subjects and their primary instruments (for non-vocalists) and to create an environment in which every participant had the same tools to work with. It was expected that this exercise would be more difficult for some participants, which is why it was introduced later in the study. Like the previous exercise, it removed the participant's primary instrument, or their mask (except for the vocalists, who were still performing on their primary instruments). While it would have been interesting to remove the vocalist's primary instrument for a second time (as was done in the Instrument Switch exercise), I wanted to examine the group's musical experience with everyone utilizing the same instrument. "Voice Alone" was the only exercise in which this was possible.

The fifth exercise of the study, "Masks," required participants to improvise as a group while literally masking themselves. Participants were provided with a variety of facial masks (including masks that covered either the full face or half of it) and other masking materials such as

scarves, hats, and other accessories. As in "The Dark Room," this exercise was intended to introduce another type of masking in which each participant's face was obscured. "Masks" was introduced later in the study because I did not want to introduce physical masks until the participants had already performed numerous times and were relatively comfortable with their surroundings.

The sixth and final exercise of the study was called "The Mirror." It was the only exercise of the study that required participants to perform as soloists. Participants were required to play a one-to-two-minute solo while staring at themselves in a mirror without breaking eye contact. If eye contact was broken, I would blow an air horn to notify the other participants in the room that a "mistake" had been made. Subjects were asked to do this exercise twice; in their second performance, they were asked to mask themselves with materials from the previous exercise. The intention was to create a higher-stress environment in which subjects were the centre of attention and it was possible to make mistakes. It also provided another opportunity to examine how masks might affect performers and whether or not masking helped subjects in higher stress environments. The original intention was to provide a performance experience with an audience. Because it proved difficult to move the participants into a space where an audience was gathered, I instead used the other participants as audience members. I then used the mirror to create a higher stress environment in which I could gage how impactful, if at all, physical masks were during the performance scenario.

Research Findings

Research findings in this study were based on the analysis of subject questionnaires, interviews, and recorded performance exercises. The primary areas of focus for the questionnaires and interviews were the subjective feelings of connection and communication with other players, feelings of inhibition or insecurity when performing, and the sense of connection to one's instrument. The questionnaires allowed these different aspects to be analyzed across the six different performance exercises while the interviews allowed for subjects to discuss their experiences in greater detail. The questionnaires utilized a ten-point Likert scale in which 0 indicated that participates strongly disagreed with the questions/statements and 10 indicated they strongly agreed. Because the practice of free improvisation relies heavily on effective communication and connection with others, much of the study focused on these areas, examining how, if at all, instruments/masks aided in establishing stronger connections and more effective communication.

Most participants throughout the study noted feeling a connection with the other players in their group throughout the study. While this feeling did vary from exercise to exercise, it was strongest in the Voice Alone exercise and lowest in the Instrument Switch exercise (participants ranked levels of communication on the 10-point Likert scale questionnaire with an average of 7.8 out of 10 in the Voice Alone exercise and 5.5 out of 10 in the Instrument Switch exercise). What is interesting with this result is that, though these exercises were designed to disrupt the relationship between participants and their instruments, both resulted in strong responses in terms of feelings of group connection, with most participants scoring these exercises either very high or very low. While Voice Alone scored highest for feelings of group connection, it was also the most divided exercise in the study, with women tending to have more positive experiences while men's experiences tended to be more negative. For example, of those who claimed the Voice Alone exercise made them feel self-conscious, 90.9% were men even though only 66.7% of the total study participants were men. In addition, it is important to note that all of the vocalists participating in this study were women. It is likely that connection was strong in the Voice Alone

exercise because all subjects were performing with the same tools for the first time—their voices.

In terms of feelings of communication between participants when improvising, the Dark Room scored highest (with an average questionnaire response of 8.6 out of 10) and the Warm-Up and Instrument Switch exercises scored the lowest (with average questionnaire responses of 6.9 out of 10 in both exercises). Despite this, feelings of communication were still fairly consistent across all exercises, though they were slightly lower at the beginning of the study when participants were still familiarizing themselves with the set-up as well as when they were forced to perform with an unfamiliar instrument. Feelings of communication in the Dark Room exercise were significantly higher than in any other exercise. This is interesting given that several participants noted in their pre-study interviews that body language and visual cues are needed for effective communication. Despite these beliefs, participants overwhelmingly felt they communicated the best in this exercise when they were unable to see one another, focusing on their ears instead of their eyes. The mask of darkness proved to be the most effective in opening up communication.

The study also aimed to see what types of masking, if any, aided or hindered feelings of inhibition. These feelings varied across each exercise in the study and were examined with several types of questions. For example, participants were asked to score how inhibited they felt during each exercise and whether they felt safe taking musical risks. Feelings of inhibition were lowest during the Dark Room and highest during the Voice Alone exercise: when asked if they felt less inhibited performing in the dark, participants gave an average ranking of 6.6 out of 10 in the Dark Room and when asked if they felt less inhibited performing using only their voices, participants scored 4.8 out of 10 in Voice Alone exercise. When asked if they felt safe taking musical risks, participants felt safest during the Warm-Up, with an average questionnaire response of 7.0 out of 10. The Dark Room was a close second for feelings of safety with an average response of 6.9 out of 10, while the participants felt the least safe during the Voice Alone exercise, with an average questionnaire response of 5.0 out of 10. What is curious about these results is that the vocalists in the study did not inflate these statistics. While one would expect the vocalists in the study to feel less inhibition when all participants were using their voices, this was not the case. In fact, only one of five vocalists in the study noted that they felt significantly less inhibition and greater safety taking risks in the Voice Alone exercise.

Another interesting aspect of the idea of masking in these exercises is that subjects responded quite differently in the Dark Room than they did in the Masks exercise. For example, subjects felt more connected and less inhibited when performing in the Dark Room. In contrast, when wearing masks, which interfere with one's ability to see the other performers in a natural way, participants felt much more inhibited and less safe taking risks. While these responses were not as low as in the Voice Alone exercise, they were significantly lower than in the Dark Room exercise: participants scored 5.8 out of 10 when asked if they felt less inhibited in the Masks exercise and 6.6 when asked the same question in the Dark Room exercise.

Feeling inhibited and more self-critical was, not surprisingly, more evident in the Mirror exercise where there was an average response of 7.6 out of ten for feelings of inhibition and an average response of 7 out of 10 for feeling self-critical. Women were more affected by these feelings than men: women had an average response of 8.2 out of 10 for feeling inhibited and 8.1 out of ten for feeling self-critical.

One of the unique aspects of the Mirror exercise was the involvement of the other participants as audience members. Vocalists generally had the most negative experience with the exercise

and specifically noted feeling more inhibited because of the audience component. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this exercise was that responses changed for vocalists when participants performed the exercise while wearing a mask. While the majority of participants noted that they felt no difference when performing the exercise with or without a mask, vocalists (and to a lesser extent, women) noted that wearing a mask made the Mirror performance easier, resulting in them feeling less self-conscious when performing. When vocalists were asked in their questionnaires (which took place immediately after each participant performed this exercise) if they were less self-conscious when performing with a mask, they scored average of 7.2 out of 10. When asked if the Mirror exercise was easier when wearing a mask, they responded with an average of 7.4 out of 10.

If our instruments are our masks, it makes sense that vocalists, who lack a physical instrument separate from their bodies, felt a boost in comfort and confidence when wearing a literal mask. When questioned about their instrument, the vocalists in this study were clear that their voice while performing was an instrument separate from themselves despite not being visible. The physical mask, however, offered the comfort and protection that a physical instrument normally would, exemplifying the concept of masks providing power. Without the mask, most vocalists had difficulty feeling comfortable performing. They felt inhibited and self-conscious. Once they were given the option to don a mask, however, there was a transfer of power allowing them to overcome those feelings to a certain extent.

As previously mentioned, there are a number of musical artists and ensembles that use masking in their performances—Björk being one of them. During an interview, the singer stated, "I wear masks because . . . it's a way to hide and reveal. With phones and selfie culture—I can [always] hear the click of phones—it's weird energy. With masks I feel protected" (Iannacci). While the participants in this study did not have to contend with phones and photographs, they did have to navigate performing in a distracting environment with the arguably "weird energy" born of looking at themselves in a Mirror while others watched and listened. The questionnaire and interview responses showed that most vocalists in the study felt largely the same as Björk: they felt protected, and that sense allowed them to take advantage of the mask's ability to conceal and reveal.

As previously discussed, mask relationships work in many ways. In the context of free improvisation, instruments function like masks: as transformers. In my dissertation, which examines this subject more deeply, I stated that "instruments, like masks, allow musicians to transform, revealing different parts of themselves and expressing themselves in ways that are not achievable through any other mechanism or means" (Ladano 135). To study this phenomenon further, participants in this study were asked questions intended to reveal different types of instrument relationships. I was interested in asking questions like: do instruments allow participants to "be" or "portray" someone else when performing? Do instruments allow musicians to reveal or express different parts of themselves? Do instruments allow for a feeling of greater security when a performer is on stage?

When asked if their instruments allowed study participants to "be" or "portray" someone different, 47% agreed at least somewhat with 27% completely agreeing. Vocalists, percussionists, and guitarists were most likely to identify with this concept. Participants were quite varied in their idea of what "being" or "portraying" someone else meant to them. Emulating a specific musical style, the sound of a specific composer, the personality of a celebrity, or an alternative fictional persona created in the moment were all mentioned. In fact, two participants spoke about creating a persona in the moment during the Masks exercise, largely influenced by the masking materials they chose to wear. Many of the participants, however, did not relate to

the concept of being or portraying someone else at all. Some participants felt this concept was relevant for them when playing composed music because they could emulate a specific composer or performer. Alternative personae were deemed less relevant in freely improvised music, though, where all of one's musical ideas are one's own. Some participants noted that using an instrument to "be" someone else was not an authentic expression and so did not apply to them when improvising. One subject (a male pianist) offered that "In order to [improvise] well, you need to be uninhibited . . . to wear a different perspective that isn't genuine to you—it isn't doing any favours in an improvisational context."

Participants identified more with the concept of one's instrument/mask allowing them to express different parts of themselves. 90% of participants agreed with the idea, with 77% agreeing strongly and 13% feeling it was true in certain circumstances. Women were the most likely to view their instruments as a mechanism that allows for deeper expression and for "being" or "portraying" someone else. 90% of women in the study strongly agreed that their instruments acted as masks that allowed for deeper expression and 50% of women felt that their instruments allowed them to be or portray someone else in certain circumstances. Several participants expanded upon the idea of instruments allowing them to communicate differently and utilize a different process of expression:

- "I think there are certain aspects about my personality that I wish I could express in just sort of a personal social way that I'm far more adept at expressing with an instrument." (male trombonist)

- "There are some things that you can't express without an instrument." (male percussionist)

- "I can totally channel the inner parts of my soul to create something musically that I think represented my thoughts and my current state of mind." (female violinist)

Women were more likely than men to identify with the idea that their instrument allows them to express different parts of themselves and/or allows for deeper expression. Both concepts were also quite strong amongst vocalists (all of whom were women), which is curious considering they do not have an instrument separate from their bodies. As noted earlier, vocalists in this study were clear that their voice while performing was an instrument separate from themselves, despite not being visible.

In order to examine the idea of deriving comfort from one's instrument/mask, participants were asked in their final interview if they felt that their instruments allowed them to feel more secure while on stage or while performing with other people. In response, 60% of participants agreed completely with an additional 30% agreeing in certain circumstances. Only two participants (a male pianist and a male synthesizer player) completely disagreed. Two female vocalists felt the question did not apply to them. Most participants shared that they derived a feeling of security from their instruments and many also noted that their instruments provided them with an element of protection:

- "I've definitely observed in myself that when I'm not standing behind an instrument and I'm in front of a lot of people, "what do I do?" There's definitely a feeling of being exposed when I'm not sitting behind a piano." (male pianist)

- "That's my voice, you know? Even feeling it in my hands, whether playing it or not, is still safety . . . [Recalls an incident from the past] We were all facing in a circle, and I was

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across from this particular person and I was feeling attacked almost. So, I had put the clarinet up as literally a shield . . . I do feel safe with my instrument. It protects me." (female clarinetist)

It is important to note that these feelings expressed by participants are unique to freely improvised music for them. Many subjects were quite open about how, for example, playing classical music interfered with their ability to express themselves, with their feelings of comfort, and with their perceived closeness to their instrument. Even those that had experience in jazz improvisation, where there are specific structures and rules to follow, noted a marked difference in their levels of comfort with jazz and free improvisation.

One participant commented on the difference in his experience with free improvisation and more structured forms of music is as follows:

- "As a musician, a lot of educational programs are teaching people how to—not necessarily intentionally—but teaching people how to play music ingenuine-ly, in the sense that you're often learning sounds that are being imposed upon you. I don't feel as skilled at being 'in-genuine' on my instrument as I am at being ingenuine when I speak . . . that's part of the reason why I feel it's a mask I'm secure with—it feels more genuine." (male guitarist)

This quotation is interesting in the way it illustrates a difference between strict and free types of performing, and in the way it highlights shortcomings in our current system of music education.

At the University of Lethbridge specifically, several players of electronic and electric instruments—such as keyboard, synthesizer, electric guitar, and electric bass—were used as research subjects in the study. They were chosen so that I could consider relationship differences between musicians and electronic or acoustic instruments. While there were not enough electronic musicians in this study to definitively establish a difference, the research did show a trend toward electronic musicians having a different relationship to their instruments than those that play acoustic instruments. When asked if their instruments allowed them to communicate things that could not be communicated verbally, electronics players scored the lowest: their responses averaged only 5 out of 10 to this question, whereas the overall average was 8.1 out of 10. They also scored the lowest when asked if they viewed their instruments as extensions of themselves, with an average response of 4.6 out of 10, compared to an average of 7.8 out of 10. These responses indicate that performers who use electronic instruments do not share the same close relationship to their instruments that acoustic players and vocalists do when improvising. It is possible that, because electronic musicians are more reliant on additional sounds created via technology (such as with a synthesizer or a guitar connected through a series of pedals), there is a sense of removal from the instrument. In other words, some aspect of the sound produced is configured or reconfigured in a way that is removed from the player. As such, it is possible that the concept of instruments functioning as masks is less applicable to these musicians. A larger sample size is needed to definitively determine this finding.

Conclusion

Like masks, instruments provide players with new-found power. In this study, instruments/masks were seen to provide improvisers with feelings of freedom and comfort, which allowed them to express different parts of themselves. The majority of participants identified with the concept of instruments functioning as masks, especially within the framework

of their instrument/mask as a "transformer." For most subjects, this meant that they were able to use their instruments as a means of revealing different parts of themselves, and specifically that they were able to express thoughts and feelings they felt unable to access any other way. Many felt that they could use their instrument to create alternative personae, as Carl Jung's theories of masking explored, allowing them to be someone else while performing. For some, both the transformative and persona-creation types of masking were relevant; they felt that they could use their instruments effectively in either way depending on the circumstances. These concepts were strongest for vocalists and players of acoustic instruments, while electronic instruments appeared to disrupt the connection between player and instrument, significantly lessening players senses of their instruments-as-masks (though a larger sample size is needed to understand and determine this factor more fully).

While this study did not seek to specifically examine how collective free improvisation could be incorporated into music education, its findings suggest several practical elements which could be of great benefit to music students. These include emphases on freedom of expression and social connection; employment of different types of communication; and the sense of connection engendered among players. Study participants were clear that these elements of performance are not attainable to the same extent when practicing other forms of music, and that they are not often explored in conventional music education. Young musicians often struggle with a variety of challenges, traumas, anxieties, and difficulties in connecting with others in meaningful ways. Therefore, the findings discussed in this paper could be useful in music education.

This study helps us to better understand the experience of improvising musicians and demonstrates how different parameters can change their experiences. It also illustrates how theories from other disciplines can contribute to a better understanding of creative and artistic processes. The improvising musician's mask/instrument helps them reveal, express, and better understand the self, and we can only fully understand ourselves through our connection with others. Collective free improvisation is an important tool for creative exploration and for the building of confidence and communication skills. The connections established in this study between improvised music-making and the power and transformation available through mask wearing certainly indicate potential benefits for anyone who wishes to take part. Through the practice of collective free improvisation, musicians of all ages might access the power of self-transformation and an expanded ability to connect with others, while expressing aspects of their lives that are difficult to express verbally.

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Three Decades of The Necks: Reciprocal Patterns of Improvised Music and Organisational Behaviour

Jeremy Rose

Research on improvisation that has turned to the social sciences suggests that underlying social and psychological structures inform performers' creative choices (see Bastian & Hostager; Sawyer; MacDonald & Wilson; Schober & Spiro 2014, and MacDonald & Wilson 2016). Terms used to express such happenings include "interactional dynamics" (Sawyer 148), "social practices . . . among musicians with experience in common" (MacDonald and Wilson 59) and "influence of the social context" (MacDonald and Wilson 23). Such a narrative explores relationships between band members and the dynamics of individual personality types. Models used to examine musical interaction, however, seldom consider ensemble behaviour outside the musical environment such as the way groups operate in social contexts outside of their music. By establishing organisational behaviour links between music groups and their socius, we can better inform collaborative models across a wide range of contexts.

This article traces how organisational behaviour is developed in relation to improvised musical processes. Using qualitative research methods including interviews with, concert observations of, and analyses of published recordings by the Australian piano trio The Necks, this article discusses emergent patterns of reciprocal behaviour between their music and social behaviour, showing how their improvised music processes correlate with their organisational behaviour.

The Necks are somewhat unusual in their long-lasting line-up, having performed together since 1987. They have released twenty albums and helped to define minimalist long-form improvisation as an art form. The group has earned a following among both jazz and non-jazz audiences and has achieved relative fame and notoriety as a cult band that seems misaligned with their relative smallness and with their original intentions to perform only for themselves. The group has remained committed to slowly evolving improvisations that easily adapt to new stylistic influences and modes of improvising.[1] The Necks have been largely self-managed and run their own record label, though they use booking agents in various regions and outsource their publicity. For these reasons, they lend themselves well to the interests of this research, which provides a privileged insight into the workings of such a group, unique in both their longevity and standing within the field.

This research is further aided by my recent collaborations with Necks members Lloyd Swanton and Chris Abrahams. *The Sacred Key* (2021) is a live performance by Vasesh—featuring myself on saxophone and bass clarinet, bassist Lloyd Swanton, and tar player Hamed Sadeghi—recorded at the Sydney Opera House. Vasesh adopts a minimalist aesthetic similar to that of The Necks. We create long-form improvisations underpinned by Swanton's slowly shifting bass lines, albeit with a less static rate of change and with our being heavily influenced by the Persian Radif-inspired compositions of Sadeghi. The Vampires' *Nightjar featuring Chris Abrahams* (forthcoming) demonstrates a shift in the ensemble's improvisation practice from its previous albums, adopting a Necks-like minimalist aesthetic and long-form build of texture, such as on *Khan Shatyr* and *Waves*. These professional collaborations and collegial engagements provide a unique perspective on the subject matter of this research.

My work here begins from the assumption that research into how musical groups operate in and out of their performance settings will add to our understanding of the complex web of research into improvised music, which has evolved significantly over the past several decades. In his book

Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music, British guitarist Derek Bailey suggests that, while improvisation has always been a part of human history, "free improvisation" came into being as a musical style of its own in the early sixties, driven by what Bailey calls a "questioning of musical language [. . .] or more correctly, the questioning of the 'rules' governing musical language" (84).[2] When viewing the documentation of influential artists from Eurological and Afrological perspectives and traditions, I note that one thing they share is a questioning of the "rules" analogous to the questioning of societal norms and political change of the sixties.[3] Other theories on improvised music view it as a negotiation of players' historical roots in emotional and intellectual terms. George Lewis expands upon Bailey, saying that "individual improvisers are now able to reference an intercultural establishment of techniques, styles, aesthetic attitudes, antecedents, and networks of cultural and social practice" (110), pointing to a complex web of cultural and social practice that informs musicians' decision-making that is still not fully understood.

Numerous studies (Murnighan and Conlon; Ford and Davidson; Seddon and Biasutti)—have shown a mutual relationship between effective internal dynamics and the success of professional chamber groups. More recently, Tom Arthurs ("Improvised Music"; *Secret Gardeners*) completed an extensive investigation into the improvised music scene in Berlin, drawing on numerous models of inquiry including grounded theory, ethnography, and social network analysis to address a variety of aspects of European improvised music making. Arthurs' methodology provides an alternative model for understanding how music operates, highlighting how diverse factors—including race, gender, and economics—can impact its practicalities, aesthetics, and ideologies (*Secret Gardeners*). Whilst these modes of inquiry provide excellent insight into the broader socio-economic factors influencing improvised music and should be applied to other music scenes around the world, my own investigation examines the musicians' psychological and social behaviour as it develops in tandem with their practice.

Research on organisational behaviour provides further understanding of the relationship between music and social behaviour. Investigations such as Murnighan and Conlon's 1991 study on how string quartets operate highlights how a group navigates conflict between its members and how certain strategies are imperative in shaping the overall success of a group. In this study, the most successful groups were shown to manage differences of opinion implicitly rather than resolving them completely. Whilst each group's "temperament, conflict resolution strategies, decision-making styles, and basic interpersonal skills" (170) varied, they were most effective in achieving successful performances when they balanced "diversity and similarity . . . so that members are familiar and sympathetic with each other's points of view yet different enough to be fresh" (170). In other studies, ensembles with such qualities were shown to produce mutually engaging spontaneous musical variations during performance, with players described as being "empathetically attuned" (Seddon 67) and as exemplifying "group flow" (Sawyer 157). Ingrid Monson's interviews with jazz musicians show how metaphors for playing "in the groove" (*Sayin'* 91–3) complement other phrases that are helpful when thinking about effective group performance, such as "walking down the street *with* somebody," "compatibility of personalities," and "a mutual feeling of agreement on a pattern."

Whilst the foremost concern of musical groups is the creation of music, they can also act as miniature enterprise organisations, with DIY initiatives in improvised music—such as Derek Bailey's Company, which acted as both an ensemble and festival—and the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), with its own set of organised general meetings, agendas, and business concerns (Bailey 133–9, Lewis). In business studies, organisational improvisation literature highlights the relationship between group improvisation and social behaviour. In their article "Organizational Improvisation: From the Constraint of Strict Tempo to the Power of the Avant-Garde," Cunha, Clegg, Rego, and Neves analyse improvisation

research in organisations, suggesting that improvisation is a contextually sensitive practice with many different forms depending on a company's structure as well as its political and cultural context. They conclude that improvisation is best managed by an organisation with certain rules and systems in place (the notion of "freedom within limitations"). Examples of this approach include "semi-structures and simple rules," enabling organisations to be both "organised and nimble, creating syntheses of structure and freedom that favour adaptation and consistency via a stream of product innovations" ("Organisational Improvisation" 9). Semi-structured improvisations were also shown to balance the forces of individual freedom, allowing individuals to express themselves within a group whilst working collectively in an organisation to readily adopt innovation.

Bettenhausen and Murnighan (1985) examine a similar theme in their research into the development of norms in newly formed groups using an experiment in competitive decision tasks. They observed the formation of social and behavioural norms in groups as new members shifted their expectations to those of the group. Subsequently, Bettenhausen (1991) surveyed over 250 studies that addressed the dynamics of small social groups: "the fundamental tension between individuals and groups, how group members form a common understanding of their world, and how groups develop and change over time" ("Five Years" 345). Bettenhausen outlines how a "basic concern in the organising process involves the fundamental tension between group members' desires to identify with and conform to group expectations and their simultaneous desire to maintain their individual identity and independence." (348) He suggests that this tension is often overlooked, highlighting how a group's effectiveness is often dependent on how well they manage expectations of both the individual and the group.

Literature that turns to social science to explain group interaction in improvised music explores the dynamics between the individuals that make up a group and the group itself. Ingrid Monson, for example, uses the social theory of Anthony Giddens to highlight forces of identity and community on musical outcomes, arriving at similar findings but from different perspectives than Bettenhausen:

> Viewed as a dynamic system through time . . . the day-to-day activities of group members express the norms, values, and expectations of a collectivity that extend beyond any one individual. The focus of cultural and social inquiry becomes the question of how the actions of social agents constitute, reproduce, and transform the social entity in question. (quoted in Monson, *Sayin'* 14)

Monson argues that jazz and improvised music are a product of existing political and social systems (*Sayin'* 14). Musical outcomes are derived from the sum of the individuals within a collective's social identity and interactions, not a geographically defined community or social category, but rather "the ways in which the latter social categories (and their representations) intersect *within* the activity of jazz performance" (Monson, *Sayin'* 13). Bringing these ideas back to my own research, it is imperative to consider the broader social dynamic in order to create meaning for players and audiences.

In this article, I examine the relationship between organisational behaviour and musical activity in an active, long-established improvising ensemble. I suggest that the characteristics of mutually engaging improvised musical collaborations can apply to ensemble behaviour beyond musical activity, and develop Bettenhausen's findings regarding the role of task rituals in shaping attitudes and behaviour. I then trace organisational behaviour throughout the musical development of The Necks as an ensemble to show how they have developed as an organisation

in tandem with their improvisational ethos. As *sui generis* improvisers, the Necks offer insights into how mutually engaging improvised music operates.

The Necks

The Necks is an Australian improvising piano trio consisting of pianist Chris Abrahams, bassist Lloyd Swanton, and drummer Tony Buck. They have produced an expansive body of work since 1987, establishing a modus operandi along the way that facilitates musical exploration within certain parameters. Their music is dynamic, having absorbed influences through time, with descriptors including John Walters' infamous quote: "entirely new and entirely now . . . they produce a post jazz, post rock, post everything sonic experience that has few parallels or rivals" ("Bishopsgate"). Their musical oeuvre is wide and diverse, making definitions of their music insufficient and suggesting it is often best to think of what The Necks' music is not, rather than what it is.

The Necks cite modal jazz as a starting point for their early musical explorations which, according to Derek Bailey, was a common point of departure for free improvisers including himself, providing a vehicle for playing 'free' but with a "definite modal orientation" (83). Tony Buck cites the use of repetition and the sustained build-up of tension in McCoy Tyner's piano solo on John Coltrane's "My Favourite Things" as providing the group with a direct source of inspiration in sound, feel, and harmonic stasis (2018). The group explores a shared overlap of language and influences, including—but not limited to—jazz, rock, ambient, new music, free jazz, post-free jazz, (post-)reductionism, textural improvisation, and durational playing. Their performances last between 45 minutes and an hour and feature evolving motifs, textures, and sounds.

To highlight the diversity of styles incorporated into their work, we can look to one of The Necks' recent releases, *Body* (2018), a post-rock eruption showcasing pounding keys and shrieking guitars, with Buck being the clear aggressor on both drums and guitar. The 56 minutes draw on Abrahams' signature piano style featuring slowly ascending/descending tremolo figures. Swanton's double bass pulses intermittently whilst Buck's backbeat continually shifts position, suggesting multiple meters or no sense of bar line at all.

A typical performance by The Necks will use one piece over the duration of a set with a long arc, a point of climax, and a steady release. However, recent experiments with improvised form defy these now-expected patterns. Whilst this use of duration and climaxes is perhaps not entirely new or unique to The Necks, the practice has become associated with them and has influenced others, such as a time when Evan Parker casually apologised to Buck following an electro-acoustic ensemble performance of his for "taking The Necks idea there" (Buck).

The Necks' musical concept has precursors in American and UK minimalists; however, Abrahams describes their music as a "human version" of minimalism, with a focus on the humanistic shortcomings of trying to repeat something indefinitely: "Things slowly morph over periods of time because we are human and our concentration, our physical ability to play a certain thing . . . not just through fatigue, but that each time you play something it is slightly different" (Abrahams). The immersive style of playing, inducive of flow states, was said to have formed early on in the workshopping stages of the band when they began playing without the aim of public performance (Buck). Swanton suggests that they were impelled to create a piece that "could go on forever" but were driven by their "aesthetic choices" to change:

When we first started out, we more had the concept that this piece could go forever, but just our aesthetic choices, in an attempt to make a piece that went forever, actually dictated that it wouldn't go forever. And that was cool, we weren't trying to see how long we could play for, but we were going in with the "if you have no end product" in mind. I guess, by definition, a piece could go on forever because you have no intention of ending it. (Swanton)

Whilst literature exists on the group,[4] no research has investigated their psychology or how their social behaviour is linked to their musical processes. Using interviews and concert observations, this study traces how their social and organisation behaviour developed in tandem with their improvisational ethos.[5]

This study adds to the growing call for investigations into how improvisation operates, particularly in solo and duo settings.[6] It is one of the first accounts of The Necks' social and organisational behaviour and is significant for providing special insight into one of the field's most pertinent improvising groups.

Findings and Discussion

Initial findings show an overlap at the meta level of organisational behavioural characteristics. Whilst the three members of The Necks expressed having individual identities and "autonomy" (Abrahams) in both musical and non-musical activities, they all spoke to the importance of a sense of collectivism. This notion is compounded by the immersive experience of their performances, as Abrahams explains:

We have kind of stuck to that structure, being an hour to forty-five minute piece of music where we use certain ideas of repetitive minimalism, and create a kind of *unified totality* that transcends the individuals of the group. (Abrahams)

Abrahams suggests here that their individualities merge to become a single entity, both sonically and consciously.

All members of The Necks made comments regarding a force greater than themselves and a form of mutual engagement that "transcends the individuals of the group" (Abrahams). The members all have an "openness" (Swanton), are "subservient" to the greater forces of the "band sound," and "wanted it to be a collective sound world where we could somehow create together," (Abrahams). As Buck put it, "there's often a cumulative effect of the sound in the room . . . a physical phenomenon . . . we are somehow going to adhere to in the performance." Abrahams notes that he does not "actually understand" their music but is part of a mechanism "too complex to break down."

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow provides an excellent model for understanding what Abrahams might mean by a *unified totality*. Flow, according to Csikszentmihalyi, is an experience linked to the complete immersion of oneself in an activity during the pursuit of manageable goals. In an interview with *Wired* magazine, Csikszentmihalyi holds up jazz performance as an excellent example of flow: "The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost" (Gierland). In this context, The Necks achieve "flow through incremental repetition and "slow" improvising.

The Necks all talked about what they do as some sort of game. Swanton, for example, reflected that "in a way what we do is a game and people are just coming along . . . to be a part of this game or ritual." Buck defines their music in similar terms:

> It's very simple methodologies, but [they are] continually able to bear fruit [for us] because of what they're *not*, also. The thing about how you do something that's kind of defined, but not . . . It is what you do, but what the material is. So yeah, it's sort of opened itself to continual new influences, and in a way it's almost a game: how do we take this material that might be, on the surface, diametrically opposed, and how do we fit it into The Necks without diluting The Necks, or without feeling like you are shoving something that's not going to work into a framework that you have. (Buck)

The Necks' members pursue artistic challenges such as subverting their own expectations and modifying the rules of the game to satisfy creative curiosity and stimulate the application of new ideas. Buck's challenge of finding "diametrically opposed materials" to fit within The Necks way of doing things is a poignant example of creating adaptable goals—each performance or studio album represents a new set of musical challenges to grapple with. For example, Buck describes their 2004 album, *Mosquito/See Through*, as his attempt to adopt ideas from pointillism, a style that seems almost incongruent to what The Necks do. The rumbling sound of Buck's wooden chimes here is reminiscent of a *klangfarbenmelodie,* set against high register piano motifs from Abrahams, whilst layers of non-rhythmic material are superimposed against non-metric accents in the bass and ride cymbal. The wooden chimes and high register piano coalesce to suggest a sort of dialogue. Throughout the sixty-one-minute-long piece, each element drops in and out to create a steady sense of forward movement while retaining a feeling of stasis. Buck reflects:

> There's a record called *Mosquito* where, from my perspective, I think I really addressed that particular issue. This abstract, never repeating, almost constantly changing pointillistic way of improvising, which is not The Necks way of improvising, but I found ways to incorporate that sort of vocabulary into The Necks' vocabulary."

Buck also suggests that playing in the slow manner of The Necks—which he describes as "improvisation… but sort of like a sloth version"—creates its own set of challenges. He sees the challenge of bringing in new musical materials to this way of playing as a game in and of itself:

> Sometimes, improvisation is much more mercurial and changing. It's a bit faster and interactive with most improvised music, or at least a lot tends to be. With The Necks, it's sort of like that, but sort of like a sloth version. Like, when someone does something and it changes it will be like [Buck makes a slow-motion hand movement]. The reaction will be very slow and measured where a lot of improvised music I play, everything happens pretty quickly. (Buck)

Rather than compare their style of interaction to groups which are often discussed in the critical literature as epitomising group interaction—such as the Bill Evans Trio with Scott La Faro and Paul Motian, in which the breakdown of form and instrumental roles allows them to, in Robert Hodson's words, "engage in a free-flowing musical conversation in which all three musicians may improvise simultaneously" (119)—I would suggest that The Necks' sound is more aligned with the McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison, and Elvin Jones' rhythm section from John Coltrane's Quartet, where an emphasis is placed on "building energy" and on a "stream that consists of utterances" (Michaelsen 47).

The Necks are also united in their conscious subversion of models from both jazz and free jazz. Their musical processes attempt to avoid the showcase of virtuosity common in jazz and the democratic processes of "everyone soloing at once" common in free jazz. Swanton explains:

> [W]e have demystified improvising to some extent because we are working with such a restricted, small palette. When a change happens, even the least musically gifted audience member can hear that something has changed, and they feel intelligent. They don't feel dumb. They don't feel lectured to . . . With a lot of the jazz that I was hearing when we formed the group, it's just like: "This is really arcane special interest stuff." There's a lot going on in here and that's great, but a lot of people feel excluded from that [. . .] In a way, what we do is a game and people are just coming along [. . .] to be a part of this game or ritual.

Abrahams also rejects the idea of a "soloist backing group," and uses an aesthetic of "anti-display of chops" so as not to be "spotlighting individuality in any way." As Abrahams tells it, the band "tried to work out what it's like to make a band sound rather than a display of individual talent." The notion of membership is very helpful here, and perhaps aligns the group's structure to more of a trade union than a corporate structure. Tomlinson and Lipsitz, in their exploration of how accompaniment operates in improvised music and social contexts, warn of the dangers of musicians "thinking of a performance [as a] display [of] their own skill." Rather, play should "entail a personal and ultimately political commitment to be a contributor rather than a competitor and to think beyond virtuosity and visibility" (28).[7]

The album *Aether* (2001) represents a high point for The Necks in their move away from jazz references. That move was heavily influenced by the members' experiences performing in the Berlin improvised music scene, a cultural hub and concert programme based around the Echtzeitmusik website, which served as a gig listing and community forum. Abrahams and Buck were regular participants, and Buck actually relocated to Berlin from Amsterdam in 1998–99 for a "complex mix of socio-musical reasons." The music on *Aether* demonstrates the removal of all aesthetic traces of jazz and a move away from pitch-based materials to an exploration of timbral and spectral possibilities of sound itself. Sonic possibilities, as well as silence, are material for interrogation, research, and exploration here. Buck reflects that this is another example of The Necks' "really minimal, silent way of improvising, this reductionist thing."

The balancing of individual voices and that of the group sound, Abrahams explains, allows them to explore the potential "mystery" of music, providing an underlying narrative of tension within their ongoing musical discourse. He explains this balancing act as being able to play "the same piece every night," in an almost Zen Buddhist view of their performance:

> There's two ways of looking at it. You could say there are three solos or no solos, or that we play a different piece every night or the same piece every night. All four of those statements are correct in some way. So yeah, the no solos thing, we verbalised at the start. (Abrahams)

This concept of negating a showcase of the individual also plays out in the way the players exploit the acoustics of venues to extend the sonic potentials of their individual instruments and to enable the converging of the group's distinct voices into a unified totality. Multiple sound textures from each instrument can create the effect of a sound greater than the sum of the individual parts. Particularly in certain venues with live acoustics, multiple textures from the three instruments merge, often creating sonic apparitions. Both band members and audiences have been known to experience hearing "phantom" instruments. For Abrahams, "there's a big

part of our live performance which has to do with the instruments transcending their sounds, you know, and coalescing in a way that creates sort of a hallucinogenic, sympathetic resonation, where the instruments tend to lose their individuality." Buck also noted that finding multiple voices within the one instrument expands the possibilities for the group: "I guess it's also how you play things, because three people can also play like five people if you really want to . . . Highly poly-possible instruments, like piano and drums, where you have two hands and two independent voices within one person." There was a period when Swanton was trying to get "multiple voices on the instrument," and he added that it was important to "avoid playing in such a dry acoustic (room) as it tended to force the pieces into a much more compact form."

Organisational patterns that mirror these musical processes include self-management and the homogenisation of tasks and responsibilities. The Necks have no leader and they share managerial and financial responsibilities.[8] All their roles are interchangeable, as Swanton explains:

> Likewise, in terms of outside the band, we all have different roles that overlap. I mostly run the record label. Chris does the travel booking. Tony used to setup the European tours but now we have a European agent, Lee [Patterson]. Chris does the accounts for The Necks. Account minded, I do the accounts for Fish of Milk, the record label account. When we used to drive, I used to do 90% of the driving because Tony doesn't drive. Chris records the gigs. I do the bulk of the merch at gigs, look after that. Well, we can all cover each other.

Whilst they each do tasks that feel most natural to them, all roles are transposable—they function as an organisation that allows for tasks to be exchanged and individual strengths to be utilised within the collective.

The band has a number of processes for implementing new ideas and change. Band choices are made through a decision-making process with mechanisms in place that allow them to avoid major disagreements. Whilst their process is not strictly a majority-rules democratic system, our interviews revealed that having three members is somewhat of a magic number when it comes to balancing voices within a group, both musically and non-musically. Tony Buck explains that the dynamics of the power of three in the group helps "clarity to exist, but also all the variations," balancing the forces of the three voices within the group whilst creating stimulus to work from:

> Three is a great number to have an improvised group with because you've got relationship of complementary and contrasting bits and two people can be playing complementary things and someone can contrast it, or you can have three individual voices, or three united voices. And this whole thing of tension and release, or whatever it is [. . .] There's not too many opinions, but you can achieve balances of strong against a less dominant voice. So, there's all those kinds of combinations and it doesn't get boring. (Buck)

Modes of communication are predominantly verbal and collaborative throughout their touring and album collaborations. Their live performances are non-verbal and nothing is discussed in relation to their music before and after a concert. Abrahams explained that "It's not like there's a concept that we've discussed, and we've said: 'This is what we're going to explore, and this will be The Necks.'" This avoidance of discussion around what will happen on stage and in the studio provides The Necks with a game in which they can challenge the shifting parameters and evolving, situated processes in their music. It also fosters greater spontaneity and avoids

predictability, an important priority for Swanton: "I would die if I thought the other guys were going 'Oh, bloody hell, Lloyd is doing that thing again, he always does that."

In contrast, modes of communication in studio mixing sessions are highly collaborative and include "rigorous discussions about aesthetic choices" (Buck) and "very robust discussions" (Swanton). Whilst in the studio, The Necks record dozens of improvised tracks and later edit them into a final composition and mix, which can all take a week or more to develop. In these situations, they demonstrate efficient interpersonal dynamics, freely conversing and expressing creative opinions, even if they differ from one another. Speaking on their modes of communication in the studio, Swanton shared that:

> Everyone is more than welcome to say to anyone else, "I don't think that's working" or "Can we try this?" or "That's fantastic, can we do more of that?" And we sort of had a rule that we don't do anything unless all three of us are in favour of it. We have never had a situation where two of us are really keen to do something and one of us is dead against it, but they have to go along with it because two of them are into it. So, I think that's important. If someone is really against it, of course we will try to talk them around, but if they remain unconvinced, well, it just doesn't happen. I think that's really important. You never get any member of the band doing anything against their will that they would really resent. But yeah, you just try to convince people of your position without being offensive and you just draw on whatever you can to make your argument. But we certainly have some really decent discussions in the studio. But on stage? It's too late, now. It's like—the time for that was thirty years ago, if it was really ever needed.

To avoid resentment and creative fallout, The Necks employ decision-making mechanisms such as a veto rule whereby all band decisions have to be unanimous and no one can be overruled. This is a crucial structural element within the group, providing a sense of safety for the members. It also means that creative decisions do not have to undergo compromise through concession. Instead, any individual can reject a band decision or proposal through veto, a distinguishable difference from the way other groups may operate. Despite having rigorous discussions, there has been no major falling out between members.

Abrahams explains the importance of the veto rule:

> I think the veto rule is very important, which means that if one person really doesn't want something to happen it won't happen, and to respect that and for people to feel safe to say that it's a very important mechanism.

A sense of safety is built through this veto mechanism as well as through the respect and healthy internal dynamics of the group, not to mention humour and friendship. These allow everyone to be creative and feel safe to take risks and assert individual identity when necessary. According to Swanton, "what each person comes up with is always respected. No one is ever going to tell each other what to play." These mechanisms to avoid conflict and deal with disagreements align with Murnighan and Conlon's 1991 study on successful string quartets, finding that difference of opinion is better recognised but not resolved completely. Writing about such successful groups, they note that:

> They viewed conflict as constructive but let emotions dissipate and unnecessary disruptions disappear by dropping things for a while. They pushed their points of view in their arguments, then dropped the issue, letting its substance either resurface or find its

way into their play. Conflict management was consistent with their performance goal—to produce an integrated, unified sound. (182)

These findings highlight how effective communication and dynamics are paramount to the success and longevity of a musical group. The Necks are a prime example of this conclusion.

The notion of group flow, which The Necks incorporate into their musical practice, can also be applied to the band's career. The Necks' trajectory has followed an arc of expanding international opportunities and engagements whilst nurturing their audiences in Australia. Swanton explains:

> In terms of the appeal, we like to say that we have never pushed anything. We grab opportunities when they appear in front of us, which is very much like the music which. . . we have learnt to not push the music anywhere. The moment anything appears, grab it and say, "Yes, that's what we're working with," but never try to force it anywhere. We sort of feel like saying the career that we have always. . . well, we just do what we do and if the opportunity arises, we just try to grab it as quickly and responsibly as we can. And enough of that happens that it's built. The concept of the band hasn't changed. We have never set our sights on stardom. Ironically, the least ambitious approach has actually borne a lot of fruit, and it has done really well, possibly by never actually trying to do well.

As Swanton suggests, the band's decision-making processes are similar to the fundamental decisions they make when improvising. Musical decisions continually repeat and intersect with one another. Abrahams outlines his creative thought processes and acceptance of repeating himself in simple terms:

> Well, I play myself into an idea. And often the ideas are similar to what I've done before. I mean, I don't try and come up with a new idea every time. Well, I know it sounds like a truism, but you just play, and something forms, and you're there . . . and often what forms is something that is probably similar to something that has formed before.

The development of an idea by an improviser undergoes the same fundamental decisions as any, as outlined by Jeff Pressing: ideation, execution, and evaluation ("Improvisation: Methods and Models"). These play out within both the Necks' performances and in their organisational behaviour.

The group displays social interaction and behaviour that also follows patterns. For instance, communication within the band is occasionally limited, and their social interactivity between tours can be minimal. This time off from each other allows them to maintain professional relationships during periods of intense touring and recording. Their tour schedules are limited to three weeks to avoid major disruptions to their lives and avoid tour fatigue. Buck shared the idea that his living in another country (and hemisphere) meant that they would have concentrated bursts of activity followed by periods off. He also reflects on how they dealt with each other in these periods:

> So, when I came back here (to Australia), we would set apart a specific amount of time, rather than just dribs and drabs, and then if everyone is living in the same city you just do things here and there, and just, I don't know. So, it became very focused because of that . . . ironically, if one member leaves the country, the band becomes more focused.

> And maybe this isn't specific about the music, but in a way it is—the way you deal with people personally and stuff, really influences the music. (Buck)

The Necks' model of musical exploration creates a challenge for the artists to continually develop and seek out new influences to apply to their music's methodology. Each musician has their own sphere of influence and realm of musical references. For Buck, "it's like three overlapping circles," and he insists that "we do challenge each other with really new ways of playing in the group." The challenge is a game for the musicians to push themselves into new musical territories.

Two examples of the way The Necks adopt new ideas into their music include the abandonment of playing in time and their experimentation of structure and form. Their exploration of rhythm includes playing out of time and using non-metric and poly-metric rhythms as well as dual tempos. Buck says that these rhythmic experiments began around the year 2000. He introduced these ideas carefully, aware that it might upset the homogeneity of the group or, in his words, "upset the apple-cart." Swanton recounted this transition as well:

> We are playing very differently now than the way we were thirty-one years ago. But the only really tectonic shift was when we all abandoned the idea that we had to play in time. I might have been the last one on board for that.

Swanton finds that they rarely play in time anymore, in fact. If they do find themselves playing in time, it might be just with themselves. This often creates streams of rhythm that operate against one another.

A live performance of the group at The Riverside Theatre (Parramatta, Australia) on February 4, 2018 highlights the group's exploration of rhythm, with each member playing their own sense of pulse and fluctuating in and out of a tempo. The piano and bass gravitate towards a rapid tremolo figure, creating a feeling of all-out metric abandonment.

The band's experimentation with form includes dramatic variations in orchestration and returning to musical ideas later in a single performance. Examples discussed by Swanton include Abrahams starting a piece and subsequently dropping out only to come back in later using material from earlier in the piece. Swanton reflects:

> We are starting to actually improvise form. Previously, it was just one form: one person starts, then another person comes in with a complementary idea, a third person comes in with a complementary idea, and then gradually we would kind of leap frog and it may build in intensity, but it was just a question of you move, and then you move, and then you move, and you would never refer back to anything that you played earlier because that is kind of classical form. We are going way out and then we are coming back, you know, with a recapitulation, but we have started doing that to some extent.

> One area—I started to notice it many years ago—was that Chris would often start a piece and we would all join in eventually, and then he would drop out, and so, in a way, he wasn't saying, "I want to play this and see where it goes," he was saying, "I want to play this, start you guys off," and then all it was, was a starter, like a match. And we've lit the fire and then we've put the match out, it might take ten minutes or so, but he would quite tangibly disappear and then maybe come in with something quite contrasting, which, up until that point, we hadn't really experimented with that, you know. You tended to be on the idea you're on, and then you would change it until it was unrecognisable,

but you did that over a long period of time. So, we have kind of added concepts along the way without replacing what we are building them on. We have never done a complete recoup, but we have slowly evolved into other areas.

This highlights another element to add to the group's ever-evolving game. Their model of inclusivity and ever-developing concepts of rhythm, form, and style has led to a diverse range of musical outcomes. As Buck points out, their modus operandi is to "exploit the differences," providing a path of continual change and innovation, another prompt to reflect on how The Necks might be considered for what they are not, rather than what they are, in their pursuit to defy expectations without doing a "complete recoup."

Conclusion

This paper has showcased how The Necks' organisational and social patterns correlate with various aspects of their performance practice. Their musical processes have allowed them to continually adopt new influences—including materials that are often diametrically opposed—as part of a process that they have turned into a game. Their performance experiences were shown to be conducive to Csikszentmihalyi's flow states, described as an immersive experience where they lose a sense of individuality and merge with a unified whole. Communication within the group was shown to use different modes for various contexts, including collaborative and non-verbal mechanisms in place to promote feelings of safety for difference of opinion such as a veto. A narrative of tension between individual voices in the group was shown to be a powerful part of the ongoing creative game that allows for the assertion of individual identities whilst serving a sense of collective or unified totality.

The findings reinforce Bailey's description of improvised music as a "questioning of the 'rules' governing musical language," with the band members describing their music as a dialogue of musical ideas that pushes the boundaries of The Necks' "way of doing things." Perspectives on improvised music must encompass a complex array of cultural and social practice, as Lewis ("Improvised Music") asserts. This study also reinforces Monson's call for inquiry into how a band's social and organisational patterns are expressed in their "norms, values and expectations" (14). Band members play out day-to-day activities in similar ways to their performances; musical parameters are reproduced off the bandstand, such as how their roles are transposable, yet utilise each other's strengths, the way that they choose to not push anything in their career and their music, often leaving them sitting in periods of silence on stage before a performance, waiting for one of them to self-nominate themselves to start a piece. They form a unique social entity that constitutes a dynamic organisation in parallel to their music.

The Necks' musical methodologies, coupled with three brilliantly creative performers and conceptualists, has facilitated a broad range of aesthetic and stylistic output. As Abrahams states, "conceptually, we all think that anything can fit in." The band's career trajectory has developed as their music has: effortless, with a long arc, yet with the potential for never ending possibilities. Their music is testament to their ability to continually reinvent and explore the fundamentals, and their stylistic diversity leads us to think of The Necks not as what they are, but as what they are not.

Notes

[1] For more information on the work and critical reception of The Necks, see Barr 333; Galbraith 114; Mitchell 55–77; Rose and Coady 68–86; and Australian Music Centre.

[2] Bailey points out the other labels for such music as "Free Improvisation," "Open Improvisation," "Free Improvised Music," and "Non-Idiomatic Improvisation" (83).

[3] See Bailey, Brown, Collin, Dean, DeVito and Coltrane, Jost, Lewis, Litweiler, Monson, and Porter.

[4] See Barr; Galbraith; and Mitchell 55–77.

[5] Interviews provided an oral account of the three band members' thoughts, experiences, and opinions. Formal semi-structured interviews (see Rapley; Shopes 451–66) were conducted in accordance with qualitative research methods outlined in Angrosino and Rosenberg, Atkinson, Creswell and Plano Clark, Gobo, Hammersley, and Rapley. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were guided by a semi-structured protocol, supplied in Appendix A (see below). An audio recording was made of the interviews which was then transcribed. Data from the interviews were coded according to a general inductive approach, as laid out by Thomas ("A General Inductive Approach"). Themes were extracted from the data and coded to provide a simple nontechnical means of carrying out qualitative analyses. Performance observations were undertaken, in accordance with Atkinson, of two concerts by the group and cross-referenced against the findings of the interviews. The study took place in Sydney during the band's Australian tour in February 2018.

[6] There are numerous studies that explore musical improvisation within groups of three or larger; however, psychological research into improvisation primarily focusses either on the individual or on improvising duets. Others that attempt to understand improvisation have focused on individuals' creative choices, such as Johnson-Laird, Hargreaves, and Pressing—who draw from theories from cognitive psychology—as well as ethnomusicologists such as Berliner and Monson.

[7] See also Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz.

[8] The Necks run their own record label, Fish of Milk. They now outsource distribution and promotion of their releases, though Buck was the band's booking agent early on. They now work with several booking agents in various territories including Lee Patterson (UK/Europe) and Jordan Verzar of Top Shelf Productions (Australia).

Appendix A: Interview Prompts

Are there any improvising strategies that The Necks utilise?

In particular, how do you deal with performing durational works using a slow rate of change?

How did these come about, and have they evolved over the lifespan of the band?

Has the model of improvisation changed within the band over time?

How do you make musical choices within the group? Specifically, how do you make choices on whether to change or stay the same?

Do you have any evaluative dimensions of what you do within this context?

Do you construct ideas about trajectory, rate of initiatives, degrees of novelty and diversity, reproduction/innovation, structural concerns, experience of enjoyment?

Do you have any limitations on what you can do musically? For example, experimentation with rhythm, harmony, levels of embellishment and complexity?

Do you use long-form improvisation in any other groups?

Do you use a personal sketch or outline in your thinking process, or any other method of future planning?

Do you monitor and evaluate your own output? That of others?

How are you impacted by others' contributions?

How do you divide your attention between your own performance and others'?

What is the impact of long-term relationships on the music and how does it affect your creativity, organisation, and responsibilities?

What is it like, socially and in an organisational capacity, to play in an improvising group for thirty years? Has the music affected how you go about touring and making band decisions?

What do you think allows the band to stay together for so long?

Do you feel you share the same musical aesthetic and taste as the other bandmates?

How important is aesthetic kinship? Humour? Mateship? Shared understanding? Group creativity? Group leadership? What effect do these have on your thinking?

Does the social world ever affect musical outcomes?

Are there roles within the band, both musically and non-musically?

Are there any points of leadership, while others follow?

Are there any opportunities to be the dominant voice?

Are there any points of conflict?

What experience have you had performing in large, improvised ensembles and how is that different from performing in The Necks?

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Just Making It Up: Structure and Spontaneity in Music and Teaching

An interview with W.A. Mathieu by Noam Lemish

Prelude

William Allaudin Mathieu (b. 1937) is a consummate musician: a pianist, composer, author, teacher—and, in my view, one of the most important musicians and philosophers of music of his generation. In the 1960s, he arranged and composed music for the Stan Kenton and Duke Ellington Big Bands, wrote for Downbeat magazine, and was the founding musical director of The Second City, the famed Chicago-based improvisational theater troupe. Also, in the 1960s (along with George Marsh, Richard Fudoli, and Clyde Flowers), Mathieu pioneered the application of theater improvisation games into the musical sphere. In 1969, after relocating to Northern California, he founded the Sufi Choir which he directed until 1982. In the 1970s, he taught at the San Francisco Conservatory and at Mills College. Transculturality has been a salient feature of Mathieu's musical life as, in addition to his work with the Sufi choir, he was a long-time disciple of North Indian vocalist Pandit Pran Nath and collaborated extensively with Nubian master musician Hamza El Din.

Mathieu began recording solo piano albums in 1980, many of which involved extensive improvisations. He has composed a large variety of chamber pieces, choral works, and song cycles. In addition, he has written four books on music, including the best-selling *The Listening Book* (1991) and the groundbreaking *Harmonic Experience* (1997) which reconciles the harmonic system of just intonation with twelve-tone temperament.

Over a teaching career spanning sixty plus years, Mathieu has been an important influence and guide to many musicians worldwide. I began studying privately with him in 2002, when I was 20 years old, and continued to meet him on a weekly basis until 2009. During this period, Mathieu became not only the most important musical influence in my life, but an important mentor and teacher in the deepest sense. Our relationship has continued to grow and, since 2014, Mathieu has entrusted me with premiering and recording two new collections of piano works entitled *The Magic Clavier Book I* (2015) and *The Magic Clavier Book II* (2018), both released by Cold Mountain Music. Over the years, we have performed numerous improvisations together and have spent many hours in and outside of formal lessons discussing music, life, and everything in between.

The interview presented here was conducted with Mathieu in the summer of 2014 at his home in Sebastopol, California. Our conversation started when I mentioned that I wanted to speak with him about improvisation and education. Mathieu's ideas presented in this interview challenge the segregation of improvisation studies and the false dichotomies that continue to persist around improvisation. He touches on the perils of separating improvisation and composition while simultaneously highlighting the value of the improvisational impulse to education, teaching, and life.

Interview

W.A. Mathieu: Years ago, I saw a cartoon—I don't know where—showing a guy playing tenor saxophone in the subway. He's got his open case there, he's obviously a busker, and you can tell he's playing very soaring music, lots of notes. A little kid, maybe a six-year-old boy, is looking up at the tenor saxophone player with an ecstatic expression on his face. His eyes are wide; he's totally transported by the music. It's a joyous moment. Meanwhile, his mother is

pulling on his jersey saying, "Billy, come *on*, that's not real music, he's just making it up." [laughs] It's funny every time I tell it.

I'd like to expand on why the joke is funny. There's an obvious level: improvised music is, of course, real music, and the mom's zeitgeist is too narrow to recognize that. But there's a deeper level, at least for people who've thought about what improvisation is, and what education is.

I think the line between musical improvisation, which is not written down, and composition, which is conventionally understood as written down, is much too precisely drawn, especially in the West where notation is our strong point. We are a notational culture, a visual culture. We were the first and best with a sophisticated notational system. No other notational system in the world gets close to the precision of ours and, of course, it has not only influenced but transformed our music while, commensurately, limiting it. Consequently, there's an *apparent* divide between what's spontaneously improvised and what's pre-meditated, notated, edited, teased, erased, and finally frozen. Such a divide appears obvious to many literate musicians.

But I suspect this is a superficially cognized boundary. Regardless of whether your field is music, visual art, literature, dance—anything that involves any kind of ideation—there's a moment of inspiration, a moment indistinguishable from improvisation. The crucial difference is what happens after that moment of realization.

One of my favourite cautions is: Beware of the brainstorm. Brainstorms can be very dangerous. The joyous jolt they give to your mind is actually addicting; it fills you full of pheromones. Brainstorms must be valid because they make me feel so good. Isn't that like any addiction?

And yet we who are writers and composers are intimate with how the process of writing and composing refines our thinking. This seems not only true but endemic in literate culture. But inspiration and refinement are two ends of a single string. One can always begin with raw, seemingly uninspired material. Creative writing teachers often advise their students to take a sheet of paper, grasp your pen, and start moving your hand. For writers, there's an underlying truth to this—because the writing of language is so ingrained with our intuitive selves, they get pretty braided together—but for musicians it's not quite that way.

There are a rarefied few of us who are so adept at notation that they can instantly write whatever they hear, and they can hear whatever, but there are not many musicians who can notate as fast as you can write or type words. Most composers, not all, compose by hunting and pecking, casting about in their minds for what sounds best, whether they are composing with the aid of an instrument or not.

Yet, I can't think of any creative act that isn't mixed with some impulsive, spontaneous aesthetic impetus. On some level, we are *all* the tenor saxophonist playing in the subway; there is always some sort of spontaneous arrival at a connection in the mind that wasn't there before. Remember, though, that the saxophonist has learned to play, he's learned his scales and chords, he's played the subway gig among others ten thousand times, and though nothing he plays is old, nothing is absolutely new either.

What I'm trying to point out about the deeper layer of the joke is that everything we do is improvised, it's just that language and literacy traps us into the refining process. I say "traps us" because you lose certain things when take yourself outside of real time, but of course you gain as well. I think, the likes of us—and I'm speaking for my generation of composers and yours, Noam—we have, most of us, some kind of improvisatory experience, most of us have some

kind of notational experience, and so it's like the intuition and the intellect just duking it out for the whole arc of your life. It's a story that's never ending, a puzzle never solved, a plot with no resolution. We don't *want* resolution. Like all paradoxes, the question goes away after a while. You don't have to solve your old problems because you've risen above them. The old questions are no longer germane.

So, for me, the thing that's funny is that everything is, to some extent, both improvisational and compositional. You and I, both, are very compositional players—more compositional than improvisers who may be more spontaneous and enlightened than we are—but there's some improvisers like Lester Young and Miles Davis who are compositional. They remember what they play to some extent, maybe not even intentionally, but there's enough memory so that patterns keep repeating, and levels of expectations are built up in the many dimensions of music. That's what composers do big time, and almost exclusively. The problem is, if you do that too much the improvisatory impulse can so easily dim, and your music gets stiff. And if you do that too much as an improviser, your improvisation gets stiff and the spontaneity dims. I think the joke is illuminating when you think about why it's funny—you're guided to the continuum between brainstorm and refinement.

Noam Lemish: Another thing it reveals is the given and obvious attitudes, the kind of misperception, about what improvisation really is, that exists and persists, and how marginalized improvised music is in Western music, especially Eurocentric Western music.

W.A. Mathieu: The truth is, when you get down to pre-notational music, if you look at the highly improvisational style of North Indian Raga, which has a very, very, very, very, very set form . . .

Noam Lemish: That's five "very"s, Allaudin.

W.A. Mathieu: . . . and yet it's *impossible* to separate the improvisation from the structure. Same thing is true of standard jazz (post early-60s is different): you can't separate the changes and the 32-bar pop song forms or the 12-bar blues forms from what was evolving improvisationally. The same thing is true, incidentally, in pre-Baroque, Baroque, and Classical music—generally, the heavy composers were the heavy improvisers: Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven to name a random few.

Even if for purely analytical reasons, the separation of improvisation from composition behaves like any duality you can name: it can be treacherous, perfidious. You start thinking in dualistic terms and you leave out the enlightened middle.

Noam Lemish: So, the joke goes right to the point of how we learn music. It brings up the question of the teacher as an improviser, the role of improvisation in teaching itself.

W.A. Mathieu: This definitely broadens the definition of improvisation past what is strictly musical into how we live our lives. It opens up the heading, "I don't teach music, I teach people." The relationship between a student and the teacher depends on the teacher's ability to realize the student's full capacity in the moment. Both teacher and student need to be present and be fully awake *right now*. Being fully awake is, by definition, improvisational because on one hand you have habits and expectations—you know, the English language, et cetera—but also "we're just making it up" in the moment.

To a conventionally trained teacher who goes by the book, first you do lesson one and then you do lesson two; much the same way as, say, chemistry lectures are droned to two-hundred

Chemistry 101 students in university. But the way you and I teach, Noam, isn't really music teaching *per se*. Our music teaching opens up into the larger domain of the way we live our lives. It involves any and every kind of experience that might come our way, experience that we can utilize according to what's most needed in the moment of teaching. On one hand, we are operating in resonance with the wealth of our own teaching history. On the other hand, anything might happen next.

I don't quite accept the term improvisation as opposed to some other way. There's a gradient between what is improvisatory and what is honed over time just as there is a gradient between now and forever. Could you seriously define *moment* in absolute terms?

Look, in the mid-50s I went to the University of Chicago, an impeccably intellectual school. We didn't concern ourselves with what was unknowable. There was no such subject. I didn't hear the word "mysticism" until I was gone from there. Our default joke as UC students was that we'd always begin a discussion by saying "let's define our terms." Isn't that the way our present culture tends to think? By definition, terms require dualistic thought which is pretty by and large what language causes us to do, unless we try to subvert it like poets and mystics. Language indicates there's life and death, cold and hot, real and unreal, improvised and composed, and on into the night.

One reason Buddhism has caught on in the West is because dualistic thought can have an anesthetic effect on our lives. You have to see the gradient, the continuum, the middle ground, the "middle way" between these terms that both reconciles and transcends them. The salient point is that everything contains its opposite.

If you listen to a really good Mozart composition, say the 40th symphony in G minor, the music seems to magically arise as if spontaneous. You see like forty violinists all bowing the same way, and *they're making it up!* It's a miracle! Conversely, when you or me are improvising really well, it's as if the music is written in stone. That was my feeling when you were recording your F improvisation as part of *The Magic Clavier* CD. I thought: "It must have taken him six years to learn that thing." And you were tossing it off. Of course, it didn't take six years, it took thirty-two, 'cause that's how old you are.

That's the ideal, where you manifest a deep knowledge—a knowledge that's so difficult to talk about. It's why the subway joke is funny, because, obviously, you make everything up as you go along and you refine it in various ways. And so even the most intuitive, spontaneous, crazy, schizophrenic thought is conditioned by the arc and pattern of that person's life. Patterns of learning are embedded in the most seemingly spontaneous utterances. And yet, [Pierre] Boulez's or [Luigi] Nono's serialization of every dimension can, and often does, have an improvisational flare.

One has to be careful not to get caught in the academic trap that your work can be justified only if you separate your terms out, reveling in the discernments you've made between and among them. That's good to do, it's important to do, mind you, but it's only one phase of the aesthetic process. The danger is that you can hardly help but be analytical if you are using analytical language. And, even when we don't express these distinctions in our language it's hard not to employ the cerebral cortex for its born job, which is, of course, to make such distinctions as clearly as possible so as not to get burned or eaten or run over by a truck.

So, what is improvisation then? Let's define our terms. [laughs] A written play is a written play, there's a script. Yet, inside of that, even if the actors are sticking to the script, every

performance is different. Same is true of chamber music, every music. So, there are pre-set patterns nearly wherever you look and there's spontaneous variety wherever you look. This is really all I'm trying to say. I'm just pointing out that as an opening exercise you gotta ask: What are you talking about? What is improvisation?

Incidentally, I need to point out that my own answers to such questions are tempered by the non-bounded fuzziness of my thought because, well, my dear, everything is everything. And *that's* the problem with asking a mystic a question. [laughs]

Noam Lemish: Right. Thanks. [both laugh]

W.A. Mathieu: The deep creative issues that we confront when we ponder our music-making don't make a lot of sense to non-musicians because they don't have that same experience that we do about, say, *where do these notes come from*? When you are improvising, you've already learned ten thousand patterns; you're a literate musician, you know your Beethoven sonatas, you know your harmonic sequences, and your blah, blah, blah. And there's only twelve notes. So, how could anyone *ever* make anything up? Yet at the same time, you yourself are a boss heavy improviser. Ponder, as we are wont to do, the subtle mixings of apparent opposites, I gotta warn you that the special lens we look through is not so clear to those who haven't cognized the subtle mixes of musical expectation and surprise.

Noam Lemish: I think, most appealing to me on some level is the idea of improvisation as teacher of "now." The difficulty is that it's an area that is slippery in a way because it can get fluffy, and I don't have enough substance to back it up.

W.A. Mathieu: Ah . . . let's talk first about the fluffiness. Why does this area get fluffy?

Noam Lemish: Well, beyond saying what is obvious, what else is there to say? I can say it in one paragraph.

W.A. Mathieu: So, say it in a sentence.

Noam Lemish: Okay. When you're improvising music, you are *ipso facto* engaged in the process of being in the present moment in much the same way that any authentic teaching requires.

W.A. Mathieu: Okay. So, why would one make a connection between improvising music and teaching? When you're driving your car you're improvising—you don't know what's going to happen next. Now the question becomes: What's so special about playing music? I'll give you my take: giant feedback loops. There are at least two feedback loops I can think of that are operative here.

First, as we've been saying, there's a feedback loop between your history and your present, between what's intuitively heard and your educated ear. Your cultured ear is constantly re-enforcing what you know sounds good and what doesn't. The *seeming* paradox is that you're making it up as you go along but, at the same time, you're drawing from your life history. The paradox isn't intrinsic to the reality, it's intrinsic to the way we're built to think about it. Paradoxes are in the *brain*, not the phenomenal world. The spontaneous feedback looping between what's coming out of the instrument and what you know to be true to heart defines what your education *is,* both in the long view and in the present moment. And, in a certain sense, you're also educating the audience by manifesting your mastery of this feedback. It is not difficult to sense

this when listening to great jazz, while watching well-played improvised theatre, or even in a good game of charades.

Now, there's an analogous feedback in the education that takes place directly between yourself and students. More specifically, there's feedback between what a teacher does, what the student needs, *and* the posited curriculum. I think the fancy name for that is intersubjective education.

Consider this, for instance: When you're improvising with a rhythm section over a jazz standard, you are being responsible to the changes of the song—the harmonic narrative—as well as the rhythm, the meter, even the original melody, but not bound by any of these. You have the freedom to interpret the boundaries responsibly, so there's a mutual understanding within the small society of your quartet. *Responsible to* but not *bound by.* Can you see the similarity to a teacher working from a curriculum but being spontaneous and interactive? *Responsible to* but not *bound by,* at least up to the point that the outcome is of benefit to the society at large.

The "of benefit" raises the practical issue of how to be spontaneous within what can often be stringent academic demands. In the same way a listener might say of even the most responsible improviser, "that's not real music, he's just making it up as he goes along," someone in a faculty meeting could—oh, so easily—say of a colleague, "he's not really teaching, he's just making up the course as he goes along." Such an instance might not be a very funny joke.

So, *now* it's time to talk about your not "having enough substance to back it up." Well, as an improviser, you're especially trained to listen to your students in a way that intersubjectively constructs your curriculum according to her needs, her being, what she presents, as well as being responsible to the prevailing ideals.

Coda

Whereas writing and research dedicated to musical improvisation remains a relatively new and still growing field, insights into the improvisational process extend in their influence beyond the musical world. Pushing to bring improvisation out of its segregated corner, several writers (including many published in this journal) have helped shed light on various dimensions of improvisation in a broad range of areas. W.A. Mathieu reminds us that, in highlighting the world of improvisation, we must be careful not to romanticize spontaneity and thus fall into the trap of dualistic thinking that separates and freezes such activity from the world of composition. Improvisation exists in composition, and composition in improvisation.

Going a step further, in sharing Mathieu's thoughts in this interview, I hope to highlight ways in which we can draw connections between the world of musical improvisation and the world of education. If, as W.A. Mathieu claims, we are all that subway saxophonist, making it up as we go along, but making it up based on the patterns and history of our own conditioning, then it is doubly true that in teaching we are constantly engaged in the ebb and flow of this seeming paradox. The teacher's task, it seems, is to stay engaged and aware of this subtle, never-ending negotiation between content, self, student, and the realities of the present moment. Admittedly, much like musical improvisation, this is no easy task, but one well worth pursuing.

Book Review

Voices Found: Free Jazz and Singing

Chris Tonelli
Routledge, 2020
ISBN 9781138341036
208 pages

Reviewed by Carey West

As a soundsinger, facilitator, and Assistant Professor at University of Groningen, Chris Tonelli traces the (incomplete) history of free jazz vocal performance in his first monograph *Voices Found: Free Jazz and Singing*. This work draws on research conducted during his postdoctoral residency at the University of Guelph for the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation, as well as during his time at Memorial University in Newfoundland and during his current post in the Netherlands. Reaching beyond a simple historical account, *Voices Found* weaves together ethnography, arts-based practice, and critical theory into a collection of essays that consider the socio-cultural implications of, and public reactions to, experimental vocal practice.

Finding Voice

Immediately confronting the complications of defining free jazz vocals within the fixed medium of text, Tonelli opens with an invitation to listen to an accompanying playlist (found online at [www.improvisationinstitute.ca/research-project/voices-found)](www.improvisationinstitute.ca/research-project/voices-found) and asks readers to consider their own visceral responses. This transmedial experiential pedagogy resonates throughout the book as Tonelli discusses the underlying cultural resistance to, and overt rejection of, a type of artistic expression so provocative that many practitioners can't even agree on its proper name. With a courage that reflects the very nature of free jazz soundsinging, Tonelli holds space for debates regarding the nomenclature of experimental vocals, introducing terms such as "extended vocal technique" and "soundsinging," and defining and applying each one along the lines proposed by the artist who prefers it. While the art and execution of free jazz vocalization may be alienating to some audiences, this book certainly is not. Rather, it guides the reader through a potentially obscure subject with clear and compassionate language. Further accessibility to the research Tonelli conducted is provided by transcripts of interviews with artists, resulting in both transparency and documentation of a relatively neglected field of study. The resulting text serves as an estuary of practice, reflection, and theory: a valuable resource for those who want to contemplate the principles of singing.

The first section of the book, "Sources," presents what the author refers to as a "partial, problematic, and [. . .] unknowable past" (73). Recognizing the myriad prejudices that free jazz vocal performance has had to contend with over the years, *Voices Found* begins with a history of the art form's pioneering interdisciplinary women: Annick Nozati, Yoko Ono, Jeanne Lee, Christine Jeffrey, and Maggie Nicols. Across their varying identities Tonelli detects two main commonalities: protean careers and rebellious spirits. "Each of these women," he writes, "practiced a radical inclusivity that challenged the norms and borders of artistic disciplines that would have prevented them from cultivating a creative practice uniting important aspects of their interests and identities" (38). As a case in point, Tonelli dissects Ono's well-known relegation by

popular media to be known first as a "cultural icon" (17), second as a visual artist, and minimally as an improvising vocalist, exemplifying the cultural discomfort Western aesthetics has with "unconventional vocality" (19). This first chapter suggests that it is precisely because race, gender, sexuality, and other identifying factors had a culturally and politically radical presence in artistic circles in the 70s and 80s that these women generated equally radical vocal performances. Such trailblazing offered permission to others interested in exploring the full capacity of their voices, such as Phil Minton and, later, David Moss. The result, Tonelli argues, was the emergence of a "small transnational community of improvising vocalists" (38).

Folding an interdisciplinary ethos into the book, the author then turns his eye to dispelling traditional partitions between vocalists and instruments by tracking the influence of music technologies on extended vocal practice. Whether the tool being discussed is a microphone or a language, the second chapter focuses on the tension between what we consider natural and what we consider mediated forms of musicking. This allows for a historical discussion of sound poetry and of rhythm's sneaky habit of turning language into music. From the work of François Dufrêne and Gil Wolman to the work of The Four Horseman with particular attention paid to the ongoing work of Paul Dutton alongside contemporary artists such as Jaap Blonk and DB Boyko, *Voices Found* documents the interactions between free jazz vocalists and technologies that create new possibilities. Favouring discussions of liminal creativity over relying upon binary constructions, the author argues that the tradition of extended vocal technique is in constant conversation with the technoscape, whether through the use of electronic tools or through the desire to replace them with the human voice.

Tonelli also makes space for more traditional "tributaries feeding free jazz singing" (73). Chapter 3 recognizes how his main subjects were influenced by commercially available recordings such as those of Louis Armstrong and John Coltrane. Here he notes that extended vocal techniques have been employed across cultures, citing yodeling, Tarzan's jungle call, and a recording of *The Music of Ba-Benzélé Pygmies* as influential materials prompting singers to reconsider their vocal capacities. In doing so, he makes note of hegemonic customs where vocal sounds become classified as un-human in spite of the very organicism of their production. Tonelli questions the purpose of policing the voice towards constructed "desirable" sounds and away from sounds judged to be unbecoming. Noting that these qualifiers change among different cultures, he theorizes that such a practice is motivated by fear of bodies—some bodies more than others. "Listeners can hear Armstrong's or Hawkins's wordless vocalisations as nonsense," he muses, "but they might also hear them as the material presence of a consciousness that has otherwise been silenced or deHumanised [sic]" (80). This thinking leads him straight into one of the great paradoxes of the voice: its dependency on our bodies as a means of production while simultaneously being something extra-corporeal. Free jazz singing is a political site where the cultural value of the body, or the corresponding cultural negation of it, is played out in real time. Soundsingers transcend traditional hegemonic categorizations of bodies through their efforts to appropriate and hybridize sounds emerging from the panorama of vocal traditions, and from non-human sources as well. Tonelli is careful to note that such appropriation "is not a mastery of the cultural property of the Other, it is embodied curiosity and engagement with the timbres and textures we encounter in the world" (87). These issues of embodiment and humility lead Tonelli towards some remarkable understandings in the second half of his book, "Theories."

The Opposite of Themselves

From the discussion on embodied curiosity, the author moves on to present historical activities of those he dubs "the second generation" of free jazz singers. That title refers to artists who were active in the 1980s and 90s and who responded to the work of the pioneers covered in the

first section. The evidence gathered represents a transnational community in which cross-cultural collaborations emerge from the interest in new possibilities with the voice. Tonelli marks the validation of unaccompanied free jazz singing through this community of practice and its rise in visibility via recordings, concerts, and festivals. He is also careful to identify challenges inherent in community interaction, especially those specific to this practice. Tonelli zeroes in on David Moss's work with the Institute for Living Voice as an example of a singer who draws on experience in traditional genres and on exchanging techniques with others at workshops. Here Tonelli notes how such exchanges resist traditional music training where students devote themselves to mastering a singular vocal tradition. He is also careful to present the added demands brought about by such a method, most notably the time required for artists to develop understanding of how to improvise in meaningful ways across varying approaches to singing. Chapter 4 ends with a list of musicians who can also be considered part of the second generation of soundsingers and invites further investigation of this expansive field.

After mapping the growing community of free jazz vocalists through the turn of the millennium, Tonelli turns to his own experience as a soundsinger, and to the public reception of Yoko Ono, to discuss the phenomenon of policing the voice that sometimes occurs when listeners encounter extended vocal technique. Chapter 5 focuses on two examples of performances met with derision and ridicule by (some) members of their audiences. This is one of the book's most compelling chapters, as it transforms the volume from a helpful history into a reflection on the impact of free jazz singing in the world. While Tonelli is careful to mention that his examples are not definitive of free jazz singing, he suggests that consideration of how and why the human voice is regulated indicates the potential for radical disruptions in future contexts. The author deftly combines theory from equity discourses—such as disability, race, gender, and sexuality studies—with Lindon Barrett's concept of modernity as a systemic process of "Humanizing and deHumanising [sic]" (128). What transpires is an examination of "how the micropolitics of the encounters [described] are part of a broader systemic cultural logic that we need to resist and reject to diminish suffering and inequity" (128). Tonelli goes on to argue that, when human voices create sounds outside of established norms, they threaten to dismantle limiting notions of identity and the value systems that order our bodies within society. He ends his deliberations with a note of caution that, while the voice has a capacity to represent our diversity and to transcend rigid identity construction, it is our improvisational attitudes that will ensure it can be used for revolution. Tonelli's thoughtful interrogation of our discomfort with the full range of the human voice results in exciting possibilities for its role in social and political change.

Voices Found's final full chapter moves seamlessly from the political potentialities of free jazz singing to its social actualities, presenting histories of community choirs leading to their current iterations. Many of the singers on whose practices Tonelli has focused his research run ensembles deploying various degrees of structure in improvised singing. This last chapter comments on the radical inclusivity that transpires within these ensembles, not only regarding the diversity of vocal sounds but also in terms of the negotiations and interactions between members. Rather than leave us with a saccharine notion of everyone singing in perfect harmony, Tonelli continues to offer relentless critical insights regarding the professional derision for specialists when they work with amateurs. Perhaps it is the fragility of sustenance that causes those employed in making music to shun projects that invite participants of all skill levels. In such a context, dedicating time to facilitating community choirs is radical act in and of itself. Of course, Tonelli digs deeper, considering the negotiations that happen within the choirs themselves. In a passage describing Maggie Nicols' approach to resolving conflict according to improvisational principals, he writes, "These kinds of encounters in improvised music provide us with a space for personal growth that can extend into and inform our approach to all our encounters with others in daily life" (155). He uses his concluding statements to emphasize

once again the accessibility of the voice and the close relationship between its metaphorical representations with literal acts of agency and inclusiveness.

This book is a wellspring of information for those who research improvisational singing. *Voices Found* presents a roadmap through the field of soundsinging that the reader can use as a resource for scholarly and creative inspiration. Tonelli provides a much-needed context for current practitioners of free jazz singing, and the section containing transcripts of his interviews serves as a master class with established artists, for singers who are looking for a path forward in this idiom. Additionally, the author's deep thinking about why voice matters so much to us, whether we appreciate or revile the sounds, explains a lot about this instrument that is both privileged and policed in mainstream culture. "My core argument throughout this book," writes Tonelli, "is that vocalists who embrace human vocal sounds that others Other as non-Human play some role in challenging or disturbing [. . .] pernicious, self-privileging worldviews" (73). The author's philosophy plays out in his methods, with regards to the singers whom he interviews, the presentation of their unedited words, and the way he chooses to order historical events. As a result, *Voices Found* is a resource with integrity, a work that acknowledges the impossibility of defining an art and a history that seeks to surprise itself through constant revolution.

Tonelli ends the book with "A Short Prayer for Social Virtuosity" that's worth reproducing to end this review: "If soundsinging tomorrow has no socio-political potential, that'd be great. It would mean it no longer exists in the philosophical sense of the term and all singing is heard, accepted, and enjoyed as singing, offending no-one and threatening nothing" (183).

Book Review

Vinyl Freak: Love Letters to a Dying Medium

John Corbett
Duke University Press, 2017
ISBN 978-0-8223-6366-8
250 pages

Reviewed by Mischa van Kan

For this book, musician, music critic, curator, author (and so forth) John Corbett has compiled over eighty columns that he wrote about rare and hard-to-find records over the period of some thirteen years for the American jazz magazine *DownBeat*. As he describes, by the time he started his column in the early 2000s, vinyl was thought to be a dead medium. However, as he continued to write the column, vinyl experienced a surprising revival. *Vinyl Freak: Love Letters to a Dying Medium* fits well into his work, through which he likes to introduce new music and promote unknown jazz and improvised music artists to his readers.

For *Vinyl Freak*, Corbett's journalistic work is ordered chronologically and alternates with freshly-written and more reflective sections (which he calls "tracks," thereby even turning the book itself into an LP). These additions allow him to tell more personal stories that put the columns focusing on individual records into a wider context of record collecting. In this way, the book adds to the individual columns, since the reader gets to know a bit more about Corbett's background and how he got hooked on records. Furthermore, the interstitial "tracks" chapters function as interludes between the different sections of collected columns, allowing for more elaborate discussions that add wider perspectives to the columns focusing on single records.

To complement the republished columns, Corbett has selected just over a hundred free improvisation and creative music records from his private collection that he wants to bring into the limelight (including some records that had been included in earlier columns). As Corbett explains, these curated records were issued in low quantities and, because they have been economically impractical to reissue, it has been hard to access the music. By directing attention to these records, he wants to prevent this music from being lost and forgotten. The selection comes with short descriptions and mini-reviews and includes not just American, but also (mainly Western) European and Japanese records.

Most of the columns discussing a particular record have received a postscript that discusses the afterlife of the record and assesses whether the record has since become available, and, if so, which record company or companies have reissued the music. Sometimes the postscript even discusses if the record store in which he found the album is still in business. The discussions balance Corbett pleading about the necessity of this music's public availability with celebrating the hunt after music that is difficult—or close to impossible—to find.

The interstitial "tracks" focus more on how Corbett got into collecting and how he has built his collection. In the sixth "track," Corbett describes the excitement of finding unknown music, such as his discovery of a great array of Sun Ra-related materials in the abandoned house of his former producer Alton Abraham. This search turns into a testimony of the ways in which material objects related to music and musicians connect people and can have considerable importance. People who have not met before can bond almost instantly by sharing their passion of musical objects like vinyl records: "We had chummed around talking nonsense as if we'd been buddies . . . I sensed a longing for camaraderie that might not be so alien to the predisposed loner" (Corbett 223). Here the camaraderie seems to be based on the

agreement that the abandoned objects that all other people deemed uninteresting and not valuable actually hold a distinct importance that "square" people cannot see. Among these items were unused record covers and the original colour separations—as Corbett notes, "all hand-painted on velum" (233)—for *Sun Ra Visits Planet Earth* and *Super-Sonic Jazz*, which aptly illustrate this clash in valuating niche objects and mark the author and like-minded collectors as different from the rest of the world.

Already in the first "track," the reader gets the ultimate proof that Corbett himself has been an avid collector (worthy of the title "Vinyl Freak") when he describes the mindset of a "proper" record collector: "The bulk of my identity as a collector was done forming by the time I had my first full-time job. The primary excitement I felt at those initial paychecks, naturally, was because they meant I could buy more records" (4). The columns that Corbett has written are aimed at an audience consisting of cognoscenti who share his values on jazz, vinyl records, and record collecting as a hobby—or even a lifestyle. This traditionally male-dominated readership knows (or is assumed to know) what is important when it comes to collecting vinyl records and understands that the ultimate goal is finding "rare" records rather than records that are widely available.

The book, however, is not primarily about giving in to the urge to build ever-growing collections of vinyl, but rather about appreciating the vinyl records themselves. As Corbett explains his personal relationship to vinyl, records are not merely artefacts that represent a final stage in a production process originating from the work done by musicians, record companies, and a variety of freelancers along the way. The author himself describes his interest as follows: "I think the thing that's always fascinated me about records is the play between understanding them as objects of solitary attention and as the focal point of social interaction" (Corbett 114). Based on this understanding, Corbett's book serves as an acknowledgement of the many afterlives of records after being bought for the first time: ending up in record stores specializing in used vinyl, changing hands several times, and connecting different people at various stages in the medium's life and (almost) death.

In that sense—focusing on vinyl as a historical document—it is different from the attention that vinyl records have received in an academic context. Scholars from various backgrounds (ranging from musicology to sociology) have tended toward discussing vinyl primarily in terms of its resurgence (see Bartmanski & Woodward), describing the medium as rising from the land of the dead during the rise of music streaming services whilst overtaking the CD as the dominating physical medium for contemporary music. Thereby, a majority of the research has focused on vinyl as a medium for newly issued music rather than used vinyl records that are of primary interest in Corbett's book. Though there is definitely a scholarly interest in record collecting (see Shuker), *Vinyl Freak* reminds us—in a less scholarly tone—of the importance that these objects have for humans, not only when being sold new, but also in their afterlives as found objects after being forgotten, neglected, or lost.

Corbett's discussions are by no means meant as academic in the sense that they aim to theorize record collecting as an activity or phenomenon. For a start, his columns are primarily written from the perspective of his experience digging up rare finds. The author describes his "hunting" technique and warns for the risk of "overlooking" special records at first glance when searching for records in a big store. When the focus turns to the record he has dug up, he further displays his knowledge of the selected records and he points out record cover designers like LeRoy Winbush, making clear why they are important.

Vinyl Freak does not follow a methodology in the way it deals with vinyl records; it can discuss the cover, the musicians collaborating on the record, the music on it, or its liner notes. But it does display the potential and richness of vinyl records as an object of academic study. Therefore, I think that this book should not be seen as a direct contribution to academic debates concerning vinyl records, but rather as a means for relaying stories of the

ways in which humans interact with used vinyl records. In that sense, it could provide inspiration for scholars to include vinyl records into their empirical material.

Corbett's focus thus gives room for the personal stories connected to records in a collection. They relate to the material aspects of records as the state they are in also testifies to the fact that the vinyl records discussed in the book have a (hi)story. Records are acquired in a particular way: they might have been gifts from close partners and been listened to over and over again. For collectors, the challenge is to "hunt" for the best possible item, a record "forgotten" by its first owner or rejected after one listen. A record is never just a record: it is a record in a specific state and with a specific story that makes it unique, and a story that can be very idiosyncratic but at the same time connect like-minded people and mark an individual's identity of having good taste and being hip and "in-the-know."

The search for obscure records also comes with the risk of exoticizing the music that Corbett discussed in his columns. It is great to see a book spotlighting records that have not received exposure elsewhere, but at the same time it is striking to see that the selection is lacking in certain forms of diversity: it is male-dominated and focused on the US, Western Europe, and Japan. Corbett does discuss some obscure African productions in the book (of which it would have been great to see more), but overall, he stays close to the kind of records collectors like him appreciate, rather than shedding some critical light on the record collectors' scene as a male-dominated world of insiders. Looking for uncommon sounds, Corbett finds "orientalist" elements that make non-American records interesting (19), and, in general, he fails to show awareness of ethical issues related to releasing ethnographic recordings into the global marketplace (134–35). This does not mean that Corbett's selection lacks in diversity—in part, this is exactly what he is looking for and finds in many records, such as Dick Wetmore's, about which Corbett comments: "It's not every day you hear modern jazz performed by a violin-led quartet" (148). But the focus on vinyl records as objects to be found and cherished means there is not much attention paid toward what music got a chance to be recorded in the first place and the ways in which record companies' and producers' target audiences have influenced the music that gets recorded and physically reproduced.

It is mostly in the "interludes" of *Vinyl Freak* where there is some space for critical reflection. In the third "interlude," Corbett discusses the vinyl record as a medium and reflects on the way the technologies that reproduce the music on the records have been of importance for record collectors. He shows a critical approach to the ever-ongoing discussion of vinyl's qualities as "'warmer' and more natural than digital" (62) and argues that some vinyl fanatics idealize the medium and fail to see the drawbacks that will persist, even if vinyl is played on the fanciest sound system. Instead, he argues: "If you keep yourself open in terms of playback devices, you're more likely to come out with the right stuff to hear" (62). In the end, Corbett's reflections are primarily expressions of his love for the medium rather than a critical investigation of its limitations or the individuals who collect them.

By embracing vinyl's shortcomings and distancing himself from the focus on hi-fi equipment, Corbett distinguishes a vinyl *snob* from a vinyl *freak*, with Corbett obviously falling into the latter category. "I have a relatively good stereo setup," he explains. "By audiophile standards, it's decent. It sounds great, but my turntable doesn't look like a glass building from the city of the future, and I have not dominated the living room with giant, towering speakers" (63). In part, this allows Corbett to argue that record collecting does not necessarily come with the maniacal, non-conformist, and hyper-masculine characteristics often associated with it. He informs the reader that, for a vinyl *freak*, audio equipment should have good audio quality without unnecessarily sacrificing an entire room (and possibly the other people living there). Corbett simultaneously offers a discussion of how the medium's limitations have influenced the music. For instance, the book discusses the "running time" of an LP consisting of twenty minutes per side, which the author qualifies as "ideal."

Corbett's discussion of vinyl might not be academic, but he does have great experience with various formats of the medium and he does have interesting points to make, demonstrating critical perspectives while narrating personal stories. A relevant observation he makes is that the fanaticalness of some record collectors has meant there are vinyl records that have become very expensive and thereby only available to a small selection of people: "I doubt that the record revival has been as democratic as vinyl once was" (64). Corbett argues that collecting is not about money, but about the process of searching for records itself, which is closely linked to the ways in which music is mediated: "Music continues to function in a similar way, but when records were the primary medium, it was somehow different. They were precious, were hard to find, required diligence, and that made owning them special" (64). Here, the reader might also reflect on the ways in which these processes are now challenged by online search engines (e.g. Google) and platforms like Discogs that change the character of the search for records, making the process a lot quicker and easier. Perhaps it is not the medium that is dying, but rather the type of collector who is willing to spend every spare hour of their time devoted to the search of that single mint copy of that long-forgotten LP by an artist whose name we cannot remember.

In considering *Vinyl Freak*'s presentation, it's worth noting that the printed version of the book lacks the characteristics of the many coffee table books that reproduce record covers or the theoretical and methodological approach of strictly academic literature. The aim of this book is different: it does not want to reproduce the vinyl records as objects or theorize them, it wants to understand them as stories. The format also allows the personal stories to get carried away about details that seem irrelevant by those not "in-the-know," as it is primarily aimed at record collectors themselves—at least, the nerdy, masculine stereotype of a record collector (see Keightley). The book even includes a "Limited Collector's Edition" flexi disc with unreleased material from Sun Ra—the story behind which the readers have been introduced to—making the book appeal primarily to the same audience that would enjoy nothing better than to roam stacks and crates of used vinyl records in search of something they did not know they were looking for.

The read is both interesting and entertaining, as Corbett displays that he is able to not take himself too seriously as a "vinyl freak." This is illustrated when he discusses one of the many dilemmas that record collectors face: to trade or not to trade. "If I make the trade," Corbett explains about a particular record in his collection, "I will lose one of my favorite punch lines. Asked by someone I'm giving a tour which of my records is the rarest in my collection, I was able to boast: *This LP was made in an edition of two; I have both of them*. That this is ridiculous is obvious, and that's what I've always liked about it" (245).

As Corbett shows in this book, vinyl is not a dying medium. Even if most music today is only available in streaming formats—despite the resurgence of vinyl in the last decade—the old media like vinyl records are still out there for freaks, snobs, and other enthusiasts to find and save from being lost and forgotten.

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Book Review

Universal Tonality: The Life and Music of William Parker

Cisco Bradley
Duke University Press, 2021
ISBN 978-1-4780-1119-4
416 Pages

Reviewed by Benjamin Barson

> *Who cares about good art, bad art, when the world is dying?*
> —Jonas Mekas

One unfamiliar with bassist William Parker's work may ask a question of this nature when deciding whether or not to engage with Cisco Bradley's recently released *Universal Tonality: The Life and Music of William Parker*. As far-right movements grow ever emboldened against a backdrop of climate-induced scarcity, a global pandemic, and ever-unbounded economic inequality and corporate malfeasance, this 416-page deep-dive into the life and work of an influential avant-garde composer and instrumentalist may initially feel irrelevant. Perhaps William Parker himself can best speak to these questions:

> Ask a starving child what jazz is
>
> And that child might say jazz
>
> Is a hot plate of food.
>
> In the final analysis,
>
> Who cares what jazz is
>
> If we have no respect for life,
>
> If the world is dying. (174)

The searing honesty of this paragraph, its humble and vulnerable self-questioning, its subtle and yet powerful invocation of revolutionary music as essential spiritual nutrition, and the fact that Parker's own voice is so centered, are all part of the unique methodology of *Universal Tonality*, which is the most important jazz biography or autobiography since George Lewis's *A Power Strong Than Itself* or John Szwed's *Space is the Place.* An innovative and effective structure fuses Parker's voice and poetry with Bradley's decades-long practice of music scholarship and critique. The result is a book that transforms the very definition of jazz biography, in addition to providing a powerful picture of a revolutionary artist's practice in the late twentieth and twenty-first century. As Bradley himself explains, "Parker's impeccable memory and storytelling ability, traits that everyone observes of him, make him the best source to speak of his own experience" (9), and Bradley manages his own voice delicately and masterfully as he seeks to center not only Parker's life but also the communities and collaborations that made it meaningful.

Universal Tonality prioritizes situating Parker's work and African American music more generally in a powerful historical framework, and the book's introductory chapter is innovative and deeply moving, providing a compelling overview of both the Parker family's genealogical branches and the various branches of North Carolina Black experience through slavery, emancipation, and the Great Migration. Bradley's training as a historian really shines here, as he is able to combine

archival research (much of it quite limited) with secondary sources and other historical context, including Equiano's autobiography, to create rich vignettes that link Igbo traditions (of what is modern-day Nigeria) to maroon life in North Carolina (Parker descended from a prominent maroon community) to the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem (where his ancestors relocated during the Great Migration). While his treatment of Reconstruction is somewhat limited—an engagement with Justin Behrend's thesis in *Reconstructing Democracy* (2014), which emphasizes African American grassroots engagement with a sometimes top-down Republican party, would have thematically fit Bradley's arc of Black agency and creative communal innovation—the opening chapter is a sweeping accomplishment which alone could be read as a meaningful introduction to any African American history course.

A deft mix of sociology and Parker's own voice help depict the structural racism that was embedded in Parker's early childhood in the South Bronx—a space Parker still felt was a "postcard for poetics" (61). Moments when Parker's own words appear are particularly noted: "They pushed us all together, Blacks and Puerto Ricans, and there was nothing there to empower people" (90), as well as Bradley's framing of the extensive interviews he recorded: "Parker could recall no Black-owned businesses in the area where he grew up" (90). In many ways, especially where education is concerned, Parker's life reads like a chapter in George Lipsitz's *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness*. Students of hip-hop will be familiar with the Cross Bronx Expressway, which also negatively impacted Parker's life and community. Bradley details Parker's forays into record collecting, including using money allocated by his parents for clothing to fuel his increasingly insatiable appetite for the new sounds of the likes of Albert Ayler and Ornette Coleman. "Inspiring music, amid the social maelstrom of life in the South Bronx, was the saving grace of Parker's childhood" (53), what Parker himself calls a "maze" filled with the potential for physical and psychological violence (55). "It wasn't until I got into the avant-garde," Parker says, "that I really began to see some light, some heavy light within all of the confusion of my life [. . .] It was a wake-up call to our inner being" (68, 73). A parallel foundational to Parker's journey of self-discovery were the Black Power and Black Arts Movements, which partially inspired him to "maintain . . . [his] own sovereignty as a human being (63)," including books by poets including Larry Neal, Don L. Lee (Haki R. Madhubuti), Gi Scott-Heron, James Baldwin, Nikki Giovanni, and Kenneth Patchen (67). It was within this context that Parker heard avant-garde jazz or new Black music as "an insurrection against European musical bondage" (67). Bradley does a deft job summarizing the different impetuses and waves of the new music in dialogue with its attendant revolutionary literati, as well as the ways in which each of these tendencies and lessons directly inspired and impacted Parker.

On that note, the book's third chapter ("Consciousness") is fascinating even for those familiar with the Black Arts Movement and the contribution of Archie Shepp and Amiri Baraka, whose work takes up much of the chapter. Fascinating because it is, in a sense, an "Adventure in perception," as we experience these works through the eyes and consciousness of William Parker and witness a very instructive example of how the new music shaped a generation of Black radical thought. It is another testament to Bradley's uncanny ability to make historical movements and a "seething mass of sensations" (71) come to life in individuals. Yet Bradley and Parker make clear that his inspiration was global and ecumenical, including not only the likes of Coltrane and Baraka but also Nicaraguan poet and priest Ernesto Cardenal, who he heard on East 10th Street; Polish theater director and theorist Jerzy Grotowski; the work of Swedish director Ingmar Bergman; filmmaker Stan Brakhage; and many others. The description of the impact of the European cinematic avant-garde and the sprinklings of power quotes is equally stirring as Bradley's distillation of Baraka and Shepp's work. Interestingly, the first creative output that Bradley focuses on is Parker's poetry from his early teens (which was nearly published by a movement publisher) and his film/photography from his later teens. Parker found

the ability to translate these motifs into music and explained his interdisciplinary approach as such: "There were no walls between writing, film, music . . . it was as if there was a room filled with sound, and another with words, one with images, and so forth. But the carpet in all of these rooms was imagination—it linked everything together. One inspired the other" (82).

Chapter 4 considers alternative pedagogical models and Parker's search for his musical voice as he navigated the straight-ahead conventions of grassroots jazz education in a program based in Harlem called Jazzmobile. In a way, this chapter is as much about the state of jazz education as it is about Parker's life, and a way for Parker to insert his own highly developed ideas about pedagogy and spirituality in sound into the text. Bradley quotes Cooper-Moore: "I have a musical education that I have been trying to get away from for fifty years. William is who he is because he had nobody telling him what to do but him. It's as if he said to himself, 'what is in me? How do I get it out of me?' He's one of the gifted ones" (98). Parker's eventual encounter with the Bronx-based cultural center Third World, run by Black liturgist Ben Caldwell, allowed him to play with and bandlead the larger and more experimental Aumic Orchestra and gave him the opportunity to meet Sun Ra. This endeavor, as Bradley himself points out, provides a rare snapshot of a poorly documented but clearly vibrant creative music scene in the 1970s South Bronx. Parker also begins playing in the East Village, including with Coltrane alumnus Rashied Ali. Cooper also centers Parker's work with his wife and longtime collaborator, Patricia Nicholson, who created the innovative "Centering Dance Music Ensemble" in the second half of the 1970s, which often included poetry, collective improvisation, choreography, multiple dancers, and mixed instrumentation groups that focused on "sound-movement communication" which required "immense in-the-moment focus" (130).

It is around these sections that Bradley's skill as a music critic and interpreter come to the foreground. Indeed, I cannot think of someone more prepared to take on the immensely challenging and rewarding work of putting words to Parker's *oeuvre* (as well as creating spaces for Parker's own descriptions of his work to breathe). In addition to his training as a historian, Bradley is the editor of *Jazz Right Now: Improvised and Experimental Music,* and he frequently publishes and edits interviews, artist features, and album reviews on the site, along with a dedicated team of volunteers. Well-versed in avant-garde and non-traditional jazz practice, Bradley can put to language subjects as experiential and otherworldly as Parker's bass approach during his collaborations with Nicholson, as is evidenced in his piece "Commitment." A particularly striking paragraph reveals Bradley's skill in helping us hear the music through language:

> Added to the rest of his developing concepts, one day it came to Parker, when he was practicing arco technique (bowing), that each string was a band of light and the bow was a prism. To Parker the harmonics were different colors in the light spectrum, and "each of those colors has an effect on people." Combining his two main concepts at the time— pizzicato bass as a trap drum set and arco work with strings as bands of light—set Parker on a productive path forward, reaching deeper levels of understanding his instrument and its limitless possibilities. (134-135)

In addition to taking seriously the visual and synaesthetic aspects of music, these descriptions of Parker's "sound paintings" are an invaluable contribution the book makes that will appeal not only to jazz studies scholars within academia but also practicing musicians, for there are concepts here that are truly invaluable to both bassists and creative musicians in general. Indeed, one might be inspired (I know, as a baritone saxophonist, I was) to attempt to put such concepts to use. Bradley and Parker do not only describe Parker's technique and sound but also those of a litany of underdocumented musicians from the avant-garde camp, including

saxophonist David S. Ware (who "always had a big sound" [135]), drummer Susie Ibarra (who "plays color and swings things" [183]), and bassoonist Karen Borca ("a groundbreaking player and barrier smasher" [155]), among dozens of other avant-garde players, some who have left an archival footprint and others who have been violently excised from the dominant jazz narrative.

Indeed, in some ways, the dizzying and inspiring network that Parker and Nicholson developed reads as a much-needed alternative to the bebop fundamentalism of Ken Burns's *Jazz*, ideologically powered by trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and jazz critic Stanley Crouch. It would be difficult to write a book of this nature that did not engage the erasure that these three figures participated in towards the music's revolutionary wing, and Bradley spends just the right amount of energy and time assessing their work. Part of this history is quite central to the book's narrative, for Crouch's infamous 1982 review of pianist Cecil Taylor in the *Village Voice*, which outed Taylor as gay, came as Parker was the bassist for Taylor and achieving a significant amount of international work as a result of this association. Although only a page and a half in length, Bradley excellently surmises the impact of the "market-cornering gesture" that partitioners and defenders of the neotraditionalist movement engaged in, also pointing out its synergy with attacks on Black radical artists in other fields (161). Bradley's book should be read as a much-needed corrective to this story of gaps and silences, to which we might add Michael Heller's *Loft Jazz* (2012) and Bill Shoemaker's *Jazz in the 1970s: Diverging Streams* (2017); Bradley and Parker's careful attention to their collaborators and side persons point to future research that deserves the attention of jazz historians and writers.

Particularly moving is Parker's own invocation to revolution, in which his rootedness in the Black Arts Movement becomes readily apparent. Beginning in Chapter 7, "'It Is the Job of the Artist to Incite Revolution': In Order to Survive," Parker's political voice becomes more centered and powerful as he transitions from Cecil Taylor's bassist to the bandleader of a group named In Order to Survive. As stated earlier, Parker's own writing on his music is so poignant that his quotations alone make for purposeful pauses from the engaged reader. He is incredibly poetic in describing his music, mixing humour, the mystical, and a critique of power and Imperialism with striking fluidity. He explains of his piece "The Golden Bell" that it is intended to invoke "a kingdom where all the trumpet players live in harmony without critics polls," a song inspired by the "ascension of the spirit into another place where the only tears cried were tears of happiness" (224). The concept behind Parker's Curtis Mayfield tribute, called "The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield," is described by Parker as "People's Music" dedicated to the "reclamation of land, self-determination, and the right to change existing structures rather than assimilation into a quagmire misnamed progress" (241). He explains of his 2011 release *Crumbling in the Shadows Is Fraulein Miller's Stale Cake* that the album was dedicated to a slave exodus, when "those displaced and tortured Africans held out their arms, they intertwined them like branches from a tree. Becoming unified as one voice they looked into the slave master's eyes and walked off the plantation never to be seen again" (259). Of equal weight is Parker's commitment to dedicate his compositions and improvisations to both personal mentors and historic figures, and Bradley always provides context around the individual being honoured. Included in his pantheon of dedications are Alan Shorter, Billy Bang, Don Cherry, dancer Rodney Diverlus, prisoner and Black liberation activist George Jackson, June Jordan, and several significant leaders of Indigenous resistance struggles in Northern America including Sitting Bull and the Navajo chief Manuelito. Parker was deeply committed to solidarity with Native American activism and history. Parker explains elsewhere that "The goal of this music is to never forget their grooves and funk that is very close to the heart of all Indigenous peoples wherever they came from" (230). In some ways, Parker's historiography of creative artists, activists, and freedom fighters maps powerfully onto his concept of "Universal Tonality," which Bradley explains is "the idea that

master musicians from any part of the world should be able to meet and play together, to speak to one another through their musical languages . . . Parker's claim to universalism is his boldest artistic statement, and through this he has demanded a place for revolutionary Black music on the world stage" (271).

One of the book's limitations is the relative lack of attention paid towards gender or women artists' experiences throughout Parker's career. In particular, the discussion of drummer Susie Ibarra from his trio In Order to Survive seems muted. Ibarra denounced the misogyny and unwanted sexual advances she experienced as a female drummer in the free jazz space in a 1999 *New York Times* profile, and we are told that "as this conflict ended up cutting through In Order to Survive, Parker decided to vary the lineups for the concerts he had booked through the remainder of 1999" (189). Bradley explains that Parker's collaborator Cooper-Moore "thought more could have been done to heal the fissure" (189) without further context or details. In a creative space overwhelmingly dominated by men, and with most of the book's central collaborators being men—save the crucial chapter on Parker's collaboration with his wife Patricia Nicholson and a later section on vocalist Leena Conquest—Bradley deprives us of a more detailed discussion of the contradictions and limitations of the scene's approach to women artists. Such an addition would have been welcome and might have provided necessary context for Ibarra's departure from Parker's band.

Universal Tonality is nonetheless a major accomplishment, providing a critical biography of a pivotal figure of the jazz avant-grade who is a repository of the "Black revolutionary spiritual school of music" (271). As the conclusion of the book details, Parker is widely acknowledged as an elder of the experimental wing of jazz known for his prolific output and incessant innovation, which as Bradley points out, "shatters the image of the so-called decline of the music" (275). The accompanying 11-page discography and 93 pages of notes and bibliography will provide future scholars interested in several of the underdocumented players mentioned to delve further into the important project of highlighting unheralded voices from the music's revolutionary wing. Perhaps most profoundly, *Universal Tonality* does a deft job amplifying the voices of a marginalized group of Black artists and allies who sought to change the world through their revolutionary improvised music in the last quarter of the twentieth century up until now. Their art is a clarion call to the important work we have yet to do.

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Book Review

Intents and Purposes: Philosophy and the Aesthetics of Improvisation

Eric Lewis
University of Michigan Press, 2019
ISBN 9780472131303
280 pages

Reviewed by Jeff Schwartz

Named for a Bill Dixon album it does not discuss, *Intents and Purposes: Philosophy and the Aesthetics of Improvisation* explores some key issues in the philosophy of music, posing five multi-part questions:

> 1. What is a musical work? Where does originality in musical works lie?
>
> 2. What is a musical agent or performer? How does agency function in the production and reception of music?
>
> 3. What aesthetically relevant properties do musical works have, and why?
>
> 4. What is a musical genre? How do genre categories operate and enter into evaluative discourses? What is their function?
>
> 5. What is a performance, what is its relationship to musical works? What is an improvisation? (x)

Lewis rejects the common practice of using hypothetical examples to test abstract answers to these sorts of questions. Instead, he draws his examples from avant-garde jazz. Developing and testing concepts from an improvisation-based perspective rather than a composition perspective challenges the traditional European score-based assumptions and biases of the philosophy of music. Lewis embraces George Lewis's (no relation) concept of Afrological music to describe a wide range of work based in the African diaspora emphasizing improvisation and the performers' individual histories and personalities. The examples chosen are themselves experimental; they thematize the philosophical questions at hand, so Lewis's work is explication as much as application.

The first chapter addresses the first question, on the identity and authorship of works, through flutist James Newton's lawsuit against the Beastie Boys for their use of a sample from his solo recording "Choir" on their song "Pass the Mic." Newton's label ECM had licensed the Beasties' use of the recording, but Newton argued that the sample violated his right as composer. The notation for the introduction to "Choir" consists of this particular flute multiphonic and instructions for the performer to explore the interactions of the sung and fingered pitches. Newton argued that the sample in question represented his unique compositional decisions and thus required permission from him as composer as well as from the owners of the copyright on the specific recording, but the court ruled in favor of the Beasties on the basis that that it was simply a combination of notes and couldn't be a composition any more than any other single chord voicing or instrumental technique. This example provides a provocative means of approaching distinctions between composition, performance, score, and recording; questioning traditional holistic concepts of the musical work in which meaning and identity depend on the complete structure; and highlighting some of the economic, legal, and racial complexity of the music business.

The second chapter addresses the question of subjectivity using the Voyager software created by George Lewis as an example. Voyager selects and produces sounds in relation to audio input. It can interact in real time with human improvisers and has passed a version of the Turing test, convincing expert listeners they were hearing a recording of two people rather than a person and a computer. Is Voyager a musical subject? Can it be an Afrological one? The argument proceeds through several theories of the self and of expression in music.

Chapter three uses John Coltrane's multiple versions of the Rogers and Hammerstein song "My Favorite Things" to discuss the identity of musical works. Coltrane's popular 1960 recording all but eliminated the chord changes of the original and replaced the original waltz feel with a driving 6/8, and his later versions increasingly left the meter and tonal center entirely. Are they all performances of "My Favorite Things"? For Lewis, the identity of works containing improvisation is continually being produced through performers' intentions and listeners' understandings.

The penultimate chapter considers genre using three albums recorded in Paris during a flurry of activity in August 1969, when a corps of touring and expatriate African American artists created the bulk of the BYG-Actuel Records catalog: The Art Ensemble of Chicago's *Message to Our Folks,* Archie Shepp's *Blasé* (featuring Jeanne Lee), and *Silence* by Anthony Braxton, Leo Smith, and Leroy Jenkins. Lewis argues genre is essential for establishing interpretative and evaluative criteria, briefly comparing Taylor Swift's fans, who expect her to always perform a song in close to its recorded form, to those of the Grateful Dead, who expect loose extended improvisational reinterpretations.

The Art Ensemble and Shepp/Lee albums overtly play with genres. The Art Ensemble's unorthodox version of Charlie Parker's "Dexterity" is followed by the parodic "Rock Out," asking the listener to think differently about bebop, rock and, reflexively, the Art Ensemble's own music in light of these works, while Lee's commanding performances of a blues, a gospel song, a Duke Ellington ballad, and the titular free jazz original critique the gender politics typical of those genres and their settings. The title piece of the Braxton/Smith/Jenkins LP, composed by Smith, is read as a claim by these three young Black men from Chicago to be considered as peers of John Cage (composer of the notorious "silent" piece *4'33"* and whose first book was entitled *Silence*), as well as both a critique of and an intervention in the European-American experimental lineage he represents (the "Eurological" contra the "Afrological"). Lewis briefly contrasts these signifyin(g) performances to John Zorn's use of pastiche in pieces like "Spillane," in which references only represent the act of reference.

Finally, Lewis returns to Coltrane's "My Favorite Things" to discuss when and how a performance is a representation of a work, and how improvisations can be works if they are not instances of an already existing composition.

The philosophy of music is a very specific niche. Readers with a general philosophy background will not find many familiar names here, but Lewis ably and accessibly handles this complex literature. The musical texts considered are well-matched to the concepts they are used to explain, test, and refine. However, Lewis is clear that this is not a musicological work. When he discusses the Art Ensemble of Chicago, he specifically directs the reader to Paul Steinbeck's *Message to Our Folks* for history, biography, and music analysis. The philosophical work is primary and, while Lewis grounds it in Afrological music, discussions of the music are secondary. The music is there to provide examples, not to serve as the focus. I found this somewhat frustrating because, apart from Coltrane, relatively little is written about these artists. Journalism aside, there is barely a handful of texts on James Newton, Archie Shepp, Jeanne

Lee, the Art Ensemble, Wadada Leo Smith, or George Lewis. While jazz studies includes a long history of uncritical and undertheorized biographies, discographies, and formal analyses which current scholars are justly attempting to problematize and move past, Jeanne Lee has passed away, as have three of the five core members of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and the basic work of gathering oral histories, archives, etc. from artists who began working in the 1960s is becoming urgent. It seems odd for these artists to appear as philosophical case studies before their lives and music have received much scholarly attention. Lewis himself has published an article on Lee, with a book forthcoming, and credit is due to projects such as the Oral History of American Music, UCLA's Beyond Central, and the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program for generating primary sources (see E. Lewis, "This Ain't a Hate Thing").

The categories of the Afrological and Eurological, presented by George Lewis in several much-anthologized and cited essays, have become commonplace without stimulating as much discussion as they deserve (G. Lewis, "Gittin' to Know Y'all"; "Improvised Music After 1950"). George Lewis is adamant that they are not essentialist or binary, but in some hands they can be a vehicle to reintroduce simplistic oppositions of Black/white, USA/Europe, improvisation/composition, and so on. This is ironic since George Lewis's own music—and that of many of his regular collaborators, including every artist discussed by Eric Lewis (except John Coltrane and the Beastie Boys), plus Muhal Richard Abrams, Anthony Davis, Derek Bailey, Steve Lacy, Musica Elettronica Viva, and the Instant Composers Pool—complicates all these divisions. In *Intents and Purposes*, the examples from both experimental/improvisational and popular music offer opportunities to trouble our notions of the Afrological/Eurological. Eric Lewis notes that the jazz community largely backed James Newton's suit against the Beastie Boys, seeing him as a creative Black artist taken advantage of by a group of white musicians who were getting rich by performing in a Black genre, part of a long history of such exploitation by the white music industry, while popular music fans and scholars saw it as one in a series of sampling lawsuits which threatened common practices in rap production. Are DJ-ing and sampling also Afrological? Do they become less so when done by the Beastie Boys' white producers Rick Rubin and the Dust Brothers? The current system of intellectual property law, focused on scores as the essential form of composition, melody as the key element of music, and recordings as work for hire, does not accommodate structured improvisation, sample-based work, or many other varieties of Afrological or Eurological experimentalism (G. Lewis, "Improvised Music," 220). Ironically, since the suit, Newton's career has moved away from performance towards more conventionally scored music, created and released in the traditional European classical paradigm, away from either experimental stream.

The primary criterion of the Afrological in *Intents and Purposes* is the centrality of the personal narrative and intent of the artist. However, for readers coming from a literary theory background, appeals to authorial intent are problematic, evoking the "intentional fallacy" from New Criticism or the structuralist "death of the author." While texts are not autonomous, it is risky to expect specific extratextual knowledge from the listener. A listener finding Coltrane recordings of "My Favorite Things" online will not even have the original liner notes, much less any other particular material on what happened to Coltrane, jazz, and the world between 1960 and 1966. While Lewis is concerned with ontology rather than semiotics, he regularly introduces questions of the meaning of texts, not only their being.

Lewis's discussion of the Beastie Boys suggests several further unexplored routes. First, while the works selected from the Black avant-garde clearly illustrate the issues at hand and often seem to explicitly thematize them, such as the Art Ensemble and Shepp/Lee albums' genre play, one could find equally provocative examples from smooth jazz. Commercialism is also a form of limit-work. Is XL's 4/4 rendition of "Take Five" still "Take Five"? Does a performance of a pop

ballad, which uses the identical arrangement but replaces the vocal melody with soprano sax, then become jazz? How much pitch correction and rhythmic quantization can be applied to a human performance before it is no longer a human performance? While many of us in jazz studies are drawn to the avant-garde as scholars, listeners, and performers, the discipline can also support a "poptimist" wing, looking at jazz as popular culture and as a commercial product (see "Beyond Genre Program"; Rosen; Porter).

Second, while Newton did not mention the Beastie Boys' lyrics in his suit, he complained about them in interviews, and about the use of "Pass the Mic" in a *Beavis and Butthead* episode, citing his religious beliefs (Sheridan). While the words to "Pass the Mic" are completely benign, it was the lead single from their third LP, and the first two albums had contained plenty of lyrical tales of excess. Relationships between words and music are an area of the philosophy of music which Lewis does not engage, although the majority of his examples are either performances with vocals or instrumental versions of songs best known as vocal performances (e.g., "My Favorite Things"). It is much easier to talk about intent and meaning in words than sound, but interpretation of works is ultimately tangential to Lewis's project, although the works chosen and his interesting use of them are what will draw most jazz studies readers to this book and keep us engaged.

Returning to the Newton case could have also been productive in the discussion of genre and pastiche. Some uses of sampling are meant to create dialogue with the source, much as the Coltrane, Shepp/Lee, Art Ensemble, and Braxton/Smith/Jenkins works Lewis discusses signify upon texts from John Cage to Rogers and Hammerstein. For example, the Beastie Boys' use of drum loops from Beatles and Led Zeppelin records on *Paul's Boutique* arguably thematizes their own whiteness and the boundaries of hip-hop. Some samples, such as the "Apache" and "Impeach the President" beats, are so ubiquitous that their referents are not the original artists but rather the canon of records which have sampled them. In contrast, the Newton sample surely originally eluded recognition by all but a handful of listeners and now, if recognized, likely evokes his lawsuit rather than his original recording.

Finally, the discussion of intellectual property law in the first chapter could have been more fully developed as a through-line. It is in this legal field that the abstractions of the philosophy of music become material and consequential. If I published a transcription of Rashied Ali's drumming on John Coltrane's 1966 *Live in Japan* rendition of "My Favorite Things" or released a recording of a performance of this transcription by a contemporary drummer, the composer credit and accompanying royalties would go to Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein III, not Ali or Coltrane, even though Rogers did not compose a single note Ali played and Hammerstein's lyrics were not sung. Judges, not philosophers, would decide who received the minuscule proceeds from my ill-advised project.

Intents and Purposes is a provocative intervention in both jazz studies and the philosophy of music, challenging jazz scholars to engage philosophical questions and philosophers to take improvisation and African-American creative music seriously.

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Book Review

Sudden Music: Improvisation, Sound, Nature

David Rothenberg
University of Georgia Press, 2002
ISBN-10 0820323187
ISBN-13 978-0820323183

Reviewed by Marcela Echeverri

Sudden Music is a book David Rothenberg wrote to tell stories about his journeys around the world, learning to listen alongside people he met during these travels. He tells stories of chance, musical instruments and technology, written and non-written music, language, and embeddedness, reflecting upon ideas such as how to find the "perfect sound" and how different traditions around the world practice their instruments in order to do something meaningful. He defies conceptions of music as language and the notion that music always has a beginning, middle, and end. He wonders whether there is a type of sound that can contain all sounds and whether there is a world that can contain all worlds. He also touches on how technology mediates sound making and the possibilities it holds for aesthetic and creative music development.

At the heart of Rothenberg's book is his personal experience of music as a lifestyle and his constant search for meaning. He reflects upon his search for meaning through practices such as playing the clarinet and learning how to play the Tibetan *gyaling*, a "conical-bore instrument with a double reed that is always played in pairs" (9).

Sudden Music brings the reader to reflect upon the tension that exists between improvisation and the written word. Using written language, Rothenberg tries to make his book resemble a spoken narrative or an ethereal improvised music piece. He emphasizes how, in his music, he tries to play sounds that cannot be scored. Nevertheless, there is a tension between this intention and his aim to produce books that predominantly contain written language:

> Accidental meaning is essential for improvisation, because we are never fully in control. When we don't know where the order of the work is coming from, wonderful surprises can result. The stories that matter the most, which are often never written down, evolve and recombine in memory so thoroughly that the truth becomes hard after a generation to pin down. (13)

This reference addresses random encounters in life, improvised friendships, and accepting whatever there is to take from unexpected events and the unknown. It suggests that stories are meant to be transformative and that memory exists to enhance creativity. Interestingly, Rothenberg also warns the reader about the risk of thinking too much when it comes to chance and storytelling. Furthermore, he points out the risk of becoming repetitive in the search for perfection. One tension in this discourse is that Rothenberg presents non-written spontaneous music as a protagonist in his book, while simultaneously, throughout two chapters, reflecting on musical practices that focus on playing a single sound over and over until the quality and intention are reached. This statement suggests that repetition can be thought of as an endless endeavour as well as a dangerous action that can lead to falling into a non-creative state of mind, reflecting an unaddressed tension between the acts of being spontaneous and being repetitive.

In the chapter "One Note History," for instance, Rothenberg reflects on the repetition of a single note as an admirable practice that some musicians around the world have performed as their main exercise. In making this claim, Rothenberg leaves several pertinent questions unaddressed: Is repetition the path towards spontaneity? Is it about producing meaningful sounds or about surprise in the constant creation of music? Is repetition without thought what he refers to as spontaneity? These unaddressed questions beg further reflection on the definitions of music and improvisation more generally. Rothenberg makes it clear that he is constantly searching for meaning, and this tension seems to demonstrate how he is using this book as a means of trying to identify *how to create* in a meaningful manner.

Another tension in this work arises when Rothenberg states that music is not language, it is not meant to be understood, but felt, and it does not necessarily need to have a structure. While these descriptors outline what Rothenberg does *not* consider music to be (e.g., it is not language), he fails to offer a definition of what music *is*. Contrary to Rothenberg's statement, one could argue that music can indeed be language. Music can be a form of communication that expresses emotion, much like facial expressions and body language. When one listens to a language they do not understand, one can interpret it as music, but this does not mean that it is no longer language. Perception of language can be informed by semantic understanding, but it does not provide a complete picture. Likewise, emotional connection to music is only one of several aspects to consider. Western music involves notation, words, symbols, structures, and terms that can be understood as language. Even though Rothenberg is not referring to Western music when he speaks of music, there is still no framing in the book for how he would define it. Some forms of music might be more distant from our conceptions of language than others, but it is key to identify the framework through which one refers to music. What *is* music and what *is not* music are questions that Rothenberg provokes in the reader but does not manage to answer effectively.

For Rothenberg, music, sound, nature, and machines are all part of an entanglement of agencies that work alongside chance as a series of events that allow creativity, surprise, and life itself to happen. Music, for Rothenberg, can be produced by a diversity of elements; it can come from birds, whales, trees, wind, water, fire, cars, planes, synthesizers, and electronic and acoustic instruments. This reflects John Cage's notion that music is not so much about what is played, but more about what is listened to: "wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments" (Cage 3).

In "A Sense of a Soundscape," Rothenberg argues that humans perceive themselves as being removed from the natural world, declaring his own personal desire and endeavour to fit in to the natural world again. He insists that there is a need to raise awareness of the surrounding world. He references R. Murray Schafer's well-established concept of "soundscape," describing this term from a visual perspective—as inescapable for us as the landscapes that enable us to stand out from and also be a part of them (46). Schafer's proposition involves a specific sense of aesthetics in which there are desirable and undesirable sounds. For Schafer, nature sounds should be preserved, and machine sounds should disappear. However, in Rothenberg's interpretation, there is no dichotomy between nature and machine, music and nature, humans and the world. Rothenberg agrees with Schafer's concept of not being able to escape a soundscape. Yet, he seeks to explore sounds as separate from the source that produces them. Rothenberg states that throughout listening experiments, he has come to discover that often it is impossible to distinguish a sound made by a human-made machine from one made among bugs:

> We will not survive as artists or as a species if we cannot become part of the world that surrounds us. There should be no duality between music and nature. Natural sound is never separable from human sound. The moment we decide to listen, to seek out meaning, we start to change the world. We cannot preserve that sound world apart from our listening, nor can we make music without sensing its resonance in an environment, be it a concert hall, a bedroom, a car, a bar or a windy bluff out in the rain. (90)

This chapter also states that space is vital for sound to develop. Rothenberg argues that space can be physical or digital. He claims that digitally modified sounds can evoke a variety of spaces, echoes, and reverberations different to the place where the sounds are being listened to. One can be at a library listening to music through headphones, close their eyes, and imagine they are in a place as big as a canyon or as intimate as a small room, depending on the music. In this case, Rothenberg defends sound recording and digitally modified sounds as tools for listeners to transport themselves to distant places.

Furthermore, Rothenberg reflects on the potential technology has to transform the way in which humans listen to music. Keeping in mind that this book was published in 2002, Rothenberg refers to an interface in which the composer can choose a series of parameters that set the tone for how they want their music to sound, but it is up to the listener to play within those parameters, making a certain composition sound different every time a listener plays it on their computer. He presents this as a tool that will allow the composer to release control of their piece, giving a machine the ability to improvise. This concept is reminiscent of Bruno Latour's depiction of a creator:

> As powerful as one might imagine a creator, he will never be capable of better controlling his creations than the puppeteer her puppets, a writer her notebooks, a cigarette its smoker, a speaker her language. He can make them do something but he cannot make them: to launch a cascade of irreversible events, yes; to be master of his tools, no. (Latour 65)

With this idea, Rothenberg aims to raise awareness of improvisation as a surprising act that can come from any source, not necessarily human:

> What artist wants to give up control to a machine that cannot think for itself? Remember, though: even though it can't think, it can help us create flexible worlds that will continue to surprise us, help us flow. It's not going to be easy, it's not here yet. Art is not like a game of chess that can be won according to a list of rules. (178)

Rothenberg hopes that musical instruments and technologies will be invisible but enabling. He aims for his art to be embedded in the world and for his music to have no beginning or end. His quest is a quest for the self and the world to be dissolved, for humans to feel like they are in the world and not divided from it. As he explains:

> I would also like to stick to instruments that would let me forget about the self. For that is key: the idea that art is not about expressing the self, but about expressing something larger than the self, a way toward fitting in with the natural world that belies the human sense of separateness, inadvertence, and doubt. (186)

As Rothenberg states, humans have a "sense" of distinctiveness from the rest of the world, and in my opinion, it is only that: a sense, a perception. The idea that humans are not embedded in—and part of—the world is a notion that can be changed through awareness, and, as

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Rothenberg would put it, through listening: listening as a way of staying in the present moment and acknowledging the self and the surroundings as one. While *Sudden Music* discusses sounds, listening, playing, and practice, it is more broadly about inviting humans to find their place in the world as ingrained elements of a series of events, agencies, relations, and sounds that are inherently governed by chance.

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