Improvised Experimental Music
and the Construction of a Collaborative Aesthetic

Stephen Timothy Chase

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Department of Music,
University of Sheffield

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Summary

Western musical aesthetics places composition at the centre of its enquiry, and this is expressed forcefully through the concept of the musical *work*: the product of a composer realised by performers who interpret the composer's score. European 'free' or improvised experimental music (IEM) is examined because of its challenge to mainstream musical thought, since it is the product of more than one organising mind in the moment of performance. The thesis shows how IEM draws upon ideas such as the work concept, articulating an identity which is bound to the work concept even as it criticises those ideas and work with ideas from other musical traditions.

Following an account of the origins of IEM in Britain (chapter 1), chapter 2 focuses upon the work concept detailing both the resistance of the concept to new kinds of practice and its influence upon new music. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the role of the individual within a collaborative context, using materials from interviews with improvisers to draw out concerns which motivate IEM. The themes of *performance* and *play* are extrapolated which respectively complement and conflict with the work concept. Chapter 4 examines these themes in a more abstract way exploring parallels with the philosophical critique of institutional models of democracy. Chapter 5 presents a case study of musicians acquiring improvising skills under the guidance of an experienced improviser. The musical negotiations between the members of the group are considered in light of the themes of performance and play upon the making of the group's aesthetic character. Chapter 6 summarises the main themes of the preceding chapters showing that the aesthetic identity of IEM distinguishes itself from the concerns of mainstream musical aesthetics by virtue of its emphasis on *collaboration*, while at the same time drawing upon the individualistic motivations of the work concept. The thesis concludes with proposals for further research arising from these conclusions.

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1. Workshop 2 – Quartet improvisation [Duration: 10 minutes]

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Introduction

When we say that a piece of music is 'improvised' we usually understand this to mean that it is made spontaneously, on the spur of the moment. The performers are doing something which they have not done before; something which is unrepeatable because it is unplanned.

Most kinds of music involve some measure of improvisation in their performance or creation, and it is often recognised as the spark which brings the music 'alive' for both the performers and an audience, making the event unique and special for those who experience it. The quality of an improvisation is usually measured in relation to whether this 'spark' or sense of 'liveness' is perceived or felt by the performers and audience members. The term 'improvisation' is used to refer to many aspects of music making such as composition, elaboration upon a given theme, and the interaction between the members of an ensemble, but pinning improvisation down to a specific measurable element is almost impossible as an improvisation is usually judged to be successful by the way in which it manages to both surprise and sustain the involvement of all who are present. This quality is something to which all musical performance aspires – what flamenco dancers and musicians refer to as *duende*[1] – and is not specific to overtly improvised music: a pub covers band running through the umpteenth version of The Troggs' 'Wild Thing' will aim to hold and excite an audience's attention for that moment just as intensely as if they were creating a completely new piece through improvisation. Therefore any study of improvisation out of practicality needs to find a more tangible framework within which to organise thoughts about this phenomenon.

Most studies focus upon particular improvisational genres and the structural features which are common to the chosen musical genre in which the improvisation is made – for example, the way in which a performer is able to demonstrate an adherence to the harmonic or rhythmic vocabulary associated with the genre without merely replicating (or appearing to replicate) the clichés of the genre. In an ensemble performance the term improvisation may describe the extemporisations of the lead

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[1] See García Lorca 'Play and Theory of the Duende' (1934/1998: 48-62).

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instrument in a specific improvised 'solo' section of a piece, and it may refer to the way in which members of the ensemble adapt their playing in order to support a soloist, or the way in which an experienced musician adapts in order to prevent a performance with novice musicians from falling apart. In such well known improvisational genres as jazz, an improvisation will often be based on a composed piece which is itself born out of a repertoire and a genre which has a set of structural 'rules' governing the kinds of musical material, gestures, formal designs, and roles and hierarchies to be observed between musicians. But what governs an improvisation if the usual rules no longer apply? What enables an ensemble to improvise a performance 'from scratch' without the safety net of a compositional structure or predetermined modes and hierarchies of interaction?

In this thesis I am concerned with the aesthetic of so called 'free improvisation' – a kind of music making which seemingly disregards all known or established modes of improvisational discourse and protocol. This is an area of music which has developed in Europe and in Britain in particular, from out of the intersection between European jazz musicians' responses to American 'free jazz' and developments in European and American avant-garde classical music during the 1950s and 1960s. American free jazz involved a radical eschewal of conventional chord change-led jazz harmony and stable rhythm as demonstrated in the music of groups led by performers such as saxophonists Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane, and pianists Cecil Taylor and Sun Ra. Avant-garde classical music during the 1950s involved, on the one hand, the development in Europe of the atonal and serial musical 'language' of Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern in the scientistic direction of serialism, and on the other hand, and from similar source inspiration, the conscious introduction of indeterminate or unpredictable elements by certain American composers. European improvisers were inspired to find an individual approach to music making by turning to these key elements.

I am interested in the things which allow a group of musicians to perform an improvisation without predetermining the outcome, to ask what binds this activity together in the absence of standard conventions of musical practice, and indeed to ask whether a break from these conventions is truly possible or desirable. I wish to examine the ways in which free improvisers attempt to resist conventional ideas and

modes of music making, but just as importantly I want to see what free improvisation owes to those very conventions. In other words I ask, what are the forces that act on free improvisation and give shape to its aesthetic identity?

The theme of the thesis could be summed up with reference to two main features, both of which are mutually dependent on each other: the first is an examination of the role of *freedom* in the context of a group improvisation, and the second is a discussion of the effect that *collaboration* has upon the nature of ideas such as freedom and improvisation. Freedom could be characterised as the impetus which drives an individual musician to investigate new ideas and ways of doing things; collaboration could be thought of as the field in which freedom is forced to operate and negotiate a path. However, musical collaboration involves a choice to work with other musicians and therefore collaboration could also be described as having a motivating role in this context (the enjoyment of creating music with others); freedom cannot, conversely, be properly characterised as a field of activity, but in the context of a collaborative improvisation it is a shared precondition no matter how elusive it turns out to be in practice. Freedom and collaboration are inextricably bound together in 'free' improvisation. However, in this thesis it is my aim to tease apart the ways in which these two elements interact. In doing so I focus principally upon the ideas that musicians articulate about their practice as free improvisers, and ideas about improvisation considered within the context of mainstream aesthetics and musicology.

Improvisation invariably suggests some notion of freedom or a flight of fancy, and so therefore the term 'free improvisation' suggests, on the one hand, an oxymoron, but on the other hand the term emphasises a desire to get away from the genre-bound limitations laid down by jazz and other improvisatory practices. Therefore it is a kind of music which is sometimes defined in relation to what it is not, or at the very least, what it aims not to be. However, if this was the only side of the story, free improvisation would be an 'anti-genre' genre of music and its 'free' aspect would be limited to merely negating the expectations of musical continuity found in other genres – a very restricted definition of the term free. As I will make clear, the negation of musical conventions is a recurring feature in the motivation and practice of free improvisation but it is not the defining feature of this music. The problem is partly one of terminology: the expression to be 'free' or to act 'freely' can have

conflicting interpretations or realisations, and they hinge on whether or not a relationship is recognised between the desire to act freely and the responsibility not to impinge on the freedom of others.

Freedom can be taken to mean a release from all responsibility (for example, to simply do what you 'feel' like doing), or freedom can mean the acknowledgement that there may be particular consequences arising from your actions but which you are more or less happy to accept because they give definition and purpose to those actions (for example, exercising a free vote as an individual can be made meaningful in the way that it combines with the free votes of others demonstrating acceptance of or resistance to the majority view). Freedom in free improvisation can have aspects of both kinds of understanding of the concept, namely the individual's desire to 'express' him or herself, and the acknowledgement that such an impetus may be exploited or undermined or abandoned (however temporarily) in the context of the ensemble. The desire to act freely is an individualistic impulse but when put into action it may be revealed or transformed by the interaction of competing individual impulses towards free actions emanating from the other members of the ensemble into an act of *volition*: an event with more apparent weight and meaning if one recognises and shows an awareness of the consequences which may arise out of the particular context in which the action is willed to happen (Kermerling, 2006).

Yet, having discussed the idea of freedom within free improvisation I now wish to signal that I shall largely use another term to label the area of music which I describe. At the beginning of chapter 1 I give my reasons why I prefer to use the term *improvised experimental music* in this study. To explain briefly, although I have no outright objection to the term free improvisation, and at times I use it interchangeably with my own coinage, for reasons of clarity the word 'experimental' is preferable to the word 'free'. The use of the word 'free' tends to be understood in the sense of 'freedom from', and as I am interested in how the music is created in relation to various competing ideas and practices, it may simply function as a misnomer and a distraction. Instead, the term 'experimental' retains a sense of escape from convention, and suggests actions which are made provisionally with, perhaps, no long-term investment: for example, Beethovenian thematic logic has no place in collaborative improvisation because there is no guarantee that a particular musical idea will be

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picked up and worked on consistently – if an experiment 'fails', then no matter, the next idea may do better. But experimental also carries with it the notion that the musicians are aiming at achieving some outcome (the excitement of music making) even if that outcome is uncertain.

In chapter 1 I give an account of the historical context for improvised experimental music and describe the particular influences which have inspired and provoked improvising musicians from its early days in the mid 1960s up to the present day. Since free improvisation is practiced in all four corners of the globe, and the line between it and other kinds of music and artistic activity is very fine, I have limited the study to European free improvisation and even more specifically to aspects of the British improvising scene. This history details the relationship between improvisation and avant-garde or experimental composition from the 1950s onwards in order to expose the differences between composition and improvisation and the overlap between the disciplines.

In chapter 2 I examine the context into which any musical activity which claims art status enters. Beginning from the prevailing mainstream aesthetic and musicological concept of the 'musical work', I examine what the 'work' is as a tool for evaluating the ontological status of a piece of music and the problems that any new kind of music faces in attempting to establish an aesthetic identity which is acceptable to mainstream aesthetic thinking.

In chapter 3 I introduce the spoken thoughts and reflections of a number of well-established practising improvisers in order to see how their ideas contrast, contradict, or reinforce the ideas of mainstream aesthetics as discussed in chapter 2. I interviewed these musicians individually and attempted to allow them to respond as freely as they wished to my questions, most of which concern the individual motivations of the musicians and their negotiated relationship with an ensemble. The main thread which is taken up in this chapter is the difference between improvisation understood as an activity centred on *performance*, and improvisation understood as an activity centred on *play*.

In chapter 4 I take up the themes of performance and play and the role of the individual within an ensemble and examine them in a more abstract setting. I make an analogy between the dynamic interaction of individualism and collaborative effort found in improvised experimental music and the critical role enacted by individuals within democratic institutions. I refer to the work of social philosophers Stanley Cavell and Chantal Mouffe and their respective critical accounts of institutional models of Western liberal democracy, notably outlined by the philosopher John Rawls. Both Cavell and Mouffe argue that it is not enough to imagine the ideal model for a democratic state: one must also account for the part individuals play in maintaining democratic institutions, and make allowances for the potential conflicts between competing individuals living in such a system. The aesthetic drive behind experimentation and improvisation has an ethical dimension (revealed in the way that the interviewees express themselves) reflected in the decisions and negotiations individuals make in choosing to work within an ensemble and accepting both the need to find cohesion in a group while allowing individuals the opportunity for self-expression. The aim is not to show that improvised experimental music is a model of democracy in action, but to explore the shared themes of cooperation and individual responsibility and freedom.

Chapter 5 presents a case study of an improvisation workshop in which I observed a group of young musicians developing their skills as free improvisers under the guidance of an experienced and established improvising musician. This study examines the musical negotiations between individual musicians and the rest of the group, and the way in which a particular musical aesthetic is established, adhered to, and occasionally questioned or deviated from.

In chapter 6 I summarise the main arguments of the preceding chapters and consider what conclusions can be made. In addition I suggest what further research may follow on from this thesis, detailing the different themes and applications which have arisen during the study specifically the potential for exploring the relationship between musical and visual art aesthetics and the discrepancy between their respective historical and empirical approaches.

Chapter 1
The Historical Conditions for Improvised Experimental Music

Improvised Experimental Music: Definitions

Ask someone what the term improvised music suggests to them and the answer is most likely to be jazz. Maybe they will also refer to Indian classical music, or, at a push, the contemporary reputations of Bach and Beethoven as great improvising performers. Mention the words experimental music and the impression conjured up could well be that of men in white coats tweaking electronic gadgetry. The music under discussion in this study is none of the above, yet at times it appears to exhibit some of these traits.

The themes of this thesis orbit about two key elements: improvisation and experimentation, and the interaction of these two things, and therefore I shall describe the kind of music that features as *improvised experimental music.* It may seem extravagant to coin a new phrase when the music under discussion has seemingly been well-served by the descriptions 'free improvisation' and 'experimental music' for at least the last forty years. However, my intention is not to provide a new journalistic hook but to examine a particular tendency within the broad field of music often described as either free improvisation or experimental music. To begin, I shall give a brief definition of improvised experimental music (henceforth, IEM), which will be followed by a historical survey of this music and the context out of which it has developed. This is intended to provide the relevant background setting for the chapters that follow.

The kind of musical improvisation that I am interested in this study is most commonly known as 'European Free Improvisation' or sometimes 'Improv'. These are terms that became prevalent especially since the early 1970s to describe a particular area of improvised music that sought to differentiate itself from 'free jazz' which has clear roots in the textural and rhythmic approaches of most other forms of jazz music. The reason why I feel the need to qualify the area of my discussion as improvised experimental music is that most of the practitioners involved have aimed

at finding new musical means other than those associated with jazz, and are often closer in aesthetic intention or in practice to experimental music as described below.

Experimental music has had currency as a descriptive term in the arts since at least the early part of the twentieth century and has often been used interchangeably with similarly problematic terms[2] such as 'avant-garde' and those of the various modernist movements. In the field of music it has become more prevalent since the generation of modernist composers who came to a position of influence following the Second World War. Although 'experimental music' has been used to describe everything from Pierre Schaeffer's tape compositions through to the leftfield pop of Frank Zappa and Björk, since the publication of Michael Nyman's *Experimental Music* (1974) there has been a general trend to associate the term with the constellation of composers and performers featured in his book, and their ideas and musical activities. Some have been more vociferous than others in espousing a strict identification between the term and the music Nyman describes focussing on a perceived distinction between 'experimental' (American, a-historical) and avant-garde (European, fed by tradition) music in particular (Anderson, 1983). But mostly the book has served as a general point of reference for describing those musicians with an aesthetic attitude that could be described as non-linear in terms of its divergent approach towards more traditional nineteenth-century derived ideas about artistic progress and modernist pedigree (for example, a lineage such as that from Beethoven to Wagner to Mahler to Schoenberg to Boulez to composer X).

Nyman's characterisations of experimental music are important to this study as they help to locate key aspects of the aesthetic tendency at the centre of my argument. However, in defining Improvised Experimental Music I shall draw selectively from Nyman's definitions and will confine myself to the most relevant parts for my purposes. Nyman is mostly concerned with the work of experimental *composers* but as the history below shows these are all composers who have exercised a significant influence upon experimental improvising musicians. Central to Nyman's definition of experimental music is John Cage's insistence on an anti-hierarchical

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[2] See Dewey (1934: 144) with reference to the inadequacy of 'experimental' as a term for new art.

conceptual separation of composition, performance, and listening (Pritchett, 1993), and Nyman categorises the elements of his definition likewise.

Of those defining elements from the category of composition, it is the emphasis on *process* that is of most relevance for improvisers:

> "Experimental composers are ... more excited by the prospect of outlining a *situation* in which sounds may occur, a *process* of generating action ... a *field* delineated by certain compositional 'rules'. ... Experimental composers have evolved a vast number of processes to bring about 'acts the outcome of which are unknown' (Cage)" (Nyman, 1974: 3. Nyman's italics)

For improvisers these processes entail a combination of 'contextual processes' and 'people processes', and sometimes 'electronic processes'. Improvisation means that, inevitably, attention is given to *the uniqueness of the moment* (8), and this will have an effect upon the way in which the *identity* of the music is perceived.

These compositional concepts have consequences for the performance of such music. According to Nyman,

> "Experimental music has for the performer, effected the reverse of Duchamp's revolution in the visual arts. Duchamp once said that "the point was to forget *with my hand* ... I wanted to put painting once again at the service of my mind." The *head* has always been the guiding principle of Western music, and experimental music has successfully taught performers to remember with their hands, to produce and experience sounds physiologically." (13, Nyman's italics)

Although this is a somewhat muddled statement – it is more a case, for the musicians at least, of (re)discovering with the hand and subverting or distracting oneself from regurgitating the conditioned responses of music making (as will become apparent in chapter 3 especially) – but the emphasis upon the empirical exploration of sounds and sound production is of central significance to improvisation. In conjunction with this is the importance of generating music from various kinds of interaction between performers, and the performing environment (which includes the audience), which for Nyman's composers is often expressed as a 'game':

"The player's situation might be compared to that of a ping-pong player awaiting his opponent's fast serve ... the details of how and when [the serve comes is] determined only at the moment of ... occurrence." (David Behrman, cited by Nyman, 16)

Experimental composition constitutes its identity by establishing rules to be acted upon (interpreted) by performers, and experimental improvisation must establish or (re)discover its rules for each performance. But the 'rules' (for want of a better word) of improvised experimental music – although they are necessarily generated in the moment of performance – have not sprung fully formed from the ether: as the following history shows they have evolved from out of a particular cultural environment.

This does not pretend to be a comprehensive historical review. The sheer diversity of experiences, influences, and personalities of the practitioners who might fall within the sphere of improvised experimental music would overwhelm the remit of this study. Indeed, establishing what kinds of music could be included under such a banner would necessitate all manner of digressions. Many relevant musical developments are completely or partially excluded from this review, such as Free Jazz, but where such music has a direct bearing it will be discussed. Secondly, I shall mainly concentrate on an examination of the experimental improvising musical scene in Britain having first established the wider international context which provided an impetus for this kind of music making. IEM is a hybrid music in the way that it echoes and filters contemporary developments since the 1950s from several fields such as popular and experimental, European and American music, and the visual arts. It might be thought of as a patch of ground (with rapidly changing vegetation) on which some stay and set up camp and others simply pass through en route to destinations elsewhere.

Other surveys and histories of this area of music do exist, notably Bailey (1992) and Dean (1992), but my purpose here is less to describe the essence of improvisation or analyse the use of improvisation as a composer's resource than to draw attention to the principal themes of this thesis: the problems of 'original', collective music making, and the relationship of such an activity to the conventions of Western art music.

There are two emphases that might be given to this history which are centred respectively on the composer and on the performer, and these are reflected within the practices of the two main elements of free improvisation and experimental music. The processes of Experimental Music emanate from composerly concepts, and those of Free Improvisation arise from performance experience. While both have at certain times appeared to be pursuing parallel but antithetical lines of enquiry their closely entwined histories has made distinguishing the intentions of their respective practitioners from the sounds and musical shapes they make often very difficult for most listeners. It could be said, crudely, that what links these two categories of music is that they have both attempted to deal with the collision of the conceptual and cultural clichés of European determinism and American spontaneity.

Experimental/Avant-garde Composition

To take the early 1950s as a not entirely arbitrary point of departure, the most visible parts of the progressive international music scene could be summed up as consisting of the up-and-coming composers associated with the Darmstadt Internationale Ferienkursen für Neue Musik, the relatively little known circle of musicians and artists clustered about the composer John Cage in New York, and the more widely recognised musicians of the Be-bop scene in North America's cities.

The younger generation of composers who were to become inextricably linked with the Darmstadt summer school such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, Luciano Berio, and Luigi Nono were largely motivated by a perceived need to find a 'relevant' musical response to the repression and catastrophe experienced during World War II, and all that retained an association with it. At the same time they had a desire to catch up with and instigate a development of the music that excited them most, in particular the rediscovered music of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern.[3] This

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[3] "The major difference between the modernism of *Erwartung*, of expressionism, and the modernism which awoke in young Europeans in the late 1940s was that while one was obsessed with death, with immanent decline and fall, the other awoke to find itself on the other side of the divide. One had everything to lose; the other, as their records testify, believed quite firmly that the only thing which had been lost was a culture proved ruinous, and that the path was now clear for the construction of a better alternative" (Grant, 2001: 68).

accelerated modernist drive, apparent not just in the arts, but across the culture and in the reconstruction effort going on all over Europe, required that musical works ought to be not simply new and original, but that they should be formally self-sufficient instead of dependent upon received formal models. In other words, the mode of articulating these new materials was to be inseparable from the totality of the work. This attitude reflected the influence of Schoenberg's insistence upon the organic unity of a composition, but more than that it was a criticism of Schoenberg's practice of using Classical and Baroque forms in most of his twelve-note works.[4]

The method that came to define the music of these composers became known as 'total serialism': this was an attempt to organize in a predetermined way almost every facet or parameter of a composition (pitch, duration, dynamic, tempo, and articulation) according to the permutations of a chosen patterning or series, which its adherents claimed to be a development following the example of Webern's rigorous adaptation of Schoenberg's twelve-note method of composition. This dogmatic approach to composition was only put into practice for a very brief time by these composers in works such as Boulez's *Structures I(a)* for two pianos and Stockhausen's *Kontra-Punkte* for ensemble (both written in 1952) before these composers began to pursue less rigid ways of making use of these principles which were more conventionally under the composer's control. Indeed, it did not take long for such a deterministic method of composition to be criticised for producing arbitrary sounding music rather than something which conveyed strictly organized sound relationships to the listener,[5] and this was brought into sharp relief by the introduction of John Cage to the European avant-garde.

Both Grant and Fox (2007) have noted that it was only after the fact that the serialist aesthetic espoused by these composers became inextricably bound to Darmstadt as they began to make international careers for themselves.

[4] It is notable that Boulez, who was perhaps the most outspoken member of the European avant garde against the employment of 'outmoded' formal designs (and Schoenberg's practice in particular), had, prior to his total serialist works, relied heavily on the example of Schoenberg's *Kammersymphonie Op.9* and Beethoven's sonatas to formulate his musical language in the Flute Sonatina (1946) and the Second Piano Sonata (1947-48) respectively. Following the total serial experiment most of the Darmstadt composers began to engage once again with models from the past, however this time much informed by an attitude of critical detachment from their application of serialist processes (for example, the employment of a *bel canto* singing style by Boulez in his *Pli selon pli* (1957-62)).

[5] See Ligeti (1960/65).

Cage and a handful of his New York colleagues were driven by a desire similar to their European contemporaries to 'make it new' and produce what were often radical alternatives to the thematic and symphonic models of the past. What differentiated Cage's music from the serialism exemplified by Boulez and Stockhausen was that ever since his large piece for piano, *Music of Changes* (1951), he had made use of the Taoist I-Ching or Book of Changes to produce an unpredictable ordering of discrete musical objects (single tones, chord clusters, and other sounds). This random or chance method of organisation quickly came to stand as the antithesis to the integral structuring of serialism in which every element could be related to each other (at least on paper) by means of the underlying series, yet the resulting music was broadly similar in its effect. This distinction has sometimes been overplayed in that serial organization involves a conscious intention to use the method as a means of avoiding tonal relationships, and so it is only natural that the results sound somewhat random compared to music with a tonal basis; the binding element in this music is provided less by the series being perceived as a melody or motif than in the way in which it provides the effect of harmonic, rhythmic and textural consistency from the local through to the global level. The difference is one of ideology, where serialism represents a universe that has a deterministic but apparently multidirectional basis, and where Cage's chance method represents nature as unstructured and non-directional. The challenge that Cage's music presented to the Darmstadt composers was that he completely sidestepped what they understood to be a 'responsibility' to construct the new musical language; in their view they were responding to a historical imperative, something that had been visible in the culture of Central Europe since at least Beethoven and Goethe's time. Cage and his associates were accused of failing in a composer's responsibility to meet these (tacitly assumed) requirements for progressive artworks and, at the very worst, of committing something akin to 'spiritual suicide' (Nono, 1960: 42).[6]

Arguably, what made the most impact upon the reawakening international avant-garde music scene was not so much Cage's compositional ideology than the

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[6] Having initially felt himself to be working along almost identical lines, Boulez also came to criticize Cage's music. The reasons he gave were similar to those in his pronouncement on the music of Erik Satie (Cage's musical hero): "a collector of rare objects [having] failed to integrate his "discoveries", into a coherent vocabulary." (Boulez, 1991: 266)

approach to performance that was taken by Cage and his colleagues.[7] The combination of dense notations, which were sometimes literally impossible to realise with accuracy, and at the other extreme, a paucity of activity which drew attention to unconventional and environmental sounds, required the performers (usually Cage and David Tudor) to go beyond normal interpretative conventions and to instead find 'solutions' to the problems that the compositional methods posed. These could range from the pragmatic (determining a number of notes to be played in a given amount of time) to the quasi-theatrical ('performing' an everyday action).[8] Such demands on the performer became greater and more involved as the importance of the contingencies of performance to the process of composition increased for Cage, Feldman, Brown and Wolff.

Largely encouraged by the dedication of Tudor to solving such musical problems, these composers, and soon after many of the composers associated with Darmstadt, began to conceive of a plethora of ways in which to produce unpredictable sounds and absurdist theatrical situations for the performer. These methods ranged from requiring the performer to make decisions as to the order of sections and particular elements within a piece following predefined limits (such as choosing from a selection of pitches to make up a chordal aggregate), through to a 'free' interpretation of unconventional or 'graphic' notations. This attempt to bring a spontaneous element to composed music was, in part, a reflection of the compositional questions raised by the arbitrary sound world produced by much serial music. Either this kind of indeterminacy would have to be accepted and therefore incorporated into the composition, following Cage's example, or the composer would have to attempt to stimulate a dialectic between the rational and intuitive parts of the composing process and the corresponding interpretative process undertaken by the

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[7] The composers Morton Feldman, Earle Brown, and Christian Wolff and the pianist David Tudor were often referred to collectively as the New York School, after the poets, abstract expressionist and pop artists with whom they were closely associated. The importance of Tudor cannot be overstated in terms of the direct impression he made upon both his New York friends and European colleagues in his dedication to the challenges to performance practices raised by their compositions.

[8] Cage's *0'00" (4'33" No.2)* (1962) requires a disciplined, non-musical action to be carried out under conditions of the loudest possible amplification. Examples of Cage performing this piece include him preparing and drinking carrot juice (with contact mics attached to his throat), and the premiere in Tokyo at which he typed the instructions for the piece on an amplified typewriter.

performer. Examples of the latter approach can be found in Boulez's Third Piano Sonata (1955-57/63) and Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke XI* (1956). Stockhausen's piece requires the performer to organize the order of musical fragments randomly during a performance with rules governing how one fragment is to be affected by the one which precedes it in terms of tempo and other interpretative aspects. Boulez's sonata is similar to some extent but the routes that may be taken through the material are far more prescribed, and a performer must prepare a version of the score in advance of the performance.

This controlled or 'virtual' spontaneity reflected a need on the part of these composers to proceed with a measure of caution in responding to Cage's radical influence; it was also an attempt to integrate indeterminacy and chance into the new internationalist musical language of serialism by treating it as a serialisable parameter. Cage, however, insisted upon a prepared approach to contingencies too. In pieces such as *Water Music* for pianist (1952), which requires the performer to organise sounds using measurements of each musical parameters such as duration and timbre derived from a graphic score (see figure 1), or *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957), in which every member of the ensemble – including the conductor – prepares their part independently selecting from a variety of possibilities and only meeting for the performance, Cage demonstrated that he was not interested in the spontaneity of performers improvising but in unpredictable events and simultaneities arising from disciplined actions. Indeed for most of his career Cage expressed much the same sort of distaste for improvisation that Boulez and influential cultural critic and philosopher Theodor Adorno did: like them he equated improvisation with jazz, feeling it to be an expression of the individual ego, the very thing he had been seeking to obliterate from his music.[9] It is debatable whether Cage ever succeeded in making music free of intentionality, or if such a thing is possible at all. Somewhat ironically, Cage's aim to free music of association in which each sound could be listened to as 'itself' depended upon the frame of the composition (or the time and space in which events were allowed to happen) having a global consistency in its form (understood as its broad

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[9] In his later years Cage did come to express admiration for certain free improvisers such as AMM (see below). Unusually, considering his interest in Eastern philosophies and his studies with Henry Cowell (one of the first American composers to take a serious interest in non-Western music), he had almost nothing to say regarding Asian models of improvisation such as that to be found in Indian classical music (see Patterson, 2002).

outline and poetic identity), if not in its structure (the – unpredictable – sequence of events):

> "His works were like a field with a fence, in which one could move as one wished. But there was a line: you couldn't just fool around. You had to do what he said you could do and not what he didn't say you could do." (Gordon Mumma, cited in Miller, 2002: 159)
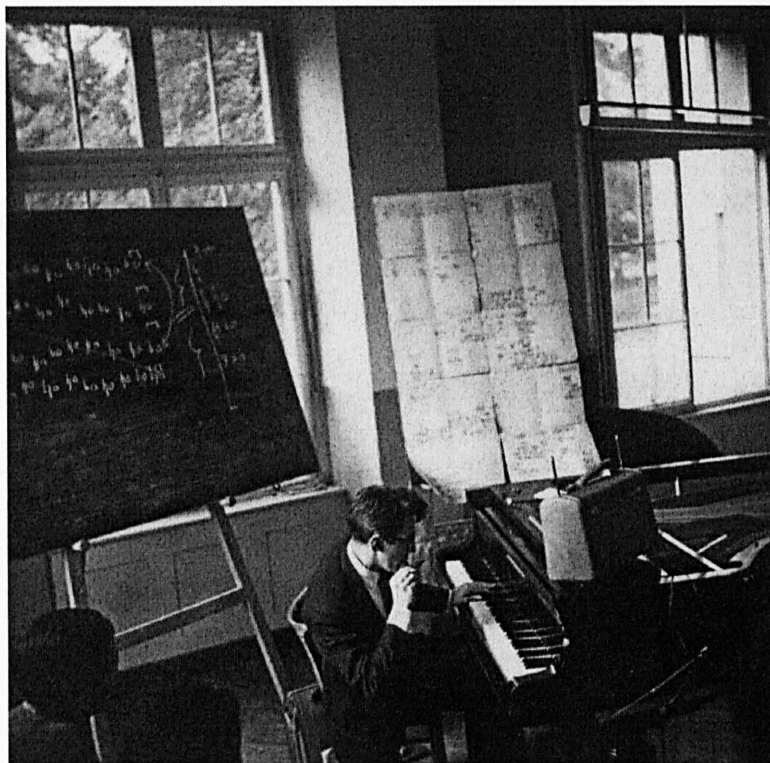
Fig. 1, David Tudor performing John Cage's *Water Music* in Darmstadt, 1958. The instructions to the piece indicate that the score may be displayed during the performance adding to the multimedia quality of the piece (note the transistor radio on the piano, and what appears to be a duck whistle that Tudor is blowing).

Alongside the anarchic appearance of his performances what contributed most to the impression gained by audiences (and propounded by his critics: Boulez, 1957 and Nono, 1960) that Cage's music was essentially improvisatory was his association with the activities of some of his colleagues and other younger composers encouraged by his broad example; amongst them was the American Earle Brown. Brown, like Feldman and Wolff, Cage's other close associates, did not adopt Cage's methods but sought out other ways of obtaining unpredictability and spontaneity in the

performance of his music. On the one hand he had a background in engineering and mathematics which had predisposed him to organizing musical material with random numbers;[10] on the other he had been a trumpet player in jazz bands and was associated with abstract expressionist artists such as Jackson Pollock and Alexander Calder. This painterly influence was most immediately apparent in the design of Brown's graphic scores and 'open form' pieces. His decision to use freehand 'scribbles' and geometrical lines in many of the pieces collected together in the series entitled *Folio* (1952-3, which includes the Mondrian-like *December 1952*, and later, *Folio II*, 1970-93) was as a direct response to the 'action' paintings of Pollock, in order to stimulate a similar active, improvisatory response in the performer. Other pieces such as *Available Forms I* and *II* for orchestra (1961 and 1962, respectively) made use of so-called 'mobile form' suggested by the hanging mobile sculptures of Calder:

"As you walk into a museum and you look at a mobile you see a configuration that's moving very subtly. You walk in the same building the next day and it's a different configuration, yet it's the same piece, the same work by Calder. I thought it would be fantastic to have a piece of music which would have a basic character always, but by virtue of aspects of improvisation or notational flexibility, the piece could take on subtly different kinds of character." (Brown, cited in Bailey, 1992: 60)

The conductors of *Available Forms* (one conductor is required for *Available Forms I* and two for *Available Forms II*) are to select blocks of musical material to juxtapose and overlay in the moment of performance. For instance, using a series of prearranged signals a conductor may decide to begin the piece with the brass section playing their third chord and introduce interjections from· the upper strings playing their third gesture, all the while varying the dynamics of each. A few years later Brown collaborated with Calder to produce a piece for an instrumental percussion sculpture bringing both visual and musical aspects together in a quasi-improvised piece (see figures 2 and 3 below).

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[10] Brown also attended the Schillinger School of Music in Boston which taught an approach to the arts that emphasised symmetry and the underlying mathematical patterns found in nature, and a method of composition that had parallels with both European and Milton Babbitt's developments of serialism.
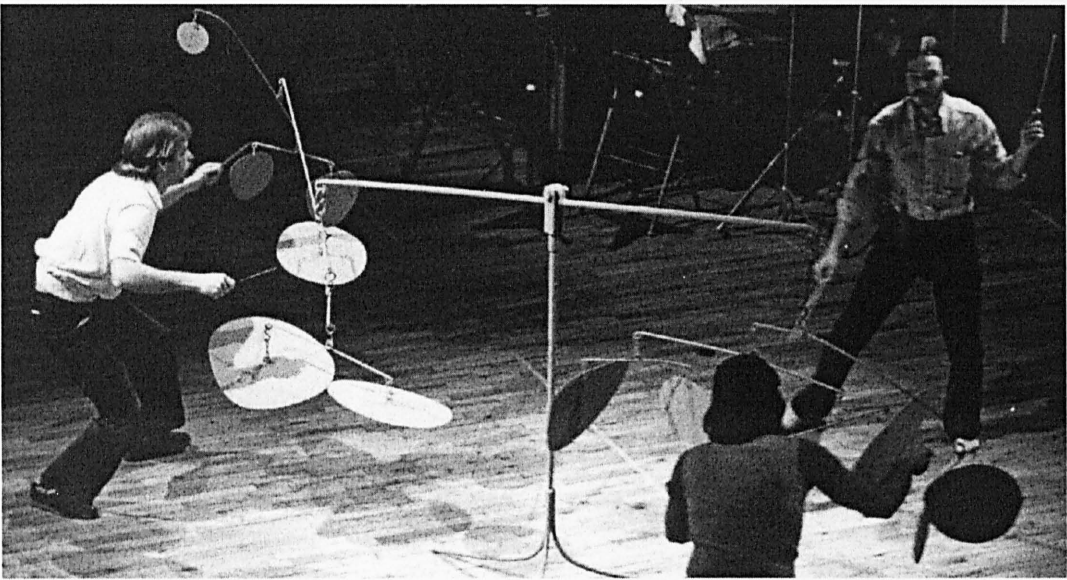
Fig. 2, A performance of Earle Brown's *Calder Piece* (1966) using Alexander Calder's mobile made especially for the purpose.

Fig. 3, A page from the score of Brown's *Calder Piece*. Note that the four lines of 'score' on the bottom half of the page do not show precise rhythms (unusually for a percussion piece) but freehand improvisatory gestures, which reveal, perhaps, the influence of Jackson Pollock.

Brown himself often took the part of conductor (see figure 4) or worked closely with other conductors and performers such as Leonard Bernstein and Bruno Maderna[11]; and here one of the biggest problems (and also one of the most positive aspects) of collaborative improvisatory music making is demonstrated: the reliance upon charismatic performers to convey a persuasive performance. When a composer makes a score that moves away from conventional practices he or she forgoes the 'safety net' of the interpretative traditions that surround the mainstream of Western classical music and so the authority behind a performance has to derive from elsewhere or outside of the text so to speak.[12]
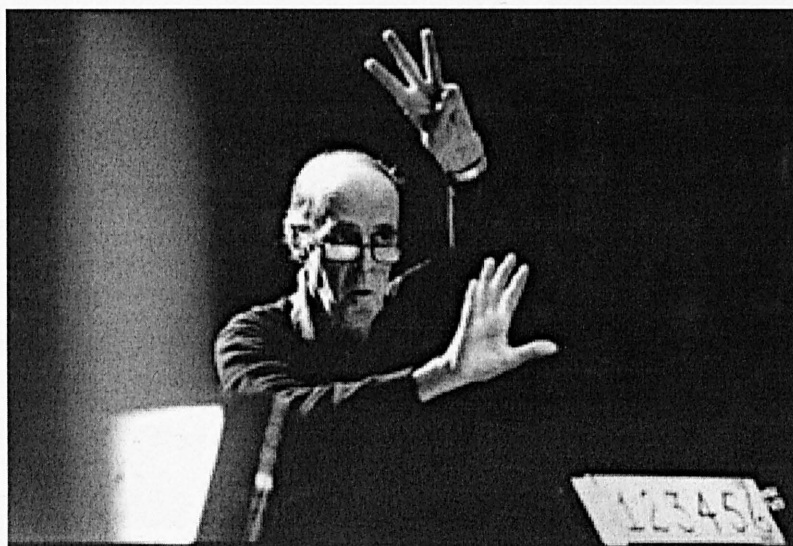
Fig. 4, Earle Brown conducting and indicating the next section of a piece to be played. Note the sequence of numbers 1-6 which refer to the six sections of the score arranged into a sequence and improvised with, following Brown's directions, in the moment of performance. Compare with figure 5.

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[11] "The vital interaction brought about by the fact of there being two conductors thinking independently ensures a constant awakeness on the part of musicians and audience, and the raw coincidences of sonority, and the desperate individual efforts made by musicians to keep up and play their parts, were like a gust of fresh air sweeping through the audience." (Cornelius Cardew, 15 January 1963, *Financial Times* review of *Available Forms II* in Cologne).

[12] Cornelius Cardew commented on such a situation in the preface to his published collection of indeterminate scores *Four Works*: "These pieces stand to one another in a relation of mutual support and enrichment: experience gained from one is of vital importance in interpreting the others. [...] So these little systems – these pieces – are not self-contained; like seeds, they depend on the surrounding soil for nourishment, they are irremovably embedded in their environment, which is the musical situation today. [...] One kind of protection is provided by the novelty and uniqueness of the notations: few musicians will take the trouble to decipher and learn the notations unless they have a positive interest in performing the works" ((ed.) Prévost, 1967/2006: 75-77).

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Fig. 5, Lawrence D. 'Butch' Morris pictured during one of his 'conductions'. Morris's conductions are conducted improvisations in which an ensemble responds to a set of designated gestures made by Morris. Morris's background is in American free jazz as a cornet player, but his conductions are inspired by a combination of methods from classical conducting and the style of big band jazz leaders as varied as Duke Ellington and Sun Ra who moulded scored arrangements to support the improvisations of soloists during performances.

As I will discuss later, the world of Classical music has traditionally come to regard a composition as something with a fixed identity that can be picked up directly from the score by the performer, where even a sight reading may give a good general picture of the piece. In Brown's case this becomes more of a problem for the performer who has limited him or herself to 'standard' Classical repertoire, because his music depends on a performer prepared to engage in improvisatory behaviour. If we leave aside all the aesthetic misunderstandings that would arise, it might even be imagined that one of Cage's most radical pieces such as his *Variations II* of 1961 (an 'assembled' graphic score for any sound-making devices) could be performed with some success by our standard repertoire performer because the score requires the performance to be mapped out in advance regardless of how unpredictable or spontaneous it may eventually sound to the audience or the performer's fellow players. Cage's insistence on measurement and preparation displays an essentially Western and desk-bound composerly mentality, whereas Brown's interest in the spontaneous reaction of performers during performance suggests a connection with (or a need for) an oral tradition. Indeed, Brown noted the influence of big band arranging upon his

approach to composition and conducting,[13] and there are certain affinities with the 'on the hoof' arrangements of band leaders like Duke Ellington and Charles Mingus who got to know the musical strengths of their band members intimately moulding and encouraging an improviser's solo and the band's accompaniment. (However, the institution of the classical orchestra tends not to encourage so intimate or creative a relationship between conductor, orchestra, and the composer's source materials.)

From Composer to Improviser

This need among certain composers to work empirically with musical ideas, could be seen in part as a response to the "hands-on" style of working with reel-to-reel tape in electronic studios and a reaction to the convoluted methods of strict serialism. Nevertheless, the pianist David Tudor, in spite of his direct link with the spontaneity and collaboration of the New York composers, in most cases he would choose to work independently of the composer, preparing highly detailed performing scores away from the piano for even the most impressionistic graphic pieces he was confronted with such as Sylvano Bussotti's *Five Pieces for David Tudor* (1959). And so while Tudor's appreciation of the aesthetic behind most pieces he played could be regarded as evolving out of an oral tradition of sorts, it was not an oral tradition in the usual sense of deriving directly from collective performing activity or a teacher-pupil relationship. Tudor often appeared to hold as much responsibility for the composed content and structure of the music as the composers whose work he was performing.

Possibly the most notable example of a composer attempting to initiate an oral tradition for his music was Stockhausen who founded his own ensemble in the mid 1960s, with the specific purpose of performing his music. At first this reflected Stockhausen's interest with indeterminate processes and as such was a development of the performer choice involved in pieces such as *Klavierstück XI*. Stockhausen had created a situation where he could integrate the indeterminacy of Cage into his music without relinquishing control of the style and manner of performance where he could exert a strong influence over the choices made by the performers. He was able to

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[13] Noted in an informal conversation with the author, York, December 1999.

build a circle of committed performers through his existing reputation as a composer. By combining performances of his strictly notated pieces and pieces which progressively introduced indeterminacy and improvisation to his scores he found that he could cultivate an improvised ensemble sound that still bore some relation to his earlier work, and suppress what he might choose to regard as inappropriate or clichéd improvisation that his performers may have naturally lapsed into.[14] In pieces such as *Prozession* (1967) for ensemble and electronics he regulated the improvisation of his ensemble by requiring the performers to respond to fragments of his earlier compositions transformed according to a system of symbols in the score (such as '+' and '–', to indicate that a performer is to either expand upon on reduce aspects of the sound material in play), and by his ultimate control sitting at a mixing desk monitoring the amplified sound of the ensemble. Stockhausen went furthest in this improvisational direction with *Aus den sieben Tagen* (1968). This was a collection of short written texts instead of conventional musical notation, with the purpose of provoking what he termed an 'Intuitive Music' – Stockhausen preferred to use this phrase instead of improvisation, which he associated with the practice of writing or performing variations upon pre-existing musical ideas or according to received habits as found in both jazz and the Classical tradition (Stockhausen, 1989). While this may suggest a loosening of the composer's grip to the point where the sense of the 'piece' as a coherent, repeatable entity disappears, each text tends to indicate a broad elemental shape or arc, for example:

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[14] See Bailey (1992: 70-73), for a musician's reflections on working with Stockhausen on his text pieces.

everyone plays the same tone

lead the tone wherever your thoughts
lead you

do not leave it,

stay with it

always return to the same place.

(Stockhausen, 1970: 9)

Stockhausen's stated preference was that the ensemble should engage in the same kind of fasting and meditational preparation that he had done when writing the piece. Allied to an established and close working relationship with his ensemble, this all adds up to a form of highly conditioned improvised performance that has something in common with the conventions of the jazz bandleaders mentioned above.[15] This enabled him to exert a large amount of control in terms of the compositional editing of his musicians' improvised responses, extended by his assumption of a guru-like status over his ensemble, and his position at a PA mixing desk during concert performances.

Stockhausen might properly be regarded as a distiller or synthesizer rather than an originator in his adoption of these practices as he did not arrive at these ideas independently. What had enabled Stockhausen to move in this direction was the example of Cage and Tudor and the way in which their practices had influenced the younger generation of composers including some of Stockhausen's most notable students and assistants (for example, La Monte Young and Cornelius Cardew). Encouraged by a combination of the multimedia performances of John Cage, and the

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[15] See also Szwed (2000), for an account of the way in which Sun Ra was able to condition the members of his Arkestra in the way of playing his music – there is something of the 'cult' in the approach of both composers.

'happenings' of Fluxus,[16] a group of Italian composers and American expatriates in Rome came together during the early 1960s to experiment with improvisation. The Gruppo d'Improvvisazione di Nuova Consonanza (GINC) was founded by Franco Evangelisti with the requirement that its members must be composers. The implication of this requirement was based on the assumption that only composers had original ideas and that by working together new forms of spontaneous composition could be explored. At various times the group included among its members Aldo Clementi, Larry Austin, Frederic Rzewski, Alvin Curran, Ennio Morricone and former Stockhausen assistant Cornelius Cardew. According to the American composer Larry Austin the decision was made that there should be "No scheme, no format, no preconceived concept but the group dynamic itself" (Childs & Hobbs, 1982/83: 27).[17]

Evangelisti, the closest person the group had to a leader, had been motivated, in part, to found the ensemble by his growing political commitment as a Communist Party member, and had come to view composition as in Austin's account "a contrivance, manipulation ... the whole "act" of sitting down to contrive a piece of music [wa]s decadent" (28). This made for a fractious group dynamic, which Austin described as "very Italian, very anarchic, very diverse. I don't think we came to an agreement about anything, which was maybe its main charm" (28). This connection made between collaborative musical experiment and a concern with social and political issues was something that was shared by many musicians involved in this area. The connection between music making and extra-musical inspiration is a contentious area as it tends to require the listener to either share the musician's beliefs or be prepared to suspend their own lack of belief for the sake of aesthetic appreciation. This has often been the case with religious and other ritual forms of

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[16] Fluxus was a diverse group of artists, musicians, and performers inspired by the aesthetic provocations of Cage, the conceptual artist Marcel Duchamp, and the early twentieth-century art movement Dada. Members included founder George Maciunas, La Monte Young, Yoko Ono, and Nam June Paik (Friedman, 1998).

[17] According to Austin, the American composer Lukas Foss had founded a 'freely improvising' ensemble in Southern California in 1956 in which the ensemble "worked from schemes and formats, graphic roadmaps to guide the performers ... they were intent on creating stand-up classical contemporary music ... I don't think anyone could have mistaken it for jazz." (Childs & Hobbs, 1982/83: 31); Austin had himself instigated an improvising ensemble in California (New Music Ensemble) before arriving in Italy which had similar concerns but more of an awareness of developments in jazz.

music-making, but musicians who have attempted to draw parallels between progressive music and progressive politics have often come up against a discrepancy between the perceived difficulty of a new musical style and the 'message' that is supposed to be embodied within the music. This may be a reason why most of what are regarded as musically 'successful' performances of experimental improvised music bears more resemblance to ritual happenings than political meetings, because the musical content obscures a clear message thereby making the activity aesthetic and mysterious. A prime example would be the ensemble Musica Elettronica Viva (MEV), a group of American expatriates many of whom had performed with GINC. MEV performances often had a political dimension that showed itself through putting on performances for progressive organisations and benefits, and working with radical groups like the Living Theatre, but musically this manifested itself in collaborations with leading free jazz musicians such as saxophonists Anthony Braxton and Steve Lacy, which when combined with a large amount of electronic instruments and devices tended towards an unpredictable noisy texture where individual voices were less apparent than the total effect of the ensemble's sound. Unlike these groups, the Stockhausen Ensemble had no explicit political 'message' apart from Stockhausen's quasi-mystical ideas and his guru-like status. Despite the fact that the sounds and textures his group created were comparable to the performances of MEV and GINC in the use of electronics and noise, the social and musical structure of his ensemble had a hierarchical organization which contrasted strongly with the more anarchic approach of the other two groups.

Improvised Music in Britain: the 1960s

The international avant-garde had not made a significant impression upon most progressively-minded musicians in Britain during the 1950s, who tended to be more enthralled with developments in jazz and popular music from the US. Those few British musicians who were interested in avant-garde ideas and practices had to go to the mainland to places like Darmstadt or to Paris to study with Olivier Messiaen (teacher of Boulez and Stockhausen) to learn about and be involved with these developments. It was only during the latter part of the 1960s as the effects of William

Glock's modernist BBC programming policies [18] and a wider acceptance of experimentation within popular culture began to be felt that British musicians started to take a more noticeable role within the musical avant-garde.

Having worked in Germany and Italy as an assistant to Stockhausen in the late 1950s and as a performer with many of the members of MEV and GINC, the English composer Cornelius Cardew returned to live and work in England. Cardew was one of the few musicians from Britain who had actively engaged with the international avant-garde, and his music reflected these influences as he moved from a serially-derived musical language to one which favoured indeterminacy, and participation by the performer in solving often paradoxical or 'problematic' notations. (His piece *Autumn '60* (1960) requires each member of the ensemble to construct their own part by ignoring any two directions indicated in the score for a given beat and making decisions about what to play from the instructions that remain. His piece *Treatise* (1963-67) is a rigorously worked 193-page graphic score with no instructions or explanations as to the interpretation of the signs contained within.) In his attempt to find like-minded people to perform these pieces Cardew found himself turning towards musicians who did not have a conventional training in Classical music and who could improvise, especially musicians from the more progressive end of jazz.

The jazz scene in Britain during the 1960s was, naturally, heavily influenced by the style of the leading American performers. British players – perhaps considering themselves marginal to the jazz tradition – were inclined to look backward to the established American masters for inspiration rather than those players on the cutting edge. The principal aspect that could be said to distinguish mainstream British jazz from its US originator was its broadly conservative and old-fashioned outlook. Those musicians who were interested in developing something individual had to look to American innovators such as John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, or Sun Ra for musical inspiration. Aesthetically and socially the jazz scene in Britain, as much as in the US, had a closer association with the contemporary art world and art colleges than the institutions of Classical music, and so adventurous jazz musicians were more inclined to take their impulse from contemporary artists. A particular

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[18] Glock brought Boulez to London as conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and strongly encouraged his concert programming ideas.

influence were the New York-based abstract expressionist painters like Jackson Pollock (see figures 6 and 7) and Willem De Kooning whose 'spontaneous' approach to the canvas suggested clear parallels with the free jazz of Taylor, Coleman and Coltrane which emphasised broad gesture, instrumental colour and avoided overt reference to the standard conventions of jazz harmony and rhythm. Out of the various ensembles that were exploring and mimicking American free jazz grew a few small groupings of musicians interested in developing a music unique to their own circumstances that was achieved through improvisation rather than any of the premeditated structural plans which still remained in free jazz.[19] Of these groups there were at least two that surfaced in London in the mid 1960s who proved most significant and influential in the development of a free improvised music: the Spontaneous Music Ensemble and AMM.

Fig. 6, *White Light* (1954) by Jackson Pollock. Although Pollock was an avid listener to jazz and a friend of experimental composers such as Earle Brown, his tastes were mostly confined to Dixieland and Bebop styles. Nevertheless, many musicians involved in free jazz and experimental

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[19] Despite doing away with the song-based harmonic structure of jazz, most free jazz musicians tended to use melodic and thematic material to initiate and conclude their improvisations. For example, Cecil Taylor's ensemble music, despite appearing at first to be completely spontaneous, has often relied upon rehearsed structures that control the textural density and the thematic material of improvisations, in a manner which is comparable with the techniques of improvised theatre, but influenced by the musical ideas of composers such as Stravinsky and Duke Ellington; see Jost (1994).

composition saw a connection between his work and their own: This painting was used as part of the sleeve art to *Free Jazz: A Collective Improvisation* by the Ornette Coleman Double Quartet (1961, Atlantic Records). See figure 7 below for a glimpse of Pollock's method of painting.

Fig. 7, Film still of Jackson Pollock painting in his characteristic dripping style. Instead of a brush Pollock is here daubing the canvas using a stick to drip the paint across the canvas to create fragmentary gestures which are not entirely within his command.

The musicians of AMM[20] came together out of a shared background in free jazz, bebop, and art school training to explore ways of making a new freely improvised music; and it was perhaps their art school background that played the most vital role in the development of their approach to making music. Guitarist Keith Rowe demonstrated this connection most clearly in the manner in which he played his instrument, laying it flat on a table and using a variety of unconventional implements to stimulate sounds in a direct emulation of Jackson Pollock's technique of placing a canvas on the floor and dripping and rubbing the paint into the canvas (see figures 7 and 8). Unlike jazz, the emphasis was not on identifiable notes or rhythms but on the variable qualities of sounds and the ways in which they might be set against one another. 'Found' sounds such as those made by non-musical objects or radio

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[20] The meaning and origin of the name has never been explained to anyone outside of the group. In its earliest incarnation the group consisted of percussionist Eddie Prévost, saxophonist Lou Gare, guitarist Keith Rowe and bassist Lawrence Sheaf; Cardew joined on cello and piano, although the group's instrumentarium was often extended by a variety of means, notably through the use of radios and ad hoc electronics.

transmissions were another important element inspired by the art practice of collage and the 'readymades' of Marcel Duchamp which added to the unpredictability and rough quality of the total sound.[21] Not long after the founding of the group, composer Cornelius Cardew was invited to join the ensemble as a performer.
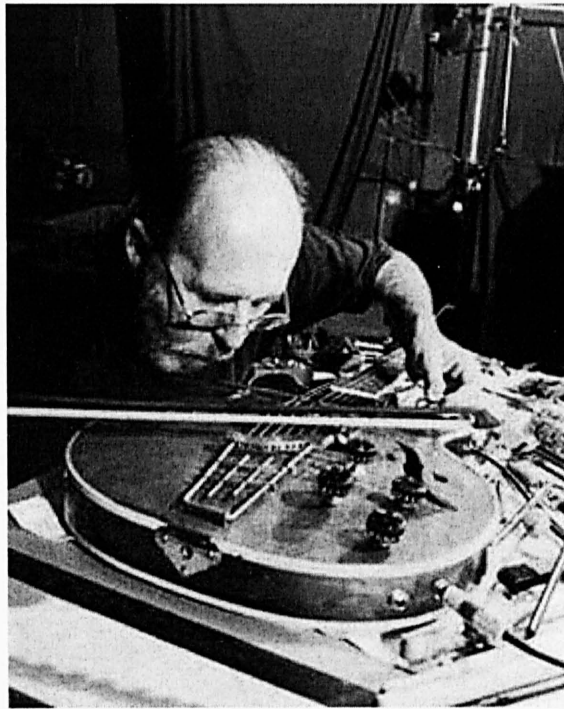
Fig. 8, Former AMM guitarist Keith Rowe demonstrating his Pollock-inspired technique. Note the range of implements on the table next to the guitar and his use of cello bow and his own breath to stimulate the strings and pick up of his guitar, which is analogous to Pollock's use of a variety of painting implements other than brushes.

As a result of having worked with the members of AMM on performances of his graphic work *Treatise*, Cardew became drawn towards ways of making music that stepped beyond even this kind of loose composerly guidance. In a reciprocal manner, Cardew's experience and knowledge of the world of avant-garde composition inevitably encouraged in the other members of the group an awareness of the connections between the music AMM made and the parallels it had with works being

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[21] 'Collage' was a common practice amongst artists since the Dada movement of the early years of the twentieth century that made use of various non-standard materials such as newspaper in the making of paintings and sculptures. Duchamp's 'readymades' on the other hand were everyday manufactured objects signed by the artist and (re)presented as artworks by their recontextualisation rather than any attempt to reshape the materials as was usual with collage.

produced by contemporary composers, and this subsequently brought them into contact with many of the leading American exponents whose music Cardew performed throughout the 1960s. Indeed AMM had far more involvement with the experimental classical music world in Europe and America than they did with other musicians associated with the emerging free improvisation scene such as the Spontaneous Music Ensemble who retained close links with the jazz circuit. AMM were often billed on programmes along with new pieces by John Cage and La Monte Young, and the ensemble was joined for a short time during 1968 by composer Christian Wolff.[22] One reason why it seemed natural for AMM to share concerts with these composers was that there were clear parallels to be heard not only in the way the music sounded but also the exploratory, empirical manner in which it was made and the similar aesthetic interests which drove both the improvisers and the composers.

What AMM shared with Cage was an attitude that music could be made from non-musical sounds or objects that were unpredictable in the sounds that they produced; for instance, the group made use of transistor radios and other, often abandoned, electronic equipment, and transformed the sounds of conventional instruments through 'preparation'[23] and electrical amplification. However, there were more than just technical similarities between AMM and Cage. Cage's Zen Buddhist-influenced doctrine of 'non-intention' – the attempt to eradicate a sense of there being a goal-oriented 'musical' form and a willed emotional expressiveness on the part of both composer and performer – resonated with aspects of AMM's aesthetic. The group were attempting to avoid the conventions of free jazz, which included its reliance on particular gestural and structural shapes that tended to play to an audience's emotional responses and expectations, such as a saxophonist building his solo to a climactic point of wailing and screeching. This is not to say that AMM necessarily succeeded in avoiding such conventions or even that they rejected the legitimacy of emotion and the conscious shaping of the direction of music. Their aim

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[22] AMM's involvement with the contemporary British art scene (most of the group had attended art schools and Keith Rowe had been a practising artist) meant that for a short time they also shared concert billings with the likes of art school rock groups such as Pink Floyd and Cream (Toop, 1995: 45-46).

[23] The 'preparation' of instruments refers to Cage's practice of placing various implements on and between the strings of a piano in order to transform its timbre and produce new sounds. The result often resembled that of percussion instruments from Southeast Asia, such as those of a Gamelan ensemble.

was to arrive in such states (or elsewhere) through a collective process of improvisation in combination with an ability to reflect critically upon their practice in the wake of performance. It was this critical approach towards musical expression that distinguished AMM from Cage's outright rejection of purposeful intention, yet it is also this refusal on Cage's part that marks him out as a composer (with a capital 'C'). This is similarly the case with many other composers who were keen not to renounce their ultimate authority over the musical process and its results, despite often having a strong interest in what collective spontaneity could offer (see Stockhausen above). Some composers were interested in the blurry line between composition and improvisation, notably Cardew and Cage's colleagues Christian Wolff and Earle Brown (who referred to the graphic scores of his collection *Folio* (1952-54) as 'activities' rather than compositions). However, in the legalistic eyes of music publishing houses and arts funding bodies it has tended to be composers who have carried the weight of artistic authority even where much or all of the music is necessarily improvised.

AMM have had an almost continuous presence in the field of free improvisation from their founding up to the present day (admittedly with a fair share of schisms amongst its membership – see Prévost, 1995 and 2004). Their way of working and the sound they make could be compared with the consistency and gradual development of a composer's style. Early on the group established a practice of approaching each performance as a single long improvisation without any prior arrangement or discussion as to what might happen. In addition, there have been two other aspects common to almost all of their performances: the first is a focus on what Cardew described as 'informal sound' [24] – meaning the inclusion of noise or unconventional musical sounds – and the second, the evolution of a total group sound in which there are no soloists as such and where individual voices are often difficult to distinguish. This continuity contrasts with the other general tendency in free improvisation that emerged in London during the 1960s as represented by the members of the Spontaneous Music Ensemble (henceforth SME). Most of the members of the SME and its associated groupings during the 1960s and 1970s retained some connection in their professional lives with mainstream modern jazz or

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[24] "Informal 'sound' has a power over our emotional responses that formal 'music' does not, in that it acts subliminally rather than on a cultural level" (Cardew, 1971: xviii).

had at the very least arrived at this new music having been working jazz musicians, and as a result of this jazz remained at some level the general model for the music they made.[25] The ensemble began making 'free jazz' in the mould of US players such as Sun Ra and Ornette Coleman, but under the influence of drummer John Stevens and guitarist Derek Bailey it became interested in exploring ideas inspired by the music of Anton Webern and various non-Western cultures – Japanese Gagaku especially. Under these influences and in reaction to the full throttle bluster of much free jazz performance they began exploring a far more experimental sound world often emphasising quiet sounds and an equal balance between each musician's contribution in which individual instrumental voices could still be clearly distinguished.[26] The SME were much more inclusive than AMM in terms of their membership, and more inclined to invite players other than those typically inclined towards the avant-garde such as the Canadian trumpeter Kenny Wheeler and the soon-to-be Miles Davis band bassist Dave Holland. However, most opportunities for performance and experimentation with these new ideas occurred 'after hours' following more mainstream performances to small audiences often consisting of other musicians.[27] In this respect it was much the same kind of practice that had precipitated developments in jazz up until that point, where the 'musicians' music' starts underground as an acquired taste before going mainstream, such as the evolution of be bop. Free improvisation has mostly continued to exist in marginal performance settings in back rooms of pubs and other such informal locations, much more so than standard concert venues. Some musicians attempted to reach beyond the confines of the virtuoso performers: John Stevens was keen to develop an educational aspect to free improvisation, organising workshop classes which became an integral part of the

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[25] See Watson (2004), for a detailed account of guitarist Derek Bailey's transition from jazz and commercial music to free improvisation with Sheffield's Joseph Holbrooke (a trio with drummer Tony Oxley and bassist Gavin Bryars).

[26] In the wake of John Coltrane's LP *Ascension* (1965) much 'free jazz' as opposed to 'free improvisation' has favoured a 'transcendental' approach to performance, sometimes referred to as 'fire music', best exemplified by the Peter Brötzmann Octet's *Machine Gun* (1968), this kind of music tends to aim at a dense active texture of 'simultaneous soloing'.

[27] In venues such as the Little Theatre Club in London (SME), or the Grapes Pub in Sheffield (Joseph Holbrooke, see footnote 24).

underground music scene, and eventually becoming formalised as Community Music in 1983, extending far beyond the confines of experimental music.[28]

Fig. 9 Marshall Allen, Sun Ra, Michael Ray, at the Bayou, Washington DC, 1978. Sun Ra and his Arkestra existed at the fringes of jazz in America due to the eccentricity of his dress and character as much for his music, but it was his ad hoc exploration of electronics, noise, and amateurism which appealed to British musicians such as AMM, as much as the sophistication and complexity of his band writing.

In contrast to the composer-led international avant-garde (which AMM might be regarded as belonging to because of the consistency of their aesthetic and composer connections), the field of free improvisation in London had a much more temporary, ad hoc existence, in which various ensembles would form, disband, and swap membership at a rapid rate. Nevertheless, the core pool of musicians involved remained more or less constant and revolved around the projects of the most distinctive performers. A key player was the guitarist Derek Bailey, who has sometimes been referred to as the 'godfather' of free improvisation on account of his

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[28] Musicians as diverse as jazz saxophonist Courtney Pine and members of dance rock band Asian Dub Foundation were products of Community Music, and Stevens's 'Search and Reflect' method became a book and influenced the Open University curriculum.

interest since the early 1960s to find a way of making a *free* improvised music. Bailey has demonstrated the transient nature of improvisation, insisting on the importance of performing in new and unfamiliar contexts and refusing to engage with conventional kinds of musical statement and development in order to avoid falling into an 'idiomatic' form of music making. Bailey has referred to his particular approach to improvisation as 'non-idiomatic' in order to emphasise his intention to avoid a predefined stylistic context or common musical language. This approach can only be properly regarded as idealistic because the musicians who are most likely to agree to perform with Bailey have tended to be those who have some prior experience of free improvisation. Despite the idiosyncrasies of each player and the stylistic dissonance of the instrumental combinations that may occur, the general inclination of the performers is likely to be toward some form of musical accommodation with the result that a degree of stylistic consistency will almost inevitably establish itself in the course of performance.[29] Partly out of an awareness of this consolidating tendency amongst musicians and a desire to push his musical ideas further, he has rarely sought to accommodate his performing partners by referring to standard musical idioms. Prévost has noted that Bailey is comparable to John Cage in his refusal to recognise communicative conventions of expression:

> "Bailey's aesthetic departs before commonality can congeal into a convention. He enjoys mismatch and confrontation: his mutuality seems to exist only at the point of agreeing to perform. Such a philosophy inevitably pushes its advocate into a corner, and perhaps generates in consequence some 'unthought of' response." (Prévost, 1995: 13)

Prévost has contrasted this with the way AMM approaches collaboration:

> "AMM implicitly accept the difficulty in appreciating meaning and sought therefore to develop a diversity in communication. This of course brought its own crop of contradictions, amongst which looms the question whether common understanding can indeed be achieved, and whether it matters." (14)

Bailey's ad hoc aesthetic is possibly best exemplified by his 'Company Week' project begun in 1977, in which a diverse range of musicians (from free improvisers

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[29] Morse Peckham has argued that the human tendency in matters of adapting to new or unusual environmental information is a predisposition towards homeostasis or settling for the simplest solution to achieve cognitive and perceptual stability (Peckham, 1970).

to classical and rock musicians) were invited to perform together in various permutations of the group over the course of a week of concerts. In later years his collaborations became more extreme in the contrast of style and genre between Bailey and his fellow performers, working with traditional Chinese musicians, drum and bass DJs, and tap dancers.[30] Nevertheless, on the whole such ad hoc free improvisation, and most free improvising groups have usually centred around a core pool of the leading performers (for instance the groups led by Evan Parker and Barry Guy have often been almost indistinguishable in their line-ups). This has made for a kind of music with its own idiomatic character, with particular proclivities for atonality, extended playing techniques, and rapid-fire (quasi-jazz) polyrhythmic interplay.

Improvisation and Composition (slight return)

Despite the fact that improvised music such as that practiced by AMM and the SME generally involved small numbers of musicians (for economic reasons and the difficulty of finding larger numbers willing to engage in musical experimentation, as much as the clarity of sound and shared aesthetic purpose afforded by small groups), there were efforts made by some musicians to bring larger ensembles together. In most cases the model of organization of these groups was that of the big band or jazz orchestra for the reason that many of the musicians most amenable to this situation shared a background in jazz – the London Jazz Composers Orchestra (LJCO, founded by bassist and composer Barry Guy in 1970) being a prime example. The leaders of ensembles like the LJCO were often also composers with as strong an interest in the 'classical' avant-garde as the progressive end of jazz. With these groups it was not simply an interest in gathering improvisers together to improvise, but it was as much if not more a desire to harness or utilise the spontaneous creativity of particular musicians in combination within the group leader's compositional framework.

The interest in using compositional ideas was due in part to a curiosity about the productive tension that the meeting of composition and improvisation might offer,

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[30] Examples can be found on the CDs *Flying Dragons* (1999, Incus Records CD50), with pipa player Min Xiao-Fen; *Guitar, drums 'n' bass* (1995, Avant Records CD060) with D.J. Ninj; and *Rappin & Tappin* (1995, Incus Records CD55) with tapdancer Will Gaines.

and also a need to deal with the perceived 'problems' which a large group of musicians improvising presents. The most obvious problem is the potential difficulty of hearing particular elements within the total ensemble sound, especially for any individual player to hear what players on the other side of the orchestra are doing or at times when the group are all playing loudly what they themselves are doing. In addition, an individual performer is unlikely to be able to improvise in a way that affords the possibility to 'express' their individuality without other players having to make room for this to happen. The common result is that individuals follow the flow of a generalised ensemble activity or become lost in a chaotic total ensemble sound, because any musical direction the ensemble takes is dominated by the loudest performers. Saxophonist John Butcher describes setting up the group Ensemble with pianist Chris Burn like so,

> "we had strong feelings about what was and what was not working. We felt that large group improvising was nearly always a disaster. Everything always ended up sounding the same: Things followed very clichéd patterns of dynamics and relationships. So we tried to find a different way of interacting in a large group. In fact, 90 percent of that was choosing the right musicians to play with, those who were more interested in listening than soloing." (John Butcher interviewed in Chénard, 2003).

Fig. 10, Chris Burn's Ensemble performing in Berlin during 2006. Note the quasi-classical layout of the group into distinct instrumental groupings with music on stands, and Burn leading from the keyboard. Left to right: Chris Burn (piano, electronics), Cordula Bösze (bass flute), Xavier Charles (clarinet), Franz Hautzinger (trumpet), Helge Hinteregger (sampler keyboard), Christof Kurzman (electronics), Burkhard Stangl (guitar), John Butcher (soprano saxophone), Eva Reiter (viola de gamba/recorder), Werner Dafeldecker (double bass), Paul Lovens (drums).

By using a compositional model or a conductor to lead the improvisation, the possibilities for textural contrast and solos are opened up, but many improvising musicians have expressed dissatisfaction with this type of control being exerted over

them and their freedom to act. Such criticisms of the use of compositional ideas in large group improvisation might be deemed questionable on account of the fact that free improvisation under such circumstances depends upon a large (perhaps unrealistic) amount of good will from all involved and a readiness to temper the kinds of soloistic playing that normally occur in smaller groups. In short, the tensions revealed by large group improvisations emphasise the need for a deeper understanding on the part of the individual player of the responsibilities demanded of freedom of expression when set in a wider musical and social context.

A recent and much larger group that has attempted to tackle these problems has been the London Improvisers Orchestra, founded in late 1990s by musicians who had taken part in a project led by the American jazz musician Lawrence D. 'Butch' Morris.[31] While the orchestra often make use of techniques developed by Morris that involve a conductor leading the ensemble in an improvisation in a manner similar to Earle Brown's system of conducted cues for a piece like *Available Forms*, described above, or use compositional ideas suggested by the members of the group, there is a significant emphasis placed upon free improvisation. The reason for the relative success of this group's free playing is perhaps down to its meeting regularly to rehearse and perform, and thereby establishing a forum for trial and error, developing a common musical understanding and confidence amongst the performers, which is further explored and tested in the composed pieces and conducted improvisations it performs (Fell, 1998).

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[31] The LJCO usually involved seventeen players and a big band-style line up, whereas the London Improvisers Orchestra tends to feature between thirty and forty members and a more diverse instrumentation.

Fig. 11, London Improvisers Orchestra in rehearsal at the Red Rose, London, 1998. The group convened for the purpose of a UK tour with Butch Morris (see figure 5 above) in 1997 as London Skyscraper and have continued to meet regularly as the London Improvisers Orchestra to explore large group improvisation. The constitution of the orchestra like that of Chris Burn's Ensemble (see figure 10 above) mirrors that of an orchestra or jazz big band with instruments assembled into standard family groupings (strings mostly on the left of the picture, winds on the right, and percussive and miscellaneous instruments at the back).

In sharp contrast to these groups of mainly professional musicians, and the broad jazz orchestra model they have employed, stands the Scratch Orchestra, an ensemble consisting of musicians and non-musicians founded by composers Cornelius Cardew, Howard Skempton, and Michael Parsons, which existed between 1969 and 1972.[32] The standard followed by the Scratch Orchestra was not jazz but the happenings of John Cage and the Fluxus group, and also, to some extent, the approach to improvisation espoused by AMM (all of whom were members of the Scratch Orchestra at some point in its existence). The primary motivation of the group was not free improvisation, indeed most of its activities were aesthetically closer to Cage and technically derived from aspects of Cardew's large composition *The Great Learning* (1968-70, revised 1972), often involving simple ritualistic and process-driven ideas applied to familiar classical and popular music or found sounds. Unlike groups such as the LJCO, the Scratch Orchestra were essentially anti-virtuoso regarding technical ability, and favoured instead an emphasis upon the sound of the group working out a single musical objective (for example, a pulse) or simultaneously performing a multiplicity of musical and quasi-theatrical actions. Unlike Cage the working out of

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[32] See Eley (1974) and (ed.) Sutherland (1994) for the histories of the Scratch Orchestra.

these compositional ideas was improvisatory, or the intention was to provide a stimulus and focus for a free improvisation to develop as is the case with Paragraph 5 of Cardew's *The Great Learning*.[33]

Fig. 12, The Scratch Orchestra playing outside Euston Station, London in 1970. Left to right: John Tilbury, Chris Hobbs, Carole Finer, Bryn Harris. Note the non-orchestral layout of the group, the informal setting for the performance, and the disposition of the performers which suggests that the music is as much for their own edification as it is for any passers by.

More recent interaction between composition and improvisation has occurred between certain London-based musicians who have collaborated with and been influenced by players from Berlin and Tokyo who share a common interest (if perhaps for differing, and not always clearly distinguishable reasons) in making a conscious effort to work with quietness, silence, extended techniques, and a complete eschewal of the cathartic model of free jazz which has continued to have an influence upon free improvisation. Most influential in this regard has been the Berlin-based

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[33] The performers are presented with a large number of disciplined actions, graphic score and text material to be performed simultaneously with the intention that all of this will be abandoned once this material is completed, the combination of chaos and discipline giving rise to a heightened awareness of the musical context in which the performer now finds him or herself.

ensemble Wandelweiser and especially its trombonist/composer Radu Malfatti (Warburton, 2001b. Phrases such as 'Reductionism' 'lowercase improv' and 'New London Silence' have all been used as tags to refer to the work of these musicians (Bell, 2005: 39)). The influence of composers is clearly discernible, coming from, on the one hand, the American experimentalists such as the expressively almost 'gestureless' music of Morton Feldman and John Cage, and on the other, Europeans such as Helmut Lachenmann and Salvatore Sciarrino who are interested in the interaction of noise textures and silence, but equally the example of AMM has been important (Bell, 2005). In addition, this intense focus on noise and quietness sometimes gives the music a composed quality because of its narrow focus. Most of the players involved have drawn upon compositional structures at one time or another, and have favoured cultivating a discriminating approach in choosing to work with more likeminded musicians in contrast to the ad hoc performances common to most concerts of free improvisation. However, the overriding emphasis is still upon improvisation, as one of the most notable of these improvisers, harpist Rhodri Davies has stated, "I feel that when everyone's listening you don't need [compositional structures] ... Only with really large ensembles does there come a need for structures." (Sani, 2002)

Plunderphonics, New Technologies

Free improvisation and experimental music has spread in many different directions since the early 1970s, and to attempt to account for all of them would not be plausible, however one last tendency ought to be mentioned before this chapter closes, which might be best described as 'plunderphonic'.

The term 'plunderphonics' derives from composer and artist John Oswald's 1988 E.P. and 1989 CD of the same title which featured compositions derived from manipulated and collaged recordings of popular music. Unlike John Cage's appropriation of existing music through the use of chance procedures, treated simply as 'found sound', the intentions behind musicians and artists of a plunderphonic tendency are often blatantly subversive, humorous or satirical (Cutler, 2000). Many of the musicians who lean towards a 'plunderphonic' aesthetic of material mismatch

have also worked in the field of commercial and popular music and so are able to draw upon a vast array of musical references which is 'at their fingertips'.[34] Plunderphonic improvising has also been heavily influenced by DJ culture in its 'abuse' of musical technology such as samplers and turntables used as musical instruments. One early example of these practices was the group Alterations (active between 1977 and 1986). The mismatch of musical materials was at the centre of the band's aesthetic, drawing parallels with both Derek Bailey's Company events and the rough collisions of punk more so than the experimental, comparatively 'classical' aesthetic of AMM. Unlike the use of quotations in jazz improvisation,[35] the use and effect of quotation by plunderphonically inclined performers is, generally speaking, to disrupt the flow or change the direction of the musical texture rather than develop melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic elements in either the quoted tune or the 'head' arrangement. The music of a group such as Alterations, proceeds through juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated elements rather than the 'organic' integration and development ideas found in most conventional models of composition, and expressed in a much starker manner than the juxtapositions of improvising groups like AMM and SME.

Concluding Remarks

In summary, improvised experimental music can be thought of as involving a somewhat fractious dialogue between individual spontaneity and the discipline and

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[34] Multi-instrumentalist Steve Beresford is a notable example. Beresford has been a member of 1980s eccentric pop group The Flying Lizards, band leader for comedian Vic Reeves, and an arranger and film composer, all of which feeds into his improvised performances.

[35] Henry Louis Gates (Gates, 1988) has written of jazz improvisation in terms of his analysis of the African American linguistic practice of 'signifyin(g)' in which familiar verbal – or in this instance, musical – phrases are given a particular emphasis which subverts the received understanding of the phrase or encodes other meanings which are shared and recognised by the speaker's or musician's social group. Within jazz, the practice of signifyin(g) often involves the parodying or pastiching of a fellow or rival performer's style for humorous effect; plunderphonics also invokes humour in its absurd juxtapositions of familiar elements, however, signifyin(g) quotation usually serves the purpose of intensifying interaction and cohesiveness in a group performance, whereas the plunderphonic use of quotation often reaches a point of saturation of juxtaposed elements effectively levelling any particular vested or nested kinds of meaning to be found in any single quotation. In other words, a plunderphonic approach to improvisation encourages musical disunity and chaos for the purpose of disrupting habitual kinds of improvised ensemble interaction.

preparation that collaborative activity requires to make it productive. In the wider musical world – especially in the eyes of music publishers and most aestheticians – experimental, improvisatory activities have tended to be viewed as lacking legitimacy. This legitimacy is bestowed on most other music because its repeatability and emphasis upon an end result. Improvised music does not preclude repeatability or a concern with satisfying an audience's expectations, as I hope will become clear. But the discrepancy between the practitioners' view of improvised experimental music as a vital *artistic* practice running parallel to developments in the visual arts and composed music, and its emphasis upon *collective process*, marks this music out. It resists a conventionally consumable experience by engaging in a dialogue (or more accurately, dialectic) between the enjoyment of communal aesthetic exploration and the individualistic aspiration towards artistic originality ordinarily associated with the composition of Western art music. The challenge posed for those who wish to evaluate such hybrid practices is to seek out what this music owes to received ways of listening, performing and composing, and to consider how usefully those traditional categories serve to measure, define and provoke further thought and music making.

IEM: a Diagram of Influence

Below is a diagram which summarises the trail of influences upon some of the key groups and tendencies within IEM discussed in the preceding chapter; those which are explicitly a part of IEM are italicised and underlined.
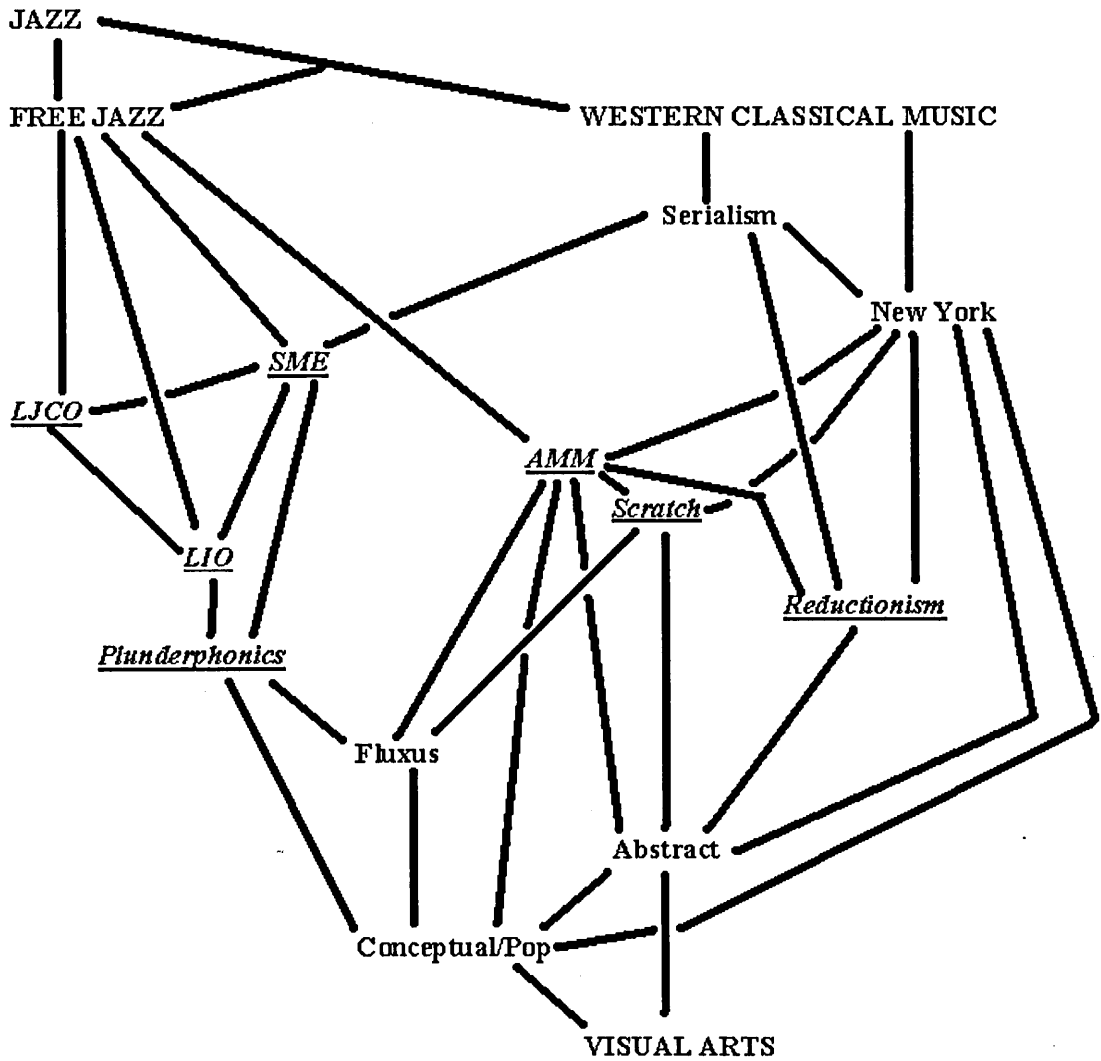
Key to diagram

- Free Jazz = American free jazz (Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane), and their European followers (Peter Brötzman, London Jazz Composers' Orchestra)
- Serialism = the post-Webern Darmstadt School composers (Stockhausen, Boulez, Berio, Nono, etc.)
- New York = The 'New York School' the circle of composers who introduced indeterminacy to their music (John Cage, Morton Feldman, Earle Brown)
- *SME* = Spontaneous Music Ensemble (John Stevens, Derek Bailey, Evan Parker)
- *LJCO* = London Jazz Composers' Orchestra (Barry Guy, Evan Parker)
- *AMM* = Eddie Prévost, Keith Rowe, Cornelius Cardew, John Tilbury
- *Scratch* = The Scratch Orchestra (Cornelius Cardew)
- *LIO* = London Improvisers Orchestra (formed from out of Butch Morris's London Skyscraper)
- *Reductionism* = In the UK: Mark Wastell, Rhodri Davies. In Germany: the Wandelweiser group and Radu Malfatti. In Japan: Otomo Yoshihide.
- *Plunderphonics* = Steve Beresford, Alterations.
- Fluxus = La Monte Young, Yoko Ono, Naim June Paik, etc.
- Abstract = Abstract Expressionism (Pollock, Calder)
- Conceptual/Pop = Conceptualist and Pop Art (Duchamp, Rauschenberg, Warhol)

Chapter 2

Conceptualising Improvised Experimental Music:
The Relevance of the 'Musical Work'

Introduction

In this chapter I consider the ways in which mainstream Western art criticism and aesthetics have shaped the debate about the evaluation of new and experimental kinds of musical activity. Much Western philosophy – especially of the Anglo-American varieties, which will be my main point of reference – has placed an emphasis upon proving general principles and 'tidying up' received ideas ahead of exploring new vistas of enquiry. Consequently, philosophical aesthetics has tended to regard the canon of 'great' pieces and their associated musical traditions – that which has become well known or is commonly recognised – as the universal standard against which *all* kinds of music are evaluated.[36] There are two key issues that arise from such a position. The first is sociological: how and why have certain kinds of musical activity come to be thought of as representative of the cultural norm in the eyes (and ears) of aesthetic critics? And the second is primarily philosophical: how applicable or adaptable are such concepts to musical life as it is lived and experienced? Both of these issues can be found entangled in the roots of the concept of the *work* of art.

In the discussion that follows I examine the concept of the 'work' of art as it has been applied to music. Specifically, I probe the ways in which the work concept has been defined and evaluated in the light of changing musical and critical practice to see what it has to offer as a tool for assessing these very changes. In wanting to find a satisfactory means for evaluating improvised experimental music (IEM) I wish to see how far such a seemingly well-ingrained conceptual frame as the 'musical work' serves as a useful model; whether the aesthetics of IEM can be properly understood without some kind of reference to the work concept, or if it is inescapably bound to this way of making aesthetic judgements about music. I explore the move from the historical but still prevalent notion of the work as a 'closed' concept through to its

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[36] For similar reasons, the institutions that constitute the art world retain a degree of conservatism that is also related to the maintenance of the institutions themselves.

status as an 'open' means of enquiry, examining how far theory shapes musical practice and is itself transformed by it.

It has been argued that the work concept became the driving force behind the way music has been evaluated in the field of Western aesthetics during the nineteenth century and that it largely refers to the symphonic model of music making (Dahlhaus, 1987; Goehr, 1992). Why then should a study such as this of a style of music developed over the last forty years, that ignores or openly contravenes symphonic principles, be measured against such an apparently inappropriate model? In the previous chapter I hope to have given some clues regarding the relationship between the origins of this music and the aesthetic aspirations it embodies, and composed concert music which has a clearer and more direct lineage to Western art music and the work concept. I argue that the work concept provides a vital and useful sounding board against which the identifying features of improvised experimental music can be tested, but that it is a concept that needs to be viewed as critically as the subjects it is used to evaluate.

The 'closed' conception of the musical work as it emerged in the late eighteenth century is synonymous with the idea that Western art music has an autonomous existence. This notion of artistic autonomy – independence from serving a function as a complementary element or accompaniment to another art form or a social occasion – has come to be viewed by the mainstream of aesthetic criticism as a fundamental aspect of artistic value. For a new piece of music to be regarded as worthy of the same kind of consideration that has been given to those pieces held to be canonical by arbiters of culture (curators, critics, other established artists) it should be seen to embody the same core values. That is to say, one ought to be able to judge a piece for its musical worth on its own particular terms but that this is measured in relation to a universalising context of canonical values. While it may appear that experimental and improvised music has closer ties with popular kinds of music making rather than the Classical tradition because of the comparatively informal methods by which it is made, most of its practitioners would regard what they do in terms of 'serious' artistic production due to their adherence to the idea of a formally

innovative music.[37] 'Open' definitions of the work concept, which were developed largely in response to innovative musical and artistic practices (such as those described in the preceding chapter), may offer more immediate solutions for the criticism of this music. Nevertheless, in revealing its aesthetic and sociological debt to 'closed' definitions of the work concept I want to suggest that opening up a dialogue or dialectic between these seemingly mutually exclusive boundaries offers a more effective way of identifying the aesthetic character of IEM.

Defining the Work Concept

What is a musical work? In the standard sense, the term 'artwork' refers to the end product of artistic activity which the artist wishes an audience to give its attention to. With a painting or a sculpture there is a tangible object which the observer can spend time with and is able to view with a certain amount of freedom (for example, observing the object from different angles). The quality of permanence accorded to the visual arts through the existence of a physical object, has helped to predispose aestheticians to define the artwork in terms of the attributes of the traditional visual arts to a much greater degree than those of music, as here expressed by Leonardo da Vinci:

> "Music which is consumed in the very act of its birth is inferior to painting which the use of varnish has rendered eternal" (cited in Benjamin, 1936/1992: 242).[38]

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[37] This is not to say that musicians involved in popular music do not also think of themselves as artists, or that the work concept might not be of use to the criticism of other kinds of vernacular or pop and other vernacular kinds of music. However, for present purposes it is simpler to say that IEM has closer ties to the ways in which symphonic concert music is produced and received because of its emphasis upon the unique performance event rather than a 'consumable' product (in spite of the increasing preponderance of recordings of this kind of music).

[38] Drama largely escaped the same fate as music by virtue of its dual existence as performance (something transient) and literature (the script as text or book). The relationship between a musical score and its performance, and between a script with its staging is in some senses similar, but these correspondences drifted apart during the nineteenth century. The association of the playscript with poetry and prose has provided a kind of aesthetic security blanket that an unperformed score lacks: for instance, there is a tradition of 'closet drama', plays that are made to be read rather than performed such as Goethe's *Faust*. But despite the eighteenth and nineteenth-century middle class tradition of *musica practica* (see Barthes, 1984) and of reading scores silently for pleasure, these became (rightly or wrongly) activities associated

While this may be a fairly crude way of establishing the values of the work of art – to simply equate the assumed 'eternal' aesthetic qualities of art with physical (albeit in actual fact decaying) longevity – it means that music has a tougher task to establish the ways in which its work character is made perceptible and therefore that its artistic value is made more concrete. Today, the only lasting evidence of a completed 'work' made by a composer or performer is a musical score or a sound recording – though neither is in and of itself 'the work'. A score is primarily either the composer's instructions to or a memory aid for the musicians who will perform the piece, and secondly it can be made to function, for analytical purposes, as a plan of the structural design of the music. According to Nelson Goodman, the score's main purpose is to provide an "authoritative identification of a work from performance to performance. [It distinguishes] … the performances that belong to the work from those that do not" (Goodman, 1976: 128), and therefore only those performances that comply with the directions in the score can qualify as instances of the work.

A recording, in this context, is simply a means of storing information such as a document relating to a performance (like a postcard reproduction of a painting), or part of a specifically designed musical experience. In either case it only connects with the musical work when it is played and listened to, much like a live performance – once again, in and of itself, the recording is not the work. A performance is evidence of work being done (literally) but if the artwork is located here it means that it exists only for as long as the duration of its performance. Most performances tend to be of compositions which may be reinterpreted and performed an infinite number of times. But a performance cannot be the source of the work because between performances the work as such would cease to exist – raising doubts as to whether a subsequent performance of the same composition would be of the same work or merely of something that resembles it. With the addition of the potentially extreme differences between the variations in interpretation that even a single performer might give to a piece, this too could threaten to undermine the work's identity as something unique.

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with amateur music making distinct from the 'art of performance' found in the concert hall or salon. Even Bach's *Goldberg Variations* or Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words* are generally considered to be 'fully realised' as artworks when played by the leading concert performers. Not until the experiments of the post-war avant-garde has there been a comparable interest like that of literature with private aesthetic experience considered as a legitimate domain for art (for example, some of the activities of the Fluxus group or Dieter Schnebel's 'visible music', *MO-NO, Muzik zum Lesen* of 1969).

If one rejects the notion that the work is embodied in a single place and time, or that on the other hand it is a platonic entity (performances and scores being tokens of the abstract ineffable design), then it could be argued instead that the work is the sum of the various parts that shape a listener's anticipation and experience of a piece of music and his or her reflection upon it. Loosely following David Horn's example (Horn, 2000: 18-28), these defining parts might be characterised like so:

(1.) To begin with there is the matter of a work's surface *identity* – what distinguishes it instantly from other examples of works – however, this may only be fully apparent after considering all of the following aspects;

(2.) The *realisation* of the work through performance and/or some other recognition of it as a successful *endeavour*;

(3.) The association of the work with an *author*, and an integrated body of works to which the individual work is related in some demonstrable manner (the primary model would be Beethoven's oeuvre);

(4.) The work's *originality*, in terms of the way in which it combines invention (how satisfactorily it operates within its own observable limits and those of comparable types of work) with individuality (how the work distinguishes itself by exceeding prescribed limits);

(5.) All of the above may give the work an exemplary reputation leading to its inclusion within a *canon* of model works (and beyond that the eventual attainment of an *aura*[39]). In addition, there are two discernable aspects which give a legalistic authority to the forgoing identifying aspects of the work:

(6.) Its recognition in law as the *property* of an author;

(7.) And finally, the existence of a *blueprint* (score) from which the work may be renewed in successive performances.

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[39] 'Aura' is here understood in the sense criticized by Walter Benjamin (1936/1992) who argues that particular art objects are considered to have transcended the limits of the specialist's canon into the wider public consciousness to embody intrinsic cultural, philosophical, religious, or nationalist values which convey a technical and spiritual uniqueness (examples would include Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, or Leonardo's *La Gioconda*, which because of their international renown might be thought of as secular icons). Benjamin also draws attention to the underlying influence of economic value and power relations upon the development of an artwork's aura. Applying Benjamin's ideas to music is problematical in the sense that there is no tangible object that can be transformed into an auratic icon, however the association has often been suggested by defenders of the musical work concept when discussing pieces that have assumed canonical status.

Rather than accepting that the work simply *is*, in the sense of existing in a quasi-mystical limbo or as 'hard-wired' into the collective unconscious, the work concept could be better said to be created in the dialogue and friction between the parameters just described. This dialogic approach to uncovering a piece's work status would not be sufficient for those who have been engaged in establishing the concept of the musical work as the historically specific development which I am about to describe. Such an approach would be considered too general and lacking in the necessary stylistic exclusivity to the forms of music around which the work concept evolved. However, it will be worth returning to this dialogical position when I come to describe the relationship between the end-orientation of the 'closed' work and the process-led 'open' work.

The History of the Work Concept

To discuss the musical work concept is not simply to invoke Western classical music, but more specifically the symphonic concert tradition. While this may seem a very limited perspective to take in an age where there is almost instant access to any variety of musical sounds from around the globe, and concert halls are no longer the sole preserve of symphonic music, it is the case that the concept of the musical work was modelled on the practices of classical music and so consequently it is this music that has been the focus of attention for those who discuss the work concept (Dahlhaus, 1987; Goehr, 1992; Scruton, 1997; Godlovitch, 1998; Davies, 2001). According to Goehr, this is in some measure a form of "conceptual imperialism" (Goehr, 1992: 245) based upon a rewriting of the musical past by a dominant Europeanised culture. Along with several other commentators, Goehr locates the clear emergence of the musical work concept around the year 1800 following the French Revolution, the introduction of copyright laws, and the growing private and secular patronage of the arts among the rising middle classes. The novelist Milan Kundera has commented on this shift in perception or growing cultural self-awareness, when audiences began to rediscover the music heard by past generations:

"Bach was thus the first composer to establish his place in the memory of later generations; with him, nineteenth-century Europe not only discovered an

important piece of music's past, it also discovered music *history*. Europe saw that Bach was not just any past but rather a past that was radically different from the present..." (Kundera, 1995: 62)

From the beginning of the nineteenth century the efforts of various musical societies, and individuals such as Felix Mendelssohn, were directed towards persuading the concert-going public that older music such as that by Bach was no longer simply an esoteric favourite, a secret guarded by the elite of living composers, but that Bach ought to be considered as both an artistic 'contemporary' of living composers *and* elevated as the idealised source of musical inspiration. Goehr notes that this tendency did not take effect immediately and only properly began to work its way into the musical culture towards the end of the nineteenth century. This was aided by a strange mixture of the growing interest in the academic study of music history (which lent an authoritative weight to older music), and a Romanticised version of the past encouraged by performers and the various nationalist – especially Germanic – movements prevalent during the century (Goehr, 1992: 246). By the mid twentieth century these 're-(en)visionings' of the musical past had managed to embed many of their values deep into Western culture, and that of the work concept in particular.

There are two main reasons why it is that symphonic concert music was seen to best serve the values which orbited the work concept, and these are given plainly by Carl Dahlhaus in his essay 'On the decline of the concept of the musical work' (Dahlhaus, 1987: 220-33). The first of these reasons is the requirement that the total shape of a piece ought to be clearly apprehended and memorable to the listener. This does not mean that the formal design should be simplistic, but that the outline of the piece should display a consistent developmental profile enabling the listener to engage with matters of formal complexity on a deeper level than that afforded by 'social music making' (for example, collective singing). According to Dahlhaus, the repetitive, block-like simplicity of design, which is a feature of much social music making, does not invite the kind of detached listening or attention to form and structure which he describes as proper to a piece deserving of work status because the focus is upon moment to moment change and interaction between the performers. Avant-garde composition and improvisation are ruled out for having formal designs that are too complex or confusing in their attention to (passing) detail to make the

necessary larger formal shapes that can be made to cohere in the mind of the ideal listener. Additionally, Dahlhaus states that for a piece of music to be recognised as a 'work' its musical processes must adhere to "a clear, as it were, *architectonic* form" (220, my italics). In other words, a composition should be able to suggest to the listener a sense of having some variety of permanent existence comparable to those qualities which have traditionally ascribed work status to painting and the plastic arts.

The Classical formal models that became established in the late eighteenth century were seen to demonstrate an appropriate intelligibility of shape which emphasised the importance of having clearly demarcated sections bound together by a 'logical' development and distribution of themes and motives. In this music sections were to be handled with an ear for proportion and balance. Repetitions of sections were expected to be integrated in such a manner that a consistent larger design would be produced (a basic example being the arch shape which is the backbone of sonata form). Furthermore, the texture of the music was to be immediately comprehensible to the listener. The position of most nineteenth-century commentators, as summed up by Dahlhaus, ruled out most polyphonic music for being too 'learned' and structurally sophisticated for the kind of listening he argued that the work concept encourages. His justification is that such music is better heard 'from the inside' as a participating performer. Therefore the vertical texture of an example of a musical work must also be sharply defined to emphasise not just melody or contrapuntal line, but (tonal) harmony.

One might want to ask why other kinds of music such as chamber music – of which several examples are held in high regard in the canons of Western music – appear not to fit the requirements of an account of the work concept like Dahlhaus's. One answer would be to regard such pieces as *informing* the make up of the work concept, along with the contributions made by opera and sacred music to the aesthetic origins of the work and the symphonic concert experience. Pre-eighteenth-century orchestral music (such as the concertos of Vivaldi or Bach) has an ambivalent position in this respect, despite claims that the first inklings of the work concept arose

in the sixteenth century (Strohm, 2000).[40] At the centre of Dahlhaus's position (much like Goehr) is the argument that the musical work concept was not established as an idea in common use until the nineteenth century. The implication of this is that the orchestral music of Vivaldi and Bach, for example, ought to be regarded in a similar manner to chamber music within the confines of this debate – something that is related to the work concept, but does not necessarily satisfy all of its requirements because of elements such as its contrapuntal density and harmonic waywardness when compared with the Classical symphonic model.

'Absolute Music'

At the heart of this confusion is the idea of 'absolute music'. Indeed, Roger Scruton notes that absolute music is "not so much an agreed idea as an aesthetic problem" (Scruton, 2001: 36).[41] The problem with the term absolute music is the fact that it stands for an idealistically *pure* music, and so the attempt to pin down an example of absolute music in the real world of performances and audiences is not likely to have an entirely fruitful end. As Scruton observes, absolute music gained currency during the nineteenth century partly in opposition to Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* which aimed to synthesise the arts through drama.[42] By contrast, absolute music can be seen as possessing (if not quite embodying) qualities that are as near to an ultimate manifestation of an autonomous music, free of functionality. Without extra-musical influence or responsibilities, the intention behind absolute music was to shift attention to the formal design of the music or rather the clarity with which the structure of a piece is conveyed to the listener. However, the appearance of absolute music along with the rise of the Romantic tendency in the arts did not create as sharp a division in practice as its advocates may have liked to claim. The

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[40] Dahlhaus and Goehr acknowledge the concept's earlier origins but discount them for lacking the more precise definition and wider currency given by nineteenth-century artists and thinkers.

[41] See also Dahlhaus (1989), and Chua (1999).

[42] Chua (1999: 224) notes that it was in fact Wagner who made the first definitive use of the term 'absolute music' in order to discredit its relevance or aesthetic 'necessity' in the face of his own music dramas which, of course, he viewed to be fully capable of engaging with the *zeitgeist*. Therefore Wagner saw the 'purity' of absolute music (its refusal to be sullied by reference to the 'extra-musical') as its weakness.

symphony, which Dahlhaus conceived of as the prime candidate for work status, would also appear to be a good example of absolute music in practice; however, several of the most important examples of this form have, to varying degrees, had programmatic associations given them by composers and contemporary audiences – Beethoven's third, and sixth symphonies are perhaps the most obvious examples. In addition, the relationship of symphonic form to absolute music is further challenged by pieces such as the Ninth Symphony and the subsequent emergence (in response to the Ninth) of the symphonic poem in the music of Berlioz and Liszt. If the symphony has a problematic relationship with absolute music, then it would appear that absolute music might only be properly applied, if at all, to music which takes the supposedly 'abstract' motivic extravaganza of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as its model.

The reason for referring to absolute music in the context of the work concept is in order to draw attention to the problem at the core of such a limited classification given by theorists like Dahlhaus to the kinds of music appropriately discussed under the banner of the work concept. The notion of absolute music provides an awareness of the difficulty of satisfying a purist categorisation of pieces of music, but rather than setting exclusionary boundaries around the kinds of music that particular theorists have found value in, it may be more profitable (not to mention practical) to choose to make use of such concepts as the musical work and absolute music as points around which thoughts about pieces of music can orbit.

Aesthetic Autonomy

What both the concept of absolute music and the musical work have in common is to insist that a piece of music can and should have an autonomous existence free of the interference of external association. Whilst many commentators have noted the problems of establishing the autonomy of pieces of music, the defence of Classical music has, in general, been constituted in terms of its autonomy relative to the functionality perceived to be a feature common to other kinds of music making. The philosopher Theodore Gracyk (1996) has noted the difficulty or reluctance within aesthetics to consider a way of discussing value in artworks that does not privilege autonomy above other qualities. Gracyk sees the institutions of art and aesthetics as

providing a necessary protective shell for autonomy from more worldly values in the form of constructs such as the 'artworld' and the canon – most clearly demonstrated by George Dickie's institutional theory of art (Gracyk, 1996: 211. See also Dickie, 1974). Unlike commentators such as Dahlhaus, Gracyk considers avant-garde challenges to the institutions and ideas of the mainstream artworld to be operating in response to the values codified by those same institutions. He reasons that the avant-garde has not dismissed the central aim in Western art to instil "aesthetic pleasure in disinterested contemplation," (212) and as such it takes part in the same system of values such as the work concept which mainstream aesthetics and art criticism continue to advocate. These assumed aesthetic 'universals' have been clearly present in much avant-garde music where composers such as Boulez, Stockhausen, and even Cage have been engaged with the production and refinement of an *opera* (in the Latin sense of bodies of 'work'). With more improvised forms of music making the production of a body of work is much less evident, except through the making of recordings of performances (which I will not concern myself with here). Scores and plans for performance, where they are used by improvisers, tend to be treated in a much more provisional way than is even the case in John Cage's most open-ended pieces.[43] Yet there is a strong tendency within IEM towards privileging disinterested contemplation which is usually thought reserved for classical music, and which I shall discuss later.

Gracyk attempts to redefine the concept of autonomy in defence of popular music, arguing against the watering down of popular music's own qualities to fit those given to 'high art'. Instead, he proposes the idea (following Fredric Jameson) that autonomy should refer to a piece of music's 'portability', referring to "a work's capacity for survival outside the originating [protective] framework" (212). This is autonomy understood as 'freedom to roam', where a piece of music can be appreciated with the minimum of knowledge (cultural capital) regarding its original context. However, this interpretation of autonomy, while it proposes something akin to a literal liberation of aesthetic thinking from the hegemony of mainstream

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[43] Cage's music, broadly speaking, relies on an approach to preparing for performance that can be clearly related (albeit in an alienated fashion) to the preparation of most Classical repertoire. However, the line between a score or composition as a 'work' and as flexible material for improvisation is only faintly drawn, and Cage's compositions and more improvisational musical experiments can be thought of as hovering either side of the border.

aesthetics and the world of art criticism, is problematic. It appeals to a universal idea that certain musical processes are "purely intrinsic" (212), and plays on the notion that popular music needs "minimal cultural capital" for its appreciation. But Gracyk largely overlooks the economic capital that enables various kinds of popular music to travel and embed itself in alien cultures, and furthermore, by appealing to intrinsic processes he runs the risk of falling back on similar kinds of received arguments made by many advocates of so-called absolute music about the 'naturalness' of particular musical processes. One could argue that Gracyk's understanding of autonomy is limited: if a 'free' action is made without considering the context in which it is articulated such as the local and wider effects it produces it is, arguably, not an autonomous act but one which is merely oblivious to the way in which it is limited and shaped by the wider culture in which it operates. It may seem perverse to talk of aesthetic autonomy as if it could be made to relate more or less directly to social freedoms, especially when music (whether 'serious' or popular) is insulated by the institutions of art and aesthetics or those of commercial entertainment. Nevertheless, if certain kinds of music are indeed more 'portable' than others, it is worth considering the ways in which they are able to (re)contextualize themselves and to what extent they alter existing contexts for appreciating music. I do not intend to continue to discuss the music that Gracyk concerns himself with, but of relevance here is the way in which practitioners of IEM often pride themselves on their aim to create the music anew for every context in which they perform, and so an understanding of autonomy as portability may have applications for this kind of music making.[44]

One of the most important reasons given by commentators for advocating the canonical Western art interpretation of musical autonomy is that those musical works which historically belong to this aesthetic disposition display a sense of being self-contained or are described as having some sense of critical self-awareness. This quality is perceived as emerging from the dialectic enacted between musical material and large scale form (the music of Beethoven is often singled out as archetypal in this

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[44] See Prévost (1995) in particular regarding both the aesthetic imperative for improvisation to involve a continual re-evaluation in response to the moment of performance, and also as an example of the social, political, and ethical connections that many members of the improvised music scene view as an integral factor in deciding to make music in this manner. See also Cardew (1974) on this latter aspect for an alternative view.

regard). However, as Daniel Chua (1999) notes, both the 'self-awareness' that Classical music may display, and the eternal abstract existence that Neo-Platonist philosophers (for example, Scruton and Levinson) argue in favour of do not in and of themselves ensure that such works (whether 'absolute' or not) are able to operate as autonomous entities outside of the institutions that support them. Indeed, the institutions that enforce the idea of the musical work might be held responsible for undermining the music's work status. Chua states that it is the desire of art critics and aestheticians to maintain particular works and the discourse which surrounds them but while this impulse serves to prolong the existence of the discourse, it also threatens the existence of the entire enterprise:

> "In reality the timelessness of art is a delusion. Musical monuments decay. They exist in eternity only as long as the institutional discourse perpetuates itself as new; when the discourse exhausts itself, the aesthetic illusion is broken. Thus modernity reaches a crisis whenever its mechanism comes to self-consciousness, and this is perhaps the case with musicology. The self-reflective and critical gestures of musicology issue from the realisation that the monuments they were supposed to immortalise are only mortal; the self-maintenance which musicology believed to be the property of autonomous music has turned out to be a function of its own discourse." (Chua, 1999: 243)

Aesthetic Distance & Conventions of Listening

Much as galleries came to be regarded as spaces that conferred 'work' status upon paintings and sculpture by the fact of their presentation within such a space, the social arrangement of the concert became inextricably linked with those musical examples considered to be expressions of the work concept.[45] (Dahlhaus draws attention less to the fact that this is socially mediated than he does to its aesthetic implications.) The concert hall functioned as a frame providing a limit within which the work could be explored and *perceived*: and this is the second principal reason why

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[45] Marcel Duchamp notoriously exploited and subverted the role of the gallery and other institutions of the art world in conferring art status upon the products of artists in the Richard Mutt incident. In 1917 Duchamp had been on the panel of an art prize and – partly in an effort to shake up the staid attitudes of his fellow judges – secretly submitted a porcelain urinal, unaltered apart from his signing the object "R. Mutt", and giving it the title *Fountain*. The other judges rejected it and Duchamp resigned in mock indignation (DeDuve, 1992). Despite its evident prankster element this act was also intended to convey a serious artistic statement by Duchamp, and the incident paved the way for his subsequent artistic activity as well as that of later conceptual and pop artists in the presentation of everyday objects and everyday activity as worthy of public *artistic* attention and not simply private aesthetic experience.

Dahlhaus argues that symphonic concert music is inextricably bound to the work concept. This is predicated on Dahlhaus's first reason – the music's formal emphasis – as described above.

The clear demarcation of a piece's musical shape or form – its progress horizontally through time in conjunction with its vertical texture – and its performance within the boundaries of the concert hall tradition make possible what Dahlhaus refers to as "formal hearing" (222). This 'formal hearing' or "perception from the outside", is, as Dahlhaus says, "constitutive for music which presents itself as a work", and so according to this position the aesthetic aim of concert music is the projection of musical form – in particular large-scale form – to the listener who is made suitably receptive by the conditions imposed by the concert hall setting (which are perhaps implied in the shape of the music itself). Dahlhaus contrasts this with more overtly polyphonic and other kinds of 'social music-making' where he claims attention is paid to *structure* rather than form. Though he does not make the distinction clear, the implication is that Dahlhaus thinks of structure as referring to musical relationships on the small, immediately experienced scale: the things performers should be aware of as they play, such as issues relating to the co-ordination of rhythmic counterpoint or changes of key. In this case *form* would be the experience of the larger picture or how the smaller structural aspects of a piece combine to make larger shapes. Therefore listening from 'inside the music', as a performer does, one cannot, so Dahlhaus argues, discern the formal design of a work because one cannot take a detached view over the music one is making in a performance – the implication is that this experience is as true for a listening audience.[46]

The notion that it is impossible for the performer – especially a creative performer – to achieve a detached perspective on a piece of music is one that has continued to influence certain areas of recent musical culture, particularly amongst composers who have close associations with the institution of the orchestra and place themselves in opposition to some of the more radical developments Dahlhaus criticises and which figure largely in this thesis. The American composer Elliott

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[46] Dahlhaus does not comment on whether, for example, an orchestral oboist has a similar 'inside the music' experience of a symphonic work.

Carter comments on what he regards as the superiority of the decisions of a composer over those of the performer of improvised and indeterminate music:

> "A composer is in command of time; he lives above time, controlling all of his material at will. He can correct the beginning of a work while the performer is literally caught in the flow of time." (Cited in Wolff, 1998: 78 & 80)

Fundamental to the concept of the musical work is its (platonic) existence 'outside time' – its realisation 'inside time' as a performance is merely a token of the work. Just as Carter stresses that the composer operates outside time, so Dahlhaus's argument requires that the work is perceived by the listener to have an existence beyond that of its immediate temporal manifestation in a performance. Therefore the conditions of a performance must emphasise the piece's formal qualities to a significantly greater degree than it does the sensual (fleeting) appeal of orchestral sound. The aim is to stimulate a disinterested kind of listening that is conducive to the recognition and appreciation of a musical work as a work: to underline the fact that this is something that will guide one's aesthetic experience rather than remain an arbitrary appreciation of a passing moment, and it is partly the function of the concert hall to satisfy these conditions.

The 'formality' of the concert hall environment and of the concert experience as a whole, is geared away from the intimacies and indulgences afforded by private and social music making and towards an *observational* stance to the musical experience. This is underlined by the physical scale of such events: the distance of the listeners from the performers, the raised platform from which the musicians can be seen and heard, the arrangement of the audience seated in rows all facing in the same direction towards the performers, and the concert etiquette of not speaking during the music and only applauding at designated times and in 'appropriate' ways. All of which adds up to an experience designed to provoke and maintain a receptive, involved, but aware state of mind through a separation of performer and audience greater than that found in most of the music Dahlhaus excludes from work status.[47]

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[47] This is not to say that the concert environment succeeds in achieving this state of detachment in the listener any more than, for example, Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* will

This leads me to what is perhaps the root of Dahlhaus's definition of the work concept, and the most contentious aspect of his argument. Dahlhaus asserts that *aesthetic perception* is what the work concept aims to induce in the listener, and because of this works ought to be judged by aesthetic rather than psychological criteria, by which he believes other kinds of music – specifically, improvisation – may be more suitably appreciated. This distinction between the aesthetic and the psychological is a problematic one and needs to be handled carefully. Under certain circumstances, the aesthetic may be held to be the subject of psychology because it concerns itself with a particular kind of perception, namely the investigation of the senses for what would appear to be their own ends rather than to obtain specific environmental information to be acted upon in the course of day-to-day living. However, considered as a philosophical category, aesthetics – in conjunction with the world of art criticism – proposes that aesthetic perception is a critical stance consciously taken up to deal with the exploration of sensual experience. The aesthetic in this instance is concerned not simply with indulging in the sensual qualities of matter (for example, the peculiar roughness of a table) but also with what it is that defines the shape of that experience and encourages something that is sustained and dynamic (for instance, the way in which the use of line in painting directs the eye about a picture, guiding the way in which colour, texture, and narrative are appreciated). The suggestion is then that symphonic concert hall music fulfils Dahlhaus's requirement by keeping the listener from 'losing oneself in the music.'[48]

Dahlhaus wishes to situate aesthetic perception squarely within the domain of philosophical aesthetics, but by making other kinds of musical activity that do not fit the requirements of the work concept the subject of psychology, he consequently

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always succeed in suppressing a cathartic response from his audience in favour of an active kind of reflection upon social conditions.

[48] This definition of the musical work as a regulator of experience may be seen as an attempt to circumvent Kant's exclusion of music from the third of his categories concerning judgement – that which is 'good', or forms a guiding principle for behaviour. The effort on the part of the advocates of the musical work (regarded as symphonic concert music) is to raise the 'ethical' standard of music up beyond Kant's first category of judgment (that which is sensually pleasing). Dahlhaus refers in an earlier essay to "Kant's [damning] statement that music was 'more pleasure than culture'" (Dahlhaus, 1987: 18) because it cannot convey a moral message, only a transient, sensory experience.

excludes non-concert music as suitable material for aesthetics. In essence, the argument is that the music that Dahlhaus excludes from his definition of the work is the subject of psychology because it fosters aesthetic *activity* but not aesthetic perception, or to phrase it more appropriately, aesthetic *reflection*. As those aspects that determine how one gains an appreciation of such 'non-work' music tend to involve participation within the music (as a performer or as a listener happily 'lost' in the dance, complexity, or confusion of the music), they might be considered as lacking opportunity for reflection or that they simply fall short of the demands made by the work concept. If one accepts this position of perception regarded as reflection then it follows that one cannot reflect in a disinterested way upon an experience whilst having that experience because one is too intimately involved in the details of the passing moment to gain a full impression of the work's shape.

The problem remains of determining what aesthetic perception is. I have suggested that it could be counted as experience mediated by the conditions of the art world rather than left (festering?) with the listener's own devices, but it appears that Dahlhaus wants to suggest that aesthetic perception is something that stands apart from the social sphere. In this respect his thinking shows the influence of German Idealism, which, while this is quite appropriate since the work concept mostly grew from Kantian roots, is problematic if one reads such philosophy in the light of G.E. Moore's criticisms (Kermerling, 2006). Moore argues that the only evidence offered by Idealist philosophers that something is perceivable (or that it exists) is that which is given by whoever is entertaining the perception, in which case such a position runs the risk of lapsing into solipsism rather than uncovering immutable truths accessible to all who choose to engage with this particular experience.

If Dahlhaus espouses a position that is, at the very least, strongly influenced by Idealist philosophy, he also problematises it by insisting on the particular social conditions of the concert hall experience. While these conditions are intended to detach one from the sort of social involvement in the musical experience had in participatory music making and other non-work kinds of music, the concert experience is still very much a social experience. If aesthetic perception is something essentially abstract, that is to say, at a remove from ordinary social or individualistic experience, then one must at least question why it is thought that a particular social

arrangement (even one as artificially constructed as the symphonic concert), will serve aesthetic perception any better than the same music performed privately for one listener (for example, as a recording or in a chamber-like setting) or in a large and busy pub. Christopher Small notes the ritualistic nature of the concert tradition, suggesting links between the customs of so-called 'primitive' cultures and the Western world's overt and historical sense of 'self-awareness':

> "What, then, is a ritual? I take it to be an act which dramatizes and re-enacts the shared mythology of a culture or a social group, the mythology which unifies and, for its members, justifies that culture or group. [...] A symphony concert, as an important ritual of the power-holding class in our society, shows the modern westerner to be as much dependent on, and, to the extent that he suppresses any awareness of them, bound by his mythologies as any member of a 'traditional' society." (Small, 1987: 7-8)

If we accept this view then we can read Dahlhaus's insistence on the separation of aesthetic perception from psychological and socially-mediated experience as reflecting a transcendentalist approach to aesthetic philosophy that is ultimately bound up with religious and mythological custom, and can therefore be regarded as a social creation.

I want to suggest that the rarefied kind of aesthetic perception Dahlhaus describes is both not quite so readily detachable from psychological experience (both individualistic and socially mediated) as he suggests, and that the music excluded from the work concept may also be regarded in terms of aesthetic perception (and therefore, potentially within the remit of the work concept), and that in either case aesthetic perception as a philosophical category of understanding does not become debased. The confusion in Dahlhaus's argument arises from the attempt to separate philosophical (universalistic) categories from psychological individualistic/social) kinds of understanding. It is reasonable in terms of the history of the work concept to want to separate the two categories, but faced with finding ways to deal with music that falls outside the work concept's exclusive remit – in particular music that has built on aspects of the musical work – the opposition becomes quite shaky. (Although, I have not made the problem go away merely by asking that philosophical and psychological perception ought to be integrated or brought closer together.)

Participatory music making has a socially conditioned aspect in that performers, and to some extent listeners, are engaged in activities that are not wholly musical or, rather, not specifically concerned with music when it is regarded as an object separate from the activity of its performance (such as the co-ordination of movement, and the motivation of the ensemble by fellow performers and audience members alike). On the other hand, these activities may give rise to aesthetic experiences, and experiences that are sustained by musical activity and encourage further exploration by those having the experience. Similarly, despite the conventions of the concert hall, most concert music cannot help but draw upon the same activities and at some level the same kinds of experience by the fact of its being a performance.

Distancing & Disinterestedness

If the opposition between 'aesthetic perception' and 'psychological experience' is muddled or simply not valid, and aesthetic perception must be regarded as a psychological process of some sort as well as a philosophical category, it should be asked what function it has that distinguishes it from 'everyday' psychological perception. The most obvious answer is that its purpose is to encourage a disinterested perspective upon an experience, one that aims at the process of matching up a concept with the unformed experience. In other words, its purpose is to enable the listener to consider the existence of the work as an entity with an enduring character irrespective of time and the nature of musical performance.

It could be argued that encouraging a disinterested, reflective state will not automatically lead one towards aesthetic perception. As the philosopher Oswald Hanfling has said with regard to the role of distancing and disinterestedness in art, "To distinguish disinterestedness in the aesthetic sense, we must refer to the aesthetic qualities of the objects concerned." (Hanfling, 2000: 90), otherwise there is little difference between aesthetic appreciation and "most of our observation of what goes on around us." Dahlhaus's definition of the work is in this sense problematic because it is concerned only to a very small degree with the concrete aspects of musical experience, and those aspects it does consider, such as the concert environment, might

be regarded as peripheral to the musical content of the work that one is listening to, which is, usually, the purpose of entering into the experience.

I would like to consider, briefly, Dahlhaus's argument in the light of some of Hanfling's thoughts on the part that distance plays in aesthetics, as it is clearly a subject of importance to Dahlhaus's understanding of the work concept. Hanfling does not refer to the work concept as such, but he does consider the position of art and the art world as something that stands at a remove from more contingent types of aesthetic experience (which according to Dahlhaus would be the subject of psychology). Hanfling argues that participation by an audience does not necessarily mean that distance between the audience and the work is lost – as long as there is some agreement that participation may be a part of the experience, and the audience is willing to accept this, distance will not be dissolved. Hanfling gives as an example, children taking an active part in the telling of a story, arguing that participation is an element that guides their involvement, and so the storytelling is not undermined because the children are, effectively, playing a role. Participation is in this instance 'ritualised' or contained by the conventions of storytelling. The children may shift rapidly between playing a role and being 'themselves' but are generally likely to distinguish when those lines have been crossed when at play in a group.

Dahlhaus argues that the work encourages a sense of detachment so that one can reflect upon the work as a unified entity in such a way that it discourages more capricious, flippant readings, but Hanfling suggests that emotional engagement with the aesthetic object encourages distance from everyday matters. This in turn leads to there being less distraction – and so less distance – between the artwork and the audience:

> "The more absorbed we are in a work of art – including [our] emotional engagement ... – the more distanced we are from our practical concerns."
> (Hanfling, 93)

There would appear to be a conflict of interests here. Both Dahlhaus and Hanfling say that it is necessary for the appreciation of art to place oneself at a remove from everyday, practical concerns (in Dahlhaus's case, this would include the explicitly social aspect of music making). For Hanfling this entails an emotional absorption in

the work, but according to Dahlhaus this would suggest the state of being 'inside the music' that occurs with social music making and other non-work kinds of music. Hanfling brings us closer to what is, perhaps, a more 'realistic' way of understanding our engagement with the work of art and the limitations of the work concept, but his approach does not offer a way of reconciling the prevailing idea of the work (as a historical construct) with more general involved musical experience. I shall leave this matter unresolved for the time being as I will now deal more specifically with alternative ways of approaching the conceptualisation of 'non-work' or improvised music. To begin with I consider what might be thought of as a 'degraded' kind of work concept.

Alternatives and Challenges:
1.) The Aesthetics of Imperfection

Improvised music suffers from a 'problem' in the sense that, as described above, musicology and musical aesthetics are largely founded on a particular idea about (or ideal of) Western Classical music. And as such musical improvisation, when it has been considered in the past, was viewed as either irrelevant to the main concern of the production of artworks or – slightly better – as a debased form of composition. With the rise of recorded music, and especially with regard to its close association with popular commercial music, it has become much more difficult to ignore the various challenges to established aesthetic positions posed by what might be loosely described as performance-generated music (as opposed to fully composed and predetermined). However, while the advocates of new musical forms are all too ready to make broad claims for the music (mostly musicians and journalists), commentators from the field of aesthetics have been faced with a need to match up the apparent values that arise from out of new musical forms and styles with those associated with established philosophical categories and arguments. This is not simply a matter of conservatism but an attempt to retain a unified aesthetic theory that shows new musical forms to be coherent beyond the bounds of their enculturated audiences. Two recent articles by philosophers (Brown, 2000; Hamilton, 2000) discuss improvisation in response to an idea posited by philosopher and jazz devotee Ted Gioia (1988).

Gioia begins with the view that improvisation is an 'imperfect art', "doomed, it seems, to offer a pale imitation of the perfection attained by composed music" (Gioia, 1988: 66), nevertheless he attempts to discover why, despite this status, it still manages to command his attention. Hamilton and Brown follow Gioia's work from a more critical and less anecdotal position, but both accept the underlying assumption that improvisation is indeed an imperfect art. Their aim is not to undermine improvised music as something less worthy of study by aesthetic criticism than the Western Classical mainstream but to demonstrate that it ought to be considered on its own terms. Yet, in making use of the phrase 'the aesthetics of imperfection' all three writers choose to accept the dominance of the Western Classical model, with the implication that improvised music is its binary 'other'. If such a position is the case then the values found within improvised music would have to be an inversion of those of the Western Classical tradition, but such a drastic demarcation of these rival aesthetics is not made (and surely not intended) by any of these writers. The discrepancy is between the philosophical grounding of Gioia, Brown and Hamilton (which could be broadly described as mainstream Anglo-American 'ordinary language' and analytic philosophy, both of which, ultimately, look to a neo-platonic ideal) and the affirmative values embodied in jazz and improvised music that they wish to draw attention to. Theory and practice rarely meet on equal terms, but if improvised music is to be discussed within the bounds of mainstream philosophical aesthetics, then there ought to be some recognition of the historical and cultural incongruity between the philosophical model and the musical practice in order to have a more productive kind of outcome. In other words the debate should be more balanced or equally questioning of the intentions and methods of both parties: philosophy and music. The tendency of this aesthetics of *imperfection* (as discussed by Brown, Gioia, and Hamilton) is to take the established philosophical model of music as read, with improvised music having to find some accommodation within these strictures.

Despite these deficiencies, the advocates of imperfection do have things of interest to offer in terms of answering the complaints of mainstream musical aesthetics. Brown attempts to define the formal parameters of jazz improvisation in order to counter the criticisms of Adorno (1941) and others who argue that such music lacks artistic complexity because it either falls into meandering incoherence or the

banality of overused ideas. Although I am less interested in the stylistic specifics of jazz improvisation, these categorisations can be summarised in a more generalised way.

The core parameters of improvisation identified by Brown move in a circular fashion from the *situation* of the improviser (that the music exists in the moment of performance), to the *forced choice* brought about by the situation (that something must happen in the performance, and everything that does must be dealt with as a part of the music), and finally, that the performer has *no script* to guide his or her actions (Brown, 2000: 114). Of course, with most jazz improvisation there is an underlying thematic, harmonic and rhythmic structure but this does not predetermine the notes played during an improvisation in the same way as does the interpretation of a 'fully-composed' score, and so the improviser is always drawn back to the performing situation for ways in which to develop musical ideas.

From these circumstantial parameters are derived kinds of risk and corresponding compensations which help to determine the value of an improvisation for performers and listeners. The risks that Brown describes may be better thought of as necessary hurdles to encourage an engaging performance. The first of these risks acts as a *"regulative ideal"* (119) where the performer's intention is to create a performance that is coherent and communicative for the listener and is realised in the moment. Allied to this is a *"secondary* regulative ideal": that the performer is encouraged to seek out opportunities for surprise within the music. Lastly (and often exceptionally), there is a *"tertiary* regulative ideal" (120), where the intention is to reach beyond accepted stylistic conventions so as to transform them and create new musical boundaries. This third regulative ideal builds upon territory established by the first two but also threatens to undermine them and the total coherence of the music if the attempt is judged to have gone 'too far'.

According to Brown, the compensations for taking these kinds of risks in combination with these regulative ideals include: the likelihood of drawing the audience and fellow musicians into "the activity of generating [the musical] product" (121). This in turn increases "appreciation of the ways players convert their confrontation [between group and instrument] ... into an individualized feature of style" (122), which is borne out of the tension between the desire for a good end result

and the potential for failure. And, finally, this can increase an audience's attention to the ways in which a player may "redeem the imperfections for which their daring is responsible" (122) – for example, the way in which a performer can demonstrate that his or her seemingly wayward performance is able to draw its constituent elements together into a coherent musical whole.[49]

Much non-improvised music could be said to contain elements of the risks and compensations which are described above, especially during performance, but what distinguishes improvisation in this instance is that these factors are *necessary* to its character. Where compositional structures are employed they are usually treated as a springboard for improvisation and recomposition. Classical audiences may go to hear 'Brendel's Schubert' but there remains an expectation of fidelity to a notion of 'Schubert' that is qualitatively distinct from the flexibility taken by improvising musicians with a composition's identity, not to mention music improvised 'from scratch'. By shifting the focus to performance, the aesthetic of imperfection emphasises improvisation's transitory existence, and therefore takes up an oppositional stance to a perfectionist aesthetic whose essence is an idealistic 'outside time' conception of music as an art of *composition* more so than it is one of performance. Hamilton makes the important point that improvisation – in his conception of the term, and in most ethnomusicological models too (Nettl, 1998; Hall, 1992) – is not "a kind of instant composition" (Hamilton, 2000: 171). Instant composition bears with it the implication that the music is less considered than something that has been fully prepared before the event of its performance. If improvisation were simply a type of compositional shorthand then an aesthetic of imperfection would indeed be a degraded or simply negative version of the perfectionist aesthetic.

Hamilton offers imperfectionism as a rival to traditional perfectionist aesthetics, arguing that the prime examples of each aesthetic contain aspects of the

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[49] Recordings of Thelonious Monk's 'stumbling style' of improvising usually reveal this to be an essential stylistic thumbprint that demonstrates a thoroughgoing examination of a piece's thematic cells through rhythmic articulation searching out the limits of his band's and his own ability to 'swing' the music and stretch the harmony through the use of 'blue' notes.

other.[50] A perfectionist aesthetic is, in Hamilton's eyes, equated with a Neo-Platonist view of aesthetics – in other words the ideal of music it espouses is something abstract that need not find its ultimate outlet in performance, in fact it may be diminished by being performed. However, the example Hamilton draws upon to illustrate how imperfectionism contains aspects of perfectionism within itself is problematic, as he freely admits (172) – this is the notion of 'authenticity' of performance as demonstrated by the Early Music Revival of the past forty or so years. The authentic performance movement could initially have been viewed as attempting to extend musical Platonism by establishing the intended media and manner of performance envisioned by the composer, thereby finding the artistic 'truth' of the music. Improvising musicians would most likely object to this notion of authenticity and musical truth, choosing instead to emphasise authenticity in performance as a commitment to the moment of performance, attending to every gesture and its potential consequences (see Prévost, 1995 in particular). Any subsequent 'return' to similar musical terrain in this kind of situation, whether purposeful or accidental, would have to be approached afresh, in order to convince improvising musicians such as Prévost, in response to the changed context.

Many of the leading practitioners of today who are associated with authentic performance (or 'historically informed' performance, as is increasingly preferred) are more likely to favour the improviser's conception of authenticity than the former ideal of fixed musical truths, which has been somewhat discredited by performers, if not necessarily all philosophers (contrast, for example, Kerman et al, 1992, with Scruton, 1997 or Davies, 2003). This leaves authentic performance in a much less convincing position as a useful ideal because of this shift from a platonic to a *performative* principle. At the heart of the matter is a notion of authenticity as a self-critical examination of habitual practice which is alien to a fixed platonic model of music (in standing apart from time, conceptually-speaking, it appears 'stuck in the past' in practice). However, this performative or motivational aim seems incompatible with an aesthetic that describes itself as imperfectionist. If the aim is to inspire (better) music-

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[50] For example, the combination of thematic integration and twelve-note procedures of Webern on the one hand, and on the other guitarist Derek Bailey's eschewal of repetition and his refusal to assimilate conventional idiomatic musical ideas both result in what may at first hearing sound like they were created from closely-related forms of musical technique.

making – whether improvised or historically informed – then it ought to be more properly described as 'perfectionist' even if it is not in actual fact something that is ever perfectible: the confusion appears to be between intention, process, and outcome. And so I shall now turn to consider some more 'affirmative' alternatives to the 'closed' concept of the musical work.

2.) The 'Open' Work

Following the activities of composers after World War II who espoused a new radical aesthetic and technical language, attempts were made by some theorists to deal with these developments and determine their potential consequences for aesthetics. Interestingly, most of these theorists came from outside the mainstream of philosophical aesthetics – Anglo-American philosophy largely continued to follow analytic and Neo-Platonic models of philosophy which predisposed such thinkers to consider new artistic practices in terms of how successfully these measured up to pre-established conceptual models such as those associated with the 'closed' work discussed so far. As I described in the previous chapter, much of this new musical activity initially arose in mainland Europe, and this, perhaps, inclined continental thinkers to consider it worthy of attention in advance of Anglo-American theorists.[51] The composers themselves were keen to provide a theoretical basis for their music; however, this mostly took the form of (barely) disguised manifestos and technical accounts of their methods of composition, and so the impact was primarily ideological (and of pedagogical use to other composers) rather than properly investigative of its aesthetic implications (see Grant, 2001). Of those thinkers prepared to discuss the new music, Umberto Eco was one of the few to delve into its particular qualities.

In an essay originally published in 1959, 'The Poetics of the Open Work', Eco considers the challenges posed by the seemingly 'open' aesthetic advocated since Mallarmé by Modernists in a variety of artistic fields (Eco, 1981: 47-66). He begins with a description of four pieces written in the late 1950s by composers closely

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[51] The few American (and later, British) musicians involved in comparable activities, for example MEV, tended to enjoy more support in Europe than from musical institutions in the US. Although see Beal (2006) for a detailed study of the roundabout ways in which American artists have received official patronage.

associated with the Darmstadt School (*Sequenza I* for flute (1958) by Luciano Berio, *Klavierstück XI* (1956) by Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Troisième Sonate* for piano (1955-57/63) by Pierre Boulez, and *Scambi* for two-track tape (1957) by Henri Pousseur), all of which make a feature of offering choices to the performer that go beyond the usual requirements of interpretation as practised in most Classical music. According to Eco, unlike the ideal of absolute music or the closed work, these pieces,

> "appeal to the initiative of the individual performer, and hence they offer themselves, not as finite works ... but as 'open' works, which are brought to their conclusion by the performer at the same time as he experiences them on an aesthetic plane" (48-49).

Eco is keen not to confuse this 'openness' of technical means with the renewability and richness of interpretation enjoyed by canonical works which might otherwise be thought of as 'closed'; he does not simply equate the 'unfinished' fragmentary aspect of these new pieces with a more highly developed notion of interpretative openness. What interests Eco is how these pieces invite their audience, in his words, "to consider *why* the contemporary artist feels the need to work in this kind of direction" (50, Eco's italics), which in turn may inspire reflection upon the socio-historical and aesthetic factors that made such actions 'necessary'.

Eco refers to pieces like these that foreground their own structural incompleteness as *works in movement*, where there is no explicit interpretative agenda (as in the metaphysical knowledge to be extracted from the mediaeval and biblical examples Eco offers in his article, by way of comparison), and instead some form of dialogue is encouraged to explore the potential meanings to be created between the artwork, the performer, and the audience. Eco argues that what leads to such changes in artistic practice are changes in the way in which science and the wider culture view reality (57). Much like the focus in contemporary physics given to relativity and quantum mechanics, he claims that these new art practices reflect a "breakdown in the concept of causation", and more than this he states that,

> "the performer's freedom functions as part of the *discontinuity* which contemporary physics recognizes ... as an essential stage in all scientific verification procedures and also as the verifiable pattern of events in the subatomic world" (58).

Eco's case becomes a little shaky in terms of the relationship between new art practices, and the wider culture when he draws upon Husserl's observation that,

> "the sides of objects which are *actually perceived* suggest to the viewer's attention the unperceived sides which, at the present are viewed only in a non-intuitive manner and are expected to become elements of the succeeding perception." (Cited in Eco: 59)

In almost all of Eco's examples of modern artworks this ability to predict the missing element is undermined and cannot be properly applied in the way that Husserl, speaking of the conventions of perception, would have intended. In the case of the aleatoric serial music Eco discusses, a listener may *attempt* to rationalise the gestures which he or she hears into something more familiar. But with this kind of music one cannot hope to predict how the beginning of a phrase will be completed in a way that is comparable to the expectations that tonal music generates such as a particular kind of cadential resolution. This is because serial and aleatoric methods of composition are used expressly to avoid the kinds of predictability associated with tonality. A listener to this kind of music is always at least one step behind the music as it unfurls, and can only evaluate how one part fits with another from a cumulative sense of what has been heard, and then judging it to be consistent or inconsistent, or consonant or dissonant (relatively speaking) guided by knowledge and a feeling for the context created by the piece and its performance.

There are some other problems with the musical examples Eco chooses to illustrate his survey. These problems are forgivable to some extent in that the pieces in question are written by his contemporaries, and the wider musical implications of these pieces would, perhaps, have been less apparent at the time than their immediate impact (and, to be fair, Eco is at pains to stress that he is only attempting to air the issues he sees raised by the existence of these pieces). However, in drawing attention to Eco's work it is necessary to show how it may be better or more usefully applied. Despite the fact that all four pieces require the performer to be involved in the shaping of the final form, the amount of flexibility handed to the performer is deceptive ultimately to both the performer and the listener.

Berio's "*Sequence* [*sic*] for solo flute" (Eco: 47) is the most conventional of the pieces to which Eco refers. The performer's choice is limited to the area of rhythm and phrasing, and uses 'time-space' notation (in which duration is determined by the distance between notes on the stave)[52] to stimulate the performer's response. This makes the piece, in one respect, something like an extended study in rubato, and as such it seems to have at least one foot in the camp of the 'closed' work because of its extension rather than subversion of a performing tradition. The remaining three pieces allow the order of sections of the piece to be organised by the performer, which suggests that a new experience of the piece will be had by the listener every time he or she listens to a performance of the composition. What makes this 'reshuffling' problematic is that the serial musical language (for want of a better term) that each of these pieces is founded on, resists repetition and thematic development and yet it attempts to maintain some element of interior dynamism, or, at the very least, a sense of there being a global consistency of harmony, rhythm, and texture. The fracturing of a piece into re-arrangeable sections should not in itself disrupt a coherent sense of the identity of one of these pieces, because serialism's aesthetic favours fracture and dissonance over conventional notions of musical continuity. But the fact that the individual sections have their own internal dynamism (in terms of intervallic relationships and expressive gesture) means that whatever expressive 'logic' is found within each chunk of music is, potentially, neutralised by its indifferent juxtaposition. In the performing tradition of Western concert music there is an implicit expectation that the performer will aim to effect some kind of narrative continuity between the sections of a piece, but this is undermined by the schism between the composed relationships within each section, the performer's juxtaposition of larger structural shapes, and the global (cumulatively made) form of the piece – in other words the potential for spontaneity in the performance of these pieces is problematised because the choices given to the performers come loaded with the composer's unspoken expectations as to how the performer will interpret the options which he or she has supplied.

If Eco had turned to the music which had significantly influenced all four composers' decisions to introduce indeterminacy and performer freedoms into their

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[52] See also Cardew's criticisms of time-space notation (Cardew, 1961: pp. 21-22).

music a better fit might be found between a theory of a work in movement and musical practice. Each of the four composers was, in their own individual ways, reacting to the music and ideas brought to Europe by the American composer John Cage and his colleagues. What makes Cage's music of the 1950s more appropriate to Eco's ideas is its embrace of heterogeneous materials and structural designs that do not give emphasis to any one part of the music whether vertically in its density and texture or horizontally through time. Instead of the integral ordering of interval, rhythm, dynamic, and texture of Eco's composers, Cage allows everyday noise, speech, and unpredictable electronics to coexist with more conventionally musical sounds by rigorously refusing to integrate these parts. As a result what emerges has a global consistency that affords multiple responses to the diverse combinations and inconsistencies that arise on the local level. While this kind of anarchic approach may not give the sense of dynamism that Eco wishes us to infer by his phrase 'work in movement', Cage's music is a better example of a composer who wishes to make *use* of what an open aesthetic affords, placing it at the centre of his methodology, rather than simply drawing upon openness as another technique in his compositional arsenal, and it points the way towards a possible place for free improvisation (IEM) within the work concept debate.

Work vs. Script

As I described in chapter one, Cage's scores of the 1950s and 1960s often consisted of instructions from which the performer was to construct a performance instead of a completed score to be followed and interpreted in the conventional manner. For several commentators this has meant that his pieces were not scores and therefore not works (or even pieces of music) but conceptual game activities.[53] However, some have questioned the need to consider pieces of music as works at all, based in part upon the flexibility that scores have in relation to their performances. Nicholas Cook (2001) has argued that a line of continuity can be drawn between pre-nineteenth century (i.e. 'non-work') music, through the music associated with the work concept, and up to the present day, giving the examples of jazz performance and

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[53] See in particular Goodman (1976: 187-192).

Baroque performance practice. Cook attempts to redress the emphasis promoted by advocates of the work concept, placing performance at the centre of the way in which music is conceptualised, or, at the very least, addressing it on the same level as the musical work concept. He sees the autonomous work understanding of music as being derived from the way in which we talk about music and musical performance, stating that a performer gives "a performance "of" something" (Cook, 2001: 2). This is a manner of thinking that places the composer (author of that 'something') at the centre, aided by the way in which music was established as a commodity through the law (intellectual property) and the marketplace in the form of scores and recordings. Cook draws upon several writers who comment that, in practical terms, our experience of music as listeners is not bound to such ideas as the work concept. He quotes Robert Martin's assertion that the listener does not hear in a performance of a piece of music the 'work' (or, perhaps, the quality of its 'workness'), and also refers to Christopher Small's reversal of the hierarchy of work and performance in favour of 'musicking' (3-4). These points, I believe, are not quite as straightforward as they may at first seem. If one equates the concept of the 'artwork' with that of the 'aura' as defined by Benjamin (1992), then it could be argued that the viewer's experience of a so-called artwork is mediated by the historical, economic, and social factors through its being recognised as a 'work' with its own iconic presence relative to other examples of art. Similarly, a musical work such as Beethoven's Fifth Symphony brings with it certain expectations that a listener who is familiar with the piece will anticipate, and hope to have satisfied or challenged. Small (1987) takes account of this latter point by stressing that Western Classical music imposes itself upon the listener in a thorough-going manner that firmly demarcates the roles of composer, performer, and listener through the institutional practices of the concert hall, and that this is not in keeping with the broader experience of music.

While Small's argument may position classical music in the debate on the aesthetics and sociology of music as a fatally flawed 'special case', his argument that pieces (works) exist for performers to have something to perform, instead of as idealised entities served by humble performers, does not seem entirely sufficient in order to do away with the work concept, even in the instance of non-classical music. The uses that music is put to in the present day – this "new sound reality" as Michel Chion puts it (Chion cited in Cook, 2001: 3) – do not simply bring music out of the

rarefied world of the concert hall and aesthetic criticism into a more direct form of contact and experience with the listener. It could be argued that the ways in which music – especially recorded music – are used plays upon some notion of Benjamin's definition of an artwork's aura. Without wishing to get into the messy value judgements made by the likes of Adorno and composer Roger Sessions, the repeatable nature of the medium of recorded music, which includes a relatively stable timbral imprint of a piece, serves to impart more of a verifiable sense of a piece of music's continued existence (by means of repetition) than that provided by a score or the critical appraisal of the keepers of musical canons.[54] In other words, sound recording technologies, which today mediate a large proportion of people's musical experience in the Western world, can be seen, for good or ill, to encourage the idea that music is an ever present entity in a similar (but not identical) manner to examples of the plastic arts, imbued with all the auratic, nostalgic associations that such artefacts attract.

Cook comments that the reversal of the hierarchy of work and performance, made by the likes of Small and Chion, effectively turns performance into the object of much the same kind of fetish which they had associated with Western Classical music's emphasis upon the work and the composer. Cook questions the separation of a work from its performance, and in so doing he draws attention to the interactive social dialogue that exists between the two poles – this is where he locates the construction of musical meaning. Following Monson (1996) and Elam (Cook, 2001: 6), from the fields of jazz musicology and theatre studies respectively, Cook proposes the term 'script' instead of 'text' so as to avoid the blurred equivalence between score and work that the latter word implies. Cook describes this musical 'script' as encoding the choreography of social interactions driven by a particular aesthetic message, which is partly reproductive and partly an encouragement towards certain kinds of appropriate listening and responsive behaviour (6). Yet while Cook's script metaphor may be seen as an attempt to loosen the grip of the work concept upon performance (without entirely rupturing the bond between them), musical meaning and authority still seems to reside with the work, because of the tangible nature of the script. If one understands interpretation to be the explanation or extrapolation of information from an 'original' source, then the interpreter is, ordinarily, in the service of the source – in

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[54] See Adorno (1991), and composer Roger Sessions' complaint against the fixed, repeatable nature of recordings (cited by Chanan, 1995: 119).

which case the meaning of a performance is, to an elementary degree, predetermined by the script. As I have noted already, according to Cook, the script serves the performers in that it is made for them to have something to perform, and performers are (almost) always free to choose not to play from a particular script, or to make alterations. Yet this is a questionable argument because when a performer plays from a script to an audience who are familiar with the piece the audience's recognition and acknowledgement of how the performer is interacting with the script, is generally judged to be most successful when the performer is seen or heard to identify with the choreography laid down by the script. In contrast, Eco's view of the 'open' works he discusses is that they demonstrate how interpretation can be made into a creative act where the work is a field of possibilities (some of which the author is unaware of), instead of fixed, pre-existing truths.

Open or Closed?

When it comes to discussing improvised experimental music, talk of scripts and works seems inappropriate or at best inadequate. This kind of music clearly does not satisfy the expected requirements of the work concept as the historical construct described above, but neither does it happily fall under the remit of the 'open' work or script-based notions. This is because there is no script to speak of, and the open work is still predicated upon there being a compositional structure of some kind. Nevertheless, rather than argue that improvised music is therefore truly an 'imperfect art' as Gioia, Hamilton, and Brown would have it, I suggest that instead of complying with the demands of the closed work or the slightly more lenient requirements of the open work or script, that improvised experimental music creates its meanings in the cleavage between the poles of open and closed musical concepts.

In terms of the 'closed' conception of the musical work, IEM and other kinds of new experimental music present a challenge that may be idly batted away if one accepts that the concept should only be applied to music which closely adheres to a nineteenth-century symphonic model. However, if the work concept only applies to such a narrow historical and cultural set of circumstances, then under present-day conditions the concept should have withered substantially, especially when

considering the current status of symphonic music in Western culture, and the variety of uses and ways of listening it is now subject to. The fact that the aesthetic status of new music has not been established in a like manner to the work concept (i.e. on its own terms) and has, to a significant extent, been made in response and reaction to the work concept, suggests that the concept – if not the body of its practice – continues to cast a powerful spell, and has served some use in conceptualising new musical practices and the manner in which they are practiced.

IEM, and other essentially Modernist-inspired kinds of music, find part of their aesthetic inspiration in reacting to or attempting to deny the tenets of the musical work concept.[55] Goehr (1992) sees an irony in this situation, arguing that,

> "those who wish to challenge a concept's regulative force usually find themselves paradoxically situated in a practice that is regulated by the very concept they want to challenge." (260)

Goehr goes on to comment on some of the prominent challenges posed to the relevance of the work concept by the avant-garde, such as John Cage's notorious piece *4'33"* (1952),

> "All these challenges have altered the material of music, and therefore can be seen to constitute *material* challenges to the traditional concept of music. It is less clear, however, that these challenges have affected the packaging or individuation of music into works – say, the interrelations between performances and scores." (262)

To take the case of *4'33"*, Goehr's argument would appear to be correct: the piece constitutes a major challenge regarding what musical material can be. In a performance of the piece, the performer aims to avoid making any sounds intentionally; instead the 'music' of the piece becomes whatever unintended sounds are heard occurring within the duration of the performance. However, the composed frame, which Cage has provided, places the performer in a situation where he or she is seated 'ready' to perform, following the conventions (packaging) of the musical work. This composed performance can be viewed as a form of commentary on the

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[55] Modernism and Postmodernism can be viewed from a certain angle as the pursuit of Enlightenment values, which the work concept embodies, to a 'logical' (potentially destructive) conclusion.

experience and limitations of Western art music because by following the conventions of concert performance it places itself squarely in the work tradition, appearing to challenge, but perhaps simply reinforcing the status of the musical work concept as a powerful aesthetic tool. Improvised music is another matter altogether.

It is clear from the descriptions in chapter one and the chapters which follow that some improvisers are inspired by many of the same values and practices associated with the work concept – in particular, the concert performance – but what differentiates improvised music from most other practices in its challenge to the work concept is its basis in collaboration. Improvised collaboration not only affects the kinds of musical materials and ways in which they are made and structured, it also affects the attitude of musicians (and, for that matter, listeners) to the conventions of concert performance, and moreover, whether concert performance is the only or most fitting medium for the music. It could be argued that once concert performance is disregarded in favour of, say, private communal 'jamming', then the music falls under Dahlhaus's categorisation of social, 'non-work' music making, properly heard from within the ensemble. However, improvised music, more than most other kinds of music, can make the borders between public performance and private 'play' seems much more fluid (in practice) than the apologists for the work concept would wish to present them. I shall explore these attitudes of performance and play in the chapter which follows.

Unlike Dahlhaus, Goehr argues that the work concept can have a more flexible identity and application in relation to the practice with which it is historically associated.[56] According to Goehr, it is possible to apply the values of the work concept to new and other music if one agrees that it is a concept created out of and mediated by a particular cultural moment in history, and not, as Neo-Platonists would have it, something with an 'absolute', unchanging and exclusive definition of the concept and its realisation in practice. The work concept appears to be a 'closed' concept because of its ties with a particular culture and repertoire, and attempts to posit an 'open' definition of the work (or work-in-process suggested by Eco and

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[56] This is to simplify Dahlhaus's position a little, as it is partly his aim to get the 'measure' of new music by setting it in dialectical tension against the more readily identifiable qualities of nineteenth-century symphonic music.

others) have, perhaps necessarily, been much more provisional and less grounded as theories, not having the 'benefit' of a singular cultural vision or the encrustation of time to lend weight to their thoughts. Yet because Goehr views the work concept from a historicist perspective she is able to argue for a more flexible approach to the way in which the concept is defined. Goehr claims that,

> "the meaning of concepts cannot be analysed independently of the practice in which they function, since they acquire their meaning just by functioning in particular ways within practices. And since practices are not known or learnt about a priori, knowledge of conceptual meaning can be no different." (90)

Taking this to be the case, she argues that the musical work can be thought of as a 'closed' concept at certain times and an 'open' concept at others. Goehr, slightly confusingly, does not mean to use open in the same sense as Eco, but simply that the strictures of the concept are loosened in order to deal with particular changes in practice and remain a relevant and useful tool of aesthetics. A better term for this kind of alteration to the concept would be 'opened' rather than 'open', as Goehr's idea is that the identity of the concept does not undergo a fundamental change. That the work concept can be regarded as a 'closed' concept at other times, in Goehr's view, is in order to retain its identity in the face of extreme or wayward challenges.

The average example of a piece of improvised music – or a piece of pop music, for that matter – does not present itself as an obvious candidate for work status, and, in this kind of instance, the work concept would generally be treated as 'closed'. However, some improvisers (and some pop musicians) bring an art attitude to their music making, in which case it may be possible to treat such examples as works, and therefore the concept may find itself 'opened' in order to be usefully adapted to the circumstances. Over a period of time the concept may have been opened enough so that when it is presented as closed its identity as a concept will have shifted significantly from whatever its former strict definition was.

A few final words on Goehr's historicist approach to the work concept: although Goehr argues for a more pragmatic treatment and acknowledgement of the way in which concepts are adapted to changes in practice, her definition of an 'open' concept does not allow for simply every new circumstance to fall under the shadow of

the musical work. Goehr distinguishes between 'original' and 'derivative' applications of the concept (89). In practice this means that something is an original example of the concept when it is, in Goehr's words, "produced directly and explicitly under the guidance of the relevant concept" (253), and not because it is the first example to satisfy the qualities that the concept is supposed to exemplify. A derivative example would be something made without the concept 'in mind' or without referring to, "the specific part of practice associated with it [the concept]" (254). A derivative example of a musical work would be something which resembles some aspect of a work in practice either inadvertently (for example, a concert of Indian Karnatak music in a European concert hall), or something which explicitly refers to an aspect of musical work practice without wholly engaging with the demands of the concept (for example, Bernard Herrmann's fleeting references to the canon of classical music in his film scores[57]).

A symphonic piece written today which demonstrates an awareness of the complex developments in Western harmony that have occurred since the nineteenth century, would be a more obvious candidate to be considered as an 'original' example of a work than *4'33"* or a group improvisation. But, as I have noted, Cage's piece was created with a full awareness of symphonic concert practice, and, to a large extent, guided by the culture of the musical work (he was a student of Schoenberg), and so it is possible to consider that this piece may be an 'original' example of a work.

A group improvisation, however, has a more tenuous claim to the status of original example. There is no central organising (composer's) mind behind the musical structure of a collaborative improvisation, and nothing in the performance can be taken for granted: there is no 'safety net' of knowing for the musicians or the audience that a satisfactory musical structure will be established, let alone whether the improvisation will be a success as a performance. This means that the only elements that can be properly considered to demonstrate that the improvisation is an original example are the collective intentions of the group, the conditions under which the

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[57] In serving the demands of film – which may be considered a contributing element of an art work within the genre of film, but not a musical work – a film score distances itself from being considered a work, following the conventional model because of its lack of aesthetic autonomy.

performance occurs, and the effects or results of the music made in performance. The fact that several musicians involved in IEM have some training in classical music or the visual arts (as shown in chapters one and three), suggests that the culture of the work concept – or, at the very least, its older sibling the 'work of art' – informs the thinking and practice of these musicians to some degree, even if the influence is only negative. IEM is not a commercial or formally a 'functional' area of music making, and therefore its participants locate its value for them by appealing either to art status (usually shown through the medium of performance) or to the seemingly more modest area of communal aesthetic activity. In other words, the aesthetic of IEM hovers at the cusp of, on the one hand, 'original' example work status when the musicians and audience consciously associate the activity with art, and on the other hand, 'derivative' example work status when no explicit artistic claim is made.

The collaborative aspect of IEM means that making distinctions about whether the music is an example of an original or derivative work cannot be a clear-cut matter. An improvising group such as AMM (who have been in existence for a number of decades and have strong art and experimental classical leanings), are more likely to have one of their improvisations considered for original example status than an ad hoc grouping of musicians (with little experience or knowledge of each other's intentions and histories); who, even if they do produce music that appears to satisfy some essential aspect of the work concept, are more likely to have their improvisation classed as a derivative example. It is largely a matter of knowing what the intentions of the musicians are, and the expectations and reflections both they and their audience have about the music that will be, is being, and has been made. However, it is almost impossible to unpick all of these elements for each and every improvisation, and so it is simpler to describe IEM as, generally speaking, fulfilling the demands of the work concept in a derivative manner (as perceived by the critic), and therefore it is, perhaps, a kind of music better dealt with by Eco's 'work-in-process' or Cook's 'script' conceptualisations. Yet IEM exists within a culture of experimental art activity, and so it makes its appeal to be valued as art (work). This aspiration comes from within the practice of IEM, voiced by many of the leading musicians in the field, and is not an arbitrary imposition of a concept upon something that only superficially resembles musical work practice.

Practice is messy, and so whenever it is made to match up with a concept, an exact fit is unlikely. But with IEM there is enough that can be demonstrated in the ways in which it is practised and reflected upon by its practitioners (see chapter three) for an example of it to be taken seriously as a contender for work status. The relevance of the work concept is surely best demonstrated not by how best it suits a particular (historical) musical practice, but through evidence of the powerful attraction it has over a variety of music and ways of thinking about musical practice.

Concluding Remarks

Both the preceding chapter and the next demonstrate the influence of the Western art music tradition of composition upon improvisational practice and the factors which influence the thinking of musicians about the music they make. This is where the most obvious connection between improvised music and the work concept may be found. To some extent it can be heard in the ways in which the music is performed and the musical structures and poetic form that are cumulatively made – this in spite of the fact that they are created out of a situation of contradiction and collaboration.[58] However, equating the aesthetic of one kind of music with that of another because a musician has acknowledged a particular influence or has made use of similar sounds is like describing Mozart's Sonata in A major as a piece of Turkish *mehter*. In which case what is needed is a more coherent way of establishing IEM's aesthetic character than noticing surface similarities. In order to be able to stand its ground between the poles of open and closed definitions of aesthetic identity some regulative markers need to be established. Rather than the regulative *ideals* which Brown refers to above (Brown, 2000: 114-122) I should like to identify some regulative *practices* essential to the character of IEM.

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[58] For example, it may sometimes result in cliché but a cumulative sense of arch form (archetypal of classical music forms) can sometimes arise in improvised music instead of song or dance-like structures. This is most often expressed in wave-like surges in dynamics and textural density rather than a recapitulation of pitch and rhythmic motifs (instead of 'ABA' the formal outline is more likely to be 'ABC' with the dynamic contour of an 'ABA' form.

With no script or pre-existing work to regulate an improvised performance (at least in linear, temporal terms) we have instead to look to the relationships observable in the improvising situation, of which there are three possible categories relating to practice. To begin with, each performer develops over the course of an improvisation particular ways of interacting with their *instrument*. The instrument may be (a.) one which they have 'studied' and performed with over many years (whether formally or not); or (b.) the performer may have an amateur grasp of the instrument – this may be a 'found' sound-making object over which they have little immediate instrumental control. Additionally, there may be a third category related to both (a.) and (b.): (c.) an instrument which has been purposely 'defamiliarised' either by alteration to the instrument (for example, a 'prepared piano'), or the way in which the instrument is played becomes altered by playing 'beyond the limits' of the performer's regular technical level of achievement in order to seek out 'unstable' pitches, rhythms and timbres.

The next regulative practice concerns the *ensemble*, which acts to regulate the ways in which the performers negotiate their musical decisions in response to actions made by their fellow performers. A performer may interact with the other performers in ways which may be variously supportive or provocative but his or her actions may also be (mis)interpreted by the other members of the ensemble in ways that are identical or opposed to the intentions behind the original gesture and the first gesture to be made in response to it.

On a broader, and perhaps more tenuous level, the performance *environment* can have a significant effect upon the way in which individual performers or the ensemble as a whole play but also upon the way in which the music is perceived and understood by an audience. This is where the identification of IEM with the Western Classical tradition or with jazz can be most obviously observed. I have described above how Dahlhaus notes the important role that the concert hall plays in aiding and abetting the listening experience of symphonic music: because of the formal arrangement of the architecture of most concert halls and the cultural associations that go with such buildings, certain expectations are set up between the audience and the performers concerning how the performers will fulfil their aim of performing the music in the appropriate manner and the audience will listen and respond suitably

(something similar is the case with 'salon' or church performances). However, in the club environment, which is associated with jazz performance, there is generally less of an expectation among the audience that they need to give their whole attention to the performance. This is largely because it is a more informal environment where the musical performance is not traditionally the main attraction as much as socialising and dancing is.[59] In practical terms, musicians may respond to these different playing environments by performing, for example, loudly and raucously (with a 'broad brush') or with more attention to subtleties of detail. Different improvising performers may favour a particular kind of environment depending on the general character of the music they are most interested in making, and this will therefore have a knock-on effect making the experience more 'closed' or 'open' in relation to the work concept.

An additional socio-historical layer is embedded within each of these regulative practices in terms of the amount and quality of experience devoted to each of the regulative practices described above. For example, the group AMM have a long established ensemble history: each member of the group has developed particular ways of using their instrument – following the model described in category (c.) – and the group have tended to favour performing in venues more often associated with classical music. All of these factors set up certain expectations amongst their regular audience lending the group a character which has more in common with classical music than it does with jazz.

In each case the relationship between and within the different regulative practices is always established afresh with a new hierarchical emphasis. These new hierarchical arrangements may also be altered within a single improvised performance. As the following two chapters show, the potential for these hierarchical relationships to harden is increased the longer they are allowed to exist unchecked (within a single performance as well as in long-term performing collaborations). However, because almost all improvised experimental music is performed collectively and by performers who are mostly motivated by the ideas of improvisation and experiment, the chances

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[59] This description is intended purely to point out notable differences between the classical concert hall and the jazz club experience, and not a comment on greater or lesser kinds of musical experience.

of such music becoming completely predictable is somewhat (although never entirely) lessened.

Chapter 3

Performance versus Play: Musicians' Motivations

Introduction

In the preceding chapter I examined the context in which new kinds of music making have usually been evaluated by mainstream Western aesthetics paying particular regard to the usefulness of the work concept in defining the ontological status of new music. Chapters 3 and 4 form a complementary pair in that they approach the role of the individual within a collective setting, first from the position of improvising musicians, and then in a more abstracted setting in relation to ideas about democracy from recent political philosophy. In this chapter I turn my attention to what could be described as the aesthetic attitude of the musician involved in collaborative improvised activity. But more than this, I also concern myself with the apparent division between the 'compromise' of collaborative endeavour and the individualistic impulse to make original yet coherent musical statements. These ideas are then taken up in chapter 4 and explored in a more abstract reflection upon the ethics of social interaction and democratic theory.

As was shown previously, most commentators stress the role of the composer as the authoritative figure responsible for the structure and potential meaning conveyed by a piece of music, following a critical model founded upon nineteenth-century classical music. However, with music that is collectively improvised, or a piece of indeterminate composed music that requires a 'collaborative' interpretative approach other than the standard performative model for classical music, the authority of an individual creator is called into question.[60] In view of these circumstances several questions may be asked: How does the performer as an individual determine what is musically of value from the collective result? What are the factors that enable

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[60] In the case of the performance of the music of John Cage, some commentators would strongly contest the notion that interpretation has anything to do with the preparation and performance of his compositions. For William Brooks, Cage's scores are more like a tablature notation of actions to be carried out (with indeterminate results) than descriptions of intended sounds to be 'musically' interpreted. (Based upon informal statements made during open discussion at the conference 'John Cage Thinker-Performer', Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, 16th April 2005)

a performer to contribute to the direction of the music and identify with the sometimes contradictory aims of an ensemble? How does a group construct or negotiate 'musical sense'? How might a sense of each performer's 'responsibility' to the life of the music and to the group be acknowledged, developed, and maintained?

In this chapter, and to a different extent in the one that follows it, I am interested in extending the means of evaluating the particular musical qualities to be found in improvised experimental music, and to move beyond those associated with the work concept tradition discussed in chapter two to consider the ways in which the individuals creating the music make the judgements that they do. I wish to open up what has so far been an examination confined to aesthetic commentators and musicologists to include the thoughts of musicians in order to explore the points of connection and disparity between ways of discussing this music, and to ask how far the thinking and practice of musicians appears to reflect a habitual, as much as an examined, outlook. The principal aim of this chapter, then, is to shift the emphasis towards the epistemological and ethical questions that shape the way in which IEM is discussed and put into practice. I examine the motivations that improvisers acknowledge for making music in an improvised and collaborative fashion, based upon interviews undertaken with a number of improvisers, most of whom have been closely involved with the London free improvisation scene and experimental composed music at one time or another. The statements of the musicians are juxtaposed in an attempt to expose common points of reference, as well as disparities and differences of understanding. The major point of difference that is seen to arise is between improvisation considered as, on the one hand, a *performance* activity, and on the other hand as *play*. Both of these tendencies may be seen to contain values which are simultaneously in conflict with each other *and* related to certain ethical inspirations associated with the work concept and its alternatives.

Motivations behind Improvisation

The two divergent types of focus that different musicians give to the practice of improvisation could be sorted into, on the one hand, an attitude centred on improvisation as a *performance* activity, and on the other hand, an attitude centred on

improvisation as *play*. Performance-driven improvisers could be characterised as those for whom improvisation is their main expressive outlet: the aim of their artistic activity is to improvise, and this must be tested in performance. Play-driven improvisers could be characterised as musicians for whom improvisation is something to be done primarily for its own sake – as a kind of social activity, for example as a 'jam session'. Improvised performance is not the aim, but rather it is a process of exploration on its own terms. Two more categories of improvisational practice may be considered, which I regard as subcategories of play-centred improvisation: these are the use of improvisation as an educational tool, and improvisation as a compositional device for producing a finished piece – much like the methods used, for example, by the film directors Robert Altman and Mike Leigh, who encourage their actors to work from loosely-scripted scenarios to develop characters and dialogue, and thicken plotlines, in order to create a naturalistic, spontaneous feel to the finished film. There may appear to be a contradiction between play for 'its own sake' and play directed towards educational ends, or the production of a finished piece, but the essential difference between play and performance improvisation is that play is, generally, insulated from the judgement of an audience. With the emphasis on 'play', improvisation might be thought of as an aspect of musical life rather than a specially privileged area of music making as it is in concert performance. This kind of play may be regarded as *aesthetic* activity, but not *art*, because it does not ask to be evaluated by anyone other than the musicians who are improvising. This distinction is not absolute, as musicians will often be involved in many kinds of activity as performers, educators, and composers, and so the aesthetic disposition produced by the one kind of activity can often filter through into other areas.

It may be felt from this explanation, and in the first section of what follows, that the performance-centred aesthetic, with its explicitly drawn association between improvised music and other kinds of 'legitimate' artistic activity, is somehow regarded as more worthy or highly valued than play-centred improvisation. Instead my intention is to treat each on its own terms according to what each musician has to say about their practice, with performance and play acting as points of reference rather than limiting categories.

Of the interviewees I refer to the AMM percussionist Eddie Prévost is one of the few musicians involved in free improvisation to have taken a sustained interest in articulating an aesthetic position in writing (Prévost, 1995 and 2004). Derek Bailey's much cited book on the subject of improvisation (Bailey, 1992) treats it as a wider musical phenomenon in the context of a variety of cultures, but he does touch upon his aesthetic attitude and that of his peers involved in free improvisation. Most writers on the subject have approached collaborative free (non-jazz) improvisation from the perspective of the listener-fan (Mitchell, 1987; Day, 1998; Watson, 2004), and therefore until recently the thoughts of musicians have tended to be filtered through journalistic interviews, or the occasional academic study (Sansom, 1998). Prévost's intentions are, in part, polemical and designed to provoke a debate with other musicians (and listeners) as well as an attempt to organise his thoughts about his musical practice. As such, his ideas do not form a consistent theory of improvisational activity in the academic sense, but this means that he does not have experience of attempting to articulate a theoretical angle on his practice. Of the other musicians interviewed, Hugh Nankivell has also written on improvisation (with reference to its use in teaching children to compose music, Nankivell, 1999), but mostly the interviewees' responses are spontaneous reflections upon personal experience of improvisation. My aim is to examine how these improvisers articulate their ideas about improvisation in order to grasp both the dialogue between musicians' intentions and actions, and the differences and correspondences that may be found with more overt attempts to theorise approaches to the matter of new musical practices, such as those under discussion in this thesis.

1.) Improvisation as Performance

Prévost has described his aesthetic position as pivoting on the idea of "meta-music" (Prévost, 1995: 1); that is to say it is his stated aim to make music in a manner that is, in some sense, critically 'self-aware' and even akin to a form of ethical inquiry.[61] He identifies two complementary themes which underpin his vision of a

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[61] Prévost's notion of 'meta-music' is not meant to imply any connection with the stylistic cross-referencing and knowing games with familiar (and sometimes not so familiar) musical materials in the compositions of, for example, Gavin Bryars, John Zorn, or even Igor

meta-music: 'heuristic dialogue', and its inversion 'dialogical heurism'. Prévost's intention is to emphasise the interaction between dialogue and discovery. He stresses that heurism cannot function properly without dialogue and that dialogue is meaningless without a heuristic approach if an improvisation is to hold value for the participants (both performers and listeners) in such a way that does not simply retreat into a re-enactment of previous performances or musical styles, with the baggage of received expressive values. According to Prévost, *heuristic dialogue* is concerned with discovery and,

> "the demystifying of the conditioning of the senses, and their clarification: the discovery of freshness in perception. (Prévost, 3)

Dialogical heurism places the emphasis upon dialogue, which according to Prévost,

> "is the interactive medium in which the products of heurism are tested. Sounds are placed: placed in contrast to ... other sounds. Minds struggle, coalesce, defer or acquiesce ... Instant decisions dictate the immediate direction of the music." (3)

One could ask why Prévost does not refer to the two aspects of his meta-music simply as heurism and dialogue, as there is a clear weighting in his descriptions towards one or the other. However, despite having more clarity, this kind of quasi-binary opposition would not serve his purpose, which is to show the impermanent nature of improvisation, and to insist that it is led by interactive process rather than by predefined goals. Heurism might be characterised as the individualistic urge to act and make an original utterance, and dialogue thought of as the mediating force which makes sense of the individual's action in relation to those of the ensemble. However, the overriding emphasis of Prévost's notion of meta-music is with finding meaning, and as such heurism could be said to have the upper hand over dialogue in that dialogue is a means to achieve heuristic ends:

Stravinsky, which have also been referred to as meta-music (music about music). Meta-music in this latter instance is influenced by the concept of 'metafiction'. This is a term from literary studies indicating the play upon genre and authorial artifice as noted by critics in the work of writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino and Angela Carter, but also extending backwards through the history of the novel to include Flann O'Brien and Laurence Sterne (Baldick, 1992: 133). This kind of game-like aesthetic has more direct relevance for those improvisers associated with 'plunderphonics', referred to in chapter 1.

"The meta-musician looks for meaning, and for music with meaning, and looks to invest as much meaning as possible in the music. The intention is to transcend all previous experience of music production and music consumption. The intention is making music, and listening to it as if for the first time." (3)

The manifesto-like turn of phrase employed by Prévost could give the impression that there is a specific kind of meaning to be had from improvised or meta-music that can only be achieved in a specific way. By emphasising meaning as the desired outcome, rather than, say, enjoyment or entertainment, he is conveying a particular seriousness of purpose. This in turn suggests that Prévost conceives of his music as a kind of activity with a concern to engage the audience with this sense of meaning which is discovered through musical dialogue in such a way that it echoes the kind of seriousness of intention as ideas and practice associated with 'high art'.

If one takes meaning to be something that is achieved, having defined (however loosely) a frame of reference, and worked through its possible ramifications, Prévost's intention to make music "as if for the first time" may appear to be in conflict with the search for meaning. The implication of Prévost's recurring use of the word 'meaning' is that a particular – though, most likely, intangible – content is achievable through the practice of improvisation. In everyday usage 'meaning' is often taken to indicate the recognition of some commonly held set of facts or truths about a particular subject, which may lead to a deeper and more elusive sense of understanding. Prévost's aim to create a sense of listening 'as if for the first time' is problematic as it suggests a stripping away of any pre-existing basis for meaningful utterance. The use of the phrase 'as if' qualifies his remark, acknowledging the appeal to the imagination required of any artistic endeavour, with this 'listening as if for the first time' thought of as an idealised state. As such, this kind of heuristic search for meaning could be thought of as alienated because it is an attempt to attain a 'pure' state of awareness by abandoning what has been learned, whilst at some level acknowledging that this is impossible. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the aim is not to (re)create an Arcadian or 'primitive' music, but a kind of improvising that does not rely on playing habits (contrast with Adorno, Boulez, and Cage's criticisms of improvisation):

"A very important feature of jazz music and, I suggest, [free] improvisation is this whole idea of self-definition – self-invention, if you like. And, you know,

if you find yourself doing somebody else's music, you know, your own sense of self... is obviously – it seems somewhat extreme to say it's under threat – but in a sense it is." (Interview with Eddie Prévost)

Musical Materials & Structure

The need for a strong sense of identification with the music that the performer makes is central to Prévost's aesthetic ideal and also that of most other established improvisers. Derek Bailey has defined free improvisation as having,

"no prescribed idiomatic sound. The characteristics ... are established only by the sonic-musical identity of the person or persons playing it." (Bailey, 1992: 83)

Fig. 13, Paul Hession (drums), Derek Bailey (electric guitar), and Mick Beck (bassoon) performing in Sheffield. Although each musician in the group has a background in performing jazz each has developed a distinctive approach to their respective instruments which makes the categorisation 'jazz' or even 'free jazz' problematic. Each has cultivated an essentially atonal and noise-based approach to sound (for example through the use of guitar feedback and multiphonic sounds), however each musician retains a highly interactive approach to improvising related to jazz improvisation but with a marked preference for the juxtaposition of mismatching elements rather than the 'idiomatic' ensemble integration at the core of most jazz.

This statement serves to underline the importance that improvising musicians give to creating and retaining their own musical identities, and seemingly echoes Prévost's jazz-inspired concern with self-invention. However, self-invention for a jazz musician is something that a player develops having grasped the ins and outs of the style and by appropriating and then expanding upon the 'voice' of established performers in order to find their own musical voice.[62] Prévost's approach to self-invention (or heurism) in tandem with an open dialogue with other performers suggests something more rounded, and – at least temporarily – idiomatic. Bailey is reluctant to associate free improvisation with more conventionally idiomatic kinds of music because the improviser's ideal is to bind the identity of the music to the context of the performance. Nevertheless, in spite of such 'anti-idiomatic' practice, particular expectations amongst performers and listeners are raised that are comparable to more overtly idiomatic musical styles. These expectations are largely formed because of the close association of free improvisation with specific communities of performers who usually have a general awareness of the mutual and intersecting musical histories that have emerged from previous performances. Composer and improviser Richard Barrett has used the term 'radically idiomatic' to describe his own practice, because he is interested in the possibilities of creating rich and complex musical materials and structures which are mediated by the physical disposition of the performer in relation to their instrument (Barrett, 1996). 'Non idiomatic' music is an attitude related to atonality in the way that it avoids common points of reference, and this term could be used as a general way of describing the approach of older improvisers like Bailey and Prévost, and some younger players (see Mark Wastell below, and the reference to 'reductionism' in chapter 1). However, musical reference is almost impossible to avoid entirely in the medium of collaborative improvisation. When improvisers interact with each other and attempt to make some 'sense' of each other's spontaneous utterances, in the moment of performance there will inevitably be some vestige of 'already known' or received musical ideas which will filter through. Additionally, it should be noted that instruments are built to emphasise particular tunings, timbres, and ways of playing. Some improvisers will attempt to work against these occurrences (see Rowe, below), others will make some attempt to incorporate familiar ideas if they happen to arise in the music, treating all musical materials as

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[62] See chapter 2, with reference to Brown (2000).

potentially useful (this is perhaps the 'normal improvising situation). Still others will make a feature of recognisable elements in a collaged pile up of existing pieces and styles of music (see the note on plunderphonics in chapter 1). Improvised music may be described as, generally speaking, having a 'radically idiomatic' attitude to musical materials: i.e. anything is possible, but not everything because the music is always mediated by the instrumental, social, and environmental circumstances of the improvisation. An improviser will like to be alert to all of the possibilities that will arise but some will tend towards one of two extremes: one improviser may prefer to respond to the pull of a Derek Baileyesque non-idiomatic way of playing; another improviser may be attracted by the opposite pole of, to coin an awkward phrase, 'meta idiomacy' or plunderphonics.

Figs. 14 and **15**, AMM's Eddie Prévost and John Tilbury. Each member of AMM has cultivated a number of instrumental techniques based around the exploration of the sonority of their respective instruments that often combine in performance in such a way as to make it difficult to entangle whom is making which sound. For example, in these illustrations the combination of bowed cymbal and stroked piano strings could create a combined sound which merges in and out of phase with Keith Rowe's electric guitar feedback. The emphasis within AMM and much free improvisation or IEM is largely directed away from 'soloist and accompanist' and towards an area between these two roles and 'simultaneous accompaniments' (the latter most typical of AMM), instead of the 'simultaneous soloists' common to free jazz performance.

Performance-centred improvisers often speak of continually developing a 'language' or a relationship with their instrument that is personal to them, and flexible and durable enough to sustain their needs; however, most are wary of describing this technical development in terms of rehearsal. AMM's pianist John Tilbury observes:

"I don't practise improvisation; I practise playing the piano. None of the stuff that I play when I'm improvising with AMM I can say that I've actually, as it were, 'practised', you know, prepared. But the physical act of touching the keys, of course, that's something which I do all the time and which I bring into my playing." (Interview with John Tilbury)

Tilbury's statement raises the question as to whether he or other free improvisers could be said to have a recognisable musical 'voice' comparable to a jazz performer's 'self-invented' musical identity. That Tilbury is recognised as having found a voice is clear from the many reviews of his performances which often compare his sound world to the compositions of Morton Feldman and John Cage, of which he is a highly regarded advocate (Toop, 2003: 62). However, as I noted with regard to non idiomatic playing, many free improvisers prefer not to characterise their music making with reference to other kinds of music, describing their musical 'materials' in physical terms, sometimes influenced by the practice of abstract expressionist painters like Jackson Pollock:

"...often what I have in my fingers I only have it approximately in my head. You know, I'll have a sort of ten-note chord. I know the quality it's going to be ... without knowing exactly what it's going to sound like. And then I play. And then you work on that. It's like a potter with clay: you start moulding it into something." (Interview with John Tilbury)

Pianist Chris Burn echoes some of these ideas about the relationship between musical material and the development of a performer's individual voice:

"...there are inherent dangers that what you practise then just becomes as clichéd as, say, a jazz musician's 'hot licks' or whatever ... I think there's a difference between techniques and specific material. So yeah, I mean most often I practise in 'areas' [of the piano] or with techniques, so that when I'm improvising [...] I'm totally on top of the game. [...] If I am doing a solo concert, then I would practise material that was more 'solo specific' and that might include particular bits of material [...] I don't think in any way I'd want to practise something and say, 'oh that's good', and then reproduce it in concert. ... Certainly, most improvisers I know, are constantly trying to develop new stuff. So, practise for me – a lot of it is trying to work on new things; new ways of doing things." (Interview with Chris Burn)

Burn's distinction between 'material' (favoured sounds and ways of interacting with the instrument) and 'techniques' (or 'hot licks' – lively phrases which have become clichéd) echoes Prévost's talk of self-invention and creating a musical identity, but makes Bailey's statement that improvisation is 'non-idiomatic' less plausible. A parallel may be drawn between a musician's identification with particular kinds of musical material and that of a composer developing a recognisable sound world across their oeuvre. However, in a collaborative context it is virtually impossible for an individual's musical voice to remain unaffected by the group – if only through its proximity to the 'voices' of other musicians. This is a key difference between improvisation and composition: no matter how integrated and 'rehearsed' an individual is in terms of their own musical sound world these elements are likely to be challenged when they come into contact with the contingencies of performance and with other musicians. Prévost notes that,

> "…if you develop a 'strategy', which you want to inject into the improvisation, it probably doesn't qualify as an improvisation anymore." (Interview with Eddie Prévost)

A view which is similarly expressed, from a different angle, by the saxophonist and bassoonist Mick Beck:

> "Something might have occurred to me as a sort of plan for the performance [during private instrumental practise] and I nearly always find that I don't use it. There's almost a strength in doing something different. I don't know why that is but it does tend to happen. I feel that having had the plan it does add something, so I don't feel that it's wasted." (Interview with Mick Beck)

Prévost elaborates on his argument against having preconceived ideas, again emphasising the importance of creating the music out of dialogue:

> "I think the idea of … developing a relationship with the materials of your instrument is a good one, and maybe it's a kind of parallel activity to rehearsal. You're looking actually to create the situation and resolve it within performance so that would preclude that very specific kind of preparation or rehearsal. But it doesn't preclude you from having some, you know, developing a relationship with the materials you're going to use." (Interview with Eddie Prévost)

However, Mark Wastell, a musician from a younger generation (who performs with cello and found objects), and a collaborator with both Burn and Prévost, appears to go much further in his claims about musical materials and preparation, even contradicting his colleagues:

> "In the broadest sense – I mean, I would argue with anybody wanting to argue this point with me – all improvisers have got certain tricks, quite honestly, you know, they do pull out of the bag when things need – I don't know – need livening up, or need calming down, or need electrifying – whatever. You know, there [are] certain things that certain musicians do, repeatedly. But that's not to say that it's wrong." (Interview with Mark Wastell)

Despite an apparent difference of opinion with Prévost indicated by this statement, Wastell's outlook is not necessarily incompatible with the views of Prévost. It is a matter of personal conviction that allows Prévost and others to regard what they do as an organic evolving interaction with the moment of performance. Yet Prévost does admit a level of self-conscious awareness regarding the continuity and coherence of his group AMM's identity on the part of the audience, even if he himself is less sure of this.

> "The medium is to actually embrace those problems which come up in performance and invite us [AMM] to actually solve them within the process. [...] But, having said that, we've been playing together for a long time, and maybe people will assume that we don't rehearse because we have a certain kind of familiarity with each other. That's possibly true, but it doesn't constitute a rehearsal in any meaningful sense." (Interview with Eddie Prévost)

For Prévost the performance is the time and place where the music ought to be created from scratch, as it were, for it to be properly an improvisation.

> "I think the general view of AMM is that ... the last thing you want to know is whether anybody else in the ensemble has got a particular performance strategy in mind, because that takes away a sense of immediacy. That takes away the element of surprise from the performance." (ibid)

Despite frequent collaborations with Prévost, Wastell's approach, as he describes it, seems almost to work against Prévost's ideal. However, the decisions that Wastell makes before the performance, in terms of whom he works with and how he approaches performance, could be likened to Prévost's long-term performing relationship with his colleagues in AMM. Speaking of these choices, Wastell says,

> "I'm [currently] using this much more reduced, smaller soundscape, which has been given the loose term, sort of, 'reductionism' or as some of the London-based players call it 'New London Silence'.[63] So, preparation, both physical – i.e. contact with the instrument – and mental preparation is something that I think a lot about now, definitely; much more so [than] maybe five years ago when I was performing and practising a different style of improvisation, which was much more pro-active and 'in-the-moment'. This new material does take some mental preparation, certainly. So that's become more and more apparent and important to me. And even preparing the performance space, the lighting, all [of this] needs consideration. [...] I'm not into 'promiscuous' improvisation anymore[64] ... It's not to say that I don't do it, of course. I mean, there are obviously certain circumstances. [...] I'm into working with individuals, longevity of playing relationships with individuals of a similar aesthetic." (Interview with Mark Wastell)

For Wastell, the development of and identification with his own musical materials has reached a stage where the notion of whether or not what he does is still 'improvisation' has become a moot point,[65]

> "...the 'reductionist' material – that's my language at the moment – probably does function on a 'semi-composed' level. Because a lot of the material is, sort of, 'on the nose' – so astute in its, kind of, musical delivery. And it's not necessarily relying on pure, one hundred per cent improvised mechanics. So there is some form of organic composition – which is all an improvisation is anyway, if you want to get into that. But that's a whole other subject." (Interview with Mark Wastell)

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[63] See Montgomery (2002) and Bell (2003) for more on the background to these journalistic categorisations.

[64] Wastell is referring to *ad hoc* performances common to many concerts of improvised music and exemplified by Derek Bailey's Company Week described in chapter one. .

[65] Musician and journalist David Toop has recently commented that, "This word – improvisation – no longer seems adequate to describe the forms that emerge from playing without a score or a predetermined structure. These categories are invidious anyway, but improvised music history, or that part that has its roots in communality and spontaneity, raises certain expectations in the listener that may have become anachronistic or simply naïve." (Toop, 2003: 62)

Fig. 16, The Sealed Knot: Rhodri Davies (harp), Burkhard Beins (drums and percussion), Mark Wastell (cello) performing at All Angel's Church, London, September 2001. Both Davies and Wastell are established improvisers who developed their approach to improvising through attending Eddie Prévost's workshops (see chapter 5). The group's 'reductionist' approach to improvising during the late 1990s and early 2000s leans heavily towards a composerly aesthetic in the limitations it places on the amount and kinds of interactive activity during an improvisation, and therefore falls clearly within the category of *performance-centred* improvisation.

What enables Prévost to work with musicians like Wastell, and his AMM colleague Keith Rowe (who has taken a similar 'reductionist' line in his musical development to Wastell) is that these musicians have developed their particular sonic-musical identities through the same kind of improvised discovery as Prévost has. Speaking of Rowe's musical identity, Prévost raises the matter of the consequences for group interaction that arise from the particular musical materials an individual chooses to work with:

> "... although Keith Rowe too came from jazz, he's now ceased to be in any way recognisable as a guitarist – in that sense. The way one manipulates an instrument [in AMM's performances, it] is totally inappropriate to use things which even relate to even a kind of minor way to jazz – it wouldn't work. If you work with other people that do have a different kind of approach, these other kinds of [conventional jazz] techniques become more relevant, they become appropriate, or they become a means to an end. So yes, that's probably what happens here. But I see it [improvising] as a way of extending

one's musical being by virtue of taking on board what the other people in the ensemble want or need from you..." (Interview with Eddie Prévost)

However, Rowe's approach to improvisation has gone beyond the reinvention of his instrument as an electronic 'sound generator' to the extent that his attitude to ensemble interaction may be regarded as similarly reconstructed – even wilfully obtuse (Prévost, 2004). Regarding a recent recording with AMM colleague John Tilbury, Rowe has written that his aim was to be,

> "strangely aware of John's movements, but not necessarily listening to what he [was] playing; not reacting to his playing but being affected by it. The act of NOT listening is very important, preferring juxtaposition to confabulation. [...] If I attempted not to actively listen to John's piano as my hand descended towards the guitar laid out before me, what might happen? Possibly I might avoid triggering memories of the piano, memories that by definition would take me away from the immediate context and towards some looping representations of past occasions. Clearly this is not an absolute state because I imagine that some memory is needed to comprehend the present. But given that my aim is to focus my attention to the situation in that room, that room will likely contain thousands of references which will in turn trigger memories." (Rowe, 2003)

To advocate '*Not* listening', of course, may sound somewhat perverse in an improvising context, where listening and responding to the group would seem to be of central importance to a performer. But, following John Cage's example in his composing of 'non-intention', I would characterise what Rowe describes he is doing as 'non-listening', which is a term Rowe uses interchangeably (though I am sure literally *not* listening really does have a role to play in his conception). It may be likened to a kind of 'wall-eyed' listening, where the performer's attention is diffused about the periphery of activity rather than in making connections with singular aspects of material detail. An attempt to force other kinds of improvisational continuity which avoid the 'conversational' or 'expressive' types of interaction familiar to those improvisers with closer ties to jazz. Such an approach to ensemble playing requires some degree of recognition of one's intentions on the part of the other musicians involved, especially when improvisation is conventionally regarded as an explicitly interactive approach to music making – Rowe's attitude seems closer to that of John Cage. Therefore, much like Wastell, Rowe has tended to favour working with specific musicians who are prepared to accept his working methods.

Beyond the immediate circle of the ensemble is the audience, and for performance-centred improvisers a context involving a listening audience is the essential ingredient. (It is not entirely clear how Rowe intends his non-listening to be regarded by an audience but it might be understood, partly, as a provocation of sorts.[66]) However, some take an approach to the matter of commitment that has much more in common with conventional ideals of the responsibility of a performer or entertainer. John Tilbury has commented on this relationship between the experimental musician and an audience,

> "if you're going to contribute, make sure that it's something that's worthwhile. I mean, people have got out of bed to come and hear you play ... and not only that, some of them have paid for it. Money is important, it's the idea of commitment: They've come, made an effort, they want something that, hopefully, will enlighten them or excite them; or even something negative, you know, want to make them even more depressed. I mean, they want something to happen, so there's quite a responsibility. It's not just amusement, it's deadly serious, especially as we [AMM] have ... dedicated most of [our] lives to improvising and making music – and that's not likely to change now. That's it, that's what you do. So it is extremely serious, you know, you've got into this and we can't get out now. Whereas if you're twenty-five, you might think, 'Well, I'm doing this now ... maybe in a few years time I'm going to go and work in an insurance agency.' ... So we have a proven commitment, and I like to feel that what we do is actually serious. I mean, there is a commitment there." (Interview with John Tilbury)

This seriousness of purpose towards the relationship between performer and audience that Tilbury puts forward does not suggest a passive acceptance of the

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[66] Speaking of a live CD recording (Keith Rowe (1999) *Harsh*, Grob Recordings 209) Rowe has commented, "Jackson Pollock made paintings and constantly went back to them to try to understand what they meant, if he liked them or if they had any relevance for him. He'd dig them out years later and say, "that's quite interesting" and add a bit more. I'm quite attracted to that. "Harsh" is something that's very important to me. I wanted to make something that was not very liked, something that was not obviously a well-rounded performance, something which wasn't aesthetic, something which wasn't that satisfying" (Warburton, 2001a). This may of course seem wilfully perverse, but there is what almost amounts to a tradition of ethically-driven provocation among the avant-garde, or more specifically, the politically-motivated avant-garde, which has notably been articulated by Bertholt Brecht and his successors such as Heiner Müller: "Success sets in where impact has ended. And there can only be impact where there is no success, and here I mean success as an overwhelming harmony which manifests itself in the reassuring applause of an audience" (Müller, 1995: vii).

listener's preferences or a desire to 'play to the gallery'. Instead it provides a clear feeling on the part of the performer that a necessary connection be made between the context and the events that occur within it, so that when aesthetic risks are taken they have to be acknowledged as such to have value. The tenor of Tilbury's argument is redolent of 'high art' discourse in its seriousness, but this is not to say that those musicians who associate their practice with 'low' entertainment or popular culture do not take their music seriously. Tilbury's intention is to challenge and provoke in a thoughtful manner by following his interests rather than those provided by previously established conventions of musical expression. This kind of discourse is echoed by many musicians down the ages who have been involved in what are ostensibly progressive types of music making. However, because Tilbury's intentions are articulated within the framework of a concert performance, they are inevitably shaped, whether consciously or not, by the expectations raised by this context. Tilbury is a classically-trained pianist, and AMM, the improvising group of which Tilbury is a member, have mostly favoured performance environments that have an association with classical music, such as concert halls, art galleries, and churches. Moreover, the group have often aimed to create an almost ritualistic atmosphere,[67] through the use of low-level lighting, and a judicious use of silence in their improvisations, all of which can combine to produce what can be viewed as a very specific context within which Tilbury improvises and feels able to speak about his music. Tilbury expands upon the relationship of the audience to the performers, commenting both upon conversations with audience members, and a general 'sense' of how the audience is responding to the music in the moment of performance:

"I think that there are certain sorts of imponderable things you get from an audience and how they are contributing, and it's difficult to say exactly what that involves. [...] They're giving something in the way they are listening, and I think that certainly influences the way we play. [...] And the other thing is you feel that the audience is inventing meanings too in the music. It's not that it has no meaning but it has many meanings – or let's say it has many potential meanings. And I feel that the creative listener is inventing, creating meanings.

[67] Eddie Prévost has referred to the "silent rituals [Cornelius Cardew] sometimes performed on our usually darkened stage, adding an eerie presence that affected audiences and the music that ensued, pacing out spaces of magical significance and placing indefinable objects to cohabit with performance" which occurred during some of AMM's performances of the 1960s (Prévost, 1995: 17-18).

And sometimes, afterwards, people come up and talk to you and say very illuminating things about the music, which you weren't really aware were there. And that's very gratifying, because they're treating it seriously as well." (Interview with John Tilbury)

2.) Improvisation as Play

Not all improvising musicians refer to concert performance to define the frame for their music making. What distinguishes performance-centred improvisers from play-centred improvisers is the necessary role of an audience. Performance-centred improvisers, such as those referred to above, can be seen to be actively aiming to engage each other and their audience with ideas of artistry and originality. What is it that motivates and validates the activity of play-centred, sometimes audience-less improvisers?

Having established the category of play-centred improvisation, I must admit that it is almost impossible to state categorically that any particular musician is a 'play-centred improviser' in the same way that some improvisers can be described as exclusively concerned with performance. Nevertheless, it can be recognised as a distinct tendency amongst some musicians (and possibly a larger number than there are performance-oriented improvisers).

Hugh Nankivell is one such musician engaged in a wide range of often overlapping activities, ranging from educational work with children and professional musicians to composition and theatrical collaborations and drawing upon a huge variety of musical genres. What binds all of these activities together is improvisation. Nankivell's involvement with the main type of improvisation discussed in this thesis (IEM) has included performing and rehearsing with musicians associated with the London Musicians' Collective in the 1980s, such as Scratch Orchestra co-founder Michael Parsons, and the composer and improviser Richard Barrett. What separates him from most of the musicians discussed in the preceding section is his refusal of stylistic exclusivity. Giving his reasons for being an improvising musician, he states,

"I think the answer is I enjoy doing it. I enjoy that interplay of working with other people. [...] For me it's much more about that sense of finding a way of communicating with other people. So with the community group that I run, what's great about that is that ... we've developed over the last five years ... an understanding. ... And it's not a kind of 'high level' of improvisation – high level is the wrong word. [...] We have done some concerts and we've kind of accepted that it's not the best thing for us to do. [...] What we do is more for ourselves. So I think I get out of it a sense of being able to communicate with other people in a way that's different from having a conversation." (Interview with Hugh Nankivell)

The emphasis in the particular group he describes is clearly geared towards *play* and the kinds of pleasurable social interaction that can be derived from making music. There is seemingly no claim made for the artistic value of such playing – indeed it may only be possible to evaluate it in sociological rather than purely musical terms. In this sense play-centred improvisation may be described as *functional*, following Adorno's distinction between autonomous and functional art works (Paddison, 1997: 200-2).

Commenting on his work with university music students, Nankivell notes the reticence with which most students approach improvisation. This reticence arises, in part, because of the lingering influence of ideas about what is traditionally regarded in Western art as musically valuable and what is disposable:

"It's that word *play*. You know one of the things I talk to the students here a lot about is, you know, 'What do you do? You say you play music, what does *play* mean?' You know, I think most people actually *work* music. [...] I try to encourage them when they practise to do ten minutes every day of just playing, you know. And when I ask them what they've done they say, 'Oh yes, I played my favourite tune'. I say, 'Well, try and play something that's just *you*.' It's very hard for quite a lot of them just to do that, to break away from that thing about playing something pre-existing to playing something [that is] just in their own head. I think you're right, that maybe the sense of guilt is just, well – it's just mucking about, isn't it?" (Interview with Hugh Nankivell)

This notion of play as 'mucking about' is pervasive. The philosopher John Dewey, considered aesthetic experience as an essential part of a rounded human life, that without it a working life could not be fulfilling. However, despite appearing to value aesthetic experience for its own sake, and emphasising the importance of the *process* of making art over that of the end product of art objects, Dewey makes it quite clear

that without the guidance of a clear outcome, aesthetic experience can not be properly fulfilling:

> "...any activity becomes work when it is directed by accomplishment of a definite material result, and it is labor [*sic*] only as the activities are onerous, undergone as mere means by which to secure a result. The product of artistic activity is significantly called the work of art. The truth in the play theory of art is its emphasis upon the unconstrained character of esthetic [*sic*] experience, not in its intimation of an objectively unregulated quality in activity. Its falsity lies in its failure to recognize that esthetic experience involves a definite reconstruction of objective materials [...] Play remains an attitude of freedom from subordination to an end imposed by external necessity, as opposed, that is, to labor; but it is transformed into work in that activity is subordinated to production of an objective result. (Dewey, 1934: 278-279)

In the example Nankivell gives of encouraging his students to *play*, there is indeed an objective to broaden their educational experience and future horizons as musicians, but this is not something which would necessarily be immediately apparent to the students because there is no clear ground provided on which to improvise when you are playing for the sake of playing. In a collective situation, play may be less exposed because players can copy ideas from each other, and a general sense of what is or isn't acceptable can be gradually established. It is a matter of familiarising oneself with the rules of an activity in order to play or adapt to survive in an unfamiliar environment. It could be said that play dampens individuality in order to merge effectively with the activity of the group, however, this tendency is, perhaps, even more characteristic of performance.

For a performance to succeed some sense of consistency must be maintained. In play there is always the possibility of starting over or having a break, whereas a performance will generally not allow for the use of such 'safety nets' because it would make the performance appear less convincing as an event. Yet while these features describe the superficial differences between performance and play-centred approaches to improvising, I would argue that at a deeper level performance is made more convincing or sincere for the performers and the audience when it encounters an element of play. Equally, what makes play worthwhile is the ability to maintain the activity at a level that resembles the consistency and coherence of a 'good performance' of a musical work (to kick a ball about in a park might have its own

everyday pleasures, but to have that experience transformed, however momentarily, by team rivalry and cooperation is likely to alter the experience of the everyday kick about). The role of play in performance, however, introduces an element of risk that threatens to undermine the coherence of the performance. With improvised performance the element of play is already in the foreground (for the performers if not always the audience), but for play-centred improvisers this uncertainty and risk is often made a defining feature or virtue of a performance. Contradictory or colliding musical ideas are often what make a performance seem vital and alive because there is a sense that either fresh new ideas will be sparked off amongst the musicians or that the whole edifice will collapse.

Humour is sometimes an important aspect that arises from such situations of musical mismatch and intentional contradiction. Mick Beck has this to say on the subject of humour in improvisation:

> "Quite an interesting thing, humour: can be a great stimulus or it can just lead to a whole heap of embarrassment. You know, if you suddenly introduce something which is patently stupid, you know, like 'Jingle Bells' or something. And then if you can't integrate it into the rest of the performance it can just stand there like a fish out of water (to mix the metaphors)." (Interview with Mick Beck)

Fig. 17, Steve Beresford (pocket trumpet) and Han Bennick (snare drum). The duo often employ physical comedy and theatrical elements into their performances which integrate with the kinds of musical materials each tends to employ, such as rapid quotation and allusion to a number of styles and pieces of music, and a combination of a high degree of instrumental sophistication with purposely 'bad' or childish technique. The inspiration behind this 'plunderphonic' approach is as much variety and music hall traditions and jazz performance as it is the influence of sampling technology and the conceptual art antagonism of John Oswald (see chapter 1).

Humour and a play-centred attitude are considered by Beck useful insofar as they are able to contribute to the coherence of the music being made, and there is a close relationship between this kind of referential playing and the African-American-derived practice of 'signifyin'' within jazz improvisation where musical humour, through recontextualising recognisable elements of other pieces and styles, can contribute as much to the musical argument as they do to the social dynamic of an ensemble (see chapter 5 for a more developed discussion of the role of signifyin' in relation to IEM). For some improvisers the use of such referential musical material for the purpose of provoking recognition (humorous or otherwise) is 'inauthentic' to the processes of free improvisation. Musicians like Prévost and Bailey who base their approach to improvisation on the idea of instrumental self-invention are often highly critical of those musicians who appear to take an 'off-the-shelf' attitude to musical materials rather than allow them to spring from the interaction between a player and their instrument. Speaking of a performance with composer and improviser Gavin Bryars in the late 1960s, Derek Bailey is critical of what he considers to be Bryars' composerly way of playing:

> "You've got to understand, this wasn't an instrumental use of records, he [Bryars] used to play the one record over and over again. This is the old *avantgarderie*, isn't it? Some sensational event that blows everybody away. Composers have a weakness for this kind of thing. He had a record of Tiny Tim which he might play five times in succession – no gaps. [...] I don't think I was particularly annoyed by this. Stunned, perhaps. [...] It's amazing how some premeditated event such as that never seems to work." (Derek Bailey, cited in Watson, 2004: 103.)

The situation Bailey describes is not quite the same thing as either jazz signifyin' or 'plunderphonics' (see chapter one). Both signifyin' and 'plunderphonic' approaches depend upon all players acknowledging the importance of improvised dialogue, because the snippets of recognisable material are aimed at broadening or intensifying dialogue and provoking a development or change in the music. With the example that Bailey gives of Bryars simply playing a recording, neither musician is able to engage in improvised dialogue with each other. Bailey may or may not continue to improvise in response to Bryars' unchanging stimulus, but there can be no dialogue – and the shape of the music is imposed by Bryars' record and not the interaction of the players. Bryars' approach might be likened to Rowe's 'non-

listening', referred to above, in that the spontaneous aspect to this example is found in the juxtaposition of unrelated elements (Derek Bailey's atonal guitar set against Tiny Tim's falsetto) rather than a conversational interaction. Dialogue tends to lead one to favour cohesiveness in the music or the production of observable relationships between the musicians, and this is often considered an important feature of an audience's enjoyment of an ensemble's *performance*, as much as it is a stimulus to the performers themselves and is not restricted to either play or performance-centred attitudes to improvising. With the 'anti' or 'non-interactive' approaches of Bryars and Rowe it is more difficult to state whether it should be regarded as either performance or play-centred. In a non concert, play-directed context this kind of experimental approach may be insulated from the demands of an audience to produce some notionally satisfactory outcome (for example, an observable musical or performing interaction), and is more likely to receive the indulgence of other musicians who may not be immediately convinced by this approach. Yet experimental music, if it is intended to be more than a private laboratory for musicians (which it surely is for most of the musicians described here), has to engage an audience with the images and processes it produces. Consequently, for a musician such as Rowe (and Bryars, possibly) the antagonism or tension generated by the differing intentions behind Rowe's performance and those of his fellow musicians functions (for Rowe, if for no one else) as a Brechtian ploy to draw attention to the brittle nature of the performance situation. This is an extreme example, because for most performances the members of an ensemble will have agreed to participate having an awareness of the general aesthetic disposition of their musical partners. And so musical and ideological antagonisms are largely absorbed by a shared knowledge and understanding of what might be possible under the circumstances – which is not to downplay the necessary role of the struggle involved in negotiating contradiction and misunderstanding, as the following chapter will explore. In order for this kind of struggle and negotiation to be musically useful or meaningful, however, a tacit acknowledgement amongst the members of the ensemble needs to be in place of the aesthetic aims of a group, and this may be quite a frail thing.[68]

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[68] An extreme example would be the ideological split in AMM in 1972, where the group briefly became two groups, one consisting of Gare and Prévost, the other of the now Maoist-motivated Cardew and Rowe who largely rejected the dialogue of improvisation in favour of the use of pre-recorded material (see Prévost, 1995: 1-2).

Concluding Remarks

Most of the musicians quoted above are concerned with communicating a shared experience. For a musician like John Tilbury – representing the performance-centred emphasis – this manifests itself in a sense of commitment to his audience described in terms similar to those expected of any performer within the Western classical tradition. For Hugh Nankivell – representing the play-centred emphasis – it is demonstrated through a commitment to the communal aspects of the interaction generated between a group of musicians. Both kinds of commitment can be thought of as cohesive aims rendered more uncertain and vital by the live situation. In addition, the aim of self-invention – espoused to some degree by all of the musicians referred to above – is what gives each member of a group a sense of autonomy and identity to be communicated, and the collaborative circumstances of the improvisation simultaneously threatens this individual identity and any sense of a group identity (note Wastell's interest in working with specific musicians), but at the same time it is the forum in which the very idea of an individual or group identity is made and scrutinised. Compare Nankivell's request to his students to expand their expressive range: "Well, try and play something that's just *you*" (Interview with Hugh Nankivell), with Prévost's more dramatic statement: "if you find yourself doing somebody else's music... your own sense of self – it seems somewhat extreme to say it's under threat – but in a sense it is" (Interview with Eddie Prévost). This latter aim requires a measure of self-confidence from a musician which is potentially supported or thwarted by the collective actions of an ensemble, but, as I shall explore in the following chapter it is the element which drives the ensemble and makes collaborative improvisation the distinctive thing that it is.

Chapter 4

The Individual Impulse within a Collaborative Aesthetic

Introduction

In this chapter I take the themes which emerged from the interview material discussed in chapter 3 and examine them from a more abstract angle in relation to ideas about collaboration and innovation from the fields of aesthetics and ethics. My main point of departure is the work of the American philosopher Stanley Cavell; specifically two aspects of his work which I feel are of relevance to the discussion of motivations behind the practice of IEM. The reason that I am interested in Cavell is that the questions he asks about art are framed similarly to the concerns of the interviewed musicians along empirical lines, and emphasise the discovery of meaning instead of simply appealing to received ways of making art and the problems inherent in this kind of approach. In addition, the questions he and other Pragmatist philosophers[69] raise about social and political organisation, specifically, questions about democracy, have strong parallels with the predicament that a musician as an individual faces in attempting to navigate between the impulse to shape and direct the music made and the need to maintain some degree of stability within the ensemble. Cavell's critique of the concept of institutional democracy leads me to consider briefly the work of the political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who explore similar themes to Cavell, but stress the irrational element within democracy which they claim is necessary to keep democracy vital. I argue that the tension between the rational and irrational aspects of democracy has echoes in the interaction between the motivations of performance and play felt by the musicians in a collaborative improvisation. From out of the 'friction' generated by these alternatively cohesive and potentially destructive impulses decisions are made and acted upon, the results of which are judged to be useful, entertaining, successful or the opposite of each of these responses. In other words, I am concerned here with the dynamic balance that musicians attempt

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[69] Cavell's work does not entirely fall into the category of American Pragmatist philosophy because he retains links with Wittgensteinian and classic 'ordinary language' philosophies. However, his main inspiration comes from the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson who significantly influenced the work of key Pragmatists like John Dewey.

to strike between originality and musical convention within an ensemble situation in order to produce something that is both 'new' and meaningful for the ensemble as a unit, and its audience.

Firstly I concern myself with the question of what it is to make a meaningful utterance or 'musical sense' in collaborative improvisation. Secondly, I examine the role of the individual within the ensemble in provoking original statements while maintaining the cohesiveness or sense of the ensemble and the larger picture of the music that is being produced. This latter 'ethical' aspect of musical collaboration and improvisation is investigated through a comparison with Cavell's, and Laclau and Mouffe's critiques of institutional models of democracy.

Cavell's Challenge

The problem that many commentators have had with improvisation and musical experimentation is that it is seen to encourage a disbelieving, sometimes hostile response from those unfamiliar with it because of the manner in which it flouts received kinds of musically communicative relationships between listeners and performers. Motivated by the desire for continual innovation and novelty (encouraged by Modernism and Postmodernism during the twentieth century) improvising experimental musicians have aimed to strip away many of the traditional ideas about making music, and, as a consequence, ways of evaluating music. This means that almost every performance of improvised experimental music has to establish itself on its own terms as if it existed in a historical, social, and aesthetic vacuum. The situation is not quite this stark – in fact, it is impossible for a performance situation not to be interpreted (correctly or incorrectly) in relation to the experience of other performing situations – but this is how it has often been painted by aesthetic commentators. The challenge to the creative musician that this set of circumstances has provoked has been expressed in the following way by Stanley Cavell:

> "... in art the chances you take are your own. But of course you are inviting others to take them with you. And since they are, nevertheless, your own, and your invitation is based not on power or authority, but on attraction and promise, your invitation incurs the most exacting of obligations: that *every*

risk must be shown worthwhile [...] You cede the possibility of excuse, explanation, or justification for your failures; and the cost of failure is not remorse and recompense, but the loss of coherence altogether." (Cavell, 1976: 200)

The explicitly stated eschewal by most performers working in improvised experimental music of the rules that govern other kinds of improvised music, such as the song and dance structures of jazz or the normative roles of soloist and accompanist, is a prime example of the kind of risk that Cavell describes.[70] The unfamiliarity of this 'non-idiomatic' musical style is for many listeners the main stumbling block to comprehension or engagement with the music. In order to satisfy Cavell's position, some aspect of the music must hold an 'attraction and promise' for its audience otherwise they are unlikely to find persevering with it to be worthwhile. On some level a listener will bring an expectation that there will be demonstrable evidence of a perceivable coherence to the music that makes it worth knowing or experiencing – something which can be, at the very least, felt, or is clearly present in the immediate attraction of its surface texture. This is in order to convince the listener (or performer for that matter) that a more rounded experience can be achieved by spending 'enough' time to become accustomed with the music. The terms 'improvised' and 'experimental', immediately flag up the aesthetic risk that both listener and performer are asked to take on board, making the improviser's invitation to an audience that little bit less attractive and promising. It cannot be guaranteed that the music will have a successful outcome even with experienced performers, let alone produce something that is in some way 'accessible' to those unfamiliar with the music: indeed the descriptions 'experimental' and 'improvised' may suggest exactly the opposite. Thus it may be thought that those listeners (and performers) who have taken the initial step to spend the time to hear what this music has to offer will expect more of an aesthetic return from their experience than those who have jumped at the first fence. Presumably this first step is based on a degree of attraction and promise that the listener has discerned and felt may be worth persisting with, but once in this position they are, once again, asked to make the leap of faith that the performers will be true to that initial suggestion of musical worth. For this leap to be satisfied at the most basic level requires that the performer is able to demonstrate a level of commitment to their

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[70] Cavell's point of reference is the 'new music' scene of the 1950s and 60s, in particular John Cage and serialist composers of the Darmstadt and Milton Babbitt variety.

chosen way of making music beyond that of merely fulfilling the normal duties of a paid jobbing musician. And this demonstration of commitment might be said to fulfil the role of an aesthetic bond (however indirectly) between the performer and the audience.

One way in which such a bond can be fostered is through the setting in which a performance takes place. As discussed previously, IEM has no single kind of venue associated with its performance – it exists in limbo between the bar and club atmosphere of jazz and popular music and the salon or concert hall environment of Western classical music. The ambience of each venue, and the associated behaviours thought appropriate for musicians and audience, affect the expectations that both listener and performer have towards the music that is made. With experimental music it can sometimes appear (and, sometimes, it is indeed the case) that the performers have a devil-may-care attitude as to how or if the audience responds, or rather that the aim is to provoke. However, as noted above, some improvisers approach the matter of commitment in a manner that has much more in common with conventional ideals of responsibility as a performer or entertainer: as John Tilbury notes, "if you're going to contribute, make sure that it's something that's worthwhile." (Interview with John Tilbury)

This sense of commitment, one which most improvisers are keen to demonstrate, reflects an ongoing dialogue between the individual's need to innovate and go beyond what is tried and tested, whilst at the same time finding a way to communicate this desire to others beyond the immediate community of their fellow performers. Or, fine tuning the matter further still, that the individual is able to generate a bond of commitment to the music from his or her fellow performers. The impression conveyed by both Cavell and Tilbury is that in the performance of new music there is a need for the performer's utterances to be 'authentic' in spite of the fact that the ground upon which such authenticity is measured from is always shifting – musical materials and means of structuring sounds are never firmly established. Anthony Gritten, referring to the notion of 'authenticity' in the performance of

classical music[71], has drawn upon Lydia Goehr's suggestion that "the performer's attention is internally divided and pulled in two directions by the claims of 'the perfect performance of music' and 'the perfect performance'" (Gritten, 2004: 192). In Gritten's example there is a pull between, on the one hand, the platonic idea of the perfect manifestation of a *work* (for example, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as imagined), and on the other hand, an exemplary instance of musical *performance* (for example, Wilhelm Furtwängler's 1937 performance with the Berlin Philharmonic[72]). For Gritten and Goehr, the classical performer can only attempt to deal with the paradox of joining that aspect of the music which is idealised to that which is experienced by making "an appeal to notions like sincerity and authenticity" (192). *Authenticity* is demonstrated by how the performer engages with the specific demands of the work, and suggests that a performer has prepared and reflected upon the work, and has a clear grasp of the work's structure as it is experienced over the necessary stretch of time. Yet, *sincerity* is what makes the performance convincing as a performance in the moment and is therefore more immediately relatable to the notion of commitment in improvised music as it has been described so far. This is a problematic division in that the relationship between a perfect performance and a perfect performance of a work is not as even as Gritten or Goehr might imply. Considered on philosophical grounds, determining the quality of a performance, in terms of its authenticity or fidelity to the work of which it is a performance, carries more weight than the sincerity of the performance act because of the platonic or culturally accepted acknowledgement of the 'work' as something that exists outside time. As such, sincerity appears conceptually weak since it can only be justified in terms of how it supports the authenticity of the performance of the work. Without a clearly defined object or activity to be sincere about or to engage with sincerely, it is difficult to give much credence to the role of sincerity because it is a matter of taking the performer at his or her word that they are being sincere. It is easy to see why the plastic arts have played such a central role in aesthetics and art criticism, because these forms result in the production of an artefact that can be verified as 'authentic'. Sincerity need not play an important part in determining the quality of a painting by

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[71] 'Authenticity' in Gritten's article is, in part, concerned with the idea of historically-correct performance, but in the main he concerns himself, as I do here, with the philosophical interpretation of 'authenticity' with regard to identifying musical works as 'genuine' works.
[72] Wilhelm Furtwängler *Pre-war HMV Recordings*, Biddulph WHL00607, 1994.

Velázquez because it can be verified as factually authentic and measured against other pictures in terms of the quality in Velázquez's adherence to and deviance from conventional techniques.

This returns us to Cavell's challenge to new music: knowing that a sonata by Boulez is constructed according to serial procedures, or that a piece by Cage is organised by chance, or that an improvisation by John Tilbury is indeed improvised, is not enough to justify its artistic worth. Merely *knowing* how something was made does not mean that it will be *experienced* in the same way because with these examples there is not an obvious connection between how the music has been made and how it appears. For Cavell, the use of traditional techniques by a composer like Stravinsky such as fugue and reference to conventional tonality makes his music comprehensible to a general, concert-going audience. And from this position of audible comprehension a listener can begin to make judgements about the authenticity of the work, and, additionally, the fidelity of a performance. With improvised music it becomes trickier to identify where the authentic element resides or if it exists at all in order to establish the musical merits of an improvisation.[73] The musical materials used and the structures made by improvising musicians are inextricably bound to the act of performance, and this makes the technical and aesthetic division between performance and composition meaningless. For a listener, authenticity of the music as a musical structure can then only be judged in relation to a score (if there is one) or knowledge, previously acquired, of a performer's 'sound', and authenticity of performance can only be judged in relation to the perceived sincerity of the performer –this can only be determined by reference to whatever conventions of performance are felt to be most appropriate to the situation.

However, like a feedback loop, perhaps sincerity can only be judged in terms of a performer's *perceived* intentions and behaviour, and only gains value when it is allied to what are then interpreted as authentic outcomes. If it is only the audience's or individual musician's perception of what is happening that can determine sincerity, then there is the possibility that sincerity may be faked or misrecognised. In any field of the performing arts there are those performers who favour an organic, 'method'

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[73] As chapter 2 has shown most commentators on the musical work concept agree that improvisations are not works (Dahlhaus, 1987; Goehr, 1992; Davies, 2003).

approach, and others who favour a more stylised and self-conscious approach. (In the field of acting one may observe these types in the work of, on the one hand, a character actor such as John Malkovich who tends to submerge his public persona as an actor by seemingly wholly identifying with the role he is playing, and on the other hand, one who plays cameo roles such as Jack Nicholson, and is to some extent always recognisably 'the actor Jack Nicholson'.) The general tendency is to recognise the organic approach to performance as displaying sincerity, rather than a detached stylised performance because it 'appears' to be more sincere. But both organic and artificial approaches can be regarded as effective ways of suspending an audiences' sense of disbelief.[74] Insofar as an improvisation is something made in the moment it could be said to be more likely to demonstrate an organic approach, and this is underlined by Prévost's appeals to dialogue and Tilbury's reference to physically moulding musical material mentioned in chapter 3. At the same time, however, other improvisers draw attention to things which may be considered stylised – but no less sincerely motivated – approaches to improvisation. Wastell, for example, stresses the importance of preparing musical materials and working with similarly-minded people, and Rowe seemingly sets out to undermine conventional notions of improvisational dialogue. In each case these approaches could be regarded as having the intention of fuelling the performer's engagement with the moment of music making, and in so doing, demonstrate the performer's sincere commitment to improvising.

Evidence of sincerity and, ultimately, the authenticity of the improvisation need not involve blind faith on the part of the performer or audience member. The customs associated with the work concept detailed in chapter 2 and the ritualistic aspect of AMM's performance may suggest, at times, a quasi-religious process of induction into the music. And this 'conventional' aspect of their performance surely plays a crucial role in persuading the audience to listen in a particular way, and in allowing the performers to feel able to proceed with a measure of confidence. What brings everything together is the performer's ability to demonstrate or suggest the integration of intention and action: in a group improvisation – in order for it to be

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[74] Sincerity is not something that is generally associated with magicians but artifice plays a prominent role in illusion acting as a distraction from the sleight of hand that is employed. A musical example might be Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* (1919-20) which lulls the listener into a false sense of familiarity with its musical materials setting up expectations that are then subverted or undermined.

meaningful as an improvisation – there must be a perceivable relationship between the actions of the individual performers, the larger picture of the group identity, and the music that is in the process of being made. In other words, a kind of 'collective sincerity' needs to be seen and heard to operate for the performance to be felt to be satisfactory for the majority of performers or listeners. This is an uncontroversial statement in the context of most kinds of musical activity: unity and consistency of purpose are underlined by the hierarchies that govern the roles musicians assume (such as soloist or accompanist), or the ways in which a harmonic structure is made to underpin a melodic line. With collaborative 'free' improvisation, on the other hand, these musical assumptions are abandoned or blurred. This begs several questions, of which the first I wish to deal with is: how does the individual musician feel able to make a contribution that demonstrates a responsiveness to the emergent musical form without being subservient to or destructive to the musical and social process of the improvisation? Allied to this question is the matter of how musicians recognise that what they are doing is right or wrong, or good or bad. This leads me to consider these ideas, regarding the role of the individual in a group, from a wider perspective. In doing so, I shall draw upon some recent writing from the fields of social and political philosophy.

Individuals & Institutions

Stanley Cavell's later work is mostly concerned with moral questions, and specifically the matter of political responsibility and self-determination. On the surface this is quite a shift from his work of the 1960s, referred to above (which was largely focussed upon aesthetics and film criticism), but the questions that Cavell broaches about aesthetic experience and new music are as much ethical questions as they are aesthetic. In addition, this later work on moral philosophy is concerned with emphasising the "culture or cultivation" (Cavell, 1990: xxxii) of moral reasoning. And here I find parallels with the dual aims of improvisers to cultivate the 'self-invention' of their sound as individual musicians alongside a commitment to the social processes that give rise to a properly *improvised* music (as opposed to the juxtaposition of elements in a piece by John Cage). Cavell does not attempt to elide the aesthetic with moral or political judgements (this is my juxtaposition of

categories); he suggests that the act of reasoning – and the institutions that are seen to validate, enable or restrict reason – is culturally determined.[75] In a loosely parallel way, improvised music foregrounds the act of musical reasoning or negotiation by drawing attention to the live situation in which decisions are made and events are determined through being improvised, in contrast with most Western classical concert music which relies heavily upon the conventions of the concert hall for its validation as an artistic experience (this is not to say that IEM does not retain some of these assumptions, as discussed in chapter 2).[76]

Cavell's project on democracy stems from two main sources: an attempt to revive aspects of the work of transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, and a critical engagement with the political philosophy of John Rawls. Cavell's interest in Emerson is not merely idiosyncratic, but can be situated within a wider philosophical context through the renewed interest in the Pragmatist tradition of John Dewey, reflected amongst Cavell's contemporaries (Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, and Richard Shusterman), and Emerson's influence upon European philosophy through Nietzche. Emerson's philosophy can be crudely characterised as concerning itself with self-determination and taking responsibility for the self. Cavell takes up an Emersonian position to examine Rawls's philosophy of democracy, justice, and political liberalism.

For Rawls (1993 and 1999), the way to ensure a working democracy (and an effective system of justice, following a model broadly derived from a critique of Enlightenment Liberal Utilitarianism), is to organise the relevant institutions in such a way that they are enabled to function in favour of the majority of the people. This is an extreme simplification of Rawls's position, but it does provide his essential argument: if democracy is an abstract notion that cannot be seen to have a partisan bias, then it must be organised in an abstract way through the appropriate organisation of institutions and conventions (such as a constitution and an impartial legal system). It could easily be argued that there is an inbuilt bias that favours liberal values and

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[75] This places Cavell slightly outside the mainstream of Anglo-American philosophy which largely refuses to consider the role of sociological matters in determining questions thought proper to philosophy.
[76] See chapter 5 for further exploration of the importance of context for both improvised and composed music with reference to the work of Hall (1992).

utilitarian outcomes in Rawls's model, and indeed, as a term, 'democracy' has been bent to favour almost any political agenda one could care to mention. Rather than take up these criticisms directly, Cavell argues that an 'institutional' model of democracy can only ever be partial because institutions must be maintained by those who make use of them, and therefore the democratic model cannot remain entirely abstract if it is to be relevant. Rawls accounts for the individual by suggesting that the state explicitly or implicitly derives its legitimacy through an agreement (social contract) that certain private rights will be surrendered or suspended in favour of certain public rights that ensure the stability of the state. For example, instead of justice being handled in an uncontrolled vigilante manner, the state provides a police force and a legal system for the benefit of the populace. For Rawls the separation of institutions from the interests of individual agendas acts as a 'check' against which decisions can only be enacted if, in their worst incarnation, they favour the minority who may under other circumstances suffer as a result. Cavell recognises the need for an agreement between institutions and the people they are built to serve, but argues that without a conscious awareness and recognition of what the agreement means by both sides (state institutions and citizens), such a 'social contract' is meaningless, as he explains:

> "What I consent to, in consenting to the contract, is not mere obedience, but membership in a polis, which implies two things: First, that I recognize the principle of consent itself; which means that I recognize others to have consented with me, and hence that I consent to political equality. Second, that I recognize the society and its government, so constituted, as mine; which means that I am answerable not merely to it, but for it. ... citizenship in that case is the same as my autonomy; the polis is the field within which I work out my personal identity and it is the creation of (political) freedom." (Cavell, 1990: 107)

The terms 'contract' and 'consent' are problematic in the sense in that for the individual citizen the contract is usually something inherited from preceding generations, and only officially acknowledged upon reaching voting age. However, Cavell stresses the importance of interacting with the institutions and processes consented to by the social contract because it provides the measure without which notions of individuality and freedom within a society cannot function and little sense can be made. Similarly, for an individual to use the occasion of a group improvisation simply to 'express' his or her sense of 'self' or do what he or she feels like, regardless of whatever else is being played by the other members of a group, is to misunderstand

the potential musical and social value of improvisation and to risk not being asked back.[77]

To ignore the contract is to leave oneself open to the possibility of coming into conflict with the freedoms of other individuals (as recognised by the contract), and – more dangerously than the wrath of fellow musicians – the workings of the institutions of the state. Cavell's idea of consent does not mean that the citizen acquiesces to whatever the state dictates but that he or she is (at some level) engaged with the debates and decisions concerned with modifying the existing contract, its institutions and the ways in which it operates. This goes beyond Rawls's position because it emphasises the potential and necessarily transformative role of the individual living within a democratic system.

In terms of the individual performer and the ensemble, the 'contract' could be thought of as consisting of different levels of understanding and consent about the ways in which the contract can be satisfied, not all of which may be automatically recognised or explicitly consented to by either party. At the most simple level there is recognition that there will be a performance, and, usually, also of the kind of improvised musical performance it is likely to be. 'Consent' could be demonstrated by attending the event and remaining until the end without significantly disrupting the performance, but this would be consent of the weak kind that Cavell argues against. To pursue this analogy, an audience might be thought of as fulfilling the institutional role of the voter, with the musicians representing a political party or parliament. The audience may voice its appreciation of the music at the end of the improvisation or even during the performance (more likely in a club setting than a concert hall), signalling their consent, or appreciation having given their consent and been satisfied with the result, or by signalling consent for the musicians to continue what they are doing either now in the performance or at a future event. Improvisers (performance-centred musicians in particular) are enabled to act 'freely' by the audience's consent as long as they recognise how far the audience will let them take their musical ideas before they are rejected as too incoherent, too provocative, or at the other end of the

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[77] Jost (1994: 38) refers to a novice improviser at a free jazz session who, told to 'play what you feel like' proceeded to play 'Jingle Bells' for the remainder of the session, to the annoyance of the other musicians.

spectrum, too ordinary and lacking in excitement (much like the way in which political parties are voted in or out).

Consensus and Agonistic Models

Unlike composition, where traditionally there is an emphasis upon unity and the integration of diverse elements, collective improvisation, by its very nature, makes the probability of a consistent, unified musical aesthetic unlikely. Some musicians, such as Mark Wastell (see chapter 3), take steps to reduce this disunity by choosing to perform with some musicians rather than others. The level of consensus about the music and kinds of appropriate musical behaviour admitted in a performance is likely to be high amongst musicians who share a similar aesthetic outlook, and the end result of the performance is more likely to resemble the integrated nature of a composed work. Due to the fact that such musicians will most likely have developed their preferences and performing partnerships over a long period of time, there is a sense in which most of the consent has been given in advance of the performance (for example, X agrees to perform with Y because X knows that Y will play in such a way that complements what X plays; and Y knows that X will not set fire to Y's cello). Broadly speaking, this kind of 'contractual' consent could be said to be common to most performance-centred improvisers. However, when it comes to play-centred improvisers it could be said that there is only contractual consent up to the point of agreeing to play. When it comes to consent about the particular content of an improvised performance, things are much less certain, and consent cannot necessarily be taken to imply a shared or integrated ensemble aesthetic. This is not to say that performance-centred improvisers are simply obedient to a prevailing ensemble aesthetic, but that musical disagreement and friction is more readily observable among play-centred musicians. There is consent that the music will be improvised but there is no consensus that the music will follow the expected trajectories of a performance in the 'work concept'-related sense where the individual parts are clearly integrated with the performance and experienced as a whole 'piece'.

To return to the political sphere, musicologist Leonard Meyer notes that consensus is not necessarily the aim of democracy and it does not rely upon it to operate successfully. According to Meyer, "what is most remarkable about democratic forms of government is that they enable groups to make ad hoc judgements so that insight bridges the gap between general principles and specific application" (Meyer, 2000: 47-48). In other words, democracy is useful politically, in practice, because for a diverse collection of people to agree entirely on one overarching systematic approach to policy is close to impossible and, potentially, dangerously inflexible. The political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe go further, arguing that to regard democracy as something completely rational and neutral is to overlook the ways in which it is described and put into practice by those in positions of power (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Mouffe, 2000). For Laclau and Mouffe, the prevailing liberal model of democracy in the Western world is inadequate because the vision it presents of an achievable rational consensus, and a pluralist, equal society is compromised in practice by the refusal to recognise the irrational element. Therefore conflict and division should be acknowledged for the role they play in drawing attention to the particular concerns of individuals within a democratic society. Laclau and Mouffe's 'agonistic' model of democracy (Mouffe, 2000: 98) may appear to be a little disturbing as a political idea if put into practice by the mainstream political parties,[78] especially because, if pushed to extremes, it could become merely an 'antagonistic' model (where political decisions are made by playing the interests of one group off those of another group, resulting in mutual antagonism). The fact that Laclau and Mouffe call their model agonistic suggests that in order to deal with the stresses and strains of social, political, and economic problems there must be an acknowledgement – or, at some level, consent – about the rules of the 'game' or principles which enable a democracy to function. Similarly, for improvised music to be acceptable and comprehensible for the performers and the audience the basic rules, however broadly defined, of play and performance ought to be acknowledged by all individuals concerned for the results to be in any way satisfactory.

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[78] Laclau and Mouffe's intention is a fairly modest attempt to articulate a space for ideas of social democracy (and not random outbreaks of anarchy) which they feel have been sidelined since the 1980s, as all the main European political parties have converged on the ground of the political centre-right.

Concluding Remarks

An improvising situation of private 'play' (for example, a group 'jamming' together) is where an agonistic model of improvising can be indulged most because the group is accountable only to itself for the mistakes it makes. Whatever 'rules of play' are established (usually tacitly) in the improvisation about the kinds of musical materials and ways of interacting that are acceptable, can be bent or exchanged without fear of becoming incoherent to any third party (an audience). This kind of model of improvising as private play requires a greater tolerance for those moments when the music becomes incoherent, on the part of the participants because it is as much a social activity as it is a musical one (often it is a situation in which to 'try out' new ideas). The model of improvisation as public performance requires a greater sense of responsibility for the actions of the group on the part of each member of the group. Instead of simply tolerating any perceived 'wrong turns' in the music and waiting for the next moment of interest to come along, it becomes essential to the survival or quality of the improvisation as a musical performance for the individual musician to actively work with the events that present themselves. The individual is impelled to find a way in which to make the music work as the effort of an ensemble by deciding to support the 'wrong' idea, or transform it or reject it by replacing it with an alternative.

The institution of the concert instils certain responsibilities on the shoulders of each member of the ensemble towards the audience, and therefore the performance-centred context would appear to be a less appropriate model to describe as 'agonistic' because the broad aim of the musicians is to provide something satisfactory for an audience. However, two things work against the possibility of a smoothly, cohesive improvised performance: The first is the fact that the music is improvised by an ensemble. Any member of the group can, at any time, alter the direction and character of the music either mistakenly or on purpose – if collective improvisation has any key 'rule' it is that the ensemble must be ready to incorporate anything that happens in the music by submerging it or making a feature of it. Secondly, there is the matter of *risk*: the reason musicians choose to improvise is that they enjoy the prospect of doing something that is in some way different from their previous performances and which creates the excitement of the performance being a 'live' and 'special' event. The sense

of risk is increased by how far the individual feels impelled to push the improvisation in the direction of unfamiliar territory. This risk is counterbalanced by the ensemble's willingness to follow these individual impulses and the ensemble's collective ability to do so (dependent upon experience of improvising and sympathy for the direction the music is taking in the performance). The individual musician's willingness to experiment may be encouraged by the knowledge of how responsive the ensemble is to his or her ideas.

At the start of this chapter I noted Cavell's challenge to experimental musicians concerning risks that can be judged 'worthwhile'. I have not sought to present a definitive solution to the matter of balancing artistic risk and intelligibility – and Cavell, would surely acknowledge the rhetorical aspect to his challenge. Instead I have attempted to widen the scope of the picture that I am making of the interaction between ideas and practice in IEM. In the next chapter I look at examples of some of the processes described so far in action. I explore the ways in which improvising groups operate and cultivate their practice in a setting which blends play-centred and performance-centred conceptions of improvising.

Chapter 5

Beyond the Jazz Model: Analysing IEM

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss ways of approaching the analysis of IEM and present a case study. If, according to Derek Bailey, improvised music has "no prescribed idiomatic sound" (Bailey, 1992: 83) and holds no allegiance to predetermined formal models such as sonata or song forms, then to attempt to define an improvisation as an object for musical analysis is to tread a very fine line. To analyse something invariably means to do so 'after the event' following the creation of the object of analysis, be it a score or a recording, and this is seemingly in conflict with the nature of improvisation as something made in and for the moment. Once an improvised performance is recorded or transcribed it arguably becomes something other than an improvisation and much more like a composition. The musician and record producer Brian Eno has described an informal experiment in which he recorded everyday sounds and then repeatedly listened to the recordings so that they changed from, in his words, "Something ... completely arbitrary and disconnected" to become "with sufficient listenings ... highly connected." (Toop, 1995: 129). Repeated listening to a recording of an improvisation can, potentially, completely transform the meaning of the experience, in particular, the relationship between small musical gestures made in the moment and the way in which they relate to the larger cumulative shape of the piece. Elements which were overlooked at the time of the performance as mistakes may take on a new structural significance. But it is difficult to dismiss things that were missed during the real time of the improvisation because, on the one hand, they may have been experienced subliminally, and on the other hand, it is often impossible to state with any certainty in most improvisations what the hierarchy of musical materials and ensemble interrelationships is – there is no 'ideal' vantage point for a listener which is comparable to the much more orderly musical and social structures which regulate a classical symphony orchestra playing a piece by Haydn. In addition, a recording can only ever be a partial reproduction of what makes an improvisation because the act of improvisation is so often responsive to the performance environment: in Cornelius Cardew's words,

"...it is impossible to record with any fidelity a kind of music that is actually derived from the room in which it is taking place – its size, shape, acoustical properties, even the view from the window..." (Cardew, 1971).

This raises the question of what precisely it is that distinguishes the content and structure of improvised music, not to mention the experience of it, from other more readily analysable kinds of music. If it cannot be reliably located then can it be said to exist at all? And is there anything to be gained from pursuing the indefinable? However, as Dunsby and Whittall remark, the purpose of music analysis, in the received sense, is always a problem to be encountered anew:

"If analysis does actually bring meaning to music ... we may conclude that theory and the application of theory are unwelcome impositions, substituting for honest intuitive response a preconceived and fundamentally anti-musical approach." (Dunsby & Whittall, 1988: 211)

Whether or not an intuitive response is always a correct one, let alone honest, may be a matter for dispute, but the application of analytical preconceptions to spontaneous materials may reveal something from the discrepancy between the aims of each. Therefore my aim here is not to impose one overarching theory upon improvised music but instead to present a latticework to show how musical, social, and conceptual elements interact in the making of music through collective improvisation.

The boundaries between musical and social acts are blurred when it comes to improvisation, and so the totality of the live musical experience would appear to be the natural subject with which to anchor an analysis. It is the 'site' where the line between musical and social structures can be most readily observed if not always easily detached from one another. The case study I describe later in this chapter is concerned with observing, experiencing, and reflecting upon the processes of 'rehearsal', experimentation, education, and performance amongst a group of improvising musicians. My approach was to document these activities through recordings and (where possible) live note-taking, my own personal reflection after the event, and a more in depth analysis of moments of particular interest. This chapter is concerned with finding ways of analysing the musical results of these situations taken as 'musical entities', and accounting for the crucial social dimension of this music.

To begin with I briefly discuss several analytical approaches to musical practice and social interaction in order to show the context for my own analytical approach (however it is not my intention to uncover what is necessarily the 'best' of these models). I then detail the case study and attempt to view the music with these analytical approaches in mind. Most of these analytical models could be broadly described as 'social constructionist' in that they emphasise a dialogical or frame-based conception.

Regulative Ideals and Practices

At the end of chapter two I referred to the need to observe the interaction of regulative *practices* in improvised music, downplaying Brown's notion of regulative *ideals* (Brown, 2000: 119). In this chapter the interaction between regulative practices and regulative ideals is considered in a more even-handed way emphasising the overlap between the two areas. Looming large in the category of regulative ideals is the musical work concept, and its influence upon the musical thinking of some improvising musicians was discussed in chapters 2 and 3. It is my contention that much improvised experimental music looks (whether knowingly or not) to the work concept, broadly defined, for aesthetic validation. This does not usually manifest itself in a direct way but through a complex, often fractious relationship with the practices associated with the concept including the idea of the *work* within other art practices.[79] However, despite its gravitational pull as a concept, its influence upon improvised musical practice is not as immediately apparent as other musical attitudes acquired from jazz and popular music. As shown in chapter 2, following Goehr and Dahlhaus, the work concept is explicitly linked to a particular kind of symphonic compositional practice. Improvisational practices are more commonly associated with 'informal' and vernacular kinds of music making, and therefore although discrepancies between IEM and the work concept are inevitable they should not blind us into thinking there is no relationship or productive tension to be found between these categories.

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[79] I shall only concern myself with the musical *work*. In chapter 6 I will outline ideas for research into the differing kinds of work concept which may be thought to guide the practice of IEM.

The notion of regulative ideals and practices is brought together in Benjamin Brinner's study of musical interaction (1995), and I shall refer to this work briefly in order to illuminate my own approach in the study which follows. Brinner refers to "four constellations of concepts" (169) which he refers to in the attempt to analyse musical interaction. These constellations are the: 'interactive network', 'interactive system', 'interactive sound structure' and 'interactive motivation'. The *interactive network* refers to the social relationships and hierarchies within an ensemble which determine whether a particular instrumentalist follows an accompanying or lead role, the particular part of the musical texture each is responsible for (for example, rhythm, harmony, or melody), and which musicians regulate *when* things happen in the music. The *interactive system* refers to the means and ways by which the music is coordinated by the members of the ensemble. The *interactive sound structure* concerns the rules governing what kinds of sound combinations can be made and the ways in which they are to be articulated. And finally *interactive motivation* concerns what drives the musicians to play a particular kind of music, and the preferences and prejudices associated with it or the cultivation of what makes a 'good' example of practice of the musical genre in question (Brinner, 1995: 169). Each of these constellations overlaps and informs each other in that each element is necessary for the music to happen and to keep happening successfully. Such a model can be applied to most genres of ensemble music with only a little tweaking. In most instances once the interactive network, system, sound structure, and even the interactive motivation have been set in motion[80] it is possible to measure the kinds and qualities of interaction with some notional level of 'fidelity' because the basic framework of the music remains unchanged and therefore the measure is more or less constant. For IEM or free improvisation, such a measurable framework is less tenable. In most musical genres the hierarchies established within the music's interactive network, system and sound structure are relatively stable, and the constellation of concepts associated with interactive motivation serve as a guiding hand ensuring the working of the

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[80] For example, it is rare in the average rock or pop group for a singer and a bass guitarist to exchange interactive roles in the network, system and sound structure of the music so that the voice instead drives the harmonic and rhythmic foundation of the music as the bass leads the song's melody.

aforementioned constellations of concepts. In the case of IEM interactive motivation has more of an explicit leading role because interactive networks, systems and sound structures are far less sure. The guiding motivations or inspirations behind IEM are, of course, improvisation and experimentation: the music is without a repertoire to preordain what and how an ensemble will play and be expected to play, and the lack of established ensemble hierarchies means that even if a hierarchy of instrumental roles, kinds of musical material, and ways of interacting are established during a performance they can only be treated as temporary and may at any moment be challenged or undermined. In addition it may not always be clear what the hierarchy is at any given moment during a performance to the musicians as much as for the audience; and this need not be down to mere incoherence, but part of a deliberate attempt to maintain and work with a musical texture that lies between, if not outside of, conventional idiomatic hierarchies.

The regulative practices of free improvisation or IEM are a little different from those found in other genres of music. IEM is one of the few areas in which regulative practices are not pre-ordained because the motivation of the musician is to discover and make relationships between musical materials, instrumental roles within an ensemble, and larger shapes and structures in the moment of performance. Most studies of improvisation are concerned with the ways in which improvisation affects genre-specific aspects of practice. For example, Ingrid Monson (1996) concentrates on the role of the rhythm section in small jazz groups in creating a sense of 'groove' or 'swing', and inspiring the music that a soloist makes. With IEM it is much less obvious where to look for a stable vantage point from where one can 'measure' the qualities and interactive dynamic of an improvisation. Sansom (1998), in his study of free improvisation, takes a psychodynamic approach to the study of improvised duo performances, noting the (almost immediate) reflections of the performers to their music making. My approach has more of a social and philosophical emphasis, dealing as it does in the case study below, with the dynamics of a group of musicians developing their improvising skills in a 'play' environment but coloured by a performance-centred aesthetic; and, broadly speaking, I am most interested in the cultural construction of this music. In other words, I am interested in how IEM is enabled to function in the way in which it does by its practitioners. IEM does not feature the same kind of more or less 'fixed' roles of ensemble hierarchy that most

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other musical genres do. Everyone involved is simultaneously a soloist and an accompanist, and the distinction between these roles is often not clear and not always relevant to the musicians in the ensemble or the audience. The regulative practices which may be said to govern the interactions between an IEM musician with their instrument, with their fellow performers, and to a lesser extent, perhaps, with the performing environment, are geared towards flexibility. IEM musicians are willing to accept and cultivate noise – or rather any sound matter – as potentially useful material in an improvisation, far more than musicians in other musical genres. This is due in part to an interest in experimentation, but more importantly because no individual musician in an ensemble improvisation can be assumed to be any more or less responsible for the direction the music takes and how it should be maintained, the IEM musician has to be ready to adapt the sounds they use in order to take up a lead or supporting role, and to blur the boundaries between such conventional ensemble hierarchies, as is the case in much IEM since AMM.

The Cultural Dynamic of Improvisation

For the anthropologist Edward Hall, context is everything. Writing of the essential difference between improvisation and composition, Hall (1992), unlike many mainstream commentators, does not characterise improvisation as 'real-time composition'. Hall reasons that mere spontaneity is not enough for an improvisation to be satisfactory as a musical experience. Instead he asserts that in order to be able to improvise a musician has to acquire and learn, and continually refine a body of knowledge and experience[81]. The main distinction that Hall makes is between 'high context' and 'low context' cultures, claiming that Western musical composition is low in context because it requires 'rules' to be learnt before any effective musical activity can take place (for example, the learning of instrumental, ensemble, score-reading, and rehearsal skills, and a familiarity with the conventions of the interpretation of tonal melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic phrase structures).

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[81] Hall's larger anthropological project is the study of what he calls *proxemics*, or the cultural rules which enable individuals to make decisions concerning how they should interact or create distance between each other; he is interested in how culture is inherited, acquired, and learnt (Hall, 1969).

Improvisatory kinds of music are, generally speaking, high in context because musical understanding is closely aligned with social understanding, and this makes the assimilation of the 'rules' and procedures of improvising much more immediate. According to Hall, there is a spectrum between high and low context situations and that, "the ratio of stored information to transmitted information shifts" (Hall: 225). Most improvisational genres rely on a body of stored knowledge specific to the genre (such as harmony in jazz), so it is unusual to find a situation where a novice musician can simply join in with experts and start improvising. The music of the Venda people of Central Africa, for example, may appear to be utterly spontaneous, with family members of all ages joining in seemingly with little schooling in the grammar of the music. However, this would be to overlook the use of this music in everyday life where the 'rules' are picked up through repeated exposure to the music. Hall refers to this kind of learning as the "*acquisition* of culture" (225, Hall's italics), which he describes as a process that is, "automatic and while reinforced, it *cannot be taught*." Of course, one could approach the music of the Venda from an analytical perspective and 'learn' their music the way one learns a second language, but this kind of self-conscious method produces a very different kind of meaning or experience of the music than for someone who has acquired the principles of the music from birth. For Hall, acquisition is the process of the subconscious adaptation of our patterns of behaviour to the context in which we find ourselves.

While the materials and 'grammar' of musical styles can be learnt from technical study, our ability and confidence in applying this learning – and, more importantly the ability to confidently *play* with this knowledge – comes from active engagement with the practice of the music, and acquiring the appropriate modes of behaviour from experience. According to Hall this means that improvisation, "is the domain of the expert" (233), because it requires the musicians to respond to a minimal amount of information from which to build a performance. He contrasts this with the performance of a composition, where the musical content or narrative is supplied by the score which also provides instructions regarding the coordination of the ensemble. (This makes the performance of classical music 'low context' as the musicians are communicating a message the content of which is already known. It is, of course, a simplification to say that all of the information is explicitly given by a score as this

ignores the acquired aspects of learning such as the way in which individual musicians aim to blend with a particular ensemble sound quality.)

Essentially, Hall's point is that the spontaneous quality of a good improvisation is not something arrived at simply in the moment of performance. Instead the ability to convey these qualities has been acquired over a period of time, having stored the required technical knowledge relating to the genre, and, more importantly, developed an ability to *play* with the conventions of the genre and modes of interacting within an ensemble. This is all clearly applicable to most kinds of improvised music. In order to play jazz a knowledge of its associated repertoire must be learnt, but beyond this the musician must acquire the ability to 'swing' the music (i.e. give the rhythm a sense of propulsion or easy flow), and a personal 'voice' or quality of tone (i.e. 'blueness'). With IEM this approach of both learning and acquiring the necessary elements is problematised.

Even though, as I have described, many musicians involved with free improvisation or IEM have a long-term commitment to the genre, and therefore will have acquired much experience of improvisational behaviour, this music has, to repeat Derek Bailey's words, "no prescribed idiomatic sound" (Bailey, 1980: 83), and therefore there is no musical material or 'grammar' as such to be learnt. Any sound or combination of sounds may form the basis of an improvisation, and because the network of roles and relationships between the members of the ensemble (i.e. melody, rhythm, solo, accompaniment, cue giver) are unassigned, the hierarchies and modes of interaction have to be established in performance. If all of these elements are decided in the moment of performance then the idea that a musician can become an expert or virtuoso, in the conventional senses, in this field of music would appear to be made nonsensical. This would seem to be borne out by the way in which complete beginners are almost as likely to be found giving concerts of IEM as are musicians with a great deal of experience. Usually, beginners will be found performing with experienced players, and this could be regarded as a process of induction where the experienced player shapes much of the context for the music, encouraging particular kinds of sound materials and ways of interacting. Groups such as the Scratch Orchestra and the expanded versions of John Stevens' Spontaneous Music Ensemble (usually involving members of the audience) encouraged collaborative improvisation

involving amateurs, which usually incorporated some kind of broad compositional point of focus provided by a more experienced member of the group.

The 'non idiomatic' inspiration of IEM means that noise and 'non musical' sounds are as much a feature of the music as those which are more conventionally musical, and a beginner and an experienced improviser are equally likely to make use of these materials. This attitude to what counts as musical sound may appear to negate the notion of skill, however, some experienced players demonstrate a skill in working with noise materials and ad hoc implements (treated as if they were instruments) comparable with the more 'conventional' skills demonstrated in other musical genres. Keith Rowe's use of electric guitar feedback and string preparations (for example, crocodile clips placed on a string to create a percussive tone) demonstrates an attention to detail to changes within the sounds that makes these materials more than simply untreated noise. This is not to say that the amateur element in IEM is something to be 'ironed out' by increasing sophistication in the way a musician manipulates their instrument. Indeed the raw, unpredictable element of 'amateurish noise' is often embraced by expert and amateur alike (for example, in the humorous collisions of noise, and stylistic genre reference in the improvisations of the group Alterations or bassoonist Mick Beck, referred to in chapters 1 and 3 respectively). In the case study which follows the musicians display a mix of conventionally 'learned' instrumental technique and a willingness to embrace noise. Instrumental technique or methods of manipulating noise making implements is not 'taught' at these workshops. Instead it is very much a case of acquiring interactive skills through the process of *doing* improvisation rather than studying it as such.

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Case Study: 'LMC Improvisation Workshops'
The Context for the Project

Eddie Prévost (percussionist with improvising group AMM) has been running weekly sessions for musicians to develop their improvising skills since 1999, administered by the London Musicians' Collective. Prévost has run improvisation workshops for many years but the LMC workshop is one of the longest running endeavours of its kind to focus on free improvisation. These sessions have acted as a focal point for younger generations of improvising and experimental musicians filling the gap left by John Stevens' Community Music 'Search and Reflect' sessions (see chapter 1) following his death in 1994. The people attracted to these workshops tend to have some prior knowledge of what free improvisation is (either as listeners or performers), and generally have some familiarity with Eddie's musical background. Several of the attendees have either been students of Eddie's colleague John Tilbury at the music department of Goldsmiths College, or art students from the same institution. There is a cross-section of musical backgrounds from those who are classically-trained, to jazz, rock, and electronic musicians. Others have almost no instrumental experience, but have trained in the visual arts (including installation and performance art). There is a variety of ages and nationalities represented, although most are students in their twenties and are male.

The sessions are run in an informal manner; as he is the convenor of the sessions, and an established 'name' in the field of improvised music, Eddie is, nominally-speaking, the leader. However, he attempts to encourage the group to make decisions about the direction that each session takes. When Eddie is unable to attend a session they often take place without him because there is a regular core of participants willing and able to turn up and maintain the sessions.

Unlike most jazz workshops or even John Stevens' 'Search and Reflect' techniques (which, feature a step-by-step approach), there is no curriculum for the participants to work their way through or a set of general principles to be learnt. Eddie suggests ideas about what the group should do and occasionally poses questions about what the group has done, but the aim is to do what interests the rest of the group, and to let questions arise naturally. The focus of the sessions is learning

to improvise through playing as an ensemble. Sometimes simple structures are suggested by Eddie or members of the group but often these simply involve deciding who will play in the next improvisation.

My interest in observing the LMC workshop came about having contacted Eddie to interview him, and because it is one of the very few regular events of its kind. Most improvisation workshops tend to be 'one-offs', or short-lived and irregular in convening. This is largely because of the fact that free improvisation or IEM is not a mainstream form of music, and its participants tend to organise themselves through informal associations rather than the kinds of structural organisation necessary to maintain an amateur choir or orchestra, for example.

The sessions took place at Community Music House in south east London. I attended five separate workshops over a period of three months. For the first four sessions I attended as an observer, sitting in a suitable corner with a DAT or minidisk recorder. For the final session I joined the group as a performer. The room in which the sessions took place was a general purpose music practise room (approximately 5 x 10 metres in width and length) which contained two upright pianos, a drum kit, a miscellany of acoustic guitars and percussion instruments, and a number of electric guitar amplifiers. The group generally assembled, facing each other in a loosely circular fashion about the larger instruments.

In what follows I give a descriptive account of the events of each workshop, and I then single out particular improvisations for more in depth examination of the musical and social issues they provoke. I end the study with a broader reflection upon the experience.

During some of the sessions I made brief notes based on my subjective impression of the apparent musical background or style and level of confidence and experience demonstrated by the players. I did not do this for all of the attendees but most of the regular members of the group are included. Below is a summary of those notes supplied for the purposes of more readily identifying the constituent characteristics of the members of the group:

"Eddie (percussion): the most experienced of the group. Very keen for others to suggest ideas, but most of the group seemed a little reluctant to do so (I think they just enjoy playing). Kept things moving with ideas for pieces, also encouraged Helen with suggestions about what could be done with the limitations of her instrument.

Han (electric guitar): first proper session attended. Technically competent and has developed aspects of his own 'sound'. Still seems to be feeling his way musically in this environment.

Helen (Tibetan bowl): Attended one session. Quite nervous and uncertain musically – possibly because she had arrived with Roberto and not intended to play, but persevered.

Joel (laptop computer): has been once or twice before, and like Mattin, friends with some of the group. Favours long, 'flat' bursts of electrical static sound. Somewhat like Mattin's music but more laid back.

Matthew (acoustic guitar and piano): a semi-regular attendee I would guess. Musically quite confident (quietness of instruments might be giving a false impression). As a guitarist he has an individual sound of sorts – scratchy, gesticulating, very little conventional notey playing. Piano playing tends to 'shadow' what Sebastian does.

Mattin (laptop computer): has attended a few times before and knows some of the players socially. Musically bold (use of yelping voice) but not in such a way as to threaten the music.

Michael (electric guitar): a regular-ish attendee I would guess. Musically confident and has his own 'sound' of sorts – twangy, clean, plectrum-based 'scrabbling', some use of amplifier feedback, and the sound of jack lead connections.

Nat (saxophone): used to attend a while ago. Quite confident musically. Has something of a 'trained' saxophone technique, perhaps still finding an individual voice as an improviser.

Roberto (piano): regular attendee. Fairly confident musically, probably has some background in jazz – his phrasing and gestures suggest this.

Ross (electric guitar): regular attendee. Seems quietly confident as a musician, does not attempt to dominate proceedings but also does not hold back. Appears to have a jazz technique but largely eschews this in favour of a Keith Rowe-style way of playing, 'preparing' guitar strings and using feedback.

Sandy (bass clarinet): regular attendee. Oldest of the group apart from Eddie. Seems to have experience in free jazz, musically confident.

Sebastian (piano): regular attendee. Musically, he is quite confident. Has developed a 'sound' of sorts, influenced by John Tilbury (although this assessment might be coloured having heard him play a couple of weeks ago with Tilbury at Goldsmiths). Seems to play the role of a 'binding agent' in the ensemble pieces.

Takehiro (voice and miscellaneous objects): first time attendee; knew Joel and Mattin. Even though he's clearly not musically trained is confident and bold favouring a sort of ritualistic attitude and injected absurd humour with his antics (clambering in a box and mimicking the sounds of other players with his voice).

Tim (drum kit): a regular at these sessions. Musically confident and technically competent; stylistically reminiscent of Eddie's playing [for example, uses resonating sounds].

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I attended as an observer.

Participants:

Eddie (percussion), Sebastian (piano), Han (electric guitar), Sandy (bass clarinet), Michael (electric guitar), Mattin (laptop & voice), Joel (laptop), Roberto (piano), Tim (drums), Helen (percussion), Takehiro (voice & objects), Nat (tenor sax), Matthew (piano & acoustic guitar).

Description of the session

The workshop began, following a suggestion from Eddie, with a sequence of improvised duos lasting about half an hour. The idea being that when one person in the duo stops playing, the next musician along in the circle forms a duo with the remaining member of the previous duo. The sequence moved around the room in an anti-clockwise direction. Each duo was to improvise for as little or as long as possible.

Sequence of duos:

1. Sebastian & Han
2. Han & Michael
3. Michael & Tim
4. Tim & Sandy
5. Sandy & Eddie
6. Eddie & Helen
7. Helen & Nat
8. Nat & Roberto
9. Roberto & Matthew
10. Matthew & Joel
11. Joel & Mattin

This was followed by a 'development' of this idea with a series of short trio improvisations. The group were a little hesitant to suggest who would go in which group, so Eddie suggested the arrangement each time.

Sequence of trios:

      1. Nat, Sebastian, Matthew

      2. Joel, Han, Sandy

      3. Helen, Michael, Roberto

      4. Mattin, Tim, Eddie, Takehiro

Eddie then suggests, as a starting point, a quartet which eventually gives way to another group, which also eventually makes way for another group, and so on. However, this time only the line up of the first quartet was arranged, with the other groups formed spontaneously by whoever wanted to play.

Sequence of quartets:

      1. Michael, Nat, Roberto, Joel

      2. Tim, Sandy, Sebastian, Matthew

      3. Michael, Takehiro, Mattin

      4. Sandy, Nat, Han, Helen

To end the session Eddie suggests a sequence of trio groupings which 'overlap' with a new trio to temporarily form a sextet before the first trio drops out. Once again, Eddie only suggests who will play in the first two trios leaving subsequent trios to form more or less spontaneously (some players signal to each other to form a trio during the improvisation).

Sequence of overlapping trios:

      1. Matthew, Sebastian, Joel

                       2. Han, Takehiro, Mattin

      3. Tim, Sandy, Michael

                       4. Eddie, Nat, Helen

      5. Roberto, Matthew, Sebastian

                       6. Mattin, Joel, Han

      7. Nat, Helen, Eddie

[The recording runs out in the final moments of this improvisation]

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I attended as an observer.

Participants:

Eddie (percussion), Romuald (bass guitar & harmonica), Dom (double bass), Tim (drums), Han (electric guitar), Sandy (bass clarinet), Roberto (piano), Amy (piano), Chris (violin), Ross (electric guitar), Olly (vibraphone), Takehiro (voice & objects).

Description of the session:

Unfortunately, a delayed train meant that I missed the beginning of this session. Ross kindly informed me that it began with a sequence of short duo improvisations.

Sequence of duos:

        1. Romuald & Dom

        2. Dom & Tim

        3. Tim & Han

        4. Han & Eddie

        5. Eddie & Sandy

        6. Sandy & Olly

        7. Olly & Roberto

        8. Roberto & Amy

        9. Amy & Chris

        10. Chris & Romuald

The recording begins with Eddie, Roberto and Tim deciding to play a trio. This improvisation lasts approximately seven minutes. Eddie, responding to the silence which follows the piece, comments to the newcomers in the group "You'll probably notice we don't talk a lot in these things!" Eddie asks for suggestions from the group. Takehiro suggests a group of Roberto, Olly, Eddie, and himself; this also lasts for about seven minutes.

Group improvisations

        1. Eddie, Roberto, Tim

2. Takehiro, Roberto, Olly, Eddie

Next Han suggests that the next four people to start playing will form the basis of a group improvisation. Eddie comments that "You can't always tell" when someone has begun in that kind of situation, and the piece begins unusually with Eddie repeating this phrase in such a way as to suggest that the improvisation has already started. This confuses everyone (humorously), and the piece falls apart. Then Tim, Romuald, Han and Ross begin to play and do so for about six minutes.

Group improvisation
Tim, Romuald, Han, Ross

Eddie asks Dom to choose a group, and he selects Sandy, Han, Roberto and himself (see analysis 1 below). This improvisation, lasting about ten minutes, features quite a lot of 'conventional' instrumental technique and all of the musicians refer to jazz stylings at stages during the piece, sometimes quite explicitly, with brief melodic phrases, and half way through a 'walking bass' line from Han. The mood of the music is much more relaxed than the preceding improvisations and meanders along. There is a brief detour into percussive sounds but overall the same mood is maintained.

Group improvisation
Dom, Sandy, Han, Roberto

Following this performance Eddie instigates a discussion about the piece indicating his sense of dissatisfaction with the use of generic references: "That piece we have to talk about" and comments on the unconvincing nature of the musical references in contrast to the sections concentrating on 'sound making'. Some of the group join the discussion, notably Han and Olly, who try to make a case for the validity of using more referential material. Han states that this was a conscious decision to work with the change in social dynamics. Sandy and Olly chip in. Han comments on the apparent absence of meaning from 'abstract improv'. Roberto makes some comments about the contrast between the difficulty that an instrumentalist faces in making musical reference convincing and the 'ease' with which computer musicians 'play technology'. Olly chips in again insisting on a place

for tunes, etc. Eddie attempts to pull this (amicable) dispute together talking about the care of sound making.

There is some indecision about what to do next, and so to end the session Eddie suggests a sequence of short overlapping trio improvisations.

Sequence of trios:

      1. Ross, Olly, Roberto

              2. Sandy, Amy, Romuald

      3. Tim, Dom, Chris

              4. Han, Eddie, Takehiro, Amy

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Workshop 3 (12/10/01)

I attended as an observer.

Participants:

Eddie (percussion), Tim (tenor sax), Sandy (bass clarinet), John (piano & percussion), Ross (electric guitar), Dennis (soprano sax), Mattin (acoustic guitar & percussion), unidentified American (drums).

Description of the session:

The session began, as now seemed to be the standard way with a sequence of duo improvisations.

Sequence of duos:

      1. Ross & Tim

      2. Tim & American drummer

      3. American drummer & Eddie

      4. Eddie & Dennis

      5. Dennis & Sandy

      6. Sandy & Mattin

      7. Mattin & John

8. John & Ross

Eddie asks John to choose some partners to start a sequence of trio improvisations:

Sequence of trios:
        1. John, Sandy, Tim
                              2. Ross, American drummer, Dennis
        3. Eddie, Mattin, Tim

Dennis has to leave early, and the session is shorter than usual because several members of the group are going to attend a concert. Following a brief, slightly tentative discussion, Eddie decides that as the group is smaller than usual they should end with an improvisation involving everyone.

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Workshop 4 (26/10/01)

I attended as an observer.

Participants:

[Eddie not present], Michael (electric guitar & transistor radio), Nathan (tenor sax), Tim (drums), Sandy (bass clarinet), Ross (electric guitar), Mattin arrives later (acoustic guitar & percussion).

Description of the session:

    Eddie cannot be present at this session but a group of the more regular members are keen for the session to go ahead.

    Things are a bit slow to get started as it has been a few weeks since the last session, and so there is more chatting and catching up with news than usual – plus there is no leader as such to 'call people to order'. Some people doodle with their

instruments in between chatting, and it is about fifteen minutes before Tim suggests beginning things with a sequence of duets.

Sequence of duos:

    1. Ross & Tim

    2. Tim & Michael

    3. Michael & Sandy

    4. Sandy & Nathan

    5. Nathan & Ross

These duos seem much more 'riff' based and noisy than usual, with elements of rock music stylings. Normally the duets (and most of the other improvisations) begin in a more tentative manner. Perhaps it is the absence of Eddie that makes their playing less circumspect or simply a matter of letting off steam not having played like this for a few weeks. There is a brief bit of doodling from Tim and jokey chat about his 'rock music stylings', Nathan goes for a short break, someone puts on a radio. Nathan returns; Tim asks, "What shall we do now?" Nathan suggests a long improvisation in which anyone can play, dropping out and returning to the ensemble whenever as they wish. This gets general approval, with someone joking about the possibility of it "lasting four hours". It lasts for approximately 44 minutes.

Long group improvisation:

    Michael, Nathan, Tim, Sandy, Ross

As this improvisation ends, Mattin arrives with some friends and there is more chat. Tim comments that they have arrived "at a strange time", referring to the dazed mood of the group following the long piece. Sandy, Michael and Nathan suggest a sequence of overlapping trios with one player dropping out in order to allow another to join.

Unfortunately, due to a train strike, and the late start of the session I have to leave at this point and the tape ends as the group begins this set of trios.

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I attended as a participant.

Participants:

Eddie (percussion), Mattin (drums), Tim (tenor sax & synthesizer), Takehiro (voice & objects), Sandy (bass clarinet), David (guitar & percussion), Ross (electric guitar), Olly (vibraphone), Me (acoustic guitar & piano).

Description of the session:

This was the last session I attended, and the only one in which I participated as a musician.

As was, by now, the standard practice, Eddie suggested beginning the session with a sequence of duos.

Sequence of duos:

1. Sandy & Takehiro
2. Takehiro & Me
3. Me & Tim
4. Tim & Eddie
5. Eddie & Ross
6. Ross & Mattin
7. Mattin & David
8. David & Olly
9. Olly & Sandy

This was followed by a sequence of overlapping trio improvisations. Apart from the first group of Tim, Mattin and Olly (suggested by Olly), Eddie suggested which players might succeed each trio by pointing or gesturing to invite a player during the course of the piece.

<u>Sequence of trios</u>:

        1. Tim, Mattin, Olly

                2. David, Ross, Takehiro

        3. Me, Eddie, Sandy

                4. Sandy, Olly, David

        5. Takehiro, Tim, Me

                6. Eddie, Ross, Mattin

        7. Sandy, Olly, David

To finish the session Eddie suggested a new idea for a piece involving the whole group which was to start from the point of silence and by 'noticing' incidental sounds – Eddie did not elaborate on this but wanted to see how we responded. This turned out to be quite a long piece (approximately 30 minutes) and seemed to push everyone in a slightly different direction than their normal playing tendencies. The group seemed to encourage each other to do something a little different in responding to Eddie's silent music concept. I switched from guitar to piano for this piece.

<u>Reflective commentary upon 'silent' improvisation</u>

Eddie initiated the idea for this piece, and unusually it was the only idea during any of the workshops which was based around a particular *procedure* for making sounds. The idea was very loosely defined as an idea but it had greater consequences for the music that the group made and felt that they were able to make or should make, than the prevailing idea during the sessions which concerned who would play, but without comment about what or how they would play.

The group applied itself to the silent idea quite rigorously, and at least a minute passed by before anyone consciously made a sound. Things proceeded in a similar manner with only the odd quiet noise (scrape of a guitar string, breath tone from the saxophone) breaking the silence. After about eight minutes the piece settled into a more equal balance between sound and silence, occasionally falling back into sparser sections. After twenty minutes Tim began to become more active by playing very quiet rolls on his drums. This quickly initiated a faster pace to the music, with each member of the group seemingly reacting rapidly – but still very quietly – to the

slightest sound made, giving a sense of the music darting around the room. This climax lasted for about five minutes until the ensemble started to withdraw into sparser outbursts, and the piece came to a halt.

Most of the group avoided making obviously 'musical' sounds, tending instead to produce extremely quiet noises either with their instruments or bits of furniture to hand. For my part, I decided to play the piano (an instrument which I only have a loose acquaintance with), and focussed on making sounds by tapping and stroking the keys with the aim of producing the occasional 'inadvertent' hammered tone. Participating in this improvisation I did get the sense that everyone seemed to be listening very intently which gave the silences and occasional rustlings a powerfully tense feeling. I have not been able to listen back to this recording in a detached way – I can still get a sense of the concentration being exerted by the group. It is difficult to say whether this would be the impression that someone who was not present at the workshop would receive from listening to the recording (the only people that I have played it to so far were aware of my thoughts about it, and so were, perhaps, more inclined to agree with my assessment).

Attending the session as a participant seemed to significantly alter the way in which I listened to the music. Even though I was recording the session and aimed to remain aware of the succession of events, I found that during the improvisations I was listening less for how each musical event related to the events which preceded it, than I was concentrating on listening to present events as they happened and for ways in which they might be responded to. In other words, I was experiencing not a cumulative sense of the shape of the music and its narrative direction, but instead I was much more aware of the physical qualities of my actions and a sense of the· sounds made by the other participants which I was responding to as physical entities.

***

Transcription: Workshop 2, Quartet improvisation

Participants: Sandy (bass clarinet), Roberto (piano), Han (electric guitar), Dom (double bass).

Duration: ca. 10 minutes.

Key to symbols used

Kinds of sound or gesture:

♫   Stylistic genre reference (usually 'jazz').

X   Remote gesture (not immediately apparent how sound is made).

✋   Physicalised, instrument-specific gesture.

......   Continuation of an idea/mode of playing

Relationships between players:

↑ ↓   Path of influence from one player to another showing which player has instigated or is leading a particular musical idea.

➜   Transition/transformation of one idea into another.

< >   Crescendo/diminuendo or increase/decrease in density of texture and activity.

Pizz.   pizzicato

Lead role/instigator

Supporting role

undetermined role
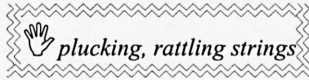
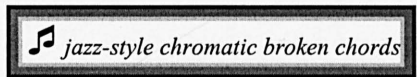'False' start   Start of improvisation proper

[0'00"]   A [0'16"]
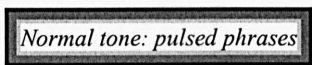
Sandy   🖐 *key clicks*   🖐 *staccato breath tones* ....

Roberto   🖐 *plucking, rattling strings* ....

Han   🖐 *harmonics*   ♫ *jazz-style chromatic broken chords*

Dom   🖐 *'slap' pizz* **X** *wipe along strings*   ♫ *jazz pizz* ....

• •

B [1'16"]

Sandy | *Normal tone: pulsed phrases* | 🖐 *Brief multiphonic phrases* < >...... < > ......

↳

Roberto | *Pulse* | → | *Repeated note phrase* | 🖐 *plucked strings* ....

Han   ....

     (Sandy ↓)   (Roberto ↓)

Dom | *Pulses* | .... | *Imitation of repeated note phrase* | < >......< >.................

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[1'53"]   [2'16"]

Sandy   ....   ✋ *key clicks*   ✋ *staccato breath tones*   ....

Roberto   ♫ *Imitation of guitar line*   ✋ *Rattle of piano frame*   ♫ *Imitation of guitar line*

Han   ....

Dom   < > ....   < >......   ....

• •
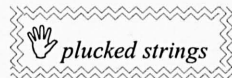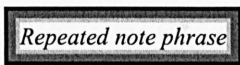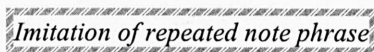
Sandy   > ....

Roberto   < ....

Han   .... >..................................

Dom   ....   ✋ *chromatic runs up & down* < >

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C [4'16"]   [4'36"]   [4'51"]

Sandy   ✋ *repeated note idea* ......   ♫ *melodic fragments* ....

                    ↴   ↱

Roberto   ✋ *repeated note idea*   ♫ *melodic fragments* ....

                    ↱   (Sandy ↓)

Han   ....   ♫ *melodic burst* ♫ *contour of BClar.*   ......

                              (Sandy ↓)

Dom   ....   ♫ *rhythmic phrasing of BClar.*

- -

[5'16"]   D [5'32"]

Sandy   > ....   > ....   > ....

Roberto   < ....   *Descent into bass register with repeated note idea*

Han   ♫ *'walking bass'* ➔   *detuning strings* ....

            (Han ↓)   (Han ↓)   (Roberto ↓)

Dom   ♫ *'walking bass'* ➔   *'detuning' strings*   *Echo of repeated note idea*

E [6'16"]

Sandy — ♪ legato 'free jazz' runs ..... > ..... > .....

Roberto — .... < > ..... 🖐 X sustained sounds: scraping strings

Han — .... 🖐 detuned phrases .... > .....

(Han ↓ + Roberto ↓)

Dom — .... 🖐 combination of 'detuning' and repeated notes >

[6'48"]

Sandy — 🖐 sustained multiphonic .... > .... >

(Roberto ↑)

Roberto — 🖐 percussive echo of double bass .....

(Dom ↑)

Han — ..... > .... > .....

Dom — ..... 🖐 repeated notes .... > .....

F [7'06"]   [7'16"]   **G** [7'39"]

Sandy   …… ……> …… …… …… > …… 🎵 *jazzy 4-note runs* ……

Roberto   〰️ ✋ *percussive rattling of piano frame* 〰️   < ………… ……

Han   …… …………… ………………………… …………………

Dom   ……   ……   〰️ ✋ *occasional 'slap' pizz* 〰️ …… …… < …… >

∙∙

[7'51"]   [7'56"]   [8'03"]

Sandy   🎵 + ✋ *2-note circling phrase* ……………… ……

          (triggered by Han ⬆)

Roberto   🎵 *jazz melody fragments* …… ……   🎵 *descending line* ……

Han   ……   ✋ *single percussive strike on strings (resonant)*

                              (Roberto ⬇)

Dom   ……   ……   ……   🎵 *echo of descending line*

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H [8'46"]

Sandy   > ....

Roberto   ♪ *repetition of 2-note phrase*   ♪ *Thelonious Monk-like melodic bursts*   <......

Han   ♫ *broken chord/melody idea* ....

(Roberto ↓)

Dom   .... *repeated note idea* <...... ...... <......

I [9'03"]   [9'12"]

Sandy   *imitation of piano* → *becoming melodic* ....

Roberto   ✋ *muted tone: accelerando/rallentando pattern* ....

Han   ✋ *out of tune drone on two*

strings ....<............<............< ......

(Roberto ↓)
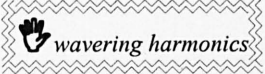
Dom   .... ✋ *echo of piano with 'slap' pizz* ....

J [9'30"]   [9'36"]

Sandy   ...... < *wavering harmonics* > ....

                                              (Sandy↓ *rhythms*)

Roberto ......   *single tone attack and resonance*   *Fast repeated bass note*

         (Han↑ *dissonance*)   (Dom↑ *rhythms*)

Han   <..................<...... ....

                   (Roberto↓)
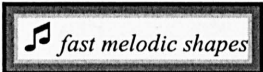
Dom   < ...... > < ......> < ...... > .... <

•••

K [9'46"]   [9'52"]

Sandy   *+ arpeggiated loop* ......<...<...... *fast melodic shapes* ....

                                              ↘
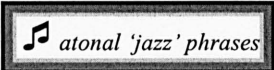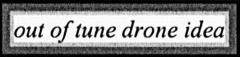
Roberto ...... *atonal 'jazz' phrases* ......>...... *Faster atonal phrases* ......

                ↑

Han   *atonal 'jazz' phrases* → *out of tune drone idea* ....

Dom   < ......< ...... <   ....

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L [9'56"]

Sandy .... 🖐+♪ *arpeggiated loop* ....

↳

Roberto .... ♪ *dissonant chord* ...>.....> ♪ *repeated bass note* ......

↳

Han ....< ....< ....< ....

(Roberto ↓)

Dom ♪ *echo of BClar. Phrases* ➜ ♪ *repeated note rallentando* ➜

●●●

[10'16"] [11'04"]

Sandy .... 🖐 *sustained multiphonic+key clicking* ...||

(Han ↑)

Roberto ♪ *atonal 'jazz' phrases – more spacious* ....> .... > ||

Han ....<...............................>...||

(Han ↓)

Dom ➜ ♪ *repeated note* ➜ *moving towards guitar's pitch centre (8va lower)* >||

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<u>Commentary</u>

The roles which each of the players assume in this improvisation correspond to a certain extent with jazz practice, but do so hesitantly: Dom's bass plays a supporting role responding to ideas and maintaining the flow of the music, but rarely initiating new ideas. Roberto's piano sometimes provides a lead role with melodic and motivic ideas (for example, the repeated note pattern) but he echoes and supports ideas as much as he initiates them. Sandy largely avoids the lead role which his bass clarinet could provide, were this a jazz improvisation, and opts to fulfil a similar role to Dom of supporting from the wings. Han initially encourages the jazz feel of the improvisation making reference to characteristic tropes such as a 'walking' bass line. Just as significantly, it is the sound he selects for his guitar which seems to establish the mood of the improvisation: in most of the other improvisations in the workshops he attends Han makes use of noise sounds such as feedback and guitar effects, but here he makes use of a 'classic' Wes Montgomery kind of jazz tone. Han's role is that of an agitator in that he often initiates many of the ideas in the improvisation but then draws back as if to listen to how the group responds to these ideas. This is especially evident in his introduction of the 'out-of-tune' drone figure in the latter part of the piece which clashes with the largely jazz-based figuration he has provided up until this point, and constrains any sense of melodic or rhythmic development because of its static nature.

Of all the improvisations in these workshops, this particular piece skirts closest to conventional jazz kinds of interaction. All of the performers, at one point or another make reference to melodic, harmonic and rhythmic figurations associated with jazz. The way in which the group interacts with the players echoing and imitating ideas or responding in a 'call and response' manner also shows a debt to jazz. However, the group consistently hold back from pushing the improvisation into a full-blown jazz-style improvisation. The musicians are possibly inhibited by their awareness that this is ostensibly a workshop for free improvisation and not jazz, and as such the improvisation has a directionless quality with long stretches where a single idea is left to hang as if waiting for the next event to come along.

***

Participants: Michael (radio & electric guitar), Nathan (saxophone), Tim (drums), Sandy (bass clarinet), Ross (electric guitar).
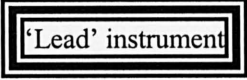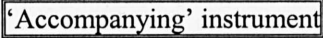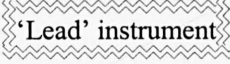Duration: ca. 44 minutes.

<u>Descriptive account</u>
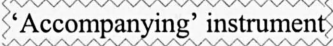
Each section is between five and eight minutes in duration.

A   Michael plays a transistor radio, emphasising noisy interference, extreme frequencies and occasional speech sounds, and is joined by Sandy (playing multiphonics) and Tim (scraping cymbals) who skirt around the edges of the radio's frequencies imitating the high unstable tones. Nathan and then Ross (very tentatively) join.

B   The group seem very intent on playing around the edges of the radio sound. Michael seems to realise this approximately five and a half minutes in and makes the radio ever quieter, receiving a corresponding response from the group. This continues until it is so quiet (about seven minutes in to the piece) that the group seem to become aware of their own sounds. However, before this ensemble sound can take on its own momentum the radio quietly returns, and the group continues to sustain this low level rumbling and rustling.

C   About ten minutes in the radio drops out and Sandy begins to assert himself with a short melodic/rhythmic phrase. There is then a pause of about ten seconds after which Nathan, Tim and Sandy return with much more active playing featuring brief jerky outbursts. Michael's radio returns and this seems to encourage the group to, once again, skirt around its frequencies. Michael transforms the radio sound into a feedback drone moving in a slow wave-like pattern. Sandy, Tim, and Nathan pick up on this wave-like manner, gradually increasing their dynamic and the clarity of their musical gestures (Nathan and Sandy hint at jazz figurations).

D   Feedback from Ross's guitar replaces what the radio is doing and seems to assume its central role as the dynamic gradually increases. Tim responds with a slow crescendo of rumbles on drums and ride cymbal, and the ensemble works its way towards a 'controlled' climax of sustained noisy tones around the guitar feedback which lasts about six minutes before Ross introduces a series of chords in a jerky jazz rhythm and the ensemble gives way to a gentler sound until only Ross's guitar is left. Tim uses his voice to vibrate the snares on his drum to accompany Ross's pluckings.

E   Ross switches to playing quiet harmonics and Sandy plucks piano strings in imitation. The feedback radio sound returns as a very soft buzzing undercurrent. Ross begins to withdraw underneath the radio sound and the rustlings from the rest of the ensemble. The radio fades out to reveal the ensemble's meandering fragments. Eventually Nathan introduces a high wavering harmonic which he repeats in a loop, and the ensemble hover around this idea briefly before again becoming more fragmented. Ross introduces a quiet percussive idea and the rest of the group drops out before rejoining with very soft imitative fragments, as the music becomes sparser.

F   Nathan and Sandy take over with ideas which mimic Tim's friction sounds made by rubbing drum skins. Tim switches to occasional soft washes of sound on the cymbals. Ross joins with the 'friction' sounds (rubbing the back of his guitar). Gradually these ideas fuse into a dialogue of sorts imitating speech patterns. Michael rejoins with a folkish, arpeggiated figure on an unamplified electric guitar, which Ross and Tim seem to accompany with occasional soft friction sounds. Eventually this peters out and Sandy quietly takes over with a wandering chromatic melody. Tim juxtaposes this idea by striking tuning forks and letting them resonate against different surfaces. And the piece comes to a sudden stop.

Transcription of the large-scale network of roles and relationships

Key to symbols used:

Sustained block of activity: 'Lead' instrument

                                                               'Accompanying' instrument

Gestural, and more fragmentary texture: 'Lead' instrument

                                                               'Accompanying' instrument

Indicates where influence upon playing originates from: ⬆ ⬇

Crescendo/diminuendo of dynamic/activity: < >

***

Section A

Nathan   Long, soft tones……..………………………

                                    (Michael ⬇

Sandy   Sustained multiphonics…………………………..

                        (Michael ⬇

Michael   Transistor radio: noisy frequencies………………………………

                                    (Michael ⬆

Ross   Soft feedback………………………………..

                        (Michael ⬆

Tim   Scraping cymbals………………………………..

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Section B

Nathan   Sim...< ....>......

(Michael ↓)

Sandy   Sim...< ....>....

(Michael ↓)

Michael   Radio...< ....>..

(Michael ↑)

Ross   Sim...< ....>..

(Michael ↑)

Tim   Sim...< ....>..

Section C

Nathan   Jazz-like   →   ....

(Michael ↓)

Sandy   Jazz-like   →   ....

(Michael ↓)

Michael   →   Return of radio <....

Ross

(Michael ↑)

Tim   Sim...........   →   Sim................

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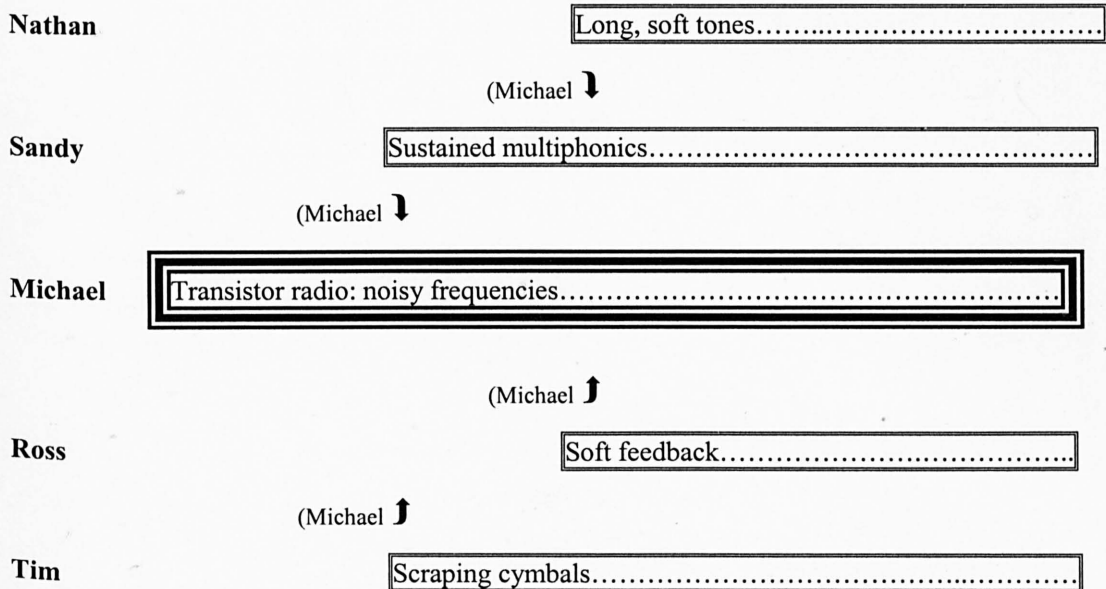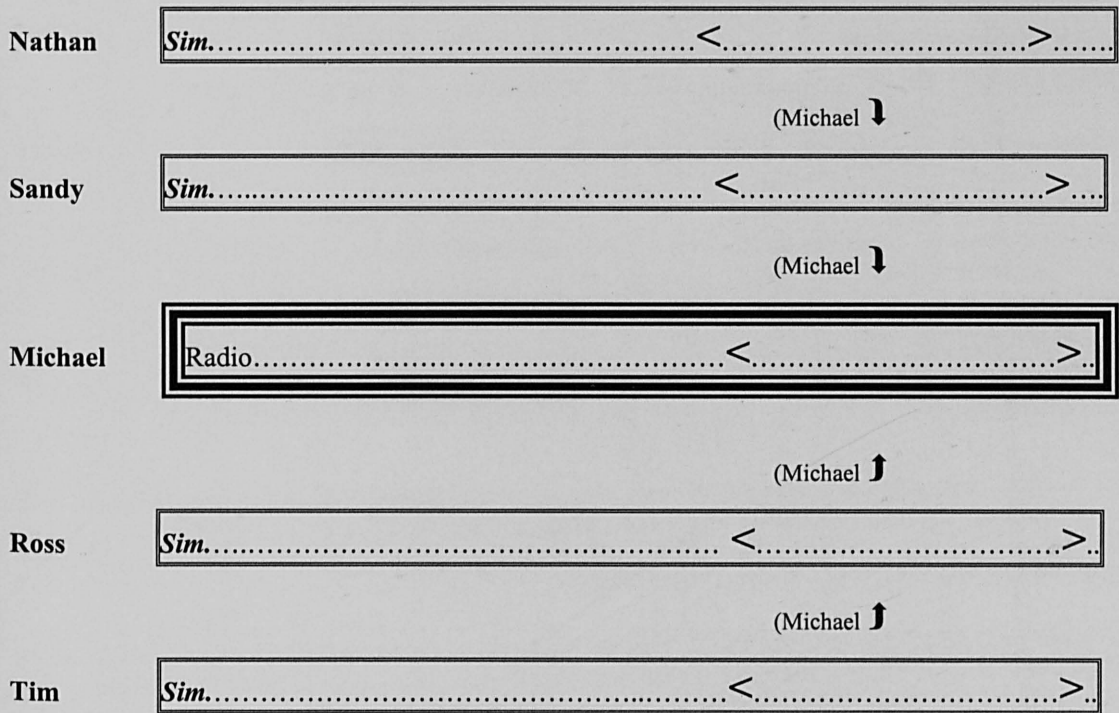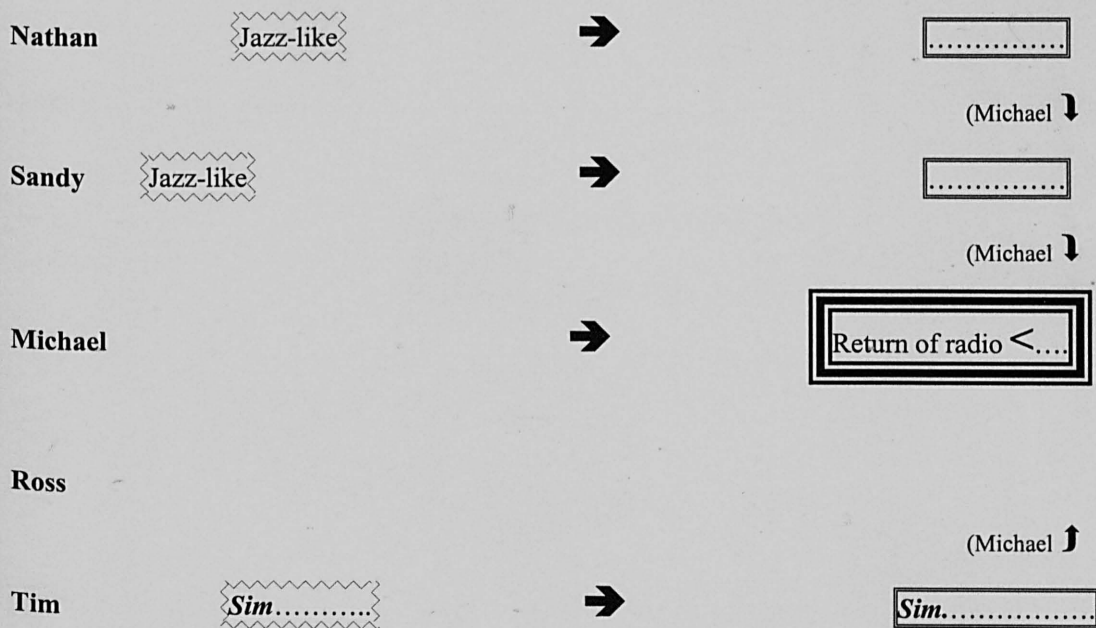
Section D

Nathan   *Sim.………*

(Ross ↓

Sandy   *Sim.……..*

(Ross ↓

Michael

Ross   Feedback…………………….. ➡ Jazz rhythm>

(Ross ↕   (Ross ↕

Tim   Rumbling……… ➡ Voice with snare

Section E

Nathan   Wavering harmonic………………………………..

(Ross ↓

Sandy   Piano strings………   High tones

(Ross ↓   (Michael ↓   (Ross ↓

Michael   Radio<………………..……>….

Ross   Quiet harmonics...…..>..   Percussive idea   *Sim.*

(Michael ↕   (Ross ↕   (Ross ↕

Tim   *Sim.………*   *Sim*   *Sim*

Nathan 〰️Mimic friction.〰️   〰️*Sim* ....〰️‖

      (Tim ⬇

Sandy   〰️Mimic friction〰️   〰️Chromatic melody〰️‖

          (Tim ⬇   (Tim ⬇

Michael   〰️Unamplified arpeggiation............>..〰️‖

                                      (Michael ⬆

Ross   〰️Friction sounds〰️ 〰️*Sim*〰️   〰️*Sim* ....〰️‖

          (Tim ⬇

Tim   ▣Friction sounds..........▣ 〰️*Sim*..〰️   〰️Tuning forks.〰️‖

Commentary

Following on from the rather raucous duo improvisations which had begun the workshop, this improvisation seems to return to the prevailing character of concentrated listening of the performances in the sessions when Eddie was present.

Although, due to its extended duration, the improvisation falls into distinct episodes, where an individual player takes the lead and moves the music in a new direction, there is a high level of consistency, particularly with regard to the roles that each musician assumes. Michael's transistor radio dominates the first half of the piece in that it is a constant presence and point of reference for the members of the group – its grainy, noisy timbre influences the character of other contributions, and generally encourages the other musicians to layer their sounds against it. However, Michael does not assert himself in such a way as to suggest that he has chosen the role of group leader. The other musicians choose to 'accompany' him, and he is then left in the position of deciding whether to reject this role or to work with it. In choosing to accept the role he is musically confident enough to test how far the ensemble will follow him by becoming ever quieter to which the ensemble's accompanying response is audibly clear. Similarly, in the second half of the improvisation Ross's guitar chord 'comping', and following this his use of feedback (which has a similar sustained noise character to Michael's radio), fulfils the same function of providing a focal point for the rest of the group. The other members of the group do assert themselves every so often with 'lead' ideas such as melodic and rhythmic motifs, but do not sustain these ideas and seem more content to work around the more continuous patterns and drones provided by Michael and Ross. Sandy, Nathan and Tim's instruments are all regarded as lead instruments in the field of jazz improvising, whereas the guitars and drones of Ross and Michael may suggest an accompanying role in most kinds of music. (Prévost, following saxophonist Evan Parker, has referred to the characteristic layering of sustained textures in his group, AMM's music as "laminal" (eds. Childs & Hobbs: 43), and there is a sense in which the group in this example is following the 'conventions' of free improvisation, especially the practice of AMM, which tends to emphasise a similar inversion of the roles of solo and accompaniment, so that the group sound merges with a continuous 'noise' of some kind (usually Keith Rowe's guitar feedback).)

Due to the continuous stream of sound emanating from the radio, and later Ross's guitar feedback, a 'conversational' or jazz-like interaction between the players is made less possible. The noise quality of the radio and guitar feedback moves the emphasis of the music away from the kinds of 'idiomatic' instrumental gestures found in the example discussed above from workshop 2. Despite the drone-like character of Michael's radio and Ross's guitar feedback, any sense of a clear pitch centre is unsettled because the sounds are so 'noisy', and this makes the use of more conventionally idiomatic pitch-led ideas by Nathan and Sandy less sustainable, or rather more difficult to sustain without the support of the other members of the group.

<center>***</center>

Concluding Remarks

The LMC workshop is unusual even for most workshops of improvised and experimental music. On the one hand it has no particular aim in terms of conventional educational targets for learning. It is not a 'course' in improvisation, there is no curriculum, and it is, ultimately, up to each individual participant to decide what it is that they feel they have gained and if they have made any discernible progress as musicians. On the other hand the workshop is not a 'jam session': admittedly there is very little overt reflection expressed by the participants on the content of the sessions whether it is directed by the leader (Eddie) or not. Those moments involving discussion about the music tend to be piecemeal and never concluded in any obvious manner beyond the agreement to continue to play. Some participants only attend a single session, although it is impossible to say with any certainty why it is that they do not return – whether it is because of an inability or unwillingness to assimilate with the prevailing musical style of the group, or if it is for other non-musical reasons. With those participants who do attend the workshops regularly it is easier to understand their loyalty when one knows that several of the regular members take part in concerts of free improvisation together, and so one of the functions of the workshop is to act as a kind of rehearsal time for those concerts. Additionally, there is a social element in that some participants attend the same educational establishment, but more pertinently, besides performing free improvisation most members enjoy

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listening to it and attending concerts of this kind of music. Eddie Prévost's status as an improvising musician seals the attraction for most of the regular attendees because of their admiration for his musicianship. Each of these factors prevents the workshops from becoming merely jamming sessions.

Eddie's example as the senior musician provides a model for most of the regular participants. This is seen clearest with regard to his emphasis on each musician discovering his or her own 'voice' as a performer with his or her chosen instrument. Most of the participants follow Eddie's example of focussing on the different sounds that their instruments can make rather than making use of conventionally learned musical technique. This is not something which is normally commented upon directly in the sessions, and it is usually left implicit because the more confident musicians tend to arrive with an idea of what sounds and kinds of interaction are acceptable for free improvisation, and the other participants tend to follow this lead.

When more conventional musical references rear their heads, they are often expressed in a partly ironical manner, or as in the transcription from workshop 2, the references are made in such a way as to avoid leading the music completely away from the predominant noise-based (quiet and loud) sound world. Eddie, as leader, rarely expresses a preference for the kinds of musical materials that are acceptable in the sessions, and does not openly condemn music which he does not like, but he does make it clear that he has a reason for questioning the use of familiar musical elements – and that therefore the other participants should similarly be wary – because they tend to distract the ensemble away from discovering something by exploring unfamiliar ideas by regurgitating 'typical' responses to received or clichéd material.

Whether one agrees with Eddie's stylistic emphasis or not, it does mean that as an educational model the workshops are closer to Hall's model of improvisational learning (Hall, 1992). In other words, there is no knowledge which is *taught* as such to the participants; instead a process for *acquiring* the culture of free improvisation is encouraged through doing or improvising over and over without relying on taught knowledge. Equally important for this process of acquisition is the fact that for long stretches of time during the sessions some participants are not playing but have to

listen to the rest of the group. There is a practical aspect to Eddie's tendency to organise the sessions in the form of smaller divisions of the group into duos, trios, and so on because it means that the participants are normally able to hear what it is that they are playing giving more clarity and focus to the improvisations than there would be if the whole group played the whole of the time. Listening and not playing aids the process of acquisition because it means that the participants are exposed to what their peers are doing, and so they are able to evaluate what 'works' in a free improvising context in terms of their peers' practice and in terms of their own development. The participants are, in a sense, learning to 'compose' themselves in terms of self examination and reflection upon how best to interact with the ensemble and in terms of exploring and developing an individual sound with their instruments following the example of their peers.

The guiding idea behind the LMC workshops could be summarised as combining play and performance-driven aesthetics. Performance as a motivating feature predominates because there is a general consistency in the way in which free improvisation is approached as a thing distinct from composition or improvising in an explicitly generic way. Play acts as the medium for the activity because the group are insulated from the pressures of delivering a satisfactory musical outcome for a concert audience; however, because the group largely consists of participants who are performing musicians the workshop is not a space in which anything goes.

Chapter 6
Summary, Conclusions, and Avenues for Further Research

Summary and Conclusions

The preceding chapters have presented a study of a particular area of music making with regard for the way in which it has been shaped by ideas arising not just from practice but also by prevailing cultural and philosophical concepts. I have not attempted to articulate a precise aesthetic of improvised experimental music or free improvisation, but at the very least I hope to have cleared a space in which aesthetic questions about the practice of improvisation and musical experimentation may be considered. Improvised and experimental musics are generally considered to be 'special cases' by mainstream aesthetics and musicology because they are not thought to have a direct bearing upon mainstream music making and musical experience. This, however, ignores the influence of mainstream thinking and practice upon improvised music: the influence may not always be explicit (the work concept is not an idea which most listeners will have at the front of their minds when listening to a piece of music), but it has affected various important facets of Western musical practice (for instance, the institution of the 'concert' and concert etiquette), and ideas about music (for example, the idea of the 'great' composer, and the canon of musical works).

In chapter 1 I set the scene for the kind of music I discussed in the remainder of the thesis, tracking a path of historical influence upon the development of IEM over the past fifty years, and noting the close relationship between the ideas behind experimental composition and those which inspired the first wave of free improvisers. As composers became disenchanted with the scientistic determinacy of serialism several leading figures such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Bruno Maderna, and (most emphatically) Franco Evangelisti saw the expressive potential in more improvisatory ways of making music inspired by the alternatives offered by American composers such as John Cage, Earle Brown, Morton Feldman and Christian Wolff. The combination of more 'open' approaches to making scores (graphic and text-based) and utilising ideas closer to oral traditions – such as forming composer-led ensembles (Cage and Tudor; Stockhausen's ensemble) and relying on the charisma of particular

performers to transmit musical ideas (Earle Brown's conducting) – led to ways of improvising which were distinct from the tropes of jazz, and more immediately relevant to the live exploration of timbre and texture exciting composers in the wake of developments in electronic music. For forward-looking jazz musicians in Britain and the rest of Europe seeking to find an authentic way of making music which did not simply echo the models of American jazz, the work of avant-garde composers provided a major stimulus as the examples of interaction between improvisers and composers given in that chapter demonstrate.

In chapter 2 I explored a prevailing theme in Western musical aesthetics – the concept of the musical work – and teased out the contradictions between its assumed status as an 'eternal' concept or value, and its intimate relationship with a specific symphonic practice which has made it difficult for subsequent musicians and aestheticians to evaluate new musical developments in an analogous manner. While IEM does not fit the requirements of a 'closed' or traditional symphonic view of the work concept, and indeed experimental, collaborative and improvised music may be seen in part to define itself in opposition to its concerns, the influence of work concept thinking and practice was shown to have more gravitational pull upon IEM than other 'open work' ways of conceptualising the ontological identity of music.

The following chapters, 3 and 4, formed a complementary pair in which statements derived from interviews with experienced and established improvising experimental musicians were placed in a narrative from which two distinct but related attitudes found in IEM were extrapolated. These tendencies were music inspired by or practised in such a way as to emphasise the importance of the *performance* event (related to the regulating role of the concert in defining a piece of music as a 'work') or the activity of *play* (relating to 'non-work' alternatives, or social music-making for its own sake) as the defining feature of the music that an improviser makes. While these characteristics are generally opposed to each other it was argued that it is impossible for an improvisation which emphasises the one characteristic to be successful if it does not also contain some element of the opposing tendency. This dynamic relationship between performance and play was explored in a more abstract manner in chapter 4 in which the role of the individual was considered within the context of the group. I took as an example Stanley Cavell's and Chantal Mouffe's

philosophical critique of institutional liberal democratic models like that proposed by John Rawls. The aesthetic inspiration expressed by the interviewees in chapter 3 was seen to have an ethical dimension which emphasised the responsibility an individual has to the music making process, the other members of the ensemble, and the audience. The tendencies of performance and play place an onus upon the improvising musician to find ways of keeping the music cohesive but without losing the provocative creative element which keeps the music exciting. This dynamic tension was argued to be analogous with the tension between an individual agreeing to participate in the maintenance of the mechanisms of the democratic state (for example, observing the law), and the possibility for minority disagreement within the state system not to be wilfully ignored or suppressed. In other words, in order for a democracy to operate healthily the citizens of the state must participate – both in order to *maintain* the underlying structure and to *alter* it when needs be.

Chapter 5 reports a case study of an improvising workshop, detailing the way in which ideas of play and performance were placed in the foreground as defining concepts or as means to an end. This particular workshop featured musicians who were interested in free improvisation as a performance art and as a consequence the music made in the sessions tended to be led by a concern for finding the necessary self-discipline for performing and creating a unique and personal sound. The element of play, while important for the group and each musician in order to explore and develop their improvising 'voices', acted as the forum in which ideas could be 'safely' developed without the worry of satisfying an audience but with the awareness of performing to peers. The influence of the group leader and conformity and resistance to this influence was considered, as were the kinds of roles which members of the group assumed during improvisations in response to the actions of each member of the ensemble. The general emphasis of the group was for a performance-centred aesthetic – influenced in part by the preference of the workshop leader, but the means by which this performance aesthetic was developed and acquired was through the medium of play. Because the workshop was not a performance situation with an audience as such the musical results were not expected to adhere to those expected of an improvised concert performance, and therefore the music of the workshops was expressed through play. However, because the workshop participants

were largely musicians interested in improvised performance peer influence meant that the general tendency of the music made was towards a performance aesthetic.

The analysis of free improvisation is still at an early stage, and it is almost in the nature of the music to be resistant to the kind of probing that has been devoted to composition, and so strategies for approaching this music are still, much like the music itself, ad hoc. In the case study described in chapter 5 I posited the idea of analysing the constituent 'regulative' ideals and practices of IEM in order to assemble a picture of the kinds of interaction involved. This study was only a partial success because there were constraints of time upon the participants' ability to discuss their involvement in the LMC workshop, and a general reluctance to put into words their experience of the workshop. Other improvising music workshops were set up for the purposes of this study, but the difficulty of maintaining a regular group of participants made the inclusion of this work less than worthwhile. The LMC workshop was chosen because of its unusually consistent existence, due in part to the leadership and renown of Eddie Prévost, and its location at the centre of a busy musical scene in London. Future projects to study the 'acquisition' of skills for free improvisation will need to account for the temporary and fringe nature of the music (many musicians 'pass through' free improvisation without feeling a need to commit) and its lack of permanent institutional support; although as improvisation begins to enter the curriculum of many higher education establishments the opportunity to delve further into 'acquired' improvisational learning may become more tenable.

At the start of the research discussed in this thesis, I set out to investigate what improvised experimental music owes to conventional ideas about the way in which music is practiced and thought about. I wanted to see how it both adhered to and deviated from a mainstream model of musical aesthetics, but more than this I wanted to understand the relationship between the individual impulse to improvise and the need to negotiate musical ideas in the context of an ensemble. *Performance* is a key motivating force behind much IEM and therefore reflects the influence of the Western concert tradition, the work concept, and expectations about producing a coherent and original musical statement that will be satisfactory to a (discerning) audience. *Play* is the "fly in the ointment" of performance, a factor which is inadvertent because the music is made by a collection of individuals improvising together: 'wrong' turns lurk

at every corner and so players must be ready to drop an idea at any moment in order to keep the music going. But play is also – as in the case study example – the medium through which musicians 'find themselves' as improvisers and acquire the necessary experience, if not a technical knowledge, of what it is to be an improvising musician and what it is to improvise 'freely'.

Avenues for Further Research

As I noted at the start of this thesis, improvisation is a feature of most kinds of music making in one form or another; and this means that the field for its study is potentially vast. In the field of psychology there have been a wide array of publications detailing everything from improvisation as a process of learning in groups following comparison with models of verbal interaction (Sawyer, 1997, 1999), learning alone (Sudnow, 2001), and models of improvisation based on neurocognition (Pressing, 2000) and psychodynamic models (Sansom, 1997). In recent years the study of improvisation has gathered pace particularly in the area of ethnomusicology in which the role of improvisation within particular cultures and musical genres has been closely observed. Jazz has featured strongly in the ethnomusicological study of improvisation largely because its usage in this genre is explicit and widely recognised as a core element of the music, and there have been a number of significant studies detailing the thoughts of jazz musicians and the roles which individual musicians assume in an ensemble (Berliner, 1994; Monson, 1996). However, even as improvisation has become increasingly popular as a subject for musicological study it has also become clear that a satisfactory definition of what the precise object of study is has become ever more problematic. For example, the privileging of improvisation as a guiding concept in jazz and experimental music in the West has at times been applied to non-Western traditions which although apparently similar in practice are conceptualised very differently. Nooshin (2003) draws attention to the privileging of composition over improvisation in much musicological discourse and to the assumption made by many commentators that most oral musical traditions are improvisatory because they are, if anything, only 'semi-composed'. Nooshin has questioned this assumption because it implies that arguments such as Leonardo's mentioned in chapter 2 still hold sway over the mainstream evaluation of music – i.e.

'it must be worth more if one can hold it or own it'.[82] Berliner (1994), echoing Hall's (1992) notion of 'acquired' learning referred to above in chapter 5, has noted that "the popular conception of improvisation as "performance without previous preparation" is fundamentally misleading. There is, in fact, a lifetime of preparation and knowledge behind every idea that an improviser performs" (Berliner, 1994: 17). This raises two difficult questions: how do Western concepts about music making reflect a prejudice or misunderstanding about music which does not adequately fit the given categories (a theme also explored by Lewis, 1996), and more fundamentally, what is improvisation? The first of these questions is not specific to the matter of musical improvisation but has implications for a project such as the one I outline below which would attempt to explore more fully the interaction between American jazz and European IEM. The second question is, perhaps, unanswerable as this study and most others have shown the question to be rhetorical if one attempts to define improvisation in and of itself; improvisation can only be defined in relation to particular musical practices, and then if it is to be found at all it is in the gaps between the more quantifiable material elements of a given genre.

Regarding the history, aesthetics and practice of free and experimental improvisation, research has been – much like the music itself – scattered, with most accounts being written by the performers (Prévost, 1995, 2004) or fans of the music and journalists (Nuttall, 1989; Day, 1998; Watson, 2004), with Sansom (1997) being one of the very few to undertake a detailed academic examination of the music. Day, Prévost, and Watson provide much social history for the origins and development of the music according to the histories of particular performers, and this is still an interesting area of investigation as the first generation of free improvisers enter their seventies, but there has as yet been no study in this area to attempt to gather a broad and more encompassing view of the social history of free improvisation. However, such a study as this may not be strictly feasible when one considers the vast and various lists of music and musicians this would necessarily involve. In chapter 1 I gave a brief historical outline of some of the musicians and their influences, but the attempt at a 'comprehensive' social history of free improvisation and experimental music, if only limited to Britain, would raise many interesting issues about the

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[82] "Music which is consumed in the very act of its birth is inferior to painting which the use of varnish has rendered eternal" (cited in Benjamin, 1936/1992: 242).

interaction between musical genres, art practices, and the relevance of the social and political motivations behind experimental music.

My study has been, out of necessity, limited to a particular strand of free improvisation which I have described as maintaining a close alignment or association with analogous developments in the work of experimental composers, and this is demonstrated most readily by the predominance of improvisers who favour a performance-led attitude to improvisation. Musicians such as Eddie Prévost, John Tilbury, Chris Burn, and Mark Wastell also have some connection with experimental composers and compositional ideas, and each could be said to give emphasis to their approach to improvisation as being defined largely through concert performance and with the seriousness of other new art music, and hence my interest in the work concept as a way of understanding the tensions within IEM. This means that I have, to some extent, downplayed the more subversive (play) element that some improvisers actively bring to their music making in order to demonstrate the links between improvisation and work concept aesthetics. Another study is needed to redress this imbalance, and to properly consider what the aesthetic position of those improvisers who are explicitly informed by 'plunderphonics', popular music, punk, poetry, and theatre, such as multi-instrumentalist Steve Beresford or the People Band.[83] Some of these performers still appear to operate with reference to an art aesthetic rather than the demands of commercial music,[84] but their approach often seems to have more in common with Dada and performance art, or the anarchic element within the punk movement[85] than anything connected with the musical work concept. Some of these musicians also retain connections with jazz and American free jazz and this adds a further tangled layer of meanings to be explored. Borgo (2002) has referred to the difficulty that several European improvisers have with aligning themselves with the jazz tradition, citing Lewis's (1994) distinction between Eurological and Afrological attitudes to improvising, and as the cultural experience of improvising musicians

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[83] The People Band was the musical element within the anarchic theatre/performance art group The People Show during the mid to late 1960s.

[84] Although several make a living from aspects of the commercial music world – see footnote 34 in chapter 1.

[85] Certain musicians from the punk scene have collaborated with free improvisers in a variety of contexts, from The Damned inviting saxophonist Lol Coxhill to improvise during their live performances in 1977 (Nuttall, 1989), to members of the New York band Sonic Youth performing with Evan Parker in more recent years.

continues to widen it is surely worth exploring the depths and kinds of interactions and the changes that occur when musicians of differing backgrounds 'freely' improvise. Stanyek (1999) has hinted at ways of approaching the intercultural hybrids that can arise when musicians from different cultures from around the world meet in free improvisation, but his work is still at an early stage in its development.

There is still much that can be written about the role of the work concept in defining the aesthetic identity of non-work kinds of music. Much has been made of the influence of art schools upon the way in which popular music is made, presented, and discussed (Rockwell, 1992; Cocker, 2006; Walser, 2006), and this has meant that the musical work concept has entered the debate about non-classical music through a side door but has been largely relegated because of the influence of its older sibling, the concept of the 'work of art'. As shown in chapter 1 there was a significant influence of contemporary artists and art school teaching upon improvisers and experimental composers, such as the improvisers of AMM and the composers of the so called 'New York School'. Composers such as Cage, Feldman and Brown, and improvisers such as Keith Rowe were inspired by 'abstract expressionist', 'pop', and conceptual artists like Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg, and Marcel Duchamp not only in the way in which they made their music but more importantly in the way in which they thought about it. Artists such as these offered quite a different model from those of composers in the European tradition, who largely looked to past musical masters for inspiration. And as a consequence, the impulse in Western art music up until the years in the aftermath of the Second World War was one of inexorable progress as innovations which were accepted by mainstream practice were viewed to have grown organically out of the traditions established by previous generations. In the field of jazz, especially on the British jazz scene, there was a similar notion of performers finding their 'voice' by building upon the styles of previous generations of performers, and with the growth in availability of recordings that could mean that performers were expected by their peers to have a historical perspective comparable to that of a classically trained musician.

However, the effect of musicians taking their lead from artists and an art school education is that an empirical, hands-on attitude to music making is emphasised over and above that of developing a historical consciousness about

musical technique and intention. The most influential artists such as the Americans named above were interested in exploring the most immediate, unmediated and sensuous ways of creating paintings and sculpture by working directly on the canvas with paint, making collages from junk and advertising materials. Additionally they found inspiration in existentialist, primitivist and other ways of thinking which emphasised engagement with the present moment rather than a historical understanding of classical reference and form, which more academic approaches to art and art theory had tended to give weight to. Likewise, a composer such as Cage, with his interest in non-Western philosophies, found in the work of these artists kindred spirits who suggested ways of proceeding without concern for linear or historical progress. Cage, Feldman and Brown, and many improvising musicians were inspired by the immediacy of their artist contemporaries, and attempted to divest their music of historical reference and a sense of linear progress, preferring instead to concentrate upon singular unrelated points of sound, simultaneities, or sustained attention to a limited palette of sounds.

The nature of experimental improvisation with its combination of the unpredictable interactions of individuals and a focus upon alternative methods of sound production (which emphasise noise as much as 'conventional' musical sounds) lends itself more to the empirical approach of visual arts education than to classical conservatoire training. Several participants at the workshops observed in chapter 5 were art students without any kind of formal musical background. Increasingly art education has incorporated instruction in multimedia, so that many of the leading contemporary artists cannot simply be described as painters, sculptors, or film makers in the conventional sense, and many artists now choose to work with sound in making installations and films (for example Tacita Dean or Andrew Kötting). A practical, concrete approach to sound – and most artists in this area describe themselves as 'sound artists' rather than composers (Poole, 2001) – lends itself in a more immediate way to IEM than the notation-led manipulations of conservatoire composition training. The examples from the workshops involving musicians who attempted to explicitly reference known genres of music such as jazz displayed much more reticence with this kind of 'harmonically governed' music in the free improvising context than did the art students making music from the instruments and junk found at hand.

While it is perhaps unfair to single out the trained musicians' reserve in this context (inexperience and the 'ad hoc-ness' of the situation were an important factor) it does demonstrate how, in practice, the technical attitude of an art education may well be more immediately applicable to IEM than that of a classical music or jazz training. In which case why have I sought to make a link between IEM and the musical work concept? Surely if the fit between IEM and the musical work is as messy as I have described then the analogous concept of the work of art would seem to be far more appropriately applied to this kind of music making? This raises two issues for discussion: first, what would a study of the influence of an 'art work' aesthetic upon IEM (and other kinds of music such as pop and rock) offer that was specifically different to that of the influence of the musical work concept? And second, how is the 'art work' concept defined? Is there an analogous discrepancy between a traditional concept of the art work and that for art practice post-1945 (the influence of Walter Benjamin's essay would suggest as much: Benjamin, 1936/1992)? Such a project would most likely involve a study of art students' involvement in music making, both in their studies and extra-curricular activity and the place of improvisation in other areas of art practice. This might be contrasted with classical and jazz-trained musicians' involvement (both formal and extra-curricular) in IEM kinds of music and other art activity. The projects might be linked by a shared musical forum such as that of the LMC workshop or similar.

Secondly, and with the most immediate relevance, there is the matter of why I have chosen to focus on the influence of the musical work concept upon IEM. It should be clear from the historical account in chapter 1 that experimental composed music has affected the development of free improvisation and that because of the direct lineage from the European tradition of classical music and concert hall performance to experimental composition the musical work concept casts a shadow over IEM. In chapter 3 musical work concept ideas were seen to prevail in the way in which most interviewees spoke of their attitude and practice to improvisation, emphasising ethical qualities concerned with a performer's responsibility to satisfy an audience, to develop a specific sonic identity (both individually and also as a group: cf. Mark Wastell), and a general interest in testing their creativity as improvisers in concert *performance*. The discrepancies and deviations from musical work thinking were also noted, such as the motivational (and potentially disruptive) tendency of *play*,

but these were seen also to contain seeds of musical work concept thinking. In the absence of a convincing alternative to the musical work concept, IEM defines itself aesthetically in the push and pull between the conventions of mainstream musical aesthetics as articulated through the musical work concept – emphasising performance and individual creativity – and the unpredictability of collaboration and play.

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