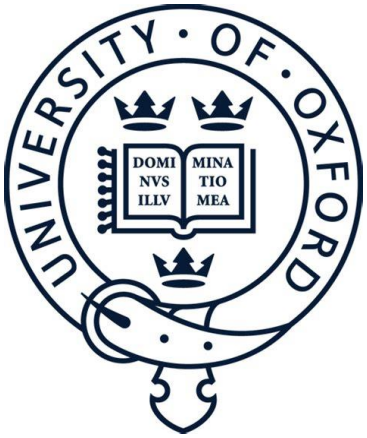
Portfolio of Original Compositions

and Critical Writing



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Libertas Regimine Crescit – developing a Working Theory of Improvising in the course of composing music for improvised performance

Piers Connor Kennedy

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Abstract

This essay approaches the field of improvisation studies from the perspective of a composer. A broad 'Working Theory of Improvising' is offered, summarised in the symbiotic relationship between Freedom and Governance, under the term 'Libertas Regimine Crescit' (Freedom [which] grows out of Governance). This theoretical framework, being developed in abstract, is presented as a departure from much existing scholarship of a 'micro-to-macro' order which uses specific improvisatory contexts to derive broader theory.

This 'macro-to-micro' Working Theory is then overlaid onto some existing scholarship, highlighting its similarities and differences. In doing so, certain flaws inherent within 'micro-to-macro' thinking are exposed, particularly with regard to the use of Free Improvisation as a catalyst for the production of improvisation theory of a pronounced leaning towards concepts of the 'uninhibited' and 'non-idiomatic'. The work of Benjamin Libet et al. (1983) is cited as a basis on which to build an understanding of the corporeal 'habitus' that acts as a foundational Governance in the performance of any music. This evidence invites an appreciation of the subconscious (involuntary) nature of improvising; it is presented in opposition to existing theory that promotes the idea of 'spontaneous' decision-making 'in the moment'.

Emphasising process over product (Small, 1998), this essay references Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizomatic' theory (1987) as a metaphor within which to consider the

development of musical products as they are arbitrary ‘surface’ markers of ongoing improvisatory processes. Following Nicholas Cook’s notion of ‘symbolic poverty’ inherent in musical notation, ‘Pro-improvisatory composing’ (or ‘PIC’) is proposed as an opportunity for the marriage of improvisation theory and the Work Concept (Goehr, 1992). Lastly, the application of this theory is revealed both in the compositions within the accompanying portfolio, and in case studies that provide direct comparisons between specific fully-notated and ‘pro-improvisatory’ compositions.

Preface

> 'Start-Beginning. The general idea is that these two terms do not, or do not necessarily, coincide. Part of this has to do with the retrospective nature of the event, which means that it has always already begun before anything can start, and then sensed again before things can begin again.' (Gary Peters, 2017, p. 3)

Let me start before I begin. In the course of composing music over the last few years, I have found that the paradigm of fully-scripted notation – efficient as it is in facilitating precision – is often a barrier to documenting other musics which are preordained but imprecise[1]. Because of this, I have been led to create musical scores which blend 'standard' notation with novel forms of notation designed to enable the performer(s) to improvise in specific ways. As the title of this essay suggests, in addressing the question 'how does one write music which facilitates improvising?', I have necessarily encountered a more profound question: 'what is improvising?'. This essay, therefore, is an attempt to unpick the latter en route to answering the former.

In turn, by 'unpicking' I have formed a conception of improvising that, whilst derived from existing scholarship, departs from most existing theory in three interlinked ways: in general, scholarship in this field tends to describe *improvisation (as a product)*, *aesthetically*, focusing

[1] 'Precision' and 'imprecision' here do not necessarily bear any relation to the sonic product of a piece, but rather to the way ideas are projected to performers through notation, as I will discuss in the latter chapters.

on *Free Improvisation as its paradigm* (e.g. Bailey 1980); my thesis describes *improvising (as a process)*, *pragmatically*, creating a Working Theory which is *common to all improvised practice*. Because, as I will come to explain, idiom is central to my appreciation of improvising, I have devoted much of this essay to discussing Free Improvisation; this is in order to unpick the misassociations derived of Free Improvisation which hold weight in current scholarship. Improvisatory music traditions (such as Jazz, Folk, Flamenco, Carnatic music, etc.) which have well-established, *formalised* idioms are much more clearly and readily absorbed into the fabric of my Working Theory of Improvising; for the sake of clarifying where my thinking departs from existing scholarship, such genres do not feature to any great extent in this essay[2].

It is also a point of interest that, in my experience, the limiting factors of different notations – being inflexible templates for projecting ideas 'on paper' – also come in turn to mould the ideas for which composers use them. The preclusion of imprecise musical ideas with standard notation is one example of this. When a composer uses a certain mode of notation, they are far more likely to generate compositional ideas which 'suit' that mode of notation, both in

[2] Save where extra-musical concepts associated with the improvised elements of such genres need to be addressed (for example, the notion of idealised micro-socialities being expressed in Jazz performances [Born 2018]). The required length of this essay precludes a discussion of these 'formalised' improvisatory idioms; a fuller account of the variety of styles, of approaches, of pedagogy, of formalisation, and of concordance with my Working theory of each of these traditions is warranted in future writings.

the completeness with which they can be expressed and in terms of the resulting visual aesthetic. In Duchampian terms, composers instinctively try to mitigate the 'art coefficient' caused by the notation they are using as much as possible[3]:

> 'The result of this struggle [towards realization] is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of. Consequently, in the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing. This gap represents the inability of the artist to express fully his intention; this difference between what he intended to realize and did realize, is the personal "art coefficient" contained in the work.' (Marcel Duchamp, 1975, p. 139)

Because improvisation tends be written about as a rather exclusivist specialism, in order to present a successful counter-narrative my scholarship is intentionally broad and inclusive. This essay covers a wide range of usages of the term 'improvisation' – including both scholarly and vernacular contexts – to highlight which attributes are common to all usages and are therefore fundamental to the term's meaning. These usages also reveal which attributes are only relevant to particular contexts and are therefore *Other to* a consistent conception of the term. Much of this essay, therefore, acts as a literature review of sorts, orienting my own thinking amongst and against existing scholarship. My Working Definition of Improvising is thus used as an analytical tool which I apply to this literature, seeking to provide clarity where there is complexity within a theory and to ensure consistency where

[3] I discuss this phenomenon in relation to my portfolio later in the essay.

there is contradiction between theories. My aim is to present a cogent definition of improvising which best serves the purposes of my doctoral research: writing music for improvised performance.

To pre-empt the later chapters herein, it might be said that this essay functions *as* an act of improvising within the governing framework of improvisation theory. Existing scholarship often demonstrates that approaching the term Improvisation 'head-on' as a reified noun is perilous[4]; I have therefore attempted to define what improvising is *by playing with it*, relishing the broad reach of its implications so that, by circumvention, a central point of orbiting might come into view. This discursive methodology is used to reflect the very nature of improvising as I understand it – that it is 'rhizomatic' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980), in the synapses, interconnected, *in media res*.

> '[A rhizome] has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, p. 25)

Moreover, my composition portfolio aims to present a depiction of improvising which is both honest to my compositional practice and consistent with my doctoral research – that is, not

[4] 'Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something people do. The apparent thing "music" is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely… It is very easy to come to think of the abstraction as more real than the reality it represents… This is the trap of reification, and it has been a besetting fault of Western thinking ever since Plato, who was one of its earliest perpetrators.' (Small, 1998, pp. 9-10).

as a ‘special’ activity isolated from mainstream artistic disciplines, but as an inherent quality of the ‘creative process’. It therefore for the most part comprises works which aim to capture their respective compositional process just as they occurred, organically; the majority of the pieces in the portfolio do not attempt to represent ‘improvisation’ as a main feature of their aesthetic, but rather they are pieces written for their own sake (in the case of the vocal pieces, for example, primarily for the sake of setting the text) and that the improvised elements therein are simply the result of the process of their creation. Indeed, I hope the theory presented in this essay will also portray something of the essential nature of improvising as a central element of compositional practice – not as an aesthetic *symptom*, but as an asymptomatic *process*.

Now let’s begin.

Introduction

Composing music for improvised performance is an ages-old, intuitive process: one imagines a performance of some kind – how it might sound, how it might look, what the performer(s) might be doing, etc. – perhaps one trials bits out on an instrument to help clarify all of these imaginings (and indeed be prompted to imagine more *by* trialling), and then one might write down something that represents the imagined performance for future reference, or one might

just choose to remember it. Of course, whilst musical notation lends itself well to the documenting of certain aspects of an imagined performance (most notably discrete pitches and rhythms), there may be aspects of the imagined performance, particularly with regard to what one imagines the performer(s) might be *doing*, which is rather more fiddly to write down: one knows the performer should do something *like* this but not exactly like *this*, and so for those more oblique elements one might not find a coherent way to document them but leave them unwritten, instead notating those elements which are more easily described and leaving the rest to be interpreted by the performer.

For example, one imagines a phrase which isn't quite any particular rhythm at all – perhaps one finds oneself trialling it a little differently every time with no single preferred result – so one resigns to notating it as a series of quavers with the cue *"molto rubato"*. In this way, a future performer will be invited – obliged – both to replicate the exact pitches as notated and also to improvise with the rhythm in a way that befits musical taste (but they certainly *shouldn't* play strict quavers[5]); the composition is 'pro-improvisatory', that is, for improvised performance. So far, so intuitive.

The trouble begins when we start to talk (and write) about improvisation as a reified concept in its own right. 'Improvisation' is a prolific homonym – such is its strength, and its curse – encompassing as it does a smorgasbord of usages from the 'spontaneous' performance of

[5] Vis. Louis Couperin's sole use of stemless, hollow noteheads in his 'unmeasured preludes' (c. 1650).

music and other arts to the impressively unorthodox/unpredictable act of a sportsperson[6], or from the carrying out of everyday tasks by nearly all humans such as daily conversation[7] to a novel invention made by a person in the absence of the proper implement[8] (to name but a few examples).

Indeed, 'improvisation' has been described in as many different ways by different writers: Gary Peters (2017) describes it as concerning all of 'a predicament… a kind of ignorance', 'a vanishing form/form of vanishing', '…the desire to begin something for the sake of the beginning and not the end', 'fixing the unfixed' *and* 'unfixing the fixed' (depending on the type of improvisation), and 'the outwitting of habit'. Heinrich Schenker (trans. Oster 1979) describes improvisation as the creative process which 'guarantees unity' in a composition through the emergence of 'fundamental structures [*Ursatz*]' which can be traced via analysis *and* which is symptomised by 'the gift of sounding spontaneous [das Ewig-Improvisierte]'. Moreover, John Rink in his discussion of Peter Schleuning's notion of the genre of

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[6] E.g. *Wimbledon 2022: Ons Jabeur hits shot of day 11 at Wimbledon with clever improvisation* (BBC Sport online, 7th July 2022, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/av/tennis/62086402, accessed 14/04/2023).

[7] 'If you are not an improvising musician, then the best analogy to improvisation is your spontaneous speech. If you ask yourself how you are able to speak a sequence of English sentences that make sense, then you will find that you are consciously aware of only the tip of the process.' (Johnson-Laird, as cited in Lewis and Piekut, 2018, p. 11).

[8] 'Do you have a plan or are we just improvising here?!' (Billy Bob Thornton, as the character Fitzroy, in *The Gray Man* (2022). Netflix.

'composed improvisations' in 18th- and 19th-century keyboard practices defines them as being characterised by 'unorthodox tonal relationships and abrupt foreground contrasts – closely approximating those of actual improvisations' (1993, p. 14), whereas Glenn Gould describes 'the hedonistic pursuit of improvisation as a way of life' (1968), and George E. Lewis says that 'improvisation is an essential – and I'm going to say equally ubiquitous – practice of everyday life, a primary method of meaning exchange [in] any interaction…' (2010).

> 'There are as many attitudes and conceptions of, and manners of, improvisation, and ways of working towards improvisation, as there are people.' (Ronnie Scott, as cited in Bailey, 1980, p. 67)

Thus 'improvisation' is often used as a 'catch-all' term to describe an event and/or an action and/or a philosophical concept wherever needed, as well as an aesthetic effect using its adjectivised 'improvisational' and the like. No surprise, then, that the corpus of literature devoted to improvisation – which has swollen rapidly in the past half-century – throws up a multitude of definitions for 'improvisation' which contradict each other, often within the same edited volume[9], and sometimes even by the same author[10]. One reason for this plethora of competing definitions, as I have already pointed out, is the flexibility of the term across

[9] See *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics* (Born et al., 2017), discussed later in this essay.

[10] See Peters' dichotomy between 'idiomatic' and 'non-idiomatic' types of Improvisation (2017, p. 6), discussed later in this essay.

vernacular and in scholarly usage; this gives rise to the need for a more diverse and nuanced lexicon, which may help us unpick our way through the various appropriations of the term.

> 'Perhaps one of the problems has been that as the study of improvisation has "come of age" and assumed a higher profile, the bluntness and inadequacy of the term have quickly become apparent… Perhaps a significant part of the problem is simply the need for a much more nuanced set of terms to do justice to the very different kinds of musical practices.' (Clarke and Doffman, 2017, p. 6)

But a second reason which stems from the first – and which directly implicates my thesis – is that definitions of improvisation in scholarship tend to be derived *from specific improvisatory contexts* (most commonly but not exclusively Free Improvisation and Jazz), thereby being led by the particular aesthetic preoccupations of those contexts in the construction of a broader theoretical framework. This is to say that the methodology of much existing scholarship is of a micro-to-macro order and direction, using specific *phenomena* associated with improvisation (such as Free Improvisation performances) to generate broader *ontological* depictions of the term – in essence letting theory act as a vehicle for aesthetics[11]. As Gilbert Ryle (1949, p. 18) identifies, there is a difference between knowing-*how* and knowing-*that*, i.e. that one can improvise successfully without having any need to explain what one is doing, nor even for a coherent understanding of it – one just *does* it. For example,

[11] 'What we seem to be doing, instead of literally identifying improvisation according to some intrinsic attribute, is allowing cultural and contextual factors to regulate the presence or absence of improvisation.' (Vijay Iyer, 2018, p. 75).

'Free' improvisers often emphasise the 'uninhibited' aspects of their improvisatory practice, leading to the development of theories of improvisation that are not only led by preoccupations concerning uninhibition, but indeed are informed by a commitment to the aesthetic principle of the 'non-idiomatic'. As such it is unwise to use improvisers' own accounts of their practice as a means of generating theory – many definitions of improvisation which do so are each predisposed to uphold the principles of a certain artistic aesthetic which skews its gaze[12].

As a result, the two worlds of Composition and Improvisation (made distinct from one another by their reification) are often presented as awkward bedfellows; having been rent asunder by their theorising, theorists then attempt to smush them back together[13]. My combined experience as a composer-improviser, singer, and jazz pianist, makes for a particularly uncomfortable relationship with this bipartite depiction of musical production.

[12] Many examples of empiricist, aesthetically-derived depictions of improvisation can be found within the edited volume *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*: '…improvisation, regardless of its medium, has often been conceived by both its practitioners and its theorists as being intimately inflected by the social formations in which it is created and as being, in aesthetically relevant ways, a social practice in itself.' (Born et al., 2017, p. 9).

[13] 'It is now largely accepted that if there is a contrast, there is also a close relationship between improvisation and composition, that the two are different faces of the same process, that it is hard to know where one ends and the other begins.' (Solis and Nettl, 2009, p xi).

At the same time, it makes me somewhat well-placed to re-evaluate the terms on which improvising and composing are approached.

In this essay, my aim is to contextualise improvised practices (including contemporary classical composition) within a unifying theoretical framework, using my own practice as a series of reflections upon the theory I develop. I begin by defining a Working Theory of Improvising; following a 'macro-to-micro' order of thinking, I first consider improvising in abstract as a creative process defined in broad but absolute terms. This then enables me to consider specific improvisatory practices with a 'steady gaze' – that is, from a fixed ontological perspective of the processes in question. In doing so I uncover the misassociations often propounded in genre-specific improvisation scholarship, focussing chiefly on Free Improvisation as the most fertile site of discourse. Through this I develop new pragmatically-derived depictions of improvised practices. In turn, I consider the implications of my thesis as it concerns the field of Cognition before discussing how this is manifest in my 'Pro-improvisatory Composing' practice as it represents the documentation of improvisatory 'micro-traditions'.

Libertas Regimine Crescit – *ex nihilo, nihil fit*

Let us address the obvious question: what is improvising? Improvising is the enactment of something novel from something known; the creation of something new from something old – or as Gilbert Ryle (1976, p. 77) put it: 'It is a bit like putting some *new* wine into *old* bottles.'[14]. To improvise is therefore to exercise freedom through the inhabiting of certain constraints. Or, to adapt the Arsenal FC motto *Victoria Concordia Crescit* (commonly translated as 'Victory Through Harmony'), to improvise is to achieve ***Libertas Regimine Crescit*** – a more nuanced translation of the Latin being important in this instance – **'Freedom [which] *grows out of* Governance'**.

Freedom and Governance here are not to be taken as absolute terms, but referential ones. Freedom does not constitute 'unboundedness', but refers to the expression of movement in relation to boundaries. Likewise, Governance does not constitute only the formal imposition of laws, but also any contextual or habitual regimen from which movement is gauged.

There is an inherent balance to this definition: much like the properties of Yin and Yang in Chinese philosophy, Freedom and Governance are two properties which both define each other by their opposition and which are mutually dependent. In the simplest ontological

[14] '…To be thinking what he is here and now up against, he must both be trying to adjust himself to just this present once-only situation *and* in doing this to be applying lessons already learned. There must be in his response an union of some Ad Hockery with some know-how…' [original italics] (Gilbert Ryle, 1976, p. 77).

terms, when Freedom is exercised in improvising, it assumes a Freedom-*from*, lest it not have any reference from which to be exercised. And that point of reference ('Governance') is therefore *a priori* both antecedent to, and brought into being by, the exercising of the Freedom from it.

> '[F]reedom and structure are not taken as oppositional. Rather, structure and freedom – as well as power, agency and constraint – become emergent in improvisative interaction.' (Lewis and Piekut, 2018, p. 17)

Improvising is therefore fundamentally rule-based, which explains one's inclination to judge its success or otherwise, as well as to attribute other value criteria; the ability to judge one's improvising can only be in relation to some *rules* of engagement undertaken in the improvising act[15]. If hypothetically there had been no rules within which improvising had occurred the act would represent nothing but a series of chance occurrences and would be meaningless. As Gary Peters affirms, 'Confronted by chance, the task of the improviser is to make the "best " choices in an effort to fend off arbitrariness… by means of… a moralization of territory-formation intended to displace chance and install "good" judgement… the attempted abolition of chance.' (2017, p. 110). Thus, in the describing of Governance through

[15] 'While musical improvisation is a fascinating feat of human cognition worthy of study in its own right, it also provides a specific instance of a much more general phenomenon in human behavior [sic.]: spontaneous rule-based combinations of elements to create novel sequences that are appropriate for a given moment in a given context.' (Aaron L. Berkowitz, 2018, p. 57).

the exercising of Freedom, improvising is an act which is distinct from the aleatoric; it prerequires *agency*[16].

The necessary existence of Governance is a site of particular pressure for theories derivative of improvisatory genres such as Free Improvisation (and Free Jazz) which are concerned with the aesthetic of the 'non-idiomatic'[17]. Because Free Improvisation holds as its chief defining principle a commitment to the concept of 'freedom' per se, as enacted by its practitioners and appreciated by its listeners, there is a natural aversion of its adherents – to the point of denial – to recognise the inherent dependence of the practices therein on Governing limitations. The aesthetic which perpetuates the fulfilment of the genre is of an order of 'suspended disbelief' that that which occurs in Free Improvisation has the capacity truly to liberate itself from the concept of Rules *per se*. Despite its illogicality, this aesthetic is apparently so tantalising as to encourage theorists oftentimes to attribute special status to Free Improvisation as a genre which exists outside the logic that determines all other forms of improvising.

For example, Gary Peters asserts a clear-cut dichotomy between two different types, or 'models', of improvisation as he sees them: '…the unfixing of the fixed (idiomatic

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[16] 'Richard Cochrane (2000, 140) concludes that "the practice of improvisation in fact exists in all musical performances except those carried out solely by machines".' (Nicholas Cook, in Born et al., 2017, p. 64).

[17] 'In his 1978 book Derek Bailey advanced the now-influential yet still theoretically rocky opposition between idiomatic and non-idiomatic music…' (Lewis and Piekut, 2018, p. 9).

improvisation) and the fixing of the unfixed (free improvisation or non-idiomatic). The former demands accuracy, the latter precision. Accuracy is reproductive; precision is productive…' (2017, p. 47). The perception of Free Improvisation as being without premise – 'unfixed' in origin – is as misleading and long-misappropriated a trope as another which Peters himself goes to great lengths to dispel: namely, that improvisation is concerned with the momentary and momentous happening, and 'fixing', of concrete form *ex nihilo*[18].

Peters searches for a neat distinction between 'idiomatic' and 'non-idiomatic' improvisation by attributing the 'severe' form to Free Improvisation alone, where he describes how 'the collective emerges out of the singular'**,** whereas in idiomatic improvisation 'the singular emerges out of the collective, the already-given.' (2017, pp. 47-48). This hazy over-simplification could hold true were it to be that, in Free Improvisation, every utterance is of an order of singularity somehow 'other than' all known demarcations of idiomata – that it appears from, and onto, blankness. But as the Latin tenet reminds us, *ex nihilo, nihil fit* ('nothing comes from nothing')[19]. Therein can be found the myth of Free Improvisation, a

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[18] 'So-called free improvisation ("so called" because no improvisation can be completely free, just as even [Brian] Ferneyhough can't and doesn't specify everything the performers do).' (Nicholas Cook, 2007).

[19] 'Musical improvisation activity is not a matter of unadulterated spontaneity or a creation *ex nihilo*… The activity of improvisation is analogous to speaking: improvisation is a kind of musical utterance… This is one of the reasons why the notion of a personal style is so central to the activity of improvisation.' (Philip Alperson, 2018, p. 427).

myth that heavily discolours theory regarding 'improvisation' itself: that it is disconnected from idiom[20].

> 'But whatever he is playing, it will not be invented from nothing. No human being ever invents anything from nothing but is guided always in his invention by the assumptions, the practices and the customs of the society in which he or she lives – in other words, by its *style*. A person may rebel against the assumptions of the society, but the style of the rebellion will inevitably continue to reflect those assumptions. It is inescapable.' (Christopher Small, 1998, p. 231)

Big Boo and the myth of Free Improvisation

How do we reconcile, then, the obvious appeal and success of Free Improvisation with a conception of improvising which is fundamentally rule-based? Following Derek Bailey's assertion that improvisation is 'essentially non-academic' (1980, p. 1), perhaps taking a different tack at this juncture might both heed his warning and reveal a path towards consolidation.

In 1996, Nintendo released a new, first-player version of its Super Mario series, *Super Mario 64*. This game featured an enemy already established within the franchise but tackled here for the first time in a 3D domain – a henchman of the archenemy Bowser called 'Big Boo'.

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[20] 'Contrary to the "free-from-habit-and-influence" discourse that all too often circulates around free improvisation, much of the effort involved in cultivating expertise – whether musical or not – involves building up fluency and automaticity so that one may be more "reflexive" and "reflective" in performance.' (David Borgo, 2018, p. 97).

Being the king of a population of spherical ghosts, Big Boo had an irritating but endearing predisposition: when approached from face-on he would disappear, ceasing to be visible or tangible, but when approached unawares from the rear he could be grabbed by his short, stubby tail, whirled around, and hurled into a wall.

This particular game of cat-and-mouse (minus the whirling and hurling) is somewhat similar to the approach I have found necessary when addressing the topic of Free Improvisation in theoretical terms. When approached face-on (that is, taking the aesthetics of the practice at 'face value') Free Improvisation is indisputably concerned with enacting freedom in its truest sense, unbounded and liberated from the tyranny of idiom *per se* which dominates genre-bound improvisatory traditions. But when approached from the rear (that is, taking a pragmatic view of its practice from 'behind the curtain') Free Improvisation can be appreciated as an improvisatory tradition of the strictest order of Governance; despite the overt absence of formalised idiom (such as harmonic frameworks, melodic contour, etc.), Free Improvisation promotes for its Governance all kinds of non-formalised (unnamed and/or subconscious) *idiomata*, in addition to the obvious Poetic governing principles: 'freedom' and 'improvisation'[21]. If it is possible to represent 'freedom' and 'improvisation' aesthetically (by, say, playing music sporadically and eccentrically, respectively), then one's appreciation

[21] '…free improvisation, far from being anticonceptual, is overdetermined by extraordinarily powerful and voluminous concepts of both "freedom" and "improvisation"…' (Peters, 2017, p. 57).

of these aesthetic qualities are themselves clear principles of Governance with which one may improvise (or indeed value improvised performance as a listener).

This is the paradox revealed by the 'Big Boo approach': that 'freedom' itself, as a concept, may be a limiting parameter of an improvisatory tradition. In other words, just as *the internal logic* (as Schenker would put it) of a work of Beethoven's might be a 'lack of logic' itself[22], so too might *the idiom* of an improvisatory tradition be the concept of 'non-idiom' itself: **the Governing principle here *is* 'non-governance'[23]**.

> 'Boulez's basic point is that the freer the music is, in the sense of avoiding overt references to established idioms or predefined musical materials, the more it reverts to banal patterns of behavior [sic.] that are not specifically musical at all. However skewed by his own compositional agenda and the larger aesthetic ideology of postwar modernism, Boulez's claim is one also found in the discourses around jazz. Charlie Mingus is supposed to have told Tim Leary, "You can't improvise on nothin', man… You gotta improvise on somethin'" (quoted in Kernfeld 1995, 11). In improvisation as in other areas of life, freedom is relative.' (Nicholas Cook, 2017, pp. 61-62)

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[22] 'The only workable interpretation [of Beethoven Op. 77], it seems to me, is to regard the piece's disunity, diversity, illogicality, inconsistencies and contradictions as themselves the principal idea of the piece… The point of the work is that is has no structural point.' (Hugh MacDonald, as cited by John Rink, 1993, p. 16).

[23] This point runs like the shadow of knife through Peters' 2017 volume. Where he extols '[L]iberated from the shackles of idiom – jazz and rock in particular – non-idiomatic improvisation is able to improvise nothingness…' (p. 201), he uses 'nothingness' here in the role of 'idiomatum' [see later 'Case Study: Arnold Davidson and Sonny Rollins' for an elaborated discussion of a similar idiomatum, 'limitlessness'].

Case study: Gary Peters and The Recedents

As Gary Peters describes in his account of the legendary Free Improviser Lol Coxhill's group The Recedents, their musical performances, in order to accommodate the most zany of juxtaposed styles (sporadic noises interjected with Coxhill's ironic popular-song crooning[24]), fall into a predictable pattern which is repeated in successive performances: 'The Recedents arrived, whether consciously or not, at a method or performance… This is how it seemed to work: the performance starts, and immediately there is quite a lot going on, something resembling an aural building site. A pulse is quickly established… [T]he majority of performances by The Recedents saw Mike Cooper and Roger Turner burying themselves from the outset with the creation of an improvised structure within which to "house" and support Lol Coxhill's contribution to proceedings.' (2017, pp. 40 & 42). This quotation reveals not only the predictability, but the great fixity of the group's improvisatory framework. Not only locally is the Free Improvisation a succession of formuli, but it is quite possible – obviously so – to provide commentary, as Peters invests much time in describing. Peters reinforces this with an anecdote concerning one time when this established structure was undermined, destabilising the performance – revealing the resistance to 'spontaneity' and the reliance on 'predictability' inherent within the group's practice:

[24] Peters coins these juxtaposed styles as 'incompossible' (2017, p. 39).

> ‘The trio worked best when Turner and Cooper resisted the temptation to respond directly to Lol’s comedic/ironic contribution; in this performance, however, Turner volunteers some humorous asides himself, which immediately transforms the interruptive impact of Lol’s comedy into a moment of the improvisation’s interiority, something shareable and to be shared by all present… After the unhappy attempt at comedic interaction, Turner returns, wisely, to the more familiar role of constructing an incredibly fluid and yet robust percussive terrain for Lol to inhabit. Once up and running… [Lol] alternates between singing and playing in such a clumsy way that the continuity of both is constantly disrupted, thus exaggerating the duality on display.’ (ibid., pp. 44-45)

The very phenomenon of Coxhill presenting an ironic juxtaposition of different sound worlds suggests the fixity of this Free Improvisation idiom as a locus from which he might depart. In short, the defining principle that governs the idiomata commonly associated with Free Improvisation is one of negation/avoidance/suppression of any other genre. Thus, far from being a liberal space of unfixity, it is often the most fixed and least fluid of any genre, as its defining principle does not condone its extension or melding with anything which could be read as ‘other’ (indeed, ‘melding’ in the puritanical arena of Free Improvisation would surely be read as ‘contaminating’). This is the reason for the humorous and ironic nature of Lol Coxhill’s ‘interruptions’: as Peters explains, it is the creation of distance between subject and object that generates irony; this would be logically impossible were one of these points of reference to be truly ‘free’ in the ‘unfixed’ sense of the word.

The 'Darwinian' (as opposed to Lamarckian)[25] brief in Free Improvisation is as such that the pool of possibilities afforded the performers is so open (essentially, things which represent the concepts of 'Freedom' and 'Improvisation' combined) and its outworking so strict (the avoidance of anything 'non-Free' or 'obvious') that the outcome is the least surprising [imagine being able to choose any colour except ones you can name]. Indeed, in a genre overtly and overly preoccupied with expecting the unexpected, it takes the unadulterated 'expected' (as in Coxhill's 'transgressive' Smooth Jazz overlay) to truly surprise – thus marrying the dual aesthetics of 'boring' and 'shocking' in a unified act[26].

> '…there is little to suggest that the borders between one idiom and another are ever radically displaced in such exercises; on the contrary, if anything, they are reaffirmed. As Bataille observes, "transgression always depends on the transgressed law remaining *in place* ".' (ibid., p. 84)

To bolster this point, Jazz, in contrast to Free Improvisation, has highly-structured formulae, literary and reception histories, theories, compositions, specialised hierarchical functionality

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[25] Johnson-Laird (2002), as cited in Clarke *et al* (2017, p.118), describes the processes of decision-making in Jazz improvisation using the concept of 'algorithm' (finite, explicit instructions). He presents two ends of a scale: 'Darwinian', where a random generation of ideas undergoes a rigorous evaluation process before selection; and 'Lamarckian', where a highly constrained generation of ideas gives way to a free selection within a narrow field.

[26] '…it is perfectly possible to imagine an improvised event that is utterly unsurprising at the level of "attribute, quality of property" but is absolutely surprising as an event.' (Jean-Luc Nancy, 1998, p. 91, as cited in Peters, 2017, p. 127).

– yet where there are countless varied forms of Jazz, there are few if any discernible varieties of Free Improvisation (this is not to say that there is no difference between the practices of say, Peter Wiegold's Notes Inégales and Dither playing one of John Zorn's Game Pieces, for example, but rather that there do not appear to be any signifying aesthetic traits by which to distinguish these different groups in terms of genre). This is a telling symptom of the fundamental (and counter-intuitive) nature of Free Improvisation: that by its process and form it bears the most overt inclinations to Governance.

> 'The *avoidance* of the idiomatic, like the avoidance of tonality in atonal music, requires great agility, discipline, and massive powers of renunciation: the gravitational pull of the idiomatic being almost insanely irresistible' (Peters, 2017, p. 86)

Peters' empirical reasoning indicates a crucial consideration concerning the 'idiomatic' which needs to be acknowledged: that the 'insanely irresistible' nature of the idiomatic reveals its situation *within ourselves*. Not only do formalised idioms influence our decision-making, they also inform all of our non-formalised idiomata, or 'habits' – 'the idiomatic' as perceived in 'genre' and the like is thereby *essential* to our corporeal sensibilities. In other words, idiom is an internal, not external, construct.

Habitus – or, *The Invisible Sarcophagus*

> 'We as a community of musicians have taken a long time to counter…the erroneous idea of a "non-idiomatic" form of improvisation… habits and thereby conventions attend each and every performance – even of "free" improvisation – and habit becomes idiom.' (Eddie Prévost, as cited in Ben Watson, 2004, p. 265)

Just as one's psyche is formed by one's experience of the world, so are one's corporeal habits formed in the same way. Free Improvisation, by the commitment of its practitioners to reflexively-informed musicality (in the avoidance of externally-informed idioms) represents the clearest attempts at interaction by musicians with their own Habitus[27]. Naming Habitus – in directing us to recognise the myriad habits formed by each of us bodily and mentally – goes some way to giving tangibility to the otherwise unnamed Governance of Free Improvisation, helping to dispel its 'non-idiomatic' mythology.

> '…having worked on contact improvisation to see if I could figure out why this thing called improvisation has a reputation for not having structure, I kept finding structure. At a certain point I decided that the structure was *me.'* (Steve Paxton, as cited by Jurij Konjar, 2011, p. 16)

In order to depict the illusion of 'freedom' within the Governance of Habitus, I will evoke the metaphor of the Invisible Sarcophagus: imagine the Governance of any improvising

[27] Dancers tend to be especially attuned to Habitus, concerned as their discipline is with bodily movement itself as an end, not as a means to an end as with musicians (vis. the Dance genre of Contact Improvisation).

idiom as physical walls – walls of a particular size, shape, colour, distance from each other, location (etc.), which describe a *space* within which the freedom of improvising is enacted through *movement*. Echoing my depiction of 'Libertas Regimine Crescit' in the introduction, the movement through three-dimensional space in this metaphor is both the enacting of Freedom and, by its relation to the fixed position of the walls, the movement also gives definition to its Governance. In the idealised Free Improvisation scenario, where there are no walls and movement is possible within an infinite space, there is also the inherent preclusion of movement because there is nothing relative to which to move[28] [See Einstein's Theory of Relativity (1905)]. In this case, the myth of Free Improvisation is as an Invisible Sarcophagus whereby the practitioner, seeing no walls which would bound her, believes herself to be moving with absolute freedom in infinite space, but in fact without any external point of reference (idiom) is only able to describe her own physicality (Habitus). This metaphor helps to highlight the ubiquity of Governance in determining improvisatory practice.

Gary Peters, committed to the Poetics of Free Improvisation, does address this issue, calling upon another renowned Free Improviser, Derek Bailey, in an effort to incorporate 'habit' into the realm of the 'non-idiomatic': 'Habits – technical habits and musical habits (clichés) – are quite consciously utilized by some performers.' (D. Bailey, 1980, p.100, as cited in

[28] Jean Ricardou summarises this essential relativity thus: 'If everything is allowed, nothing is possible.' (1977, p. 118, as cited in Perloff, 2008, p. 229).

Peters, 2017, p. 203). But Bailey here simply manoeuvres the discussion syntactically by his manipulation of the word 'habit'; where habit has been clarified (by Peters) as the un-/sub-conscious renderings of Self – the formations of which are not subject to conscious decision-making, but to encounter with chance – Bailey describes 'utilising' habits as tools consciously recognised and harnessed, as though habit meant no more than trait. But this is either to undermine or ignore the essential quality of habit with regard to improvising, as something which embodies the happening of all acts – not which features within, but which *manifests*, the happening[29].

Case-study: Gould and Mozart

Glenn Gould's 1968 monologue to camera, *How Mozart Became a Bad Composer*, gives us a tantalising view into his well-reasoned opinion regarding habit which runs directly upstream, against the current of contemporary thinking concerning 'improvisation' and 'creativity' (acknowledging that, together, they make a rather bizarre pair of reified concepts):

> 'And as Mozart grew older and abused this facility for improvising, his best ideas were necessarily aborted by those clichés [cycles of fifths, etc.], because in fact

[29] 'One would completely misunderstand the phenomenon of resoluteness if one should want to suppose that this consists simply in taking up possibilities which have been proposed and recommended, and seizing hold of them.' (Heidegger, trans. Macquarrie and Robinson, 1962, p. 347).

> a computer could produce them really with the minimum of programming, and so could a five-year-old after a few weeks of theory lessons… And that's why I think we can learn from Mozart, why his reliance in his late works on a facility for improvisation provides a real object lesson for the twentieth century.'

The argument Gould makes here seems to be that over the course of Mozart's career, he had become – as so many musicians of his time, particularly keyboardists, would have done – proficient at improvising successful and entertaining musical works which fulfil the rigorous harmonic and structural conventions of the concert music of the time. These works would sometimes have been written down and published, and sometimes performed in concert (and oftentimes both, of course, whilst affording himself much flexibility in the performances of his own published works to deviate from the score, as was also the improvisatory custom at the time) (Small, 1998). In fact, Gould claims that Mozart was so successful as an improviser that he became complacent in his later years, succumbing to the easy crowd-pleasing clichés to which his fingers led him – not because he was incapable or uninspired, but because in his reliance on improvising he acted *unthinkingly*.

This, Gould suggests, is in stark contrast to Beethoven's methodology, which counter-balanced his equally-gifted skills as an improviser with his more studied, 'long-range' schema as a composer. Gould's reasoning curiously presents improvisation as the means of generating predictable templates and – inversely – composition as the mechanism via which

those templates might be elaborated upon, disguising their otherwise foursquare framework in the fine illusion of whim and fancy[30]:

> 'Legend has it that [Beethoven] was every bit Mozart's equal as an improviser and yet many of the great moments in his scores are the least improvisatorially-inclined. He had, in fact, a unique ability to simulate improvisation, to pretend that he was improvising, without in fact ever deviating from a scrupulously-plotted course… And that's the real difference between those two composers: Beethoven can appear to be noodling dilettantishly about… and in fact all the while be realising some very subtle aspect of his design; but if Mozart seems to be going nowhere in a hurry, the chances are that's exactly where he's at… The inveterate improvisers like Mozart are as caught up in the glory of the moment as the social climber in the jet-stream of café society – they just can't take the long-range view.' (1968)

The Robocop Fallacy - *The unconscious initiation of a freely voluntary act*

Extending this line of inquiry, I would like to dive deeper into the phenomenon of the 'unthinking' improviser. Gould's argument is not an essentialist one, being framed by a political and moral stance which he takes up in reaction to the wave of ostentatiously-'improvisational' art of the 1960s including movements such as Fluxus and Action Painting[31].

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[30] C.f.: 'Books in this new series… study the creative risk-taking imbued with a sense of movement and momentum that makes improvisation an exciting, unpredictable, ubiquitous, and necessary endeavour.' (Born et al., 2018, front matter).

[31] 'Much of the activity in the art world just now suggests that the isolated artist – romantic figure that he is – is being attacked, and may well succumb to the free-wheeling attitude of the 'chance' composers,

Nevertheless, I believe his observation of the improvising musician as being one not only acting on habit, but also *confined* by habitual action bespeaks a profound truth about the experience of the improviser. This, I would argue, corrects a common misdirection in musicological scholarship towards an appreciation of improvised performance as 'spontaneous creation' 'in the moment'[32].

In this I refer to the work of Benjamin Libet et al. who, in 1983, published the results of their study entitled *Time of conscious intention to act in relation to onset of cerebral activity (readiness-potential): The unconscious initiation of a freely voluntary act*. As the title suggests, their study was designed to measure the difference in time, if any, between their subjects' awareness of their own 'intention to act' – the 'action' for each subject being a 'quick, abrupt flexion of the fingers and/or the wrist of his [sic] right hand' (Libet et al., 1983, p. 625) – and the cerebral activity which prepares the onset of that action as recorded using linked mastoid electrodes. The difference in time between these two triggers of voluntary action – one conscious and one subconscious – they call 'readiness-potential'. This research, focussing for the first time on 'self-initiated "freely" voluntary acts which are not only fully

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the 'random' paint-throwers, the 'mixed-media' enthusiasts, and such [pauses to groan] less-aggressively nihilistic souls as the 'happening' devotees who simply want to draw the audience into the making of a work of art... there are more dangers menacing that idea than anyone has taken time to calculate as yet…' (Gould, 1968).

[32] See Michael Gallope's chapter *Is Improvisation Present?* (2018) which presents Jankélévitch's theory of the improvised 'lived instant' – discussed in the next chapter of this essay.

endogenous but even spontaneously capricious in origin' (ibid., p. 624), built upon the work of Kornhuber and Deecke (1965), and of Gilden et al. (1966) who had conducted similar experiments, but with their subjects instead conducting 'self-paced acts' (ibid.).

Libet et al.'s findings were conclusive:

> 'The onset of cerebral activity clearly preceded by at least several hundred milliseconds the reported time of conscious intention to act… It is concluded that cerebral initiation of a spontaneous, freely voluntary act can begin unconsciously, that is, before there is any (at least recallable) subjective awareness that a 'decision' to act has already been initiated cerebrally. This introduces certain constraints on the potentiality for conscious initiation and control of voluntary acts… The appearance of preparatory cerebral processes at such surprisingly long times before a freely voluntary act raises the question of whether conscious awareness of the voluntary urge or intention to act also appears with such similar advance timings.' (1983, pp. 623-624)

They summarise:

> '…it would appear that some neuronal activity associated with the eventual performance of the act has started well before any (recallable) conscious initiation or intervention could be possible. Put another way, the brain evidently 'decides' to initiate or, at the least, prepare to initiate the act at a time before there is any reportable subjective awareness that such a decision has taken place. It is concluded that cerebral initiation even of a spontaneous voluntary act, of the kind studied here, can and usually does begin *unconsciously*… It thus invites the extrapolation that other relatively 'spontaneous' voluntary acts, performed

> without conscious deliberation or planning, may also be initiated by cerebral activities proceeding unconsciously.' (ibid., pp. 640-641)

The implications of these findings as regards improvised musical performance are significant: despite the temptation to view improvising performers as making creative decisions in reaction to stimuli (amongst those stimuli being the actions of others, as in cases of ensemble performance), the reactions of improvising performers must be understood as being determined unconsciously prior to any conscious awareness of having decided to react. This is particularly significant when one considers the speed with which improvisers are said to make 'decisions' in performance[33].

The crux of the matter is that one cannot be both acting spontaneously *and* be making a conscious decision; the two are mutually-exclusive[34]. Rather, it is our ingrained *Habitus* which acts subconsciously to produce spontaneous actions, the success or otherwise of which

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[33] C.f.: 'The definition of "improvisation" given by Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow (1990, 1) encodes the commonly assigned attributes of the activity: of spontaneity, the foregrounding of the human, and the alertness to the specific moment in space and time of the performance; "the skill of using bodies, space, all human resources, to generate a coherent physical expression of an idea, a situation, a character (even, perhaps, a text); to do this spontaneously, in response to the immediate stimuli of one's environment, and to do it à l'improviste: as though taken by surprise, without preconceptions".' (Zoë Svendsen, 2017, p. 294).

[34] Gary Peters faintly gestures towards this realisation: 'Such repetition [through repeated listenings to recordings of improvised performance] also risks exposing the clichés, formulas, and tricks secreted within the so-called spontaneity: thus, if it does not undermine the pioneering credentials of free improvisers, then it certainly clips their wings.' (2017, p. 192).

we decide on reflection after the fact. And it is because of that reflexive judgement which we as humans project onto our actions that we can readily believe ourselves to have acted with agency when we have not.

I have dubbed this self-deception 'The Robocop Fallacy' after the eponymous antihero who, having been transformed from a man into a cyborg, acts according to pre-programmed algorithms regarding upholding the law, but who believes himself in fact to be acting according to his human morality. That is, Robocop's programming compels him to act, and then he retrospectively – naively – attributes moral code as the mechanism via which he must have chosen how to act. We, as improvisers, as humans, also experience this phenomenon: we often believe ourselves to have acted with agency (making conscious/ voluntary decisions) when in reality we have reacted involuntarily (according to subconscious/ involuntary mechanisms). If Robocop is a robot portraying itself as human, a human is often *Habitus* (instinct) portraying itself as *agency* (will).

We must therefore each consider ourselves corporeally – in many contexts, but particularly in the sphere of musical improvising where high-speed reactions are observed – as an ever-growing Habitus of accumulated experience which first acts in response to external stimuli (subconsciously) and then which is successively recalibrated (consciously) after each action according to the success or otherwise of that action, in readiness for future stimuli.

Case study: Michael Gallope and Ornette Coleman

This proven time-lag between subconscious initiation and conscious realisation (or *affirmation*, in the case of the Robocop Fallacy) of spontaneous actions presents a solid counter-narrative to the scholarship of Gallope and others: in keeping with the reification of improvisation as a 'product' (Gallope, 2018, p. 147) and led by the theories of 20th century French philosophy abstracted from musical practice, such scholars promote and valorise the notion that improvising musicians have the supposed ability to enact a hyper-awareness moment-to-moment between their actions *in the present* and the moments in time *immediately* before and after. The fact that improvising musicians may well *display* the ability to enact such incredible hyper-awareness (especially with behavioural gestures that project an appearance of fervent attentiveness, receptibility, extreme concentration and the like), and even believe in their own ability to do so, goes to reinforce three points previously made in this essay: that scholarship on this subject must avoid being led by the aesthetics of certain improvisatory practices; similarly, that scholarship cannot rely on the testimony of improvising musicians about their own practice/abilities; and that the unreliability of such testimony is in part because of the Robocop Fallacy.

> 'What we see here [in Jankélévitch's theory of improvisation] is the temporal structure of a committed "adventure" of improvised time, something I will refer to as a theory of *complex temporality*. Rather than a meditative channeling [sic.] of a spontaneously expressive now, complex temporality makes clear that

> improvisation is the product of an intervallic network that ties the coming now to the nearest possible anticipation of the future and the nearest possible recollection of the past. The measure of an improviser's skill (or virtue) show up in the degree to which one maintains attentive fidelity toward the nearest possible moment without ever becoming simply self-present. In this sense, improvisation, with its necessary and constitutive blindnesses and uncertainties, represents a faithful and vigilant operation that, for Jankélévitch, "leads" presence.' (Gallope, 2018, pp. 147-148)

Gallope's chapter devotes itself to this view whilst, interestingly, also acknowledging that the 'present' is beyond the realm of human perception: '[Jankélévitch] is interested in the knotty and paradoxical issues that structure the possibility of focusing on the instant as a point of attentive fidelity.' (ibid., p. 146). Nevertheless, by focusing on the 'vanishing now' he *assumes* that it is humanly possible to '[maintain] attentive fidelity toward the nearest possible moment…' – that the inherent paradox of Jankélévitch's theory can be somehow overlooked. But if it is our subconscious *reflexes* which cause us to react in short spaces of time, not our conscious thoughts, and such actions can be only retrospectively acknowledged, then Gallope's 'attentive fidelity' represents the very signature of the Robocop Fallacy. This is also why, as Gary Peters (2017) takes pains to clarify, jazz musicians *practise so much*: so that they will have trained themselves, in performance, to react appropriately according to their own cultivated taste, knowing that their all-important utterances rely on their reactions

– which have been subject to retrospective judgement and thereby 'tailored' to a certain degree – not on conscious decision-making.

Gallope continues: 'As [Jankélévitch] says, improvisational fidelity toward the becoming of the lived instant requires not a submersion within the embodied present, but a hyperactive attentiveness to the micro-timing of remembrance and anticipation *around* the lived instant' (2018, p. 147). 'Improvisation' is here referenced oftentimes in passing as something related to 'the creative instant of improvisation' (ibid.) without Gallope giving any impression as to what improvisation might be, nor in what context it might occur, nor *by what method(s) one might improvise*. In this way, the substance at the heart of the theory therein is left unsaid, leaving a gulf in which the reader is, supposedly, invited to condone the assumption that improvisation involves being 'in the moment'/uncertain/spontaneous/'present'; '…in [Jankélévitch's] view, "intervallic" inscriptions immediately before and after the now are the mediating substance of all improvisation.' (ibid., p. 149).

> 'In the *Philosophie première* of 1953, Jankélévitch… ventures that just as the conscious mind comes to isolate the absolute productivity of the creative instant, consciousness itself paradoxically seems to face phenomenological occlusion... The instant cannot be presented as a form of absolute knowledge without recourse to a mediating network of remembered or "absent" temporal intervals.' (ibid., p. 146)

In other words, we retrospectively attribute creativity to having happened in 'moments', despite it having been impossible to experience any single moment as it occurred. Perhaps

this is because to focus on the momentary occurrences of experience is to focus not on the momentary *happening* of creativity, but on the momentary *symptom* of an ongoing creative *process*. Jankélévitch's impression of a chronological 'string' of instants does constitute a 'body' of experiences which can be understood to mediate between absolute knowledge and the negative 'vanishing' of any one particular moment. Nevertheless, Jankélévitch seeks to preserve the value of each moment as a source of knowledge in itself by referring it to a corpus of moments, rather than acknowledging that the perceived 'moment' is ontologically insubstantial and has no value save that our perception of it is symptomatic of a separate generative process which itself has no perceived events of definition in time[35].

Jankélévitch (via Gallope) continues: '…improvisation carries the existential burdens of evanescence, loss, and silence; negativity constitutes "all that is melancholy in temporality".' (ibid., p. 147). When each perceived moment is understood to be symptomatic of a generative process, the possibility of 'loss' itself is irradicated; a moment does not constitute an event in its own right, but rather is an arbitrary occurrence in real-time of an ongoing process which the perceived event can neither fully describe nor define. However, Jankélévitch's proposal

[35] This key issue of representing process over product is evident in the writings of many scholars referenced in this essay, among them Christopher Small (1998), Nicholas Cook (2007), and Deleuze and Guattari (1980) – the latter of whom developed a 'rhizomatic' theory which anticipated much of the current interest in 'mycelian' phenomena in musicology (Eric Clarke, 2023, for example). I discuss this theory in later chapters.

of music as '*Charme*' does touch upon an appreciation of the nothingness of musical moments and their significance as symptoms of something intangible: '*Charme* rejects therefore the question "Where?" just as it eludes the question "What?" *Charme*, that is not keen on this-or-that, does not lie either here-or-there." (1988, p. 346, as cited in Gallope, 2018, p. 148).

'For Hegel, a sound [*Klang*] becomes a tone [*Ton*] when an "idea," a reflection of inward subjectivity, allows a sonorous being to overcome the incessant flux of time's "double negation" and acquire a proper and discrete unity.' (Hegel, 1975, 2, p. 890, as cited in Gallope, 2018, pp. 148-9). Another understanding of this is to say that, when we reflect in retrospect upon the features of improvised performance, we attribute value to them according to their relation to extant rubric which act as moral arbiters – it is this system of valuation that, through subjection, transforms otherwise meaningless noise '*Klang*' into meaningful sound '*Ton*'. It is also as a by-product of this process of valuation that we can misinterpret subconscious reaction for conscious choice.

Seeking to support his presentation of the 'improvised instant' as a defining principle of improvisation, Gallope then leans on the oft-cited dichotomy between notated music and improvised music:

> 'In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida deconstructs the medium of embodied speech because its alleged immediacy facilitates a "metaphysics of presence", an operation that could be applied to alphabetic script or Western musical notation

> for different reasons—any naturalized medium that might claim to overcome the instabilities of time and inscribe the eternal. By contrast, the improvised instant is structured by an undecidable multiplicity of inscriptions.' (ibid, p. 150)

Superficially, it may appear intuitive that notated music 'inscribes' certainty into performance, and that, by contrast, improvised performance rejoices in the lack of certainty. But this reductive appreciation of improvising neglects to attend to the necessity of certainty in all real-time performance, whether specifically prescribed by an author or chosen by the performer[36]. Gary Peters opens his 2017 *Improvising Improvisation* by de-bunking several myths concerning improvisation, including the role of 'deciding' – which he explains precedes 'in the moment' choices – in casting certainty into improvised performances as does notation:

> '…this book is grounded on one fundamental belief… that improvisation is a *predicament*… [not] the over-hyped uncertainty of the improvised situation as it unfolds in the "now", but one that recognizes that the performativity of choice, fun though it may be, is ontologically secondary to the *a-priority of decision*: improvisers *make* choices, but they are *made* by decisions. That's the predicament.'

> '..the analysis of an individual unfolding improvisation would be less concerned with the <u>experience</u> of uncertainty, expectancy, risk-taking and surprise; the issue

[36] Indeed, this viewpoint also neglects to attend to the uncertainty of notation, as I will discuss in reference to Nicholas Cook's coined 'symbolic poverty' later in this essay.

> here is rather the extraordinary *certainty* of the improviser, the *predictability* of the improvisation, and the *absence* of risk-taking.' [original italics etc.]
>
> (pp. ix & 23)

Peters' depiction of the *a priori* Decision which enables Choice is foundational to my appreciation of Governance – however formalised or non-formalised, goal-oriented or arbitrary – within and against which Freedom is facilitated in improvising. And it is the existence of Governance that, whilst improvised performances can no doubt produce novel results, 'inscribes' certainty in much the same way as notation. In other words, it is not that in improvised performances *anything can happen* and in performances from notation *this will happen*, but rather than in **both** *something like this will happen* – the two share the same continuum of practice between Governed and Free elements. The perceived schism between 'scored music' and 'improvisation' has become calcified by reductive appreciations of composition as a medium of 'maximum control'[37] and of improvisation (particularly Free Improvisation) as a medium of 'total freedom', respectively, by theorists and also by practitioners of each. This synthesis in improvising of 'choosing' and of acting with certainty can be understood clearly when we consider a sphere of improvising which nearly all of us attend to daily: conversation.

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[37] I discussed this point more fully in my paper *Drawing a Line in the Sand: Composition and the negotiation of Control* (2021), largely drawing upon the scholarship of Peters (2017) and Small (1998). Elements of this discussion also appear in my case-study of Finnissy and Lutoslawski later in this essay.

> '…all human agency unfolds with a certain degree of improvisation… improvised behaviour is so much a part of human existence as to be one of its fundamental realities… Consider a response elicited by an unexpected question: the response calls for a reaction, but, more important, for knowledge of the argument and a strong vocabulary. Although what we say in conversation can never be completely anticipated, and, moreover, calls for mental alertness, the language with which we communicate is familiar enough to us (we are already competent users of language by the time we have undertaken to tell an unedited story).' (Davide Sparti, 2018, pp. 182-183)

Conversely, Philip Alperson expresses a conflation of the *novelty* associated with unscripted acts with *unpredictability*:

> 'One of the chief ways in which improvisatory spontaneity, freedom, and risk play out is in the exercising of musical skills… There are also skills involved in reactive ensemble playing, whether as a soloist or in accompanying roles, engaging in various "conversational" protocols with other players. Here one attends to the social graces of improvisational etiquette by observing standard conventions about the length and order of solos, by showing respect to your immediately preceding soloist by building your solo on a musical phrase he or she has left you, and so on.' (2018, pp. 429-430)

Alperson repeats that 'improvisatory spontaneity, freedom, and risk' is played out 'in the exercising of musical skills', but then refers to 'conversational' etiquette and convention – a type of socialised behaviour of which we are all aware, and which must be recognised as being internalised and mastered over very long spans of time. Therefore, the social conventions which Alperson correctly identifies as being key to improvising can have

nothing to do with 'spontaneity, freedom, and risk', but rather their opposites: habit, restriction, and reliability.

Gallope echoes Alperson's conflation in his depiction of Derrida's on-stage improvised reading alongside Ornette Coleman at the 'La Villette' festival in 1997:

> **'**Qu'est-ce qui arrive? What's happening? What's going to happen, Ornette, now, right now? What's happening to me, here, now, with Ornette Coleman? With you? Who*? Il faut bien improviser, il faut***bien***improviser*. [It is indeed necessary to improvise, it is necessary to improvise *well*.] I knew that Ornette was going to call on me to join him tonight, he told me so when we met to talk one afternoon last week. This chance frightens me, I have no idea what's going to happen.' (Derrida, 1997, pp. 331–332, as cited in Gallope, 2018, p. 151)

'Here, Derrida's two varying emphases on "bien" playfully juxtapose the unchosen injunction to improvise against the ethical imperative to do it well.' (Gallope, 2018, p. 151). Here, Gallope makes the right point, and yet only makes half the point: there is indeed with any improvised action an imperative for the performer to act according to 'ethical imperatives', which may just as easily by referred to as 'rules of engagement', 'Governance', or, formally, a 'tradition'. Indeed, it is this understanding of an 'ethical' framework which facilitates the improvising as an act of transgression within/around/against the rules. But in acknowledging that he feels a necessity to improvise well, Derrida presupposes the existence

of – and his own understanding of – a set of rules of engagement for the task at hand; ergo, *he knew what was going to happen*[38].

It is a commonly-worn aesthetic of improvised performance that 'uncertainty' is the chief catalyst. This is particularly evident in genres where participants wish to exude the appearance of one who is 'off-beat'/'eccentric'/'free-spirited' (or in Derrida's case, bashful, perhaps?). But the very fact that all improvised performance implies some set of 'ethical' arbiters belies these superficial qualities and reveals, in fact, that they are exercises of radical predictability. As Gallope later confirms: '[T]he affirmations at play in musical improvisation exemplify a basic paradox of lived becoming… because all musical improvisation entails the necessity of reproducing something one has already heard or played' (ibid., pp. 153-154).

> 'More soberly, here he [Derrida] emphasizes the hauntingly absent "prescriptions" and "schemas" we improvisers are bound to adopt as mere marionettes of a symbolic order beyond our control and apprehension: "It's not easy to improvise, it's the most difficult thing to do. … [O]ne ventriloquizes or leaves another to speak in one's place the schemas and languages that are already there. There are already a great number of prescriptions that are prescribed in our memory and in our culture. … One can't say whatever one wants, one is obliged

[38] 'If he is not at once *improvising* and improvising *warily*, he is not engaging his somewhat trained wits in some momentarily live issue, but perhaps acting from sheer unthinking habit. So thinking, I now declare quite generally, is, at the least, the engaging of partly trained wits in a partly fresh situation.' (Gilbert Ryle, 1976, p. 77).

> more or less to reproduce the stereotypical discourse".' (Derrida, 1982, as cited in Gallope, 2018, p. 151)

Gallope subscribes to Derrida's own account of his time improvising on stage with Coleman – that he was completely blind to the nature of the 'ethical imperative' to which he felt obligated to conform. But even if Derrida was entering into a improvisatory tradition the likes of which he had no prior experience of whatsoever (which does not appear to be the case), his naivety would provide no basis on which to build a theory of improvisation; for one, it is clear that Coleman and the other musicians on stage are experienced operators (and officiators) of such ethics.

Moreover, Derrida himself (1982) references directly the 'schemas', 'languages', or 'prescriptions' that form the basis for improvised activity. In fact, his depiction of the 'great number of prescriptions that are prescribed in our memory and in our culture' describes neatly the non-formalised idiomata which come to bear so weightily upon the formation of an improvisatory tradition, and which are often overlooked for the more formalised idioms therein (the acknowledgment of jazz harmonic theory overshadowing the importance of timbre in defining a jazz guitar performance, for example).

> 'In replacing the interpreted reproduction of a notated work with the injunction of consequential real-time decisions, improvisers, according to this logic, can be understood to affirm a constitutive absence at the heart of musical practice itself. According to this view, one improvises onward without a commonly agreed upon medium like notation or without the regulatory grid of a single musical idiom;

> and that would be the point of improvisation – to expose the ground of music to our survival instincts, to our idiomatic proclivities, to our historicities, to our notably faulty efforts and to our embarrassing mistakes...' (Gallope, 2018, p. 153)

Gallope, then, is guilty here of having an ontological definition of 'improvisation' which is informed by and extracted from his appreciation of the aesthetics of Free Improvisation. That is to say, where Free Improvisation explores the possibilities of performing music that negates reference to formalised idioms, Gallope infers that the actions taken by improvising performers – even those improvising according to tightly-controlled idiomata – are made according to 'instincts' which are divorced from idiom. However, Derrida's testimony of the 'ethical' imperative to improvise *well* neatly summarises the 'a priori' existence of Governance as the basis upon which such ethics are judged (including judgements such as 'notably faulty efforts' and 'embarrassing mistakes', for example).

Case study: Arnold Davidson and Sonny Rollins

Arnold Davidson in his account of Sonny Rollins' career as a Jazz performer provides, albeit obliquely, a good case study in the formation of Habitus: 'Rollins is renowned for the periods during which he did nothing other than practice, up to 15 hours per day. That which Rollins dubbed his "relentless practicing" is a way of manifesting his ethical attitude: "I've taken several sabbaticals from performing and recording… I never viewed practicing as a chore. I

always saw it as a necessity to improve".' (2018, pp. 525-6). This reveals the necessity of *practice* in becoming better at improvising – preparation (not ingenuity) being the bedrock of improvised performance. Davidson extends this point, however, in a more ideologically-oriented manner: 'The interminable exercises of Rollins also highlight the priority of a certain relationship with oneself and, in the case of Rollins, the necessity of forming oneself in such a way that improvisation can become unlimited.' (ibid., p. 526). The concept offered here, that *practice* (repeatedly reforming, reaffirming and reshaping Habitus) could effect a *limitlessness* (an *escape from Habitus*), is paradoxical.

This paradox can be unworked when we reconsider Davidson's 'unlimited' as 'relimited' – rather than viewing rehearsing improvising as a means of moving *beyond* embodied practice, we may view it as a means of actively *evolving* one's embodied practice. In this way, rehearsing improvising – rather pragmatically – has the same function as all forms of experience, including performing and listening (though rehearsing, if it has any 'special' status over other forms of experience, is perhaps the most directed and purposeful means of shaping one's embodied practice as it represents the opportunity to hone ways of playing and thinking through repetition without the burden of the external critique assumed in performance).

With the term 'relimited', Rollins' relentless pursuit of the *not-yet* is continuously fulfilled by his successive *changing*, without necessarily assuming value added with that change, nor

for that change to represent a cumulative growth *towards* anything but rather a constant movement *away from* his present Habitus. This is not to say that, through rehearsing, Rollins' Habitus cannot become 'better' in his opinion (that is, more nuanced, more flexible, etc.), but that any 'better' ability he achieves is by definition an 'improved' Habitus – not a non-Habitus. As such, the 'ethical attitude' (ibid., p. 525) displayed by Rollins in his commitment to change might be considered as a *direction* (positioning away from Habitus) rather than a *vector* (towards a fixed point outside Habitus). When one improves one's repartee, one doesn't move beyond language, one becomes a better user of language.

This also explains Davidson's later comment that 'Rollins created a form of himself that allowed him never to exhaust an improvisation, to always invent new possibilities, as if the improvisation was, literally, an infinite creation without determinate limits. The form of Rollins's self at the end of the 1950s is a form never filled in, one that precedes all substance, a form without weight, always in movement, vital, a form, one might say, whose dimensions are limitless. It is a form that responds precisely to Rollins's incessant exercises.' (ibid., p. 526). Despite Davidson's commitment to an idealised phenomenologically-derived depiction of Rollins' 'form', he nevertheless returns to the simple truth that 'it is a form that responds directly to Rollins's incessant exercises'. So it corresponds that if Rollins is dedicated to developing his Habitus through rehearsing (including by deeply ingraining ways of playing

governed by the shapes obsessively reinforced into his muscle-memory through exercises), he will in successive performances be seen (and heard) to change.

Following Cardinal Newman's tenet 'to be perfect is to change often' (1992), Rollins can thus be observed to have achieved a perfection in his continuous commitment to change. Or, as Davidson puts it, 'Sonny Rollins is the living image of moral perfectionism' (2018, p. 533). This may well result in others' perception of Rollins as exhibiting a sort of formlessness (as Davidson perceives) because of a lack of consistency of output which is common to most musicians (and indeed to most people). But that is not to say he is ever *without form*, but rather that 'form' as defined by the usual markers of a musician's identity (perceptible signifiers of their character heard and repeated in their music including phrasing, gesture, thematic development, etc.) is in Rollins' case an ever-shifting design (and re-design). This phenomenon explains Davidson's observation that Rollins' rehearsal schedule is extremely unusual: Rollins makes himself change much more and much more often than most people are wont to do (in fact, many people would much rather stay the same, for aesthetic consistency among other reasons).

> 'Rollins's solo [in *I'm an Old Cowhand* (from *Way Out West*, 1957)] is magnificent; one perceives in it, at the same time, both imagination and organization, yet it is a solo that is in a clear sense unfinished. However, its felt incompleteness is of a very particular kind; it concerns the inexhaustibility of the improvisation, an inexhaustibility achieved thanks to a certain practice, a certain form of the self… Without any doubt, in these years, there was a sound, a clear

> style, that is to say a distinctive form called Rollins, precisely that form which, within a piece, authorized a beyond, always elsewhere, further on, which knew no permanent pause, no definitive conclusion, no resting in peace.' (ibid., p. 526)

If 'incompleteness' can be 'felt' – if there is 'a sound, a clear style' which denotes 'inexhaustibility' – then what Davidson is commenting on is the *aesthetic* of these concepts as displayed in Rollins' playing (including 'Rollins's cadences', for example (ibid., p. 526)). Indeed, Davidson can only be commenting on *his perception* of Rollins' aesthetic disposition, a disposition which Davidson has already acknowledged as being obsessively honed by Rollins himself in his incessant exercises. It cannot be surprising – nor deserving of apotheosis[39] – that if Rollins spends most of his time developing his playing style in accordance with *the aesthetic of limitlessness*, then an observer (particularly one so admiring of this aesthetic as Davidson) would hear in Rollins' playing *that which sounds like limitlessness*.

Eric Clarke (2008) in his review of David Huron's *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation* (2006) describes this tendency for listeners (and theorists) to 'hear' in music that which they expect to be represented musically:

> 'When a person expects some event to occur at a particular time, the timely occurrence of that event is pleasurable because it confirms the accuracy of the original prediction - a kind of psychological pat on the back. Research cited by

[39] 'All things considered, it seems that a single note of Rollins encompasses, from the outset, all musical worlds, as if his improvisation unravels the cosmos itself.' (Davidson, 2018, p. 528)

> Huron demonstrates that this is true even when the event is itself intrinsically unpleasant… This pleasure principle is the driving force for the Prediction response. The Imagination response relates in turn to the highly developed human capacity to imagine events and to experience responses to those events - real or imagined - in the future.' (p. 390)

To expand Clarke's (and Huron's) train of thought, it is possible to apply this principle to the phenomenon described by Davidson in his chapter [above]: if one *expects* to encounter an experience (such as listening to a Jazz or Free Improvisation performance) which contains and/or exhibits certain characteristics – even idealised or imaginary ones, such as 'limitlessness' – one is bound to believe that they have encountered such an experience as it is pleasurable to fulfil the expectation to do so. This is made all the more possible by the fact that the evidence needed to support such idealised experiences as expected by Davidson (and many other improvisation theorists) is highly subjective. In this way, it becomes apparent that as listeners our *perception* of the workings of improvisers in performance can be as misleading for developing theory about improvising as are performers' own accounts of their improvisatory processes.

For example, David Borgo muses, 'As an improviser, I proudly wear the moniker of ant as well. Improvisers, like their ANT [Actor Network Theory] counterparts, can be equally single-minded and dedicated, while also supportive and community-minded. Free improvisation, filled as it sometimes is with quick reactions and dense soundscapes, has even

inspired literal analogies to insect behavior [sic.].', and, 'Ultimately, how we conceive of and value ant-like behavior also tells us as much about ourselves as it does about ants.' (2018, pp. 102 & 103). The lesson learned here might be that if one chooses to sound like what one thinks ants sound like, one ought not to be surprised that one has given oneself the impression of behaving like ants. Similarly, one can easily be convinced that another improvises in a way that represents limitlessness if one is already convinced that their ability to improvise is without limit.

Extrapolated outwards, the specific socio-aesthetic predilections for which music is used (by people) as a catalyst in specific contexts are non-sequiturs to the types of musical practices therein. In such contexts where improvised musical practice is explicitly featured, such socio-aesthetic predilections (as 'community-minded') are nevertheless all-too-often projected onto theorists' understanding of 'improvisation' itself. For instance, it would be naïve to perceive the consciously interactive dynamic of a quintet playing at a jazz festival and conclude that *improvisation is therefore fundamentally interactive*, just as it would be to conclude that *improvisation is fundamentally solitary* if only Keith Jarrett had taken the stage.

> 'The view of artistic improvisation as symbolizing social and political formations was dear to many authors in an earlier moment of improvisation studies. Newer critical engagements with the practice tended to turn this view on its head, finding that social and political formations themselves improvise and that improvisation not only enacts such formations directly but also is fundamentally constitutive of them.' (Lewis and Peikut, 2018, p. 13)

Case study: Georgina Born et al. and Improvisation

Born's chapter – the first chapter from her co-edited volume with Lewis and Straw (2017) – provides some examples of the conflation of extra-musical aesthetic predilections present in music events with the types of musical practices involved. Indeed, the book asserts its main assumption in its title, *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*, and is almost[40] wholly weighted in favour of scholarship which subscribes to the view that there is an essential relation between the two concepts. It comprises chapters which conflate, for example, 'community-minded, 'insect-like' behaviour with Actor Network Theory (see Davidson, above), and a 'utopian politics of interactivity' with automatic [computer] composition (despite the musics described being strictly aleatoric and therefore not improvisatory – see George E. Lewis). Among such conflations is Born's consistent synthesis of improvisation *per se* with the presentation of specific idealised social interactions such as 'collaboration' and 'openness':

> '…there is perhaps something singular about improvisation in that improvised performances are marked by and enable degrees of openness, mutuality, and

[40] Intriguingly, notable exceptions to the central narrative of this volume can be found in the chapters by Ingrid Monson and Nicholas Cook, respectively, who engage critically with – and deconstruct – the notion that improvised practices have anything inherently to do with social aesthetics. Their chapters do not appear to be represented in the introduction to the volume, however, which asserts that '…group improvisation involves essentially dialogical engagements between the improvisers, so that they are compelled to communicate with one another, all parties receiving, negotiating, responding to, and attempting to create meaningful (musical or performances) utterances and gestures in real time.' (Born et al., 2017, pp. 9-10).

> collaboration that are heightened and intensified when compared with the interpretation of scored works…' (Born, 2017, p. 41)

These concepts are misguided in opposing improvised performances to 'scored works', as it would seem that they are observable in some forms of improvisation – in which real-time reaction between performers is 'scored' (required) – but are not evident in many other types of improvised performances. Indeed, they are also observable or not observable in certain performances from scores. Compare, for example, the intense dialogical 'empractising' (Born, 2017) of mediation, sympathy, collaboration, gestural openness, etc. present in a string quartet's performance of Schubert's *String Quartet no. 14* D. 810 (1824), with the individualised, isolated presences of the same performers as they each conjure the discrete improvised medley of fragments which form their part of Earle Brown's *String Quartet* (1965).

As Peters (2018) describes, improvising, fundamentally, is a thing which must be done *alone*[41]. The 'openness, mutuality, and collaboration that are heightened and intensified' by some improvised performances are therefore empractised by the performers through

[41] '[Though there are] models of improvisation that equate dialogue with community and communion (some might say a rather facile model), it becomes evident, as other writings of Husserl betray, that the twinning of self and other ultimately breaks down under the weight of irreducible difference and existential solitude… [T]he collectivity of collective improvisation: a commonality without communion.' (Gary Peters, 2018, p. 450, citing Emmanuel Levinas, 1969).

performative traits which are independent of improvised performance *per se*, and are just as readily employable in some fully-notated works. Moreover, the distinction drawn between 'improvised performances' and 'scored works' is also adrift from a meaningful recognition of improvised musics as oftentimes being scored, even heavily so[42] – a recognition that further threatens to undermine the validity of Born's dichotomised argument.

Born frames the difference between scored and improvised musics with reference to the differing effects on social interaction between the concert performance tradition of Western art music since the nineteenth century and 'certain lineages' of late twentieth-century improvised musics:

> 'In the former tradition, as historians have shown, the social is relatively less foregrounded and is subject to a weak reflexivity… concert life saw the cultivation of silent, self-disciplined, contemplative, and interiorized spectatorship—a bourgeois "act of purification" that, in his [Richard Sennett, 2002, pp. 213-14] compelling phrase, amounted to "a defense [sic.] against the experience of social relations."…In marked contrast, the lineages of improvised

[42] Consider, for example, Lutoslawski's scored improvising in works such as *Venetian Games* (1961), in which each performer is called to improvise the exact timing of fully-notated fragments. Despite its reputation, this performance technique is not aleatoric but improvised; the fact that many performers in such a case may feel obliged to perform in a way that results in a faux-aleatoric, 'random' aesthetic goes to reveal how influential these non-formalised conventions of improvising can be, in addition to the formalised instructions notated by the composer. I discuss this work in comparison with Michael Finnissy's 'New Complexity' approach later in this essay.

> music of the late twentieth century often manifested a heightened reflexivity about the socialities engendered by performance.' (2017, p. 40)

The concert tradition of Western art music is here presented in direct opposition to improvised musics as regards their respective capacities for the exploration of social relations:

> '…improvising musicians have often demonstrated a self-conscious interest in the aesthetic potential or effects of the socialities of performance, including the dialogical and multilateral expressive exchanges enlivened by collective improvisations… improvising musicians have shown a concern with how wider, enduring social relations of race, class, and gender enter into and may be reproduced, entrenched, refracted, or reimagined in the socialities of musical performance…' (ibid., pp. 40-41)

The link between the concert tradition of nineteenth-to-twentieth-century Western art music and non-improvised music is implicit here. But if we were to assume such a link, we would – amongst other things – deny that the concert platform in question grew in tandem with the rise of some of the most prolific and famous improvisers and of improvised performance practices, among them Paganini, Chopin and Liszt – the latter of whom was a central figure in the establishment of the solo piano recital format. It is sure, then, that this concert tradition – which persists to this day – goes some way to stifle reflexive social engagement, but it is not for the lack of, or preclusion of, improvised practices within that tradition. Indeed, it is also not that *the improvised elements* of improvising musicians' performances enable their

supposed engagement with social formations, but rather that certain musicians empractise 'dialogical and multilateral expressive exchanges' and the like in order to enact socialities, quite aside from the presence (or not) of improvised processes. Born may have attributed to them the moniker 'improvising musicians', but that does not mean that everything they do is directly related to 'improvisation'.

> 'This must immediately be qualified, for improvised music is not unique in exhibiting these types of social mediation, which are shared with other musical traditions. However, there is perhaps something singular about improvisation in that…' (ibid., p. 41)

Nicholas Cook, within the same volume, provides thorough counter-arguments to Born, making explicit the non-sequitur relationship between a 'dialogical' sociality in music performance and the presence (or not) of improvised practice:

> 'In talking about the string quartet as a model for social interaction in music, I have chosen the classical genre that perhaps most closely resembles jazz improvisation. Both embody the same relational values: the need to play by ear… means that everyone is open to everyone else, resulting in an ensemble that is egalitarian or, at least, in which hierarchies are dynamic and negotiated… it is no accident that the metaphor of conversation was as deeply embedded in eighteenth-century thinking about chamber music as in twentieth-century thinking about jazz.'
>
> 'The first and second violinists in the fourth movement of Tchaikovsky's Pathétique each "sing" the complete melody, although they play only half of it, and the effort to coordinate individual and social action, matching collective

> instrumental sound to individually imagined vocalization, arguably results in an effect of concentration, of the forging of social community against the odds, that would be hard to create in any other manner… an extreme form of communality. In essence, what we are talking about is distributed cognition.'
>
> (2017, pp. 69 & 73)

Ingrid Monson's chapter further challenges the notion of an inherent link between ensemble improvisation and social relations:

> 'My discomfort with uncritical claims for the creation of new social relations through music has led me to take the position that ensemble improvisation is not inherently egalitarian or emancipatory; instead, it offers only the potential for such human interaction, necessarily subject to the very human and social shortcomings the various individuals bring into the circle of sound that frames musical experience.' (ibid., p. 83)

That the social aesthetics of which Born writes are interesting is a given, that there is fertile ground amongst improvised musics for the presentation of such socialities in question is beyond doubt, but that the improvised processes therein are in any way directly related to those social aesthetics is never reasoned – it is simply stated. Though sociological concerns are no doubt 'played out' in improvised art – as much as they are in any art – to assert that improvisation is in any way more concerned with social activity (either in performance or as a result of performance) than other forms of art is misleading. Indeed, it risks misappropriating the aesthetic qualities of community, exchange of ideas, and receptivity – which are often embodied in spaces and events where improvisatory practices occurs – to be

fundamental elements of improvisatory process. This risks misdirecting our understanding of what improvising *is*. In short, the omission of the term 'improvisation' from Born's discourse (as well as others' in the volume, including George E. Lewis) – and indeed the volume's title – would result in no loss to critical engagement; all of the salient and interesting points would remain intact, and only the superfluous associations to some Other entity would be removed. Eric Lewis' chapter, *What is "Great Black Music?"*, is particularly telling in this regard:

> 'They [members of the AACM in Paris] *consciously* engaged in what I will call repeated acts of "aesthetic thickening."… They accomplished this by destabilizing any single genre perspective from which to critique their art and (therefore) argued that their art was best seen as multi-generic and thus aesthetically thick… The expression "Great Black Music" as coined by members of the AEC, […] takes on the function of a meta-genre, signifying on the notion of genre itself—an act that is simultaneously a social and an aesthetic critique of how genres function and the politics of genre ownership… The instrumentation [in *Silence*, by Wadada Leo Smith] also avoids coding as jazz. The violin is often played in non-standard ways; the percussion lacks the characteristic tones and effects of a trap set; there is a preponderance of small percussion instruments; the trumpet is played with highly inflected timbre decentering its sound from the jazz world; and a series of reed instruments are all played with no sonic gestures toward the jazz idiom. Certainly, this piece is worlds away from the dynamics, pitch density, rhythmic sense, and melodic and harmonic language of what at the time was commonly called "free jazz".' (Eric Lewis, 2017, pp. 135-137)

Improvised practice lies outside the remit of this discourse, with instrumentation, formal structure, thematic tropes, and, most importantly, genre distinction being foregrounded as the

aesthetic forum in which socio-cultural issues are negotiated. The generally-improvised nature of the music is relevant inasmuch as it suggests pre-associations ripe for discussion. However, consideration of the specific modes or processes of improvising as they relate to composition, or to notation, or to real-time enactment of any particular aesthetic qualities, is irrelevant here. Improvisation is simply lingering in the rhetoric, not a part of the reasoning.

> 'Those social meanings are not to be hived off into something called a "sociology" of music that is separate from the meaning of the sounds but are fundamental to an understanding of the activity that is called music.' (Small, 1998, p. 16)

In presenting music-making ***as*** social, as a mutually-informing synthesis between music and the social, why then would improvised performances in particular be used to frame discrete paradigms of social aesthetics? Given that music performance ***is*** social, and that, as Born's writing here often attests, improvised practices are readily used as platforms for certain kinds of utopian or rebellious (or collaborative, or experimental, etc.) musico-socialities, surely it is self-evident that it is not 'improvisation' which signifies moments of musico-sociological processes, but rather that specific kinds of improvised performance are but some of the innumerable ways in which specific musico-socialities are empractised, for non-improvised musics similarly empractise other types of musico-socialities. That is to say, the improvised practices are ***used*** to empractise certain socialities; improvisation *per se* has nothing to do with bringing any specific socialities into effect.

Born continues: ‘The analytics of four planes of social mediation developed in the main body of the chapter is offered as a conceptual foundation, and I worked it through with reference to improvised music in which the articulation of the four planes is manifest in richly reticulate socialities.’ (2017, p. 57). This quotation comes at the end of a chapter in which groups known to include improvised practices in their performances are referenced, but also in which no improvised situations are actually described.

That a variety of socialities and the ‘four planes of social mediation’ are manifest in improvised performances may be true, but at no point in the exploration of the relationship between improvisation and social aesthetics does Born identify whether or not the ‘social’ aspects of the music being referred to are explicitly improvisatory; this despite the fact that the aspects of their respective musicalities and practices which seem to be related to social aesthetics (such as the AACM’s ‘blend of sonic, visual, and textual iconography’ and ‘use of body paint’ (George E. Lewis 1998, p. 90, as cited in Born 2017, p. 53)) are non-sequiturs to a discussion about improvising. Nor is it made clear how the different *improvised* processes undertaken by the three artists discussed (Charlie Parker, AACM, and FIG) reflect different relationships with social aesthetics. What is certain, then, is that these examples of improvised practices contain novel socialities and also that this is *not because of* their improvisatory processes, but rather because of the adopted social aesthetics of their participants.

> '… Philip Auslander's (2013, 54) argument that "the fact that music is improvised is not accessible or verifiable through the act of listening." He sees improvisation as "a social characteristic of jazz performance rather than an ontological characteristic of the music" (57), an agreement between players and listeners to treat the performance as if it is improvised. An expression of this is the elaborate gestural stage play through which both jazz and rock musicians create the impression of—or perform—spontaneity. (It is telling that this stage play is essentially identical to that through which WAM soloists perform the authenticity of their emotional engagement with the music they are playing.)' (Nicholas Cook, 2017, pp. 66-67)

Cook's recognition of performers' tendency to portray spontaneity through stage play in rock and jazz is significant in highlighting not only the superficial nature of such acts, but also the commonality of such behaviour. That improvising musicians should enact idealised forms of interaction during performances with such regularity speaks of the perceived inherence of those ideals with regards to improvised acts. Despite Gilbert Ryle's distinction between (the performer's) knowing-*how* and (the theorist's) knowing-*that*, the continual empractising of idealised socialities 'through' improvisation – and appreciated as such by listeners – validates Born's depiction of improvised performance as being uniquely fertile sites for such socialities. To borrow Lydia Goehr's description of the way in which a concept (specifically the Work Concept) can become so entrenched as to become difficult to recognise, we might say that the concept of 'spontaneous' and 'collaborative' improvisation has become 'crystallised': 'From a practical point of view… the concept sinks into opacity; its existence

is taken so much for granted that we find it difficult to think of the practice without it.' (Goehr, 1994, p. 109).

Nevertheless, the conflation of improvisation within the performances of improvisatory genres and the social aesthetics commonly empractised within those performances has undermined the ability of musicological scholarship to generate successful theory regarding improvising; it ties together various conflicting associations. For example, Born et al. write: 'The improvisatory, in this kind of art making [the creation of 'ordinary craft objects', as promoted by bell hooks], is most evident in the use of discarded, fragmented, and everyday materials.' (2017, p. 21). The usage of the term 'improvisatory' in this context is misleading, as neither the suitability/legitimacy of art materials, nor the willingness of an artist to work with 'chance' objects as opposed to traditionally-sourced objects (as it relates to forms of deviancy or transgression) have any bearing on the process of composition.

This volume's introduction contains another such example, whereby the association of 'improvisation' to 'improvidence' becomes entangled with other independent associations to 'improvisation' including 'experimental', 'alternative' and 'inclusive': '…interpreting the aesthetics of dance improvisation through a variant of phenomenology to reveal "the dynamic ebb and flow of states of encounter of all the participants," in which everyone is, in some sense, a performer.' (ibid., p. 23). The inadequate lexicon needed to assign unique terms to

each of these associations results in perpetually cyclical and contradictory conclusions about what the term 'improvisation' may entail.

Born et al. reinforce this false union between improvisation and improvidence: 'Improvisation represented a challenge to long-standing protocols and trade union agreements in which professional roles were clear, dialogue and camera angles were planned in advance, and a polished quality was the ultimate objective.' (ibid., p. 22). Herein lies another misassociation: 'unrefinement'. Because partially-scripted scenarios can make it more difficult to achieve an aesthetic of refinement, it is often assumed that the subversive, 'improvident' aesthetic of unrefinement is essential to improvisation. This, in turn, often leads to clichéd practices whereby practitioners seek to make their improvised performances (and indeed their personae, as below) overtly eccentric or surprising, as though liberated to do so in a way which would be restricted by fully-scripted means. In reality, choosing to be or to sound 'surprising' when improvising in performance is no different to choosing to script aesthetically-surprising events in composition[43]. It is partly to highlight this phenomenon that

[43] 'My second (and final) historical case is that of the Feminist Improvising Group (FIG), an experimental and occasional all-woman performing ensemble founded in London in 1977 in which I played cello and bass guitar. Like the Art Ensemble, FIG was known for its extraordinary and eccentric performance style; along with musical and sonic improvisations, it often entailed the anarchic and uneven use of visual, theatrical, and performance elements…' (Born, 2017, p. 53).

my DPhil composition portfolio presents many different contexts in which improvised processes are effected with unsurprising, predictable and/or consistent results.

> 'Club Inégales is a place of surprises, do not expect the conventional! … we search for the best of real new, spontaneous performance… First resident band Notes Inégales, under my direction, warm us up… [Then] something unique. Maybe spontaneously created in the afternoon – with improv in the evening. We never know what's going to happen…' (Club Inégales website, 'About' page, https://clubinegales.com/about, accessed 10/03/2023).

In this way, the concept of improvisation has come to be represented in direct opposition to the original usage of the term which concerned the noble 'improvisare' art of late Medieval Italian thespians who, being highly-trained within the *conventions* of theatrical performance at that time, were able to improvise drama which was so sophisticated and refined as to be *indistinguishable* from scripted performance (Pietropaolo, 2003).

A Working Theory of Improvising

The introduction to this essay proposed the idea of a 'Working Theory of Improvising', summarised by the symbiotic relationship between Freedom and Governance, under the term 'Libertas Regimine Crescit', or 'LRC' (Freedom [which] grows out of Governance). This theoretical framework, being developed in abstract, represents a departure from much existing scholarship of a 'micro-to-macro' order which uses specific improvisatory contexts

(particularly Free Improvisation performances) to derive broader theory, as detailed in the previous three chapters.

In contrast to existing theory which perpetuates the concept of 'non-idiomatic' improvisation, LRC insists on the fundamental presence of Governance, or idiom, within all improvised practice. As such, this 'Working Theory' is intended to be a unifying theory – one which 'works' in all improvisatory contexts. Further exploration of the notion of Governance reveals that it includes the central role which corporeal 'Habitus' plays in shaping improvised acts. This, in turn, portrays improvising as an ongoing process of 'assessment' in retrospection of our involuntary actions. Being a process, then, improvising per se is shown to be fundamentally asymptomatic. Rather, improvising involves the adherence to, and departure from, certain limiting factors as expressed in the relationship between Freedom and Governance. The following chapters develop these ideas by framing the relationship between Governance and Freedom through its depiction in musical notation.

Pro-Improvisatory Composing – *utilising the ha-ha*

I will now turn towards the applicatory branch of my research which concerns 'pro-improvisatory composing', or PIC. As mentioned in the introduction to this essay, 'Pro-improvisatory' is the term I use to describe any musical work – and the process of its creation – which requires of its performance (and performer) some indeterminate elements, both

implicitly (non-documented) and explicitly (documented). As such, this term references and draws together many different composers working in many different improvisatory traditions throughout history, connecting them to contemporary practice, including my own[44].

There is an inherent danger, of course, with labelling 'pro-improvisatory' composition: taxonomising in this way creates a divide between it and 'mainstream', or 'non-improvisatory' composition. This danger may be mitigated when 'pro-improvisatory composition' is considered as an analogue continuum of practice that – far from representing a niche – covers nearly the entirety of composed musics, across a range of degrees. In this way even fully-notated music which includes extra-notated or '*ad lib.*' performance acts (such as '*rubato*', for example) can be appreciated as 'pro-improvisatory', if towards the more tightly-controlled end of the continuum. As Nicholas Cook observes, 'There is no

[44] Among these connected improvisatory traditions are: the 'free' timings common to Hildegard von Bingen's melodic plainchant, to Louis Couperin's 'unmeasured preludes', and to John Cage's *ASLSP* (1985); the commonality of the choral works of Tomás Luis de Victoria and the vocal 'da capo' arias of George Frederick Handel, both of which expect lavish melodic embellishment of the given material by the performer(s); and the commonality of J.S. Bach's 'figured bass' keyboard notation, the violin sonatas of Arcangelo Corelli, and Clark Terry's *Mumbles* (1964), all of which provide chord symbols which the performer(s) must articulate as they see fit. Of course, these distinctions are not to suggest mutual exclusivity between different improvisatory traditions – indeed, 'pro-improvisatory' is a concept designed to highlight their commonality of process – but rather to reveal the direct lineage of different improvisatory processes throughout the history of Western music.

categorical distinction between improvisation and performance; rather, there is a continuum of practices…' (2017, p. 64)[45].

Despite this potential danger, I consider it to be important to name PIC in order to distinguish the concept from the *modus operandi* of classical music-making today, which – even concerning music from *essentially* improvisatory traditions – avoids improvising in performance (and in pedagogy)[46]. And in turn, because we tend to honour the classical tradition as one defined by a permanent and unchanging Canon of Works (Lydia Goehr, 1992), our perception of its history (however misrepresented[47]) serves to legitimise our own

[45] 'Any string quartet by Haydn, Mozart, or Beethoven will suffice to make the point. Here… the musicians play the notes as written—except that, of course, they do not play the notes as written. The notes are represented as fixed pitches with proportionate durations (a quarter-note lasts twice as long as an eighth), with dynamics being indicated only schematically and without any specification of timbral quality. But in performance every one of these is negotiated between the players, both in the course of rehearsal and in the real time of performance… In other words, the players do not do some things that are specified in the score and do others that are not… Just as in the case of jazz lead sheets, then, the relationship between WAM notation and performance is highly mediated, with many decisions being delegated to performers and with at least some of these needing to be negotiated in real time. Playing the notes is nowhere near as straightforward as it sounds.' (Nicholas Cook, 2017, pp. 63-64).

[46] These 'ignored' or 'forgotten' historical improvisatory traditions have been described in detail by a number of scholars, including Timothy McGee (2003, p. xi), C. M. Moersch (2009, p. 167), and Nicholas Cook (2017, p. 62).

[47] 'A modern symphony concert, then, is a very different kind of event from those at which most of the musical works we hear there today were first performed…' (Small, 1998, p. 50).

contemporary compositional practice, too, which is often concerned foremost with fastidious and comprehensive notation – that is, notation that seeks to control as much as possible[48].

> '…They [those great musicians] would no doubt have thought… that any musician… who was unable to improvise was lacking in important skills and, worse, had been deprived of an important aspect of musical experience.' (Small, 1998, p. 131)

The principle of PIC is to embrace and utilise the inherent inadequacy of music notation as a form of documenting musical works for future performance. If we are to appreciate that all performances (given by humans) of notated works inherently involve improvising at least to some degree, then we must also appreciate that the scores which bear them are incomplete inasmuch as they do not – or rather *cannot* – contain the full information necessary to control every aspect of the performance (which would thereby negate improvising).

This is also to read the situation backwards, for if works are written in order to enable humans to improvise music, then works need not contain any more information than is sufficient to

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[48] 'Since…[the nineteenth century], the status of improvisation as a compositional form has undergone several changes, chief among which are its radical decline in popularity and artistic dignity (virtuosity being now measured with different meters)… This attitude…is the result of a presumed hierarchy in artistic culture which places written words far above spoken words…compositions above performances, concepts above designs, and designs above the objects that embody them… [whereas in the preceding centuries] performance was not an instrument for the execution of previously conceived art but itself art of the highest calibre, equal and possibly superior to the art of composition …' (Pietropaolo, 2003, pp. 2 & 7).

facilitate that improvising[49]. It is this latter reading of the inherent relationship between written notation and improvised performance in which PIC rejoices. And it is also this which reveals the vital intervention PIC plays both in interrupting contemporary thinking by revealing the legacy of a Romantic, Work-oriented perception of Composition and in reinstating an awareness of improvisatory processes within the fabric of contemporary composing.

> 'But who is to say that the omission of rhythmic specification [in *qin* tablature] is a greater deficiency than staff notation's inability to distinguish between different kinds of vibrato? (Classical composers occasionally specified "vibrato," or more commonly, "non vibrato," but the idea of *composing* vibrato has no place in the Western tradition.) The truth is that both staff notation and *qin* tablature are radically incomplete, making constant demands on the performer's tacit knowledge of what is normal or appropriate within a given musical context or style… It is a general principle, then, that musical notations specify some things but not others… The positive way to make the point is that, far from being deficiencies, the gaps in the notation represent opportunities for creative interpretation and interaction between performers… In short, it is the gaps in the notation – its symbolic poverty – that give it its value as a way of specifying the series of social actions and interactions of which any performance consists… Music, in short, shows how you get things done, not through the hopeless attempt to anticipate and comprehensively specify people's actions, but by finding ways to prompt their performance in real time. In this way, you invoke people's tacit

[49] '[Artists should not] tie their creative process down to their original commitment… Do not articulate too much… confused things rouse the mind to new inventions.' (Ernst Gombrich, as cited in Blum, 2009, p. 249).

> knowledge, their ability to interact with one another and to improvise, within a shared sense of direction and purpose. And in doing this, you are making the most of symbolic poverty.' (Nicholas Cook, 2010)

What Cook articulates here is that, as musical notation cannot 'comprehensively specify people's actions', it instead projects ideas by way of symbols (the musical stave is the clearest example of this, being a rudimentary mathematical graph with pitch on the *x* axis and time on the *y* axis). This 'symbolic poverty' between what is specified on the score and what is acted out in performance creates a conceptual 'synapse' between the prescriptivity of the written score and the imagined performance as interpreted by the performer(s).

In the rhetoric of landscape architecture, this 'synapse' might be likened to a 'ha-ha' – a walled ditch which separates two plains of different levels, constructed in such a way as to create, when viewed from the upper level, the illusion of one uninterrupted vista. I use the metaphor of the ha-ha to describe both the essential and yet unacknowledged nature of the synapse between the limits of a score's projection of its ideas and of the realisation of those ideas as by the performer(s).

The Canon of Musical Works as a corpus of autonomous entities has become so entrenched within the thinking of Western Art Music that bridging this ha-ha, though hermeneutically demanding, is a skill easily overlooked. Indeed, pedagogical ignorance of the inherent 'symbolic poverty' of notated music has perpetuated the 'ocularcentric' culture which dominates contemporary classical music-making; written Works thereby come to be seen not

as insufficient, but as comprehensive musical assets, and the performance of them – perceived to be nothing more than the execution of instructions – is considered a meaningless tautology of the written score[50].

> 'The biggest handicap inflicted by [classical] training is the instilling of a deeply reverential attitude towards the creation of music, based upon the physical and hierarchical separation of playing and creating. From this stems the view of improvisation as a frivolous or even sacrilegious activity... Notated music is precious and performance constitutes a threat to its existence.' (Bailey, 1980, p. 85)

Chopin and Rhizome

The obstacle of standard notation – its descriptive limitations and preclusion of imprecision – seems over the course of music history (particularly since the turn of the nineteenth century) to have become accepted as an inevitability. Strict notation ultimately involves freezing a hitherto flowing process into a fossilised product, to the benefit of exactitude and the detriment of vitality. It is possibly the most remarkable – and the least discussed – aspect that for an improvisatory-performance-led composer such as Chopin (but also Liszt, Mozart, Schubert, Rachmaninoff, etc.) there remains no documented attempt by him to convey or instruct his improvisatory process for others to follow. Instead, when notating a piece, he

[50] See also: Small (1998, pp. 12-13).

produced variant upon variant, the fixity of each betraying the unfixity of the improvisatory nature of its genesis. For example, John Rink notes that Chopin's Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2 has 'no less than fifteen known variants' (1989, p. 31)[51].

> 'The other day I heard Chopin improvise at George Sand's house. It is marvellous to hear Chopin compose in this way… But when it comes to writing it down and recapturing the original thought in all its details, he spends days of nervous strain… He alters and re-touches the same phrase incessantly and walks up and down like a madman.' (Joseph Filtsch, as cited in Rink, 1989, p. 32)

Chopin's struggle with notating points to a deeper revelation: that any notated emergence of a work, however 'final' or 'complete' in form, is ontologically – and temporally – secondary to a generative, sub-actual, 'other' entity (Governance). For Chopin both to 'improvise' performances and to 'compose' works out of the same process, it follows logically that there must exist a precursive origin, or governance, from which such 'improvising' and 'composing' flows, but which is not defined by either outcome[52]. Works, then, do exist – clearly – but can never be fully 'known' from their notation, as it pertains to an unwritten

[51] See also: A. J. Hipkins (as cited in Rink, 1989, p. 29).

[52] Schenker's notion of the 'fundamental line' or 'consistent logic' which flows from the 'background'/'origin', through the 'middleground'/'development', to the 'foreground'/'present' is a useful metaphor here (Schenker and Oster, 1979, p. 3).

origin[53]. We are therefore to consider the creation of musical objects not as 'ends' but as signifiers of a 'continuing'; not as products in their own right, but surface markers of an unspoken – '*sotto voce*' (Peters, 2017)/ 'mycelian' – process[54].

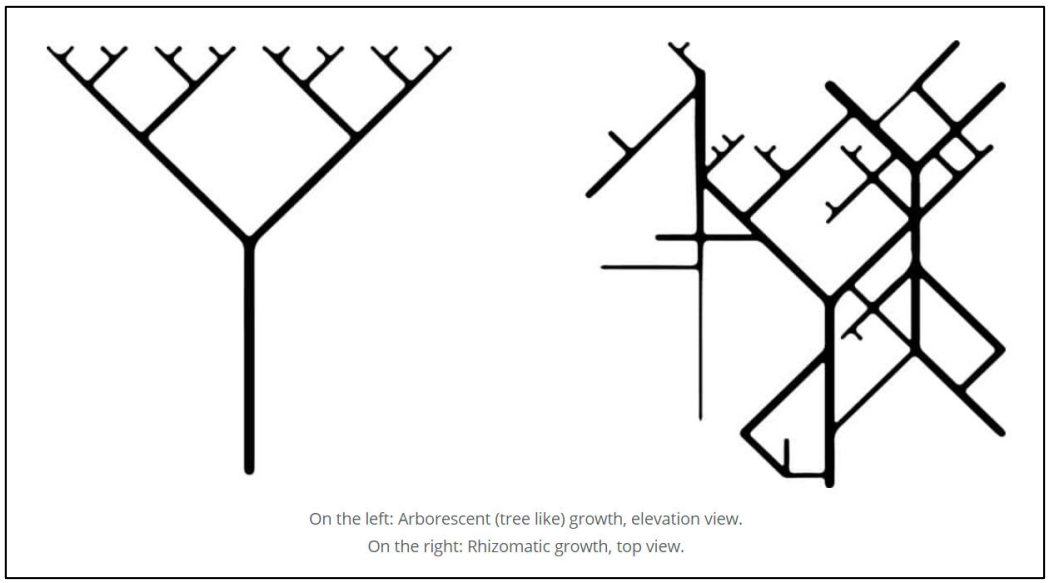


Fig. 1 – Diagram from *Think like fungus* (13/08/2019), in *Beyond Architecture*, by Meitar Keshet https://beyondarchitecture.co/think-like-fungus/, accessed 09/09/2020

As mentioned in the introduction to this essay, Deleuze and Guattari provide a comprehensive metaphor to describe the difference between goal-oriented, hierarchical, 'arborescent' structures, and multi-lateral, unfixed, 'rhizomatic' systems. So may we consider the ongoing process of improvising and the compositions which 'offshoot' to be a rhizomatic

[53] As a parallel, Peters describes that a tradition 'is always already complete – the necessary past-ness or historicity of tradition: complete but not finished… the idea is complete but not a whole…' (2017, p. 106).

[54] La Monte Young's *Dream Chord* and its subsequent realisations across a number of pieces, including those within *The Four Dreams of China*, provides a good case study in this regard; his *Dream Chord* acts as a mycelian origin from which numerous ongoing musical works 'sprout'.

phenomenon, with Works acting as interconnected rhizomes communicating through the transformational force of improvising [see Fig. 1].

Where composition is a means of notating imagined performance, rather than the paradigmatic fully-notated score which is but 'a tracing' (of an imagined product), PIC notation might be reconsidered as 'a map' (to an imagined improvisation), thereby preserving the essential changeability and subjectivity of the musical work *as it occurs*: 'A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back "to the same."' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 12)[55].

> '[T]he musical work… is not fabricated with static themes, it is organized from a dynamic scheme… before being developed, it was a rhapsody. Yet the inventor incapable of explicating his inexplicable invention can only demonstrate by the fact of doing, that is to say to lead by example… [I]t has the name Improvisation.' (Jankélévitch, 1998, p. xx, as cited in Gallope, 2017, p. 152)

This depiction of 'Improvisation' has keen parallels with Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizomatic' theory, as well as my own adaptation of Schenker's theory of 'middleground': the 'dynamic

[55] 'It is inaccurate to say that a tracing reproduces the map. It is instead like a photograph or X ray that begins by selecting or isolating, by artificial means such as colorations or other restrictive procedures, what it intends to reproduce… The tracing has already translated the map into an image… It has organized, stabilized, neutralized the multiplicities according to the axes of significance and subjectification belonging to it. It has generated, structuralized the rhizome, and when it thinks it is reproducing something else it is in fact only reproducing itself. That is why the tracing is so dangerous. It injects redundancies and propagates them.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 13).

scheme' or 'rhapsody' which is not yet static suggests the appreciation of an underlying concept, or 'Governance', which, in being improvised, may take the form of a notated work and/or an improvisatory performance. When this fluid 'rhapsody' is made to become 'static' in the form of a notated composition, it can be understood to produce a 'tracing of a map', and the composer, in lieu of being able to document fully the nature and bounds of this 'dynamic scheme', can but 'lead by example' – that is, create (improvise) an example product of the underlying process.

'Branding' Composers – *The Emperor's New Clothes*

In presenting PIC as a concept worthy of taxonomical classification, then, I am acknowledging that it represents something of a departure from the *status quo* of contemporary compositional practice which functions as a part of the product-driven music industry; in creating a commodifiable musical asset in the form of a fully-notated score, composers present a reification, or 'fossilisation', of improvising. This signifies a form of forgetting, for to consecrate musical creation in a fixed product is therefore to choose to forget its precursive process – it is to make a 'tracing' and discard the 'map'.

The creation of works, as they are 'fossilised' from the improvisatory process of composition, also creates as a by-product a preoccupation with the score as an aesthetic object. This is particularly the case for fully-notated scores, as they give no indication of their 'pre-

actualised' status. If one is to 'read' a musical work for its content, one must assume that it is defined by the absoluteness, the completeness, of its apparent form[56]. And so the essential contingency employed in the process of the composition of a work – replete with an infinite array of possible outcomes – must therefore be forgotten in the recognition of the 'finalised' artefact. Thus, the apparent 'perfection', or 'impenetrability', of standard notation serves to preclude the witnessing of the mutability of its creation.

This Composer-led paradigm serves to disguise contingency 'beneath the lustrous sheen of a pristine "work" and the pure virginity of its commencement… the finished "work" is precisely intended to conceal or obscure the uncertainty and improvisatory nature of its genesis.' (Peters, 2017, pp. 8 & 14). In the creation of musical artefacts, then, we choose to forget the inherent transience and elemental arbitrariness of the compositional artefact.

One compelling reason why we would tend to 'forget' the mutability of process in favour of the reliability of product in music notation is that the result in appealing. As listeners, for the most part, we would sooner enjoy the repetition of one single 'tracing' than listen to numerous improvised enactments of a 'map' because we find direct repetitions pleasurable; referring again to the work of Eric Clarke (2008), as above, the 'Prediction response' means

[56] 'According to [Moses] Mendelssohn, what is to be acknowledged as beautiful must be capable of being scanned without effort... Wholeness, thus, is a psychological condition for beauty…' (Dalhaus, 1982, p. 6).

that we as humans are programmed to find pleasurable that which we have anticipated to happen.

In other words, even music which a listener finds unpleasant, if heard by them either twice the same or once when the listener knows what to expect (by reading through the score whilst listening, for example) creates a positive cerebral 'Prediction response' which is *itself* pleasurable. Because of the 'maximum control' of standard notation, the resulting 'maximum reliability' of its aural product when performed in real-time is most conducive to this system of pleasure-in-repetition; improvised performance from PIC – whilst also potentially being capable of consistency across performances, depending on the Governance of the score – represents the negation of this system and is therefore undesirable as a function of the gratification-led music industry.

Moreover, because we instinctively seek to judge the appearance of a score as an autonomous object, we assign aesthetic criteria accordingly. With fully-scripted notation this evaluation seems entirely plausible, because mathematical apportion of pitch and rhythm on the stave accurately represents a visual transmutation of the aural product. In contrast, when partially-notated or pro-improvisatory scores are judged by the same criteria, the imagined aural product can seem far removed from the visual stimuli. In other words, non-standard notations cannot be easily 'read' and thereby disrupt the consumer-focused, ocularcentric, industrial values of contemporary classical composition [see Fig. 2].

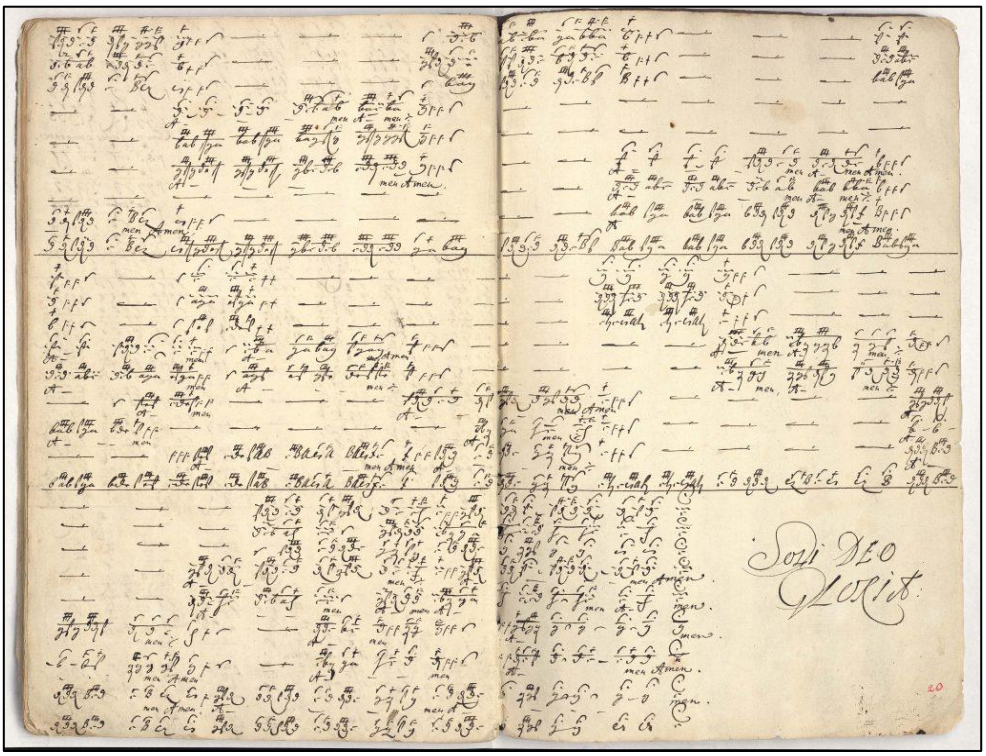


Fig. 2 – Excerpt from *Membra Jesu nostri*, BuxWV 75, by Dietrich Buxtehude (1680)

In the same way, Works act as allegories for their Composer, who likewise personifies the brand. Such branding is rife in contemporary classical music scores – functioning as they do as marketable assets – with many including a black-and-white headshot of the Composer (caught in a suitably pensive moment) tucked next to the final page of notated music, for example. In turn, the visual score represents – even embodies – aesthetic qualities which speak directly to the projected personality of the Composer, emphasising, for example: intellectual capacity (with complexity), grandeur (with scale), originality (with eccentricity), etc. In near-actualisation of Hans Christian Anderson's *The Emperor's New Clothes* (1837),

composers who produce works which are dramatically simple, minimal and/or repetitive are often portrayed as 'profound' by their branding[57].

In particular, the 'completeness' of fully-notated works projects an image of integrity and *decisiveness* which is fundamental to the presentation of a composer's brand. These allegorical markers are undermined by pro-improvisatory scores as they exhibit transparent portrayals of imprecise middleground ideas and thereby commit to a determined *undecidedness*[58]. As such, compositional pedagogy has evolved in tandem with the music industry's capitalist, brand-driven agenda to encourage forms of notation that speak to these allegorical signifiers (of intellectual capacity, grandeur, and 'originality', etc.).

If we consider composing, then, rather than being post-improvisatory (as is often cited of Chopin, and others), as **pro-**improvisatory, it may engage with the Work Concept inasmuch as it conceptualises each work not as a definitive entity but as a *catalyst of happenings*. Therewith, it demotes, or de-requires, 'wholeness' as an intrinsic element of a work – whether notated or not. A PIC score surmises the nature and outline and boundary of its Governance, and in doing so gestures in expectation of something beyond itself. The fulfilment of the work

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[57] The reception of Pärt's music uses such rhetoric of the 'profound': 'Pärt's setting of the Lorica of St Patrick, entitled *The deer's cry*, is also text-driven but in a very different way, and what appears initially to be merely eccentric proves to be an extraordinarily profound and rich response to the words.' (Moody, 2014). Also see: Phillips (2015).

[58] '…the refusal of decisiveness is not indecisiveness, it is *irony*. Indeed, a great definition of irony might be "the act of choosing without deciding".' (Peters, 2017, p. 33).

here requires transformation in order to be realised, and in doing so the identity of the piece – the *substance* – is at once stable in form and unstable in practice, opaque and translucent, intelligible and para-intelligible.

> 'What interests [Kenneth] Goldsmith is the practice of commingling composed scores and improvised works… producing "flexible and spontaneous" structures that hold composition and improvisation in tension without resolving that tension in one direction or another (180).' (Darren Wershler, 2017, p. 163 – citing Kenneth Goldsmith, 1999)

Where a conventional score may provide one realisation of its Governance for others to replicate, PIC therefore expects the performer – the 'reader' – to appropriate the score as it pertains to concepts beyond its form. The text must therefore be recognised as both indicative of, and obstructive of, the underlying 'work', as assimilated by the performer through negotiation of the 'ha-ha'[59]. In this mode, to perceive the Work is – wilfully, actively – to 'ignore' the Text. This 'reading between the lines' – the act of determining inner/deeper strata within/despite external features – Peters describes as 'the predicament of the improviser: a kind of ignorance.' (2017, p. 1). The necessary severity of the decisions made by the composer in creating PIC notation – rather than attempting to conjure the illusion of perfection – serves to make explicit the delicate balance of authorship with contingency (the

[59] 'The appropriation of a text is not…an act of possession; on the contrary, to enter into the world of the text through an act of reading is to become dispossessed...' (Peters, 2017, p. 92).

point at which, in the denial of infinite possibilities, the realm of Governed finites comes into view); '…a sense of an existing work as a work *yet to come*; a virtual work that could have been actualized any number of ways…' (Peters, 2017, p. 81)**.**

In the same way, PIC reveals the inadequacy of its formal product as one which cannot be 'read', but which forever anticipates a future 'working' of the work – 'The essential futurity of improvisation, bespeaks a profound faith in the emergent substantiality of a "not yet".' (Peters 2017, p. 191). The PIC work exists **as** an anticipatory 'set of rules'/ 'governance' which is fulfilled by, but not completed by, its performance; it therefore remains 'virtual' despite its embodiment because it always tends towards 'any number of ways' of its realisation. 'The difference [between repetitions] is taken to be only external to the concept; it is a difference between objects represented by the same concept, falling into the indifference of space and time.' (Deleuze, 2001, p. 24).

PIC represents a shift in the perception of musical practice from being 'arborescent' (goal-oriented) to being 'rhizomatic' (ever inter-being), thereby accommodating improvising as ubiquitous within the composer-performer paradigm. Since PIC diminishes the significance of the authorship of both composer and score – without apotheosising the performer, either –

so the Work itself, as the bearer of musical happenings, is of elevated significance[60]. Thus, PIC affords the longevity of Works, not as artefacts cast in time, but as a process of continual improvising through time: '…that which must be forged and re-forged again and again.' (Peters, 2017, p. 99).

Portfolio examples

PIC thus implicates many lines of enquiry, from the practical to the theoretical, which I have explored in the previous chapter and which are informed by my Working Theory of Improvising. In extension, the various components of my DPhil composition portfolio each explore a particular aspect of the 'pro-improvisatory' concept. For example, I used *A Short Story of Falling* (2020) [see Fig. 3] to explore the concept of the 'continuum' between maximum and minimum control in composition, attempting to establish some viable territory between the two extremes. The challenge here was to articulate – in the absence of the paradigm of 'maximum control' – a workable paradigm, or 'micro-tradition', unique to this piece which explains *how* the performers should engage with the notation as a basis for improvising.

[60] 'Improvisers often speak of creating "space"… But actually…by "letting be", it is not the individual interlocutor who is offered space, but alterity of the work itself, unowned by all collaborators.' (Peters, 2017, p. 52).

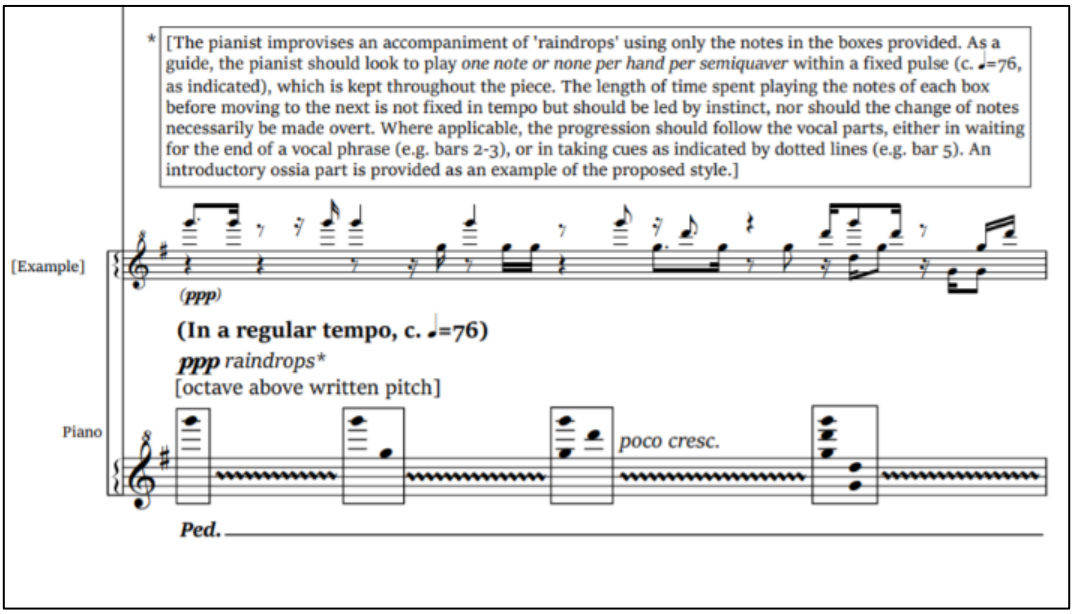


Fig. 3 – Excerpt from *A Short Story of Falling* (2020)

To achieve this I used a combination of different 'projections': poetic stimuli (using the imagery of falling raindrops), stave notation (exact pitch groupings), written mechanical instructions (e.g. 'any semiquaver pulse within crotchet=76'), and an example realisation (for the first system of music only) . Together, these describe a template into which a performance might be empractised by the pianist; certain elements are fixed, some are suggested, and some are inevitably left unmentioned. The intention is to create a piece which breathes, which is both stable and in flux, and which – crucially – serves the improvisatory capabilities of the performer *through* the utilisation of the 'ha-ha'.

In this way, the score itself can be conceived as a meeting-place/ a liminal space/ a prism through which a one-way system can occur of depositing (in notation) and then assimilating (in performance) musical thought. The roles of composer and performer are not to be blurred here – they function discretely as either pre- or post-notation; it is simply that the

responsibility for producing the musical performance transcends this distinction. It is, perhaps, 'remote collaboration'.

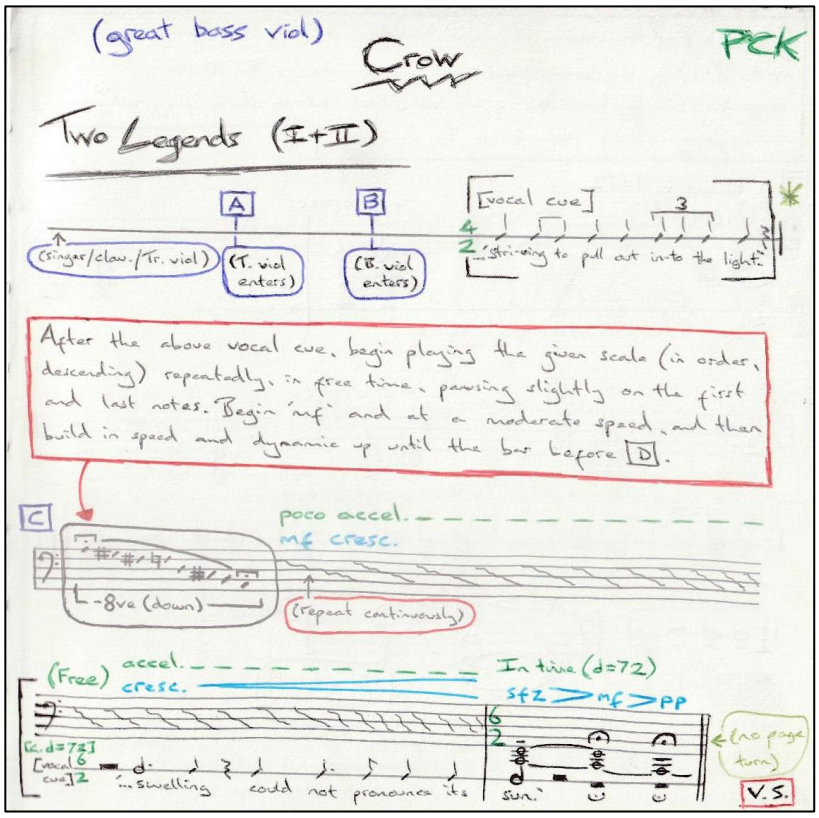
The wealth of information/stimuli in this notation also goes to dispel the notion that a work which involves improvised performance ought to be 'freeing' (that is, 'liberating') for the performer(s). But, rather than such a 'freedom' involving a *relaxation* from the rigours usually associated with the execution of fully-notated works, PIC in this way effects increased Freedom through the increased attention to forms of Governance. In other words, to document and interpret the 'ha-ha' of PIC is in fact to *compound* the rigours associated with standard notation, as the performers are called to multi-task with expressing an array of bespoke idiomata in addition to the discipline of score-'reading'.

> 'If you can understand what it means to be disciplined and to be accurate, committed and involved with something which is purely notated, and also be capable of being free, of being able to step outside the inhibition that notation produces, and do something which is your own and relevant, then I still think that is probably the highest form of instrumental talent that there is' (Antony Pay, as cited in Bailey, 1980, p. 93)

The potential to diminish the significance of authorship, particularly with regard to 'distributed creativity' (Clarke and Doffman, 2017), was one of the major themes I explored in my song-cycle *Crow* (2023) [see Fig. 2]. Written for solo counter-tenor (Hugh Cutting), quartet of viols (The Linarol Consort), and amplified clavichord, the work is a setting of

eleven poems from Ted Hughes' monumental poetry cycle *Crow*. Inspired by the sixteenth century European medieval part-books commonly used by the Linarol Consort, I sought to harness in this work the use of part-books as catalysts for improvising and idiosyncrasy. As such, I first sketched all six parts by hand into the back of six separate books [see Fig. 4] – using a mixture of conventional and novel notations - and then gave each book to one of six visual artists (acting as 'Scribes') for them to recreate the part, merged with their own artwork, in the front of the book [see Fig. 5]. It is these artists' creations from which the performers play the music in performance. I encouraged the Scribes to take as much creative licence over the appearance of their part-book as they liked, with the one caveat that the musical material should be legible.

Between the eleven movements there is a wide variety of improvisatory 'micro-traditions' – both in style and in terms of degrees of control – which bear a spectrum of notational approaches, giving way to a blended performance in which the performers are called to interpret their part-book in a number of ways; elements such as pitch, rhythm, tempo, and articulation are treated in different permutations of control and flexibility, sometimes being fully-notated, sometimes barely at all, and oftentimes in a mixture of degrees in between [see Fig. 6].



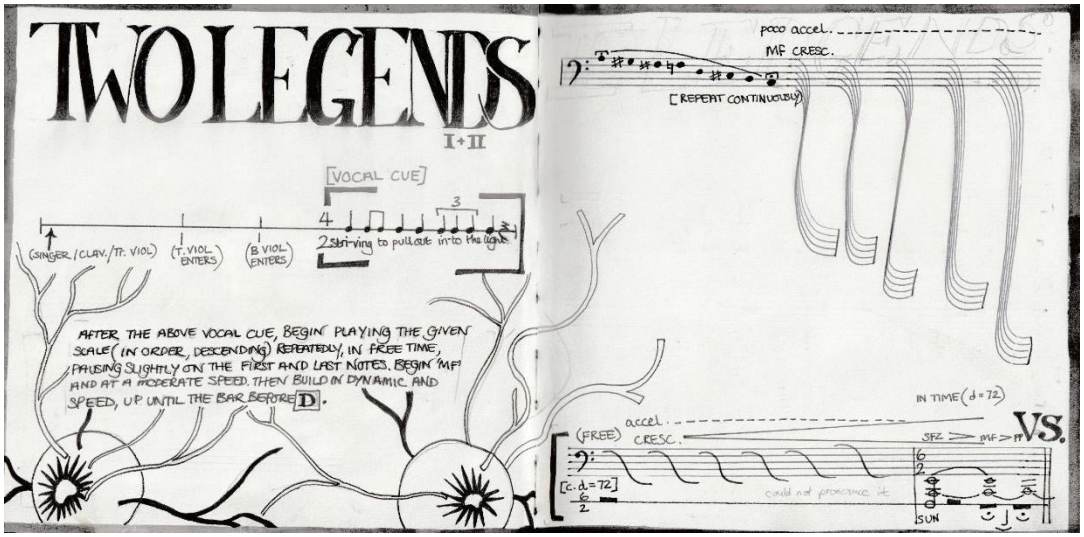


Fig.s 4 & 5 – Excerpts of draft material and of an artist's realisation from the 'Great' Bass viol part-book, *Crow* (2023)

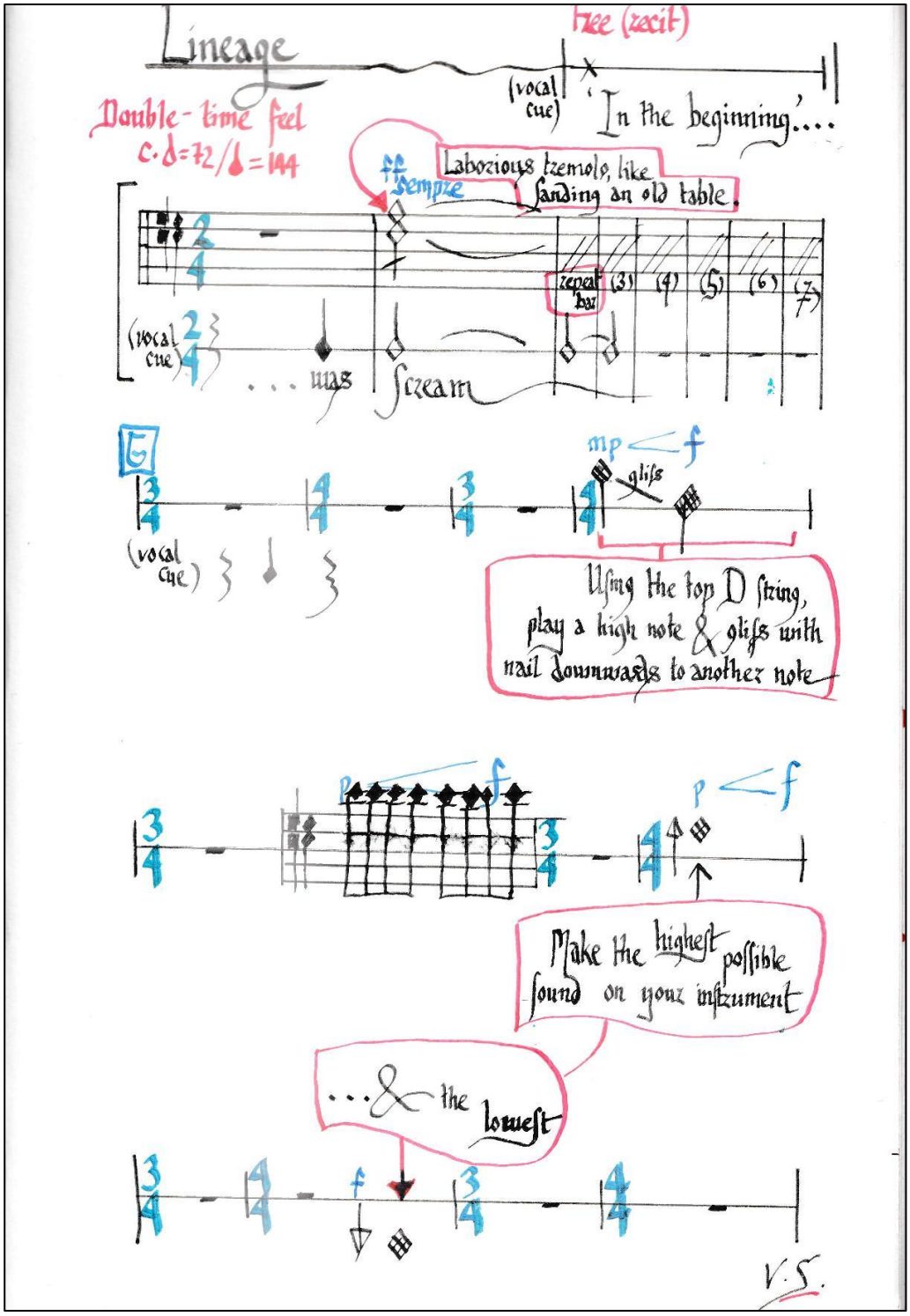


Fig. 6 – Excerpt from the Bass viol part-book, *Crow* (2023)

The resulting work cleaves apart and illuminates the topics of authorship, ocularcentricity, improvised performance, and 'branding' in a number of ways: *Crow* is as much a musical 'score' as it is a portable art exhibition, and yet despite its overt ocularcentricity, the

embedded pro-improvisatory approaches to notation within it denies 'reading' the music as a method of valuing the musical material as with conventional scores. Indeed, valuing *Crow* also demands a reconfiguration of the critic's value criteria regarding musical scores, as it must be valued as the work of a collective of disparate visual artists disconnected from the 'composition' of the musical material and therefore no single person's hand (Composer) – yet in performance those disparate hands work in collaboration in real-time. Moreover, the lingering presence of the extant 'draft' material in the back of each part-book with which the Scribes formed their material serves to preclude 'the lustrous sheen of a pristine "work"' (Peters, 2017, p. 8) and instead embraces both the haphazard, uncertain process of composition and also the arbitrary nature of the appearance of the 'finished' work[61].

Furthermore, the celebration of the 'collective' regarding the composition of the part-books both resists the 'collaboration' often associated with improvised group work in that the artists worked fully independently of one another throughout the process of writing – this also rejects the notion of 'branding' regarding my authorship as the 'Composer'. In befuddlement of the ocularcentric culture which stills pervades contemporary classical music-making and

[61] This is particularly clear in those places where the Scribes' material differs most from the format of the draft material – though it has been interesting to note how closely, for the most part, the artists mirrored the layout of the draft material despite its arbitrariness. This latter observation reinforces my suspicion of the elevated importance of the appearance of musical scores regarding the appreciation of its content, and perhaps also the Scribes' reluctance to challenge what they may have perceived to be integral to my authority as the Composer, even despite my encouragement.

that relies on the appearance of the Score to assimilate qualities about the Composer, *Crow* provides six different scores, each of which speak indirectly to the composer of the music only through a unique, unregulated partnership which refracts authorship in ambiguous ways. This highly unusual form of scoring also acted as a catalyst for the production of novel musical invention. Because standard notation inevitably creates scores which are pleasing for their visual comprehension of the Work, the Composer as the creator of that visual form is predisposed to develop musical ideas which suit the visual aesthetic of their scoring – in other words, composers, perhaps unthinkingly, may be inclined to compose music which looks good. As J. D. Heinichen wrote in 1728:

> 'It is… absurd if one should say along with the pedants: this is outstanding music because it looks so fine (I mean pedantic) on paper, even though it does not please the ear, for which music is surely made…' (as cited in Bailey, 1980, p. 39)

As such, the highly individualised, 'fractured' assembly of the *Crow* part-books allowed me to engage with a form of scoring (and therefore of composing) unburdened not only from the presentation of a full score, but also from the final presentation of the notation itself. This allowance, I believe, shaped the musical ideas which I was led to generate, catalysing a much more fluid relationship between different types of stave notation and prose, for example. This format, naturally, also presented its own limitations which shaped my decision-making (such is the inevitability of Limitation in creative acts). For example, the traditional five-line staves for all the draft material was drawn using a standardised noligraph, and so I found that the

physical dimensions of the part-books' pages 'paragraphed' my thinking in a certain ways, particularly given that a double-page-turn represented a break in the playing of any of the viols and the clavichord parts (thought this was not the case for the singer). In turn, I embraced this limitation in the spirit of idiosyncrasy, using six part-books of different sizes and orientations so that for each part I was led to develop unique and pragmatic musical solutions[62].

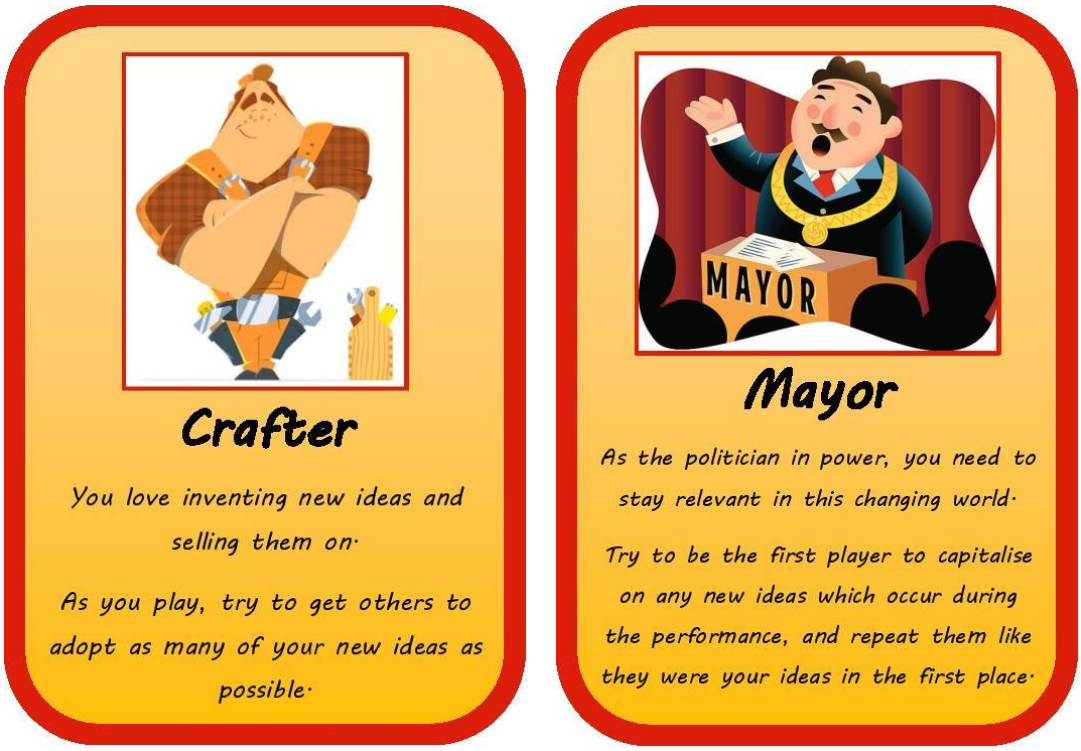


Fig.s 7 & 8 – Character cards 'Crafter' and 'Mayor' from *BANDIT* (2023)

In my piece *BANDIT*, I have attempted to articulate something of the *fundamentality* of idiom regarding improvising, particularly with regard to challenging the notion of 'non-idiomatic'

[62] I should also add that an important aspect of this compositional process was that I didn't ever create a 'full' score at all, but rather I notated each part-book directly, composing as I went. This in turn afforded me greater flexibility in allowing the format of each part-book to shape my ideas.

Free Improvisation. The piece is in the form of a parlour-game and is designed for use by an improvising ensemble in both musical and theatrical contexts. In short, each member of a group of three or more players is given a secret character card at random (such as 'Crafter' [see Fig. 7] and 'Mayor' [see Fig. 8]) – the description on that character card then acts as the Governance for their interactions as they 'freely' improvise a group performance.

The crux of the piece is an exploration of the element of Contingency, inherent within collaborative improvising, but which in this case is exacerbated through the untrustworthiness of the players' personae. Whilst the character cards are distributed randomly and each player's identity is kept secret from the others, two characters are always present in each performance: that of the Bandit and the Sheriff [see Fig.s 9 & 10]. The Bandit's role is to undermine and degrade the success of the group's performance, whilst the Sheriff's role is to promote the success of the performance and steer it to a successful conclusion. In addition to their musical-behavioural actions, the Bandit and Sheriff may also express their agendas by 'shooting' one another (if they can identify the other) and thereby seize control of the performance:

> ''Shooting' rules: Only the Sheriff and BANDIT may 'shoot' another player – this is done at any time during the performance by aiming a finger gun at a performer and shouting "bang!" (or by identifying them publicly in some other way). Whenever a player is 'shot', they must immediately reveal their identity aloud, take a new Identity Card from the pack, and then resume playing. The

BANDIT initially only has one shot; if they shoot the Sheriff with that shot, they may thereafter shoot as many others as they please. The Sheriff has unlimited shots.' (*BANDIT*, 2023, 'Shooting' rule card)



Fig.s 9 & 10 – 'Bandit' and 'Sherriff' character cards from *BANDIT*

Case-study: Finnissy and Lutoslawski

In order to illuminate further the use of pro-improvisatory compositional techniques in contrast to standard models of 'maximum control', I will discuss two case-studies which each provide a direct comparison of two different notational strategies designed to serve similar sonic results. The first of these case-studies compares the hyper-precise approach of Michael Finnissy's *Piano Concerto No. 4* (1978) with the pseudo-aleatoric 'modular' approach of

Witold Lutoslawski's *Jeux Venitiens* (1961). These two works both include passages which comprise overlapping, desynchronised lines that together construct a complex 'mesh' of scattered sounds across expansive, fractured harmonies. The passages in question, however, employ radically different means of projecting to the performer(s) how to create this aesthetic in performance.

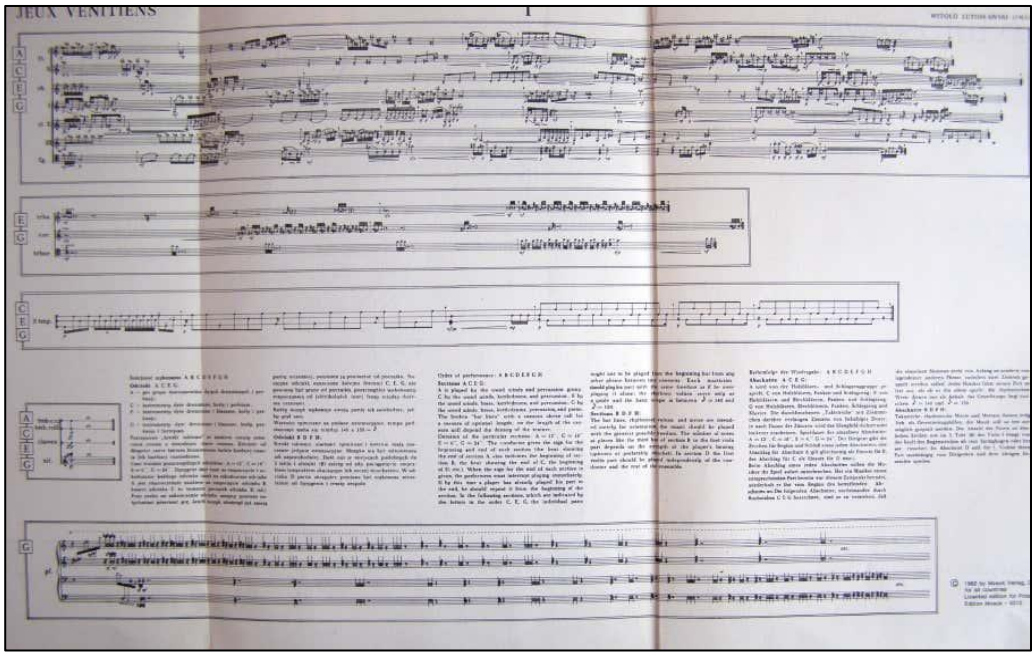


Fig. 11 – Extract from *Jeux Venitiens*, by Witold Lutoslawski (1961)

Written after hearing Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1958), *Jeux Venitiens* [see Fig. 11] represents the initiation of Lutoslawski's interest in composing for improvised performance. In this work, Lutoslawski achieves 'desynchronisation' by presenting a series of fully-scored melodic fragments which are to be played in a predetermined order, the start of each being signalled by one of a series of percussion strikes; within this structure, each performer must improvise their own exact rhythmic timing of the fragments insomuch that

they choose both exactly when they start the fragment and what tempo at which to play. The simple removal of the imperative for the performers to play together, despite them playing the same material, creates the desired 'randomised' effect; the elegant projection of ideas creates the aesthetic of complexity via the presentation of simple notation which is easily executed.

Lutoslawski's notation thereby acknowledges that the presentation of ideas in the score is arbitrary inasmuch as it has bearing neither on the internal logic of the work nor on the sound of the work as it is heard in real-time – i.e. these facets cannot be 'read'. Moreover, whereas 'fully-notated' music of 'maximum control' facilitates the attempted reproduction of one single outcome in performance, Lutoslawski's pro-improvisatory notation facilitates the production of multiple outcomes, producing performances which are each unique whilst each being fundamentally the same 'work'.

> 'The externalization of a given and regulatory concept is responsible for the production and proliferation of an infinite number of parts that are diverse but not different. As regards improvisation, this makes perfect sense, especially where the governing concept (the standard, "head arrangement", the choreography, the script, and so on) permits – even encourages – a diversification of externalization…' (Gary Peters, 2017, p. 57)

This pro-improvisatory approach thus advocates the negotiation – not rejection – of the Work Concept. There can be an inherent assumption that the consistency and character of a work have a direct inverse relationship with the extent to which the work includes improvising.

But this assumption is not necessarily accurate; the 'sound' of an improvised piece (such as *Jeux Venitiens*) may well be predictable across performances, regardless of the unfixity of its details – likewise, a performance given by a 'free' improvisation ensemble may be inherently unique and surprising, but in exactly the same predictable ways as their other performances. In contrast, Michael Finnissy's *Piano Concerto No. 4* [see Fig. 12] represents notation on the extreme end of 'maximum control'. It is a prime example of the New Complexity aesthetic[63]: outlandishly complex material which pushes – even ignores – human capability, is notated here in fine detail. In this case, there is no creative licence extended to the performer by the composer – the notation demands that they must simply strive to execute as accurately as possible the given realisation. There is no reason for Finnissy to provide any additional written instruction, nor is there any subtext of which the performer should be informed; it's all controlled in the stave notation.

At the same time, the physical and cognitive demands made on the performer through the instructions of the score – being absurdly complex in terms of timing whilst also extremely virtuosic – create a performance scenario in which the performer *must* improvise *in lieu* of being physically capable of executing the score's instructions; the performer is thus compelled to approximate (improvise with) the score's instructions in such a way as to conjure the illusion of its fulfilment despite the inherent inaccuracy of the performance.

[63] Though it should be noted that Finnissy has rejected his supposed affiliation with this School.

Whereas the pro-improvisatory model recognises that a score need only project that information which is sufficient to enable the performer to improvise the performance, Finnissy's notation here perversely and knowingly demands too much of the performer, insisting that they approximate the information provided as convincingly as possible whilst providing no insight as to *how* they should improvise with it.

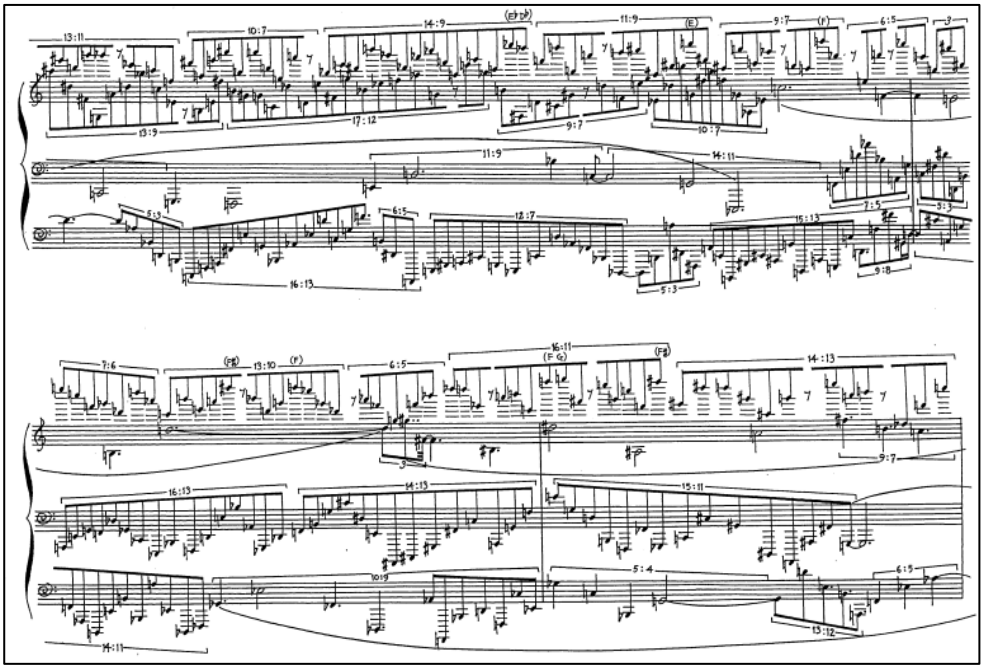


Fig. 12 – Extract from *Piano Concerto No. 4*, by Michael Finnissy (1978)

> 'But the musician who works with notation is aiming – has to aim – to achieve total conscious control of the material. Working with notation gives the illusion that such a thing is possible…' (Small, 1998, p. 205)

The assumption Small makes is that using notation in composition inherently involves seeking 'total conscious control', or 'maximum control', over the material the composer is producing. It is a position which Small takes as a self-confessed cynic of Western Art Music

and is therefore laced with a pejorative assessment of the contemporary classical music industry as it perpetuates false myths about 'The Canon of Musical Works'. However, whilst I reject the assumption that notation is *inherently* concerned with 'maximum control', the interesting point is that this is an assumption which often *composers themselves perpetuate*, as the above extract illustrates.

These two compositional approaches – Lutoslawski's pro-improvisatory notation and Finnissy's precise notation – whilst they appeal largely to the same aesthetic in conjuring similar musical products in real-time, have very different intentions: the former speaks to its sonic realisation in performance despite the inadequacy ('symbolic poverty') of its score; the latter speaks to its visual realisation 'on paper' despite the inevitable inadequacy (impossibility) of its performance. It is a central tenet of New Complexity that the musical material is governed by highly organised and complex networks which describe an internal logic. In other words, there is a sophisticated architecture embedded within the construction of this Finnissy work. But the interesting observation is that the intensely sophisticated logic in Finnissy's work has no discernible aural relevance. This is far from saying that the logic does not exist – on the contrary, the integrity of Finnissy's vision is clear to see. But that's just it: it can be *seen* in the score – it is also possible to explain it in words – but it cannot be *heard*. And so this reminds us of the aforementioned issue highlighted by J. D. Heinichen:

what does a composer intend to control in any given score, the visual product or the aural product?

I believe it may be quite valid to deem music 'outstanding' even if only on paper (if the score is appreciated as visual art, which inevitably it is), but with the caveat that such music therefore does not compel performance in real-time – as it gains no meaning through sonic representation – unless that performance presents its own unique meanings. In other words, it is clear, as Finnissy's work demonstrates, that compositions can be complete in and for and of themselves outside of performance, and also that such meaning is fundamentally different to the meanings of performances. Thus, when we notate (and interpret others') musical scores we ought to consider exactly what meaning is being conveyed in notation and how that meaning might be articulated in sound, if at all, or whether its best appreciation can be conveyed visually. The term 'music' – as opposed to 'visual' art – does not necessitate performance.

So, Lutoslawski uses his score to project the information necessary to enable the performers to improvise the desired musical product in performance. Conversely, Finnissy notates the intricate rhythmic relationships between every single note, conveying intellectual reasoning visually whilst at the same time disregarding the inherent arbitrariness of the score's fixed form as it relates to the sonic musical product of its performance. In other words, both the actions of the performer as they attempt to execute Finnissy's super-complex notation, and

the sonic product they produce in doing so – if written with pro-improvisatory processes in mind – could be conveyed successfully using much simpler, pragmatic notation. The Lutoslawski example attests to this, for it could not be said that the sonic product of its performance is any simpler than the Finnissy – rather, that each achieves a similar product in performance via very different means. As such, these two examples might represent the point at which the two extreme ends of the aforementioned continuum of notational control, coming full circle, meet.

Case-study: Adams and Kennedy

This second case-study compares the Neo-minimalist approach of John Adams' *Phrygian Gates* (1977) with my own 'pro-improvisatory' approach in *Mobile* (2020). Again, both extracts achieve similar musical products, employing minimalist ostinati within long-form structures, but achieve this via very different notations.

Together with its companion piece *China Gates* (1977), Adams' *Phrygian Gates* [see Fig. 13], represents the establishment of his 'mature' style, defined by post-minimalist principles and highly-organised sequential structures. Despite the 'pristineness' of this work, and unlike the Finnissy example above, the minimalist idiom within which the piece is situated makes it much more straightforward to infer the 'internal logic' of its composition (cyclical ostinati, the sequential addition and subtraction of notes which mutate those ostinati, etc.). And yet,

Adams has notated every single one of these notes over very long spans of material. In Deleuzian terms, seeing as the work seems founded upon simple minimalist principles, the 'full' notation of Adams' ideas seems to be a prime example of a 'tracing' of a 'map' which 'injects redundancies and propagates them.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 13).



Fig. 13 – Excerpt from *Phrygian Gates*, by John Adams (1977)

In other words, the *detail* of the exact intervallic relationships and synchrony between particular notes seems to be of negligible importance against the prominence of the overall *aesthetic* (of the first section of the work, i.e. bars 1-639) as described by the rippling ostinati and the modality – which is largely static but either develops at a glacial rate or changes dramatically at infrequent structural events. No doubt there are moments in the work where the synchrony between certain notes is of special significance within this overall aesthetic, but it surely cannot be contested that not every note combination as they co-occur seems

worthy of prescribing, and that those ‘significant’ elements could be scored *in addition to* much simpler pro-improvisatory notation. Indeed, if this were the case then such moments would present visually as significant, rather than with the current fully-notated model in which every moment, regardless of whether or not it is especially significant, is presented as equally significant and equally insignificant.

I would therefore ask this question: is this notation of ‘maximum control’ to the benefit of the performance? The ‘readability’ of the notation allows the viewer to appreciate the elegance of the minimalist aesthetic very easily, but is that benefit worth both the inability of the score to indicate degrees of ‘significance’ to the ideas it projects and the preclusion of each performer to improvise a unique performance which is replete of the same ideas but which is ‘diverse but not different’ (Peters, 2017, p. 57)? Indeed, with the work being something of a display of concentration and endurance by the performer, a pro-improvisatory version of the score would be a pragmatic solution, allowing the performer to accommodate the moments of significant synchrony within a larger flexible framework of slowly-evolving ostinati.

This was the task I set myself when pianist Sam Mitchell commissioned me to write a companion piece to *Phrygian Gates* in 2020. Inspired by Earle Brown’s depiction of Alexander Calders’ ‘Mobiles’ as having "indigenous transformational factors" (as cited in Bailey, 1980, p. 93), *Mobile* [see Fig. 14] is an attempt to distil Adams’ aesthetic to its core

principles, first by defining a set of rules formally and then by using shorthand instructions to describe the flow of the structure in real-time. As such, *Mobile* acts as a basis for 'preluding' into *Phrygian Gates* in the Baroque sense of the term – that is, improvising a preliminary piece to 'set the stage', running *attacca* into the Adams. *Mobile* also thereby provides a clear comparison between 'pro-improvisatory' and 'full' notation. In essence, I tried to articulate as best I could in the score what the 'internal logic' of the piece was without writing out all the notes, so that it might facilitate improvising in performance, catalysing an infinite variety of performances that were each unique and yet alike expressions of the work.

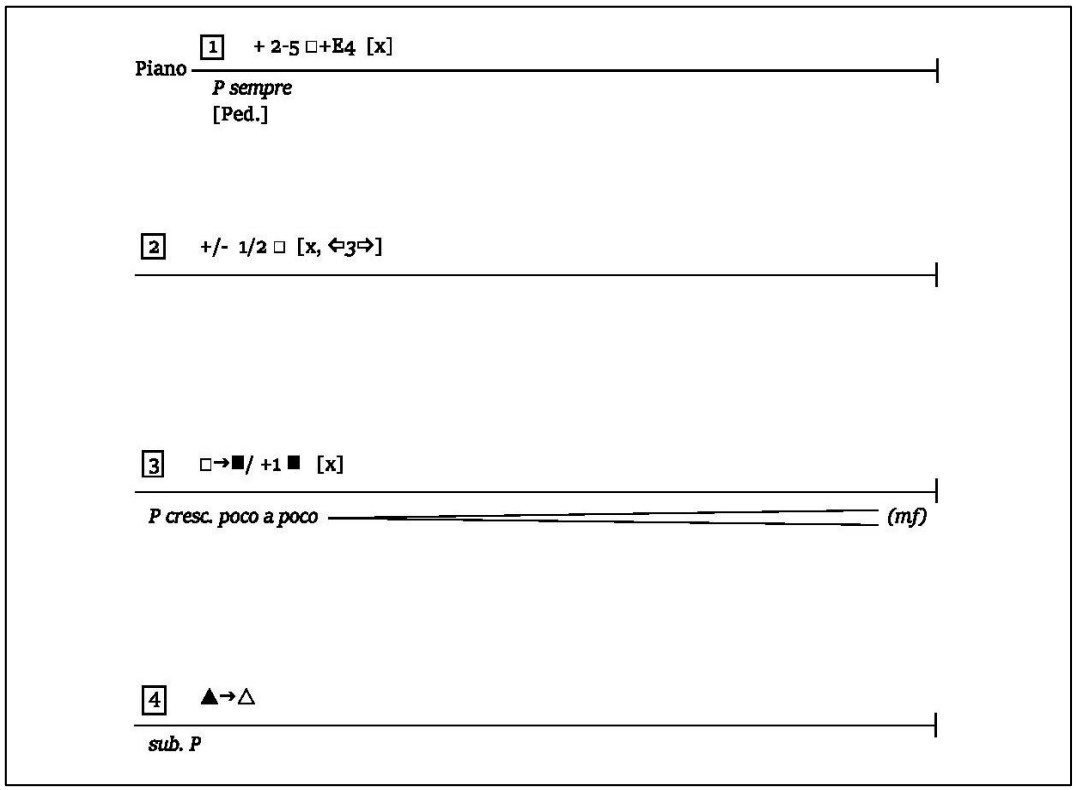


Fig. 14 – Excerpt from *Mobile* (2020)

On the continuum of control, I've attempted to negotiate an indeterminate middle-ground, one in which the parameters of an improvising 'micro-tradition' are fixed, so that both the work is stable and the performance is indeterminate – or, in neo-Schenkerian terms, the 'middleground' is stable and the 'foreground' is indeterminate.

Conclusion

This essay vouches for a reconsidered appreciation of improvising – summarised by 'Libertas Regimine Crescit' – one that operates on a 'macro-to-micro' level, not deriving its theoretical framework from the testimony of practitioners nor from the observations of any specific improvisatory contexts, but in abstract. This is in order to approach the wide variety of improvisatory contexts in music-making – including composing – from a 'fixed gaze', with the ultimate goal of promoting a viable relationship between improvising and the Work Concept ('Pro-improvisatory Composing').

I have outlined the fundamental mechanics of improvising in any context as the enacting of Freedom out of Governance – the play of movement from a fixed position – in order to create new composites of existing ideas. This results in a depiction of improvising as a process which is always 'at work'; the process is itself asymptomatic, but can be perceived through its rhizomatic offshoots (in the case of music, performances and Works), which present surface-level symptoms in the form of reified products.

In this way, I hope to have contributed to the 'recentring' of the concept of 'improvisation' from being a fringe, eccentric, or specialised activity towards an appreciation of improvising as being a fundamental process in human behaviour. This essay also contains a certain element of 'reintroduction', as I hope to reinstate a more receptive mentality as regards 'pro-improvisatory composition' in the specific sphere of contemporary classical composition which has been 'lost' to the ocularcentric preoccupation of the music industry. This is not to present anything 'new', however, but rather to illuminate the pro-improvisatory elements in the music of past traditions and to expose the pro-improvisatory systems often unacknowledged within the practice of contemporary music-making.

As fashions reoccur cyclically, the increased attention around improvisation in musical scholarship and practice during the last half-century is perpetuating a re-evaluation of improvised practices across musical contexts, which should aid to facilitate the accommodation of a 'pro-improvisatory' outlook within contemporary classical music-making. Indeed, as the wider community of classical musicians comes to reinterpret its comprehension of improvising, it is my hope that PIC may dissolve imperceptibly back into the mainstream of contemporary composition.

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