

**TOO IMPORTANT TO BE LEFT TO THE MUSICIANS: UN-
MUSICAL ACTIVISM AND IMPROVISED FICTION**

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Abstract

This thesis articulates a particular conception of improvisation and explores to what extent it can be thought of as a revolutionary socio-music practice that critiques dominant conceptions of musicality through micro-communities of existentialist-anarchist thought and practice. In particular, significant attention will be paid to the role that ideology, power and politics play in these dominant conceptions of musicality, and therefore, a broad yet rigorous analysis of the strands of education and culture in which these ideas are disseminated will be a central concern throughout the thesis. Various auto-ethnographic methods and case-studies will be utilised to explore the practical impact of what I call an un-Musical activism, which seeks to dismantle the binaries between 'professional'/'amateur'; 'musician'/'non-musician'; 'musical'/'unmusical'. I will argue that historically, there has been a strong tendency to want to specialise, stratify, and ultimately contain the musical environment through rigid and restrictive rules for inclusion; that this situation might be getting worse, not better; that various attempts at inclusivity, widening participation and musical 'freedom' have maintained the same core components of exclusion; and that it is only by thinking beyond colonial notions of inclusivity that improvisation can begin to make sense as revolutionary socio-musical activism which draws upon key components of existentialist and anarchist thought and practice.

For Mam

Acknowledgments

This hasn't been a straightforward PhD. It has not been a solitary experience, nor have I had the 'luxury' of holing myself away and just getting on with it. Having a young family has shaped the PhD, structuring its process and contributing directly to its content. I knew I had to find a way of utilising my family situation to not hinder, but contribute positively, and it has. Sitting at the computer, reading or writing, and my 3-year old Daughter Arietti coming in and saying 'stop doing work, let's be dinosaurs instead', puts things in perspective, not to mention welcoming new baby Elodie shortly before travelling to Canada for an important symposium on improvisation. There have been difficult times like this, but also, this was the primary reason for making the whole thing a bit more fun, flexible and creative. It was also the reason for the weekly open-access sessions, so I could take Arietti and Elodie along, and be doing research at the same time. Time management has needed to be precise, with me and my partner Laura constantly negotiating the collective work-home balance over the past 4 years has required flexibility on both of our parts and having somehow reached this stage now, I can say wholeheartedly that this has been a cooperative effort in every sense, and I could not have done it without Laura, Arietti and Elodie making it fun, meaningful and real. And of course the endless early morning and late-night conversations we've all had throughout this past 4 years has been invaluable to keeping this thing on course.

We have also had massive amounts of pragmatic help from both mine and Laura's parents. I want to say something specific about my parents, Maureen and Rob, and my brother John, who as a family growing up provided me with the best preparation for having a family myself. Life was busy, hectic, noisy, but always, always loving, nurturing and together. The noisy bit is important of course to the concerns here, not just for sonic reasons, but also, because it was during my youth that I learned how to work effectively regardless of what else was going on! My family have always been incredibly supportive of me following what I wanted to do, without judgement or pressure, and they created the space for me to pursue music and writing, which is ultimately why I have ended up doing this. They also gave me the inner confidence to believe in myself, while nurturing

the outward confidence to stick by my principles with others, and not place others on pedestals of illegitimacy or unjustified authority.

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From an academic perspective, I need to say a few things about certain people. Well, really mainly one person as it happens, my long-term supervisor, Dr. William Edmondson. Because it's been a really difficult trajectory getting to this position, and while I don't want to antagonise anyone, it's fair to say that my development has been shaped almost completely by Will's direct contributions. I could not have got here without the immense support, encouragement and help Will has provided. He has stepped in when needed from day one, nurtured ideas, allowed me the space to breathe out and express to the fullest my current situation, knowing that given the right kind of dialogue, debate and critical intervention, ideas would progress and develop. This is a very rare and special talent. While other academic staff would respond angrily to informal e-mail exchanges or requests, I would regularly be in contact over late-night informal e-mail exchanges, or sporadic meet-ups at the pub, at gigs, or once even in the Apple Store during a laptop repair! This all contributed towards a personalised supervisory approach that has yielded excellent results. He has gone way beyond the call of duty in his attempts to support my development and my ideas. Through his development of the ICMUS Hub forum, I hugely improved my academic skills of debate, argument and writing; through his development of Felt Beak, I hugely improved my confidence in playing music and this enabled me to completely re-define my relationship with music. This PhD wouldn't actually have existed at all without his influence. In fact, to go even further, I'm not even sure I would have gone through with any of my degrees. I came to University with not much hope or excitement about it, and certainly didn't consider post-graduate education as a possibility. However, Will's energy and distinctive approaches radically inspired and completely re-energised me, extracting my potential and guiding me through each step, and I can't thank him enough.

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I need to close this section though by giving a very special dedication to my Mother who, after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2013, recently died. Her devotion to providing everything we could need as a family, both emotionally and practically, has been a constant source of inspiration and she will always be my inner voice that guides me. She showed me the way by her constant questioning of authority wherever it existed, and her immense bravery in the face of adversity. I know that I could not have got here without her influence, not least the daily late-night conversations about ideas, work and life that shaped so much of how I view the world. I know how proud it will make her to see this in print, and so I dedicate this to her.

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Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to animate musicological discourse with theoretical and practical frameworks fed by a hyper-rich vein of existentialist-anarchist politics that seeks to revolutionise stagnant understandings of music, so as to produce an unprecedented expansion of possibilities for widening access to improvised music-making.

Key Terminology

Improvisation and Freedom.

Improvisation as a term is typically deployed in improvised music scenes and avant-garde discourse through its most common stylistic outputs. In other words, it is generally thought of as a pseudo-genre: 'improvised music', which typically is defined by an extremely unpredictable and unforeseen sonic event severely disconnected from pre-meditated rules, designs or structural frameworks. This understanding is aligned with improvisation's role in the Euro-American Avant-Garde and the European Free-Improvisation Movement, as opposed to the more stylistic and genre-based Avant-Jazz and Free-Jazz movements. The primary problem with this is that it allows for partial understandings of what improvised music can be to dominate the conception itself. The way that improvisation as a term is used throughout this thesis can be defined by my positioning of it as deviating from mono-thematic genre/style, and instead as a pluralistic *approach* to making music. This provides us with an existentialist-interpretation of improvisation, as an existential force that acts upon music in different ways by each different individual. As an approach to music, it can then inevitably cut across different styles limitlessly. This cutting across different styles is a kind of feralizing of existing styles and genres, opening up rigid musical structures to the un-tamed nature of free-form improvisation. Freedom in improvisation is negotiated by a complex web of power relations related to notions of negative and positive liberty. I will address this by engaging with George Lewis' concepts of Eurological and Afrological respectively. I will argue that a positive liberty freedom that draws on Afrological tendencies serves an un-Musical activism best, by positing that individuals are free-to pursue any and all musical

structures, styles at will, within the context of an improvised approach to music in which anything and everything can happen.

un-Musical Activism

I posit the term 'un-Musical activism' to account for the activist 'un-doing' of dominant Musical ideology that underpins ubiquitous notions of professionalism and specialism, which unnecessarily narrow and constrain participation in music-making. I will pursue a radical undermining of the privileged status of Musician (with a capital M) and instead seek to dismantle the distinction between Musicians and so-called non-Musicians. Through this work, I seek to create the theoretical and practical foundations for non-musicians to revolutionise the wider musical environment.

Revolution

For the purposes here, revolution will mean to revolve, to revolt and to *re-vision*: a revolving of dominant musical ideology and dominant power relations; a revolt against the effects of professionalism; and a re-visioning of musical meaning, what music is, and who musicians are. Put more direct, it is to politicise the very structures and foundations of music itself, and to put in place certain measures of community resistance, so as to create micro-rebellions through communities of existentialist-anarchist musical organisation.

Existentialist-Anarchism

Existentialism and Anarchism are posited here as mutually complimentary forms of community-based political praxis. I will argue for a particular interpretation of Existentialist philosophy drawn from the work of Simone de Beauvoir and the later work of Jean-Paul Sartre. Primarily, I will seek to embrace the existential philosophy that each individual's existential freedom to pursue his/her own life choices precedes whatever objective essence guides or hampers those choices. Each of us cannot avoid choosing the nature and function of our lives, reminding us that existential agency is an unavoidable fact of our lives - a responsibility to properly consider our choices and the implications of those choices on others. Even to not choose is to choose to not choose! I will argue alongside de Beauvoir that the existential argument that life has no inherent essential

meanings is not an absurd claim for no meaning whatsoever, but instead a positive reclamation of the individual's freedom to define meaning for themselves. Contrary to negative interpretations, existentialism is a philosophy that requires the development of ethical interpersonal relations – for each individual to maximise their own freedom, they cannot do so at the expense of another, as this would destroy the very concept of existential freedom itself. As such, in order for one of us to be free, we must all be free.

Anarchist political philosophy and anarchist community organisation provides a material foundation for these existential ideas, and they help form the modes of socio-musical organisational frameworks needed to demonstrate the practical arguments of this thesis. Anarchism in practice demonstrates examples of micro-communities organising themselves with the absence of a leader, without authority, or any externally imposed objective dictates; as such, they posit means of community organising and making collective choices based on existential principles. I will argue that an existentialist-anarchist approach to un-Musical activism allows for the greatest possible maximisation of each individual's freedom to pursue their own objectives without essential objective *truths* about music, musicality and musicians.

Research Methods and Data Collection

Various auto-ethnographical and ethnographical case study research projects will be discussed. I deployed a participatory-action approach to ethnographical research projects by inviting participants to define their own objectives, what they wanted to achieve, and through discussion at every stage, created research methods collaboratively. I also routinely deployed auto-ethnographical accounts, in which I devised my own research hypotheses and objectives and used my own experience and engagement as a so-called 'non-musician' in a variety of community music settings to test those hypotheses. I have also implemented case-study ethnography in the form of state-school projects and workshops. Data collection methods have consisted of participant observations, observational diaries, and informal conversations after activity with participants and audience members. Video and audio recording were additionally used for the activity with adults and was consensually implemented at all sessions with transcriptions taken from these recordings. All participants were fully informed, and subsequent consent was

given for any recording and use of audio, video and verbal commentary in any public domain usage, including this thesis.

Overview

The primary goal of this thesis is to analyse the ways in which dominant conceptions of musicality can create social realities that hinder participation in music-making by creating the perception that music is something to be attained in a distant future *after* professionalised, specialist learning. I will explore how this situation not only hinders the willingness of people to engage in music-making, but actively restricts access to it in some circumstances, and alienates those who do try, through the value systems embedded in the various educational and cultural institutions which attempt to produce musical learning and entertainment. Central to the thesis will be a positive revision and indeed, reclamation of what has been termed 'unmusical'. The thesis will be written by this author who has been labelled as such, and the auto-ethnography that will be utilised will display various forms of practical research projects that challenge this concept. The various projects are subsumed under an overarching agenda that I have entitled un-Musical activism, which is a multi-layered approach that involves creating opportunities for improvised music-making for groups of people who either classify themselves as 'unmusical', have been classified that way by others, or who have had minimal music-making experience. It is multi-layered, because it features both: a cultivation model that happens through workshops, practice and recording session, usually in studio spaces; and then there is the expansion model, which happens in various socially accessible spaces for large groups – parks, pubs, restaurants, the street, etc. These projects are unashamedly political and they attempt to create micro-revolutions through the individuals involved and their communities. The particular form of improvisation that I will be discussing has its social basis in the micro-communities that spring from it, and these micro-communities of socio-musical activism reflect a form of existentialist-anarchist thought that draws comparisons with thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre and L. Susan Brown, amongst others. As I will explain in depth later, the model of improvisation pursued is one that distances itself from certain dominant models that have emerged, in particular the 'non-idiomatic' model of the 'European free-improvisation movement'. The conception of freedom implicated here problematizes certain binaries of positive/negative that have been created around the discourses on improvisation, and instead, attempts to forge an existentialist-anarchist conception that

insists on freedom as always situated, unstable, and something to be fought for. There is an ethics in the ambiguity that arises from this, which is insisted upon and worked through constantly.

The thesis comprises five chapters with an unusual afterword after each chapter (which I will explain below). Chapter 1 is an exploration of the various ways in which ideological conceptions of musicality can restrict access to music-making. This chapter will focus itself on various educational and cultural methods by which people become accustomed to cultural norms regarding music and its production. Chapter 2 offers a detailed analysis of important historical antecedents and current developments in the theory and practice of improvised, experimental and various avant-garde cultural practices. This chapter will offer a rigorous critique of these practices and the models of community and freedom they propose. Both chapters 1 and 2 will seek to illuminate a particular way of thinking about music that is based within conceptual essentialism, fixity, professionalism and preservation of dominant power relations. Chapter 3 provides an outline of various auto-ethnographical methods and case-studies pertaining to the following research question: to what extent can this form of improvisation be thought of as a model of socio-musical practice that can widen participation in music-making? Among the projects discussed will be the 'Unmusical project', 'Improvisation for Children's Creative Practice' and 'Human Beings Improvising'. All of these projects were designed to identify some practical significance and impact of this music in people's actual lives – to connect a theory with pragmatic social practice. Chapter 4 attempts to ground the specific model of improvisation identified here in an existentialist-anarchist political philosophy, through the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, L. Susan Brown, and others. This chapter also seeks to utilise such theoretical formations to show how un-Musical improvised practice can reflect alternative models of interpersonal relations, social organisation and political action. The conclusion doesn't simply repeat what has been said already, but gathers together the key aspects of each chapter, offering a commentary on these aspects, while drawing out new ideas from what has emerged throughout.

An unusual inclusion in this thesis is an afterword after each chapter, which in this case takes the form of an initial chapter summary, followed by a fictional narrative between

two characters who discuss the key themes of the chapter, and debate back and forth the potential conflicts, contradictions and problems with arguments made in the preceding chapter. I deemed this necessary in each chapter because I will deliberately try to give myself the space and oxygen needed for the ideas to breathe, meaning that I will commit to a fairly assertive argument which won't rest much in its consistent 'manifesto' style approach. This style is preferable in order to open up discussion on these issues, while not getting bogged down in the inevitable doubt of traditional academic writing. This will mean however that the nuanced problems, conflicts and ongoing obstacles of the theoretical and practical frameworks I have proposed have not been sufficiently dealt with, and so these afterwords will serve to deal with these issues, meaning I can give them the proper focus and dedication in their own right, but in a more interesting and engaging manner. I want to open up debate from within the thesis itself, pausing for reflection and self-critical engagement, but not in the usual anxious-ridden academic manner. These afterwords are called Discrepant Anachronism's and are numbered according to the relevant chapter. 'Discrepant Anachronism' is a combination of two words whose mutually related meanings, drawn from multiple etymological accounts are combined to produce a reinvented meaning - *to rattle and crack against time, something out of harmony with the present.*

The discrepant anachronism's will include various questions that have been taken from both real actual questions proposed to me throughout this research (either through supervision or casual conversation), and as imagined, potential questions that people may have regarding these ideas. They are also meant to critically comment upon the ironical relationship between the ideas presented in this thesis as reflecting a desired step away from a certain academic orthodoxy, while at the same time being inextricably intertwined with the thesis' required viva voce 'thesis defence'. Using language such as 'defence' creates a kind of perception that this process is an 'interrogation', and having this process embedded into the passing or failing of the PhD itself automatically sets up a negativity around the production of ideas, meaning that writing up a PhD is consistently haunted by knowing the success of this very writing, this very idea right now, this very word (and this one) is dependent upon someone else agreeing after verbal performative interrogation that it is legitimate enough to warrant granting me this qualification. But,

but, but: I get to have a say in who that person is. Wonderful. I get to cherry-pick who my interrogator is, how lovely. What I am trying to get at in an intentionally humorous, but serious way, is that by placing such a mediating device into proceedings, you constrain the potential for radicality, for revolution, for real significant change. I have a deep suspicion that such a process was always a deliberate attempt to do just that, to constrain the production of academic ideas, to retain a certain traditional orthodoxy to what is allowed to leave the academy and enter the 'real world', by producing doubt into the minds of academics as they struggle to produce significant changes within a system still deeply rooted within the history of a stiff orthodoxy dressed in tweed.

What follows, is an attempt to present a thesis that goes beyond this orthodoxy both in terms of the radicality of its ideas as well as the accessibility of its presentation.

Chapter 1 – The Structuralist Membrane of Music Education: Social, Cultural, and Institutional Disseminations.

This chapter will look primarily at how dominant conceptions of music are embedded within music education, and how they frame the kinds of music communities that emerge. While this chapter will focus substantially on ‘formal’ state-school music education, it will be important to bear in mind, that throughout the chapter and the thesis as a whole, education will be interpreted broadly, as in not just those formal, institutional structures such as the state-school system, but various indirect, cultural methods by which people become accustomed to certain ways of thinking, such as music ‘scenes’. Before beginning this discussion, it is important to briefly articulate what I mean by dominant conceptions of music, so that the following argument receives the sufficient context.

The Ideology, Power and Politics of Musical Meaning

Music, according to its dominant conception is defined in terms of a systematic unity whose purpose is generally its notation, or more broadly its preservation as representation – a system of organising sounds so as to be able to perform (represent) them again. From the start then, improvisation either must assimilate into this unity, or be considered outside *music itself*. Jean-Francois Lyotard’s description of music as sounds that are ‘defined...by their place in a system (the scale and rules of harmony)’¹ presents an ideological, but overwhelmingly normalised interpretation of music, where each different sound must be reducible to a fundamental framework. Even when composers have deviated from ‘the scale and rules of harmony’ or from diatonic structures, as in Arnold Schoenberg’s work, the fundamental is always retained, that the sounds are defined by their place in a systematic unity. Unity is the sonic glue in a pre-assembled solid oak dining table that you must never stain with your social pleasures and excesses. The structure must have internal unity always. Even when disorientation, incoherence, or ‘chaos’ is factored into composition, it is generally done so as a *tactic*, it is defined in relation to what it is not, and the ‘chaos’ is a constitutive element of the

¹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, ‘A Few Words to Sing’ in Adam Krims, ed., *Music/Ideology: Resisting the Aesthetic* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishing, 1998) 17.

systematic musical order. In other words, the structural membrane of Music with a capital M, is the demand that music be structured according to systematic unity, and that this unity provides an intelligible frame of reference for future representation in performance. It also overwhelmingly culminates in structured *products* whose process is seen in the past tense.

Unsurprisingly, dictionary definitions routinely refer to music in terms of harmony, tonality, or various other structural or mathematical terminology.² Educational curricula tend to take these definitions as a priori, and use them to determine what constitutes children's musical development: coherence of compositions, singing in-tune, playing in time, etc. What results is a crystallization of musical organisation in a form that must be representable for future performance and consumption, therefore requiring certain skill-sets to be developed in order to engage in the process of music-making. This is a crucial, if not totally normalised stage in the process. It is crucial because it actively excludes free-form improvisation from the process, and excludes the idea in people's minds that they could *just* make music without thinking first of what it might end up sounding like, or whether they might be able to repeat it later – that *just* doing is automatically inferior and lacking in some advanced display of ability. What I will repeatedly argue for is a re-thinking of this assumption, and a suggestion that what is actually at work in free-form improvisation are *different* routes to the organisation of sounds that are no less skilled or advanced. These approaches need to be kept constantly at the disposal of potential music-makers, not systematically excluded, camouflaged or assimilated. While I will go into depth in chapter 2 regarding notions of free forms of improvisation and the problematic terminology of 'freedom' itself, for now it is necessary to say that when I refer to 'free-form' improvisation, I am not meaning that the form necessarily *has* to be 'free', but more that players are free to use whatever form they want. It is a total collective improvisation where the form is decided on completely by each group without any over-arching rule or external authority on how the music should be organised. More on that in chapter 2 though.

What is important then in what may be called the dominant structuralist understanding of music is not the performer's present experience or interaction with sound, but the

² 'Music', <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/music> (23rd January, 2013).

representation, maintenance and consumption of musical objects. There is a product-oriented nature to the way in which musical labor is directed. Improvisation is absent, and even when the term improvisation is used, it is in strict reference to 'patterns of diatonic harmony',³ or is colonised 'within given structures'⁴ (whatever that actually means) and appropriated to serve exclusive agendas. Immediate generation and interaction with sound is recognised only as a stepping stone towards more crystallised structures, and is almost nowhere seen as valid in and of itself. In other words, improvisation is almost never seen as 'good enough' in and of itself to represent a product, and so it is relegated to *in the process of something more*.

This conception of music is so overwhelmingly normalised that it includes almost every style of music one can think of. The problem is a problem of the colon and of colonies: of colonisation and of colonialism, really. It is a process of an inhabitation of social territory by a group who come to define this territory as their own. We will call them the Music Factory Pig Police (M.F.P.P). We'll call them that, because they factory-farm and process music in their own nitrate-infused image, as a factory-farmed processed pig-music, wherein musicians are forced to exist in working conditions in which their ability to move is tightly constrained and they have to consume and regurgitate their own repetitive waste over and over again, in order to produce a product that is so tightly packaged, processed and sterile that it has lost all connection with the tremendous potential that lies beyond these constraints. The M.F.P.P. then sell this brand of factory-farmed pig music to schools, universities and the general public, who sell musician-pig meat and educate others about the farming of musician-pigs for future consumption to the youth of tomorrow. This actually changes the very identity of what the 'nature' of pigs/music is and distorts what is possible under the right conditions. What I'm talking about here is not the specific characteristics of certain kinds of farmed-music, such as commercial pop music, RnB, or smooth jazz, but the fundamental modes of operation inherent in factory-farming that control the production of most music on the planet. As such, it is the producers of this conception of music who are to blame, but as with most capitalist products, this product has liquefied to an extent that it exists on auto-pilot, and pre-

3 'Music: Key Stages 1-3', The National Curriculum for England, 2012, viewed 27th April, 2012. - expired website.

4 'Music: Attainment Target Level Descriptions', ' Primary National Curriculum until 2014, viewed 15th April, 2014, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130802151205/https://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/primary/b00199150/music/attainment> (27th April, 2012).

assumed to not be a specific conception of music at all, but just 'Music'. The M.F.P.P. always capitalises itself, attempting to define for everyone what music can be, but a counter-revolution occurs through improvised techniques of colon-irrigation, when people resist this restrictive situation and define for themselves their future and the future of what music can be. This is what William Parker means when he says 'there's no such thing as music police, saying this is music, this is not music. Everything is valid'.⁵

Jacques Attali's book *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* traces important historical ways in which the M.F.P.P. has been able to utilise power to control and preserve music as an agent of social order, by initiating rigid noise/music dichotomies and then enforcing ways of using these dichotomies to realise dominant political agendas (Attali doesn't use the specific term invented here instead opting just for 'power'). He traces this 'power' from ancient times all the way to the end of the 20th Century, but a particularly useful quote comes from the French Government in 1835 saying of street music: 'The government could greatly improve the street music of Paris and exert a powerful influence [by having] in its pay a considerable number of musicians equipped with always well-tuned instruments, who would only play good music.'⁶ According to Attali, this 'says everything there is to be said: about aesthetics and political control, about the rerouting of popular music toward the imposition of social norms.'⁷ 'The game of music resembles the game of power...dissonances are eliminated from it to keep noise from spreading⁸... Power reduces the noise made by others and adds sound prevention to its arsenal.'⁹ Attali cites three 'strategic usages of music by power':¹⁰ Sacrificing, Representation and Repetition:

When power wants to make people forget, music is ritual sacrifice, the scapegoat; when it wants them to believe, music is enactment, representation; when it wants to silence them, it is reproduced, normalized, repetition.'¹¹

⁵ 'William Parker: Everything is Valid', *All About Jazz*, 2005, <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/william-parker-everything-is-valid-william-parker-by-eyal-hareuveni.php?&pg=2#.VCAagvldWSo> (21st April 2012).

⁶ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985) 74.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 28.

⁹ Ibid, 122

¹⁰ Ibid, 19.

¹¹ Ibid, 20.

Attali then proposes improvisation, which he simply terms *composition*, as the means by which music begins to forge resistance. More than anything, Attali is concerned with liberating music 'from the rigid institutions of specialized musical training in order to return it to all members of society.'¹² A big part of this pursuit of Attali's is dismantling notions of music as a universal language and of a resistance to the kinds of colonial invasion alluded to earlier:

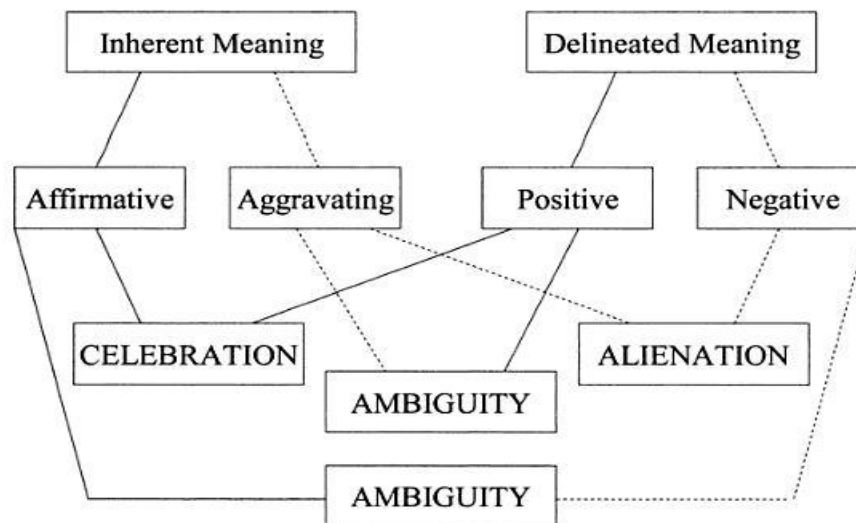
The attempts to transcribe music into language or language into music reflect this will to construct a universal language operating on the same scale as the exchanges made necessary by colonial expansion: music, a flexible code, was dreamed of as an instrument of world unification, the language of all the mighty.¹³

We will return to Attali soon, but for now, it is important to look more closely at the structuralist conception of music as a systematic unity, and how this conception can embed itself even within research that aims to challenge dominant conceptions of music. Lucy Green's work in music education, and the dominant ideology that underpins the way we educate children about music, has been significantly influential and she is an important scholar in this field. I want to draw upon her analysis of musical meaning to illustrate how pervasive this structuralist understanding can be, which again is characterised crucially by its dependence on systematic unity.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, 92.

Fig.1 ¹⁴



Source: Adapted from Green 1988, p. 138 and 1997, pp. 134 and 251.

The diagram above shows Green's analysis of what she conceives as the two fundamental aspects of musical meaning: inherent, and delineated, and the fundamental ways in which people respond to these meanings in their listening experience. 'Inherent' meaning is a perception that there exists a relationship between sonic materials that is encapsulated within those materials themselves. Musical meaning, arises, according to Green, as a result of 'natural sound' being harnessed into musical systems 'and through history, made to count as music'.¹⁵ Straight-faced, 'made to count as music' is uttered, without the slightest irony, doubt or suspicion. This is the core of the problem. This is precisely where every cultural analysis of music should find its richest veins of ideological bias and therefore interrogated, yet time and time again it is uttered in ignorant assumption of its perceived fundamental truth. 'Inherent musical meaning' is the idea that there is such a thing as 'Music', or more accurately, that whatever 'music' becomes existentially can be reduced essentially to the term 'Music'.

Delineated musical meaning, is all of those social and symbolic factors that the music can refer to - its social, philosophical and cultural context.

¹⁴ Lucy Green, 'Research in the Sociology of Music Education: Some Introductory Concepts' in Ruth Wright, *Sociology and Music Education* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2010) 27.

¹⁵ Lucy Green, *Music on Deaf Ears* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990) 81.

The difference between the concepts of inherent and delineated meaning is as follows: with inherent meaning, both the musical 'sign' and the object being referred to are made up of musical materials; with delineated meaning, the 'sign' is made up of musical materials, but the object being referred to is made up of non-musical elements.¹⁶

The first thing I want to draw attention to here, is how inherent meaning is assumed here to be not only a dominant force in the understanding of music, but an absolute necessity for musical meaning to exist at all. 'Musical meaning' means a particular conception of music, one in which a musical gesture needs to function as a 'sign' even if it doesn't ultimately refer to an 'object'. To use an analogy, if we imagine we are on a motorway, and a road sign tells us Liverpool is 3 miles to the right, when, in actuality, Liverpool is 5 miles to the left, Green seems to be suggesting that the fact the sign exists is enough to suggest Liverpool does indeed exist. In actuality though, as the work of Ferdinand de Saussure has tried to demonstrate, this signifier-signified relation is arbitrary, and we cannot actually be sure completely whether Liverpool (or music) exists. OK, so let's be realistic for a second. We really do know Liverpool exists and to an extent we know music exists. However, even if we know it exists because we've been there before, the fact omitted from Green's conception is that we can't have any realistic expectation of what it will look or sound like the next time we visit. The possibility for nonsensical, non-representational sonic gestures is removed here. Perhaps Green believes this to be impossible, assumedly because such gestures would not be 'made to count as music', but to rule out this possibility is to insist upon a very rigid, structural conception of music that seems to be at odds with any attempt to move beyond the kinds of dominant musical ideology which Green often claims to challenge, especially in terms of the ideologies underpinning mainstream music education.

The other key aspect of this model is the assumption that a lack of understanding of inherent musical meaning automatically leads to a negative experience (aggravating and alienating): 'if we are unfamiliar with the style of the music, and therefore aggravated by its inherent meanings'.¹⁷ It is the 'therefore' here, which I think is extremely problematic

¹⁶ Green, *Sociology and Music Education*, 26.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 28.

in Green's formulation, as it assumes that not having structural knowledge of the music we listen to automatically leads to an aggravating and alienating listening experience. In other words, it is impossible, according to this system to have a non-structuralist enjoyment or celebration of music, to not be alienated by music whose inherent meaning we don't grasp. This is such a widely-spread idea, and I will argue throughout this thesis, that it is a myth - that it is indeed possible to have a non-alienating and indeed non-structuralist enjoyment of music, and this unrecognised possibility emerges most lucidly through the various free-form practices which insist upon allowing individuals and collectives the freedom to explore all possible sound configurations. Such an approach opens the door to new listening perspectives that do not even appear on the radar of most music theorists, musicians and listeners. Just because an approach is rare, or even unheard of, does not mean it cannot exist, and by making totalising claims regarding music, musical meaning and musical listening, as Green and many others do, they contribute to what I see as a dangerous monopolisation and colonisation of the meaning of music that actively excludes alternative understandings.

It is worth noting that there has been some attention drawn to this kind of emphasis on 'structural listening', as critiqued primarily by Rose Subotnik. Subotnik articulates this as an approach to musical listening based on the assumption of autonomous structures that are defined 'wholly through some implicit and intelligible principle of unity'.¹⁸ As I keep repeating, it is this feature of unity which becomes the crucial element of 'structural listening', as it is the requirement for unity at the core of a representational composition that excludes Attali's 'composition' from emerging. Unity presupposes a particular method of organising sonic materials, so as to ensure that whatever else happens, no matter how 'experimental' the composition is, there is always a 'method in the madness', serial, aleatoric, indeterminate, and so on and so on, all rely on a pre-determined system which guides the resulting music, even if this system is the apparent lack of determined sounds. This is how, for instance Gary Peters can refer to chance and indeterminacy as featuring a 'all-too predictable unpredictability',¹⁹ because the essential aesthetic object of these works is always the systematic unity of chance itself, the

¹⁸ Rose Subotnik in Andrew Dell' Antonio, *Beyond Structural Listening: Postmodern Modes of Hearing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). 2.

¹⁹ Gary Peters, *The Philosophy of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 111.

conceptual idea behind the piece, rather than the actual sounds that get produced or the real-time interaction between performers. Unity is not therefore about the surface-level content of the sounds, but the governing principles of the work and the pre-defined parameters of what is deemed possible in the course of performance.

Subotnik goes on to say that structural listeners 'look upon the ability of a unifying principle to establish the internal necessity of a structure as tantamount to a guarantee of musical value'.²⁰ The consequences of this are not just that structural listening has been used to judge 'the value of musical works, but also their place in the musical canon'.²¹ It is here where the critique reveals explicitly ideological motives that have political consequences, in that certain a priori assumptions about musical structures are used to not only determine musical value, but also which musical works are promoted and therefore, which conception of music is made to 'count as music' as Lucy Green says. 'Count as music' then, as a statement is, as I argued earlier, partial, contextual, and for the most part, ideological and political. Improvised, experimental and other such practices are generally relegated, not just to alternative forms, but in most cases, not music at all. Such ideological assumptions are in the very blood-stream of musical education. It is worth drawing attention to the following comments from Helene Cixous before we move on, as I think her illuminations regarding ideology are crucial as we progress from here:

For me ideology is a kind of vast membrane enveloping everything. We have to know that this skin exists even if it encloses us like a net or like closed eyelids. We have to know that, to change the world, we must constantly try to scratch and tear it. We can never rip the whole thing off, but we must never let it stick or stop being suspicious of it. It grows back and you start again.²²

What I will want to suggest throughout is that structuralist understandings of music that depend upon systematic unity actually provide the net for musical ideology to attach itself, hitchhiking on the back of systems of musical organisation whose methods are put forward as 'natural' and 'essential' facets of *music itself*. These assumptions of music as

²⁰ Ibid, 2.

²¹ Ibid, 2

²² Helene Cixous in William Corlett, *Community Without Unity: A Politics of Derridian Extravagance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989) Preface with no page number.

a systematic unity that requires certain skill-sets are so overwhelmingly embedded that they are incredibly difficult to break past and find genuinely alternative routes of musical knowledge(s) being articulated, really anywhere. For instance, even in the book *Beyond Structural Listening*, various authors discuss the complexities involved with going beyond structuralism but as far as I can gather, all are musically trained scholars. The same goes for most discussion on music, all the way from the most experimental academic research, to conventional popular journalism, to rock bands, to noise music. In music we see a particularly pertinent example of Cixous' claim. The membrane is tough and vast, and the net which encloses it will not budge easily.

Only those with special skills and natural ability – problematizing music education and research

Now that the sufficient background and context have been outlined, we will now begin to explore the ways in which dominant musical ideologies are generally implemented through institutional means. This will inevitably begin with state-school education and progress onwards from there. The focus of this critique will be primarily upon the U.K. formal music education system for two primary reasons: the UK acts as a specific manifestation of both the wider problems at hand, and a key site for historically significant yet flawed alternative models; also, the auto-ethnography I intend to draw upon later is inevitably located within, and around U.K. educational models.

English state grammar school, sometime in the 1970's.

At the end of each lesson the teacher used to make all the boys in the classroom stand up. Then he would ask questions about crotchets and quavers and the like. If you got the question right you could sit down, if you got it wrong you got hit on the head with the big end of a baton and had to remain standing.²³

As Lucy Green has noted, formal music education is not something historically intrinsic to schooling, or to societies, and as it happens, formal music education has an ironic history:

While technological developments have increased the availability of music for the listener, only a relatively small percentage of the adult population is engaged in

²³ Personal Correspondence with Tony Gage, a member of touring improvisational band 'Radioactive Sparrow'.

active music making...The decline of music making has occurred in tandem with the expansion of music education.²⁴

Green goes on to say that whether this process is mere irony, or whether formal music education has been a contributing factor in this decline is not easily demonstrated, and she was unable to make such an assertion. However, we should explore the irony a little further. At the core of the idea of formal music education is a professionalism that is effectively ideological in principle, which insists on the social specialisation of musical labour. As Green remarks: 'the more highly specialized is the division of labor generally, the more likely it is that music will also become a specialized sphere of action: listened to and enjoyed by many, but practiced by only a few'.²⁵ The fact that Green's pursuit is clearly about getting more of the general public active in music-making makes her earlier positions and comments even more frustrating, because her solution to all of these problems involves a shift to popular-music in music education, which as I will argue later, doesn't substantially change the fundamentals of structuralist musical meaning. It also completely ignores free-form improvisation from this pursuit, and I would argue strongly that such an omission is a fatal flaw given its potential for genuinely alternative ways of socio-musical organisation.

Christopher Small has undertaken a lot of research into this general area, and especially in relation to various non-Western societies that feature significantly different forms of socio-musical organisation. He refers to a Western 'professionalisation of Music' and the institutionalised creation of a 'pyramid of musical ability':

Below this layer of the pyramid are those whose lot it is simply to contemplate and 'appreciate' the music objects created by composers and presented by performers...Those who do not imagine that they might ever take part in a public performance, so completely has the culture been taken over by professionalism.²⁶

This culture of professionalism that Small focuses on so heavily can be extended beyond just musical terms. Jacob Tobia, a political activist and writer has written about how

²⁴ Lucy Green, 'Music Education, Cultural Capital, and Social Group Identity', in Richard Middleton, *The Cultural Study of Music* (London: Routledge, 2003). 263.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue* (London: Calder Publications, 1987) 179.

professionalism is almost always loaded with ideological and political oppression. He says the following:

Professionalism is a funny term, because it masquerades as neutral despite being loaded with immense oppression. As a concept, professionalism is racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, classist, imperialist and so much more -- and yet people act like professionalism is non-political. Bosses across the country constantly tell their employees to 'act professionally' without a second thought. Wear a garment that represents your non-Western culture to work? Your boss may tell you it's unprofessional. Wear your hair in braids or dreadlocks instead of straightened? That's probably unprofessional too. Wear shoes that are slightly scuffed because you can't yet afford new ones? People may not think you're being professional either.²⁷

It's this particular function of professionalism as something which needs to seem so neutral and objectively true, while at the same time disseminating extremely loaded and ideological perspectives that oppress various people in different ways. This is an important function to keep in mind, because it is startling just how far professionalism reaches in musical communities. While it is mostly accepted that this political function of professionalism to reflect dominant political ideology and to oppress minorities is also reflective in the political class of successful musicians in the traditional, orthodox sphere of Western art music and the canon of the concert tradition; it is less acknowledged that most alternative spheres of popular music, the avant-garde and improvised, also suffer from this particular function. A professionalism in music that is retained in a general 'learn the rules before you break them' mandate, matched with a particular set of micro-skill sets that are revered – this happens in almost every musical scene, matched with discriminatory practices in those scenes reflecting dominant political agendas, causing the kinds of oppressive functions that Tobia identifies above. To come back to the specific idea of musical professionalism then, this is also picked up upon by Estelle Jorgensen in her book *Transforming Music Education* where she historicises it and traces it back to the middle ages:

²⁷ Jacob Tobia, 'Why I'm Genderqueer, Professional and Unafraid', *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jacob-tobia/genderqueer-professional-_b_5476239.html?utm_hp_ref=gay-voices (21st March, 2012).

The development of a class of professional musicians in Europe during the Middle Ages however, established guilds which formalized requirements of musicians... and prevented unqualified persons from entering the profession...the technical requirements of musicians gradually increased to such a degree that by the twentieth century, professional music making lay outside the reach of the ordinary person.²⁸

Attali's critique of such a historical movement is ruthless, and he is in no doubt that the movement to surpass such hierarchical divisions and destroy preceding codes must in its wake bring about 'the death of the specialist.'²⁹This idea that music is a specialised activity requiring a revered skill-set that only certain individuals can attain to, is something which is pervasive and leaks itself throughout societies, but especially, it seems in the minds of those geared for active learning. Alexandra Lamont and Karl Maton have done some significant research into this area, which I think highlights the impact of such a situation on children. They draw on recent findings in the U.K. that suggest 91% of children and young people aged 7–19 liked listening to music, but only 39% engaged in music-making activities and that less than 10% opt to study music at GCSE on average. Most interestingly though, Maton and Lamont developed a framework for studying pupils, called Legitimation Code Theory, which devised questions that mapped onto the following different forms of learning codes:

'relativist' – 'Anyone can do it, nothing special is needed'.

'knower' – 'you need to have "natural ability" or a 'feel' for it'.

'knowledge' – 'You need to learn special skills or knowledge'.

'elite' – 'only people with "natural ability" can learn the special skills needed'.³⁰

²⁸ Estelle Jorgensen, *Transforming Music Education* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) 31.

²⁹ Attali, *Noise*, 136.

³⁰ Alexandra Lamont, Karl Maton, 'Choosing music: exploratory studies into the low uptake of music GCSE', *British Journal of Music Education* 25 (2008), 267-282 (270).

They then asked students a variety of questions pertaining to the perception of 5 different subjects: Maths, English Literature, Science, History and Music. Perhaps surprisingly to some, they found that Music topped the charts, above all other subjects for the perception of elite knowledge code. The children overwhelmingly thought that 'only people with natural ability can learn the special skills needed' to play music.³¹ Interestingly, they also found a marked increase in this perception as the children got closer to GCSE study. Lamont and Maton look to the UK National Curriculum for a possible answer to this. Their analysis showed that 'the official requirements for music embody different legitimisation codes of specialisation for different stages of the curriculum'.³² During Key Stages 1-2 (ages 5-11), achievement is defined by pupils ability to express themselves, and emphasis is placed upon emotion, thoughts, feelings, etc. Words like 'independence' and 'creativity' are emphasised. This, Maton and Lamont say reflects a 'knower' code. However, during Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14) there is a downplay of attitude, personal engagement and independence, in favour of the demonstration and mastery of musical 'skills' and 'knowledge' – a 'knowledge code'. At GCSE level (14-16), the code shifts again. Here, what is required are both the capacity of personal expression, and the technical mastery of generic musical skill, technique and precision. Certain performance assessment criteria further illustrate this characteristic: 'singing and/or playing an individual part with technical control, *expression, interpretation and, where appropriate, a sense of ensemble*;³³ or a performance being both 'accurate and fluent'; 'an expressive performance that is generally stylish'.³⁴ In other words, what is expected, is an 'elite code' whereby one assumes a presence of 'natural ability', in which they can express 'personality' or 'individuality' within the confines of rigid technical requirements and display of mastery.

Lamont and Maton cite this gradually shifting code towards that of 'elite' perception as one possible factor involved with children's notably low uptake with GCSE Music, and their perception of music as 'out of reach'. However, they are keen to caution against taking these studies as definitive, and point to a number of limiting factors that may have

³¹ Alexandra Lamont, Karl Maton, 'Choosing music: exploratory studies into the low uptake of music GCSE', *British Journal of Music Education* 25 (2008), 267-282 (267).

³² *Ibid*, 273.

³³ *Ibid*, 274.

³⁴ *Ibid*.

been improved by the study, i.e. the wording of the questions that may have influenced students in a particular direction. However, the study offers a very interesting avenue for exploration into not just low uptake in Music GCSE, but also the more general reasons for low-uptake in music-making activities, in particular what it says about 'elite' conceptions of musical knowledge that stratify musicality into distinctions between 'professional' and 'amateur', or worse, between 'musical' and 'unmusical'. Sadly, these conceptions can become embedded both indirectly and directly into state-school music education, and the research surrounding it, and, of course, most 'extra-curricular' information streams will also cement this perception of 'elite' musical knowledge.

In Hannah Bibby's chapter in the book *MasterClass in Music Education*, she looks at problems of musical identities in school-children, and she draws on research done by Alexandra Lamont, in which she found that children's perceptions of whether or not they were musical was out of sync with the factual information. She found that 48% of the children studied described themselves as 'non-musicians' despite taking part in regular musical activities.³⁵ Bibby quotes D.J Hargreaves and A.N. Marshall when they comment that 'this may be particularly important for pupils who have the idea that they are 'unmusical' ...[as] this perception could lead to a downward spiral of not trying, therefore becoming less able, therefore trying even less and so on'.³⁶ I'd suggest here though that it is very problematic that the researchers do not consider that it could actually be their own assumption that there is such thing as being 'less able' that could be a primary factor to such a belief in the illusory binary between 'musician' and 'non-musician', or worse, the myth of the 'unmusical'.

This underlying belief system rears its head in most music education research, and that probably says more about the overwhelming pervasiveness of dominant musical ideology, more than it does about the quality of the research, but it is disappointing how infrequently this ideology gets questioned. Lucy Green for instance says 'there is nothing in an alienating experience of music from which it can be deduced that a pupil is really

³⁵ Hannah Bibby, 'The Problems of School Music', in Felicity Laurence and John Finney, *MasterClass in Music Education* (New York: Continuum, 2013) 145.

³⁶ D.J. Hargreaves and A.N. Marshall in Laurence and Finney, *MasterClass in Music Education*, 145.

'unmusical'. In this sense musicality can itself be an appearance or social construction'.³⁷ So far so good, but then almost in the next sentence, she cautions: 'that is not to deny that people have different degrees of musicality'.³⁸ It's surely not possible to conceive of 'musicality' as both a social construction *and* to insist upon such a fixed conception of 'musicality' from which different degrees of competence and abilities adhere! She does indeed define musicality according to abilities (albeit blocked or promoted by social structures), but it seems here that, there is a sense that sociological analyses of musical meaning want to insist upon socially constructed knowledges, yet find it impossible to budge or break past the structural membrane of 'musicality' – the problem is usually located as a lack of access to this musicality and the musicality itself never really gets questioned in its entirety.

For example, in the same book, Katy Ambrose's chapter *Performing Samba, Finding 'Flow'*, she reports on a study that was intended to explore and challenge the conditions that give rise to negative musical identities and the binaries of 'musicians' and 'non-musicians' (split according to the children themselves as those who had instrumental lessons and those who didn't). The study sought to utilise Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow' theory and apply it to the practice of samba music with three mixed-ability secondary school groups. She commented that at the end of the project, there was no discernible difference between this compulsory Samba class, and a public samba band who would rehearse in their own time. The quality was identical to her, and therefore, she concluded that 'during the performance, I had in front of me a whole class of musicians...there was no real sign of the "non-musician"'.³⁹

Again, it becomes clear that the assumption here is that orthodox conceptions of musicality are generally retained, and the pursuit is not to completely unravel or undermine these, but to ultimately accept them and show that everyone can technically 'become musical' with the right kind of training. Various chapters within this book reinforce this position, including Zoe Bremner's '*Transforming an 'Unmusical' Primary Teacher into a Confident Musician*' where the teacher in question is described as going through a process of not feeling 'musical', but through gradual expert guidance, building

³⁷ Green, *Music on Deaf Ears*, 139-140.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 140.

³⁹ Katy Ambrose, 'Performing Samba, Finding Flow' in *MasterClass in Music Education*, 193.

up the confidence to express herself in standard, orthodox manners, thus creating a 'confident musician' who has *become musical*. To return to Chapter 16, Ambrose states 'if we can foster engagement for all, I see no reason why music should not become a subject with which all students identify positively'.⁴⁰ This statement sounds innocent enough, but, if 'engagement' is simply an extended effort to 'include' pupils in the same core concerns of musical education (to train them in orthodox musical structures), then I would be concerned about the totalitarian nature of this kind of 'engagement for all', masqueraded as it is under the suspicious implicated claim that the children are defining themselves through their own personal agency. It is reminiscent of the conservative political rallying call for integration into a unified democratic society. This reflects what I have already alluded to earlier, in terms of colon/colonisation and colonialisation, and in particular here, a kind of colonial idea of inclusivity (which I will elaborate on later). It has a suspicious desire to assume difference can always be reduced to sameness in the end, can always be integrated into a dominant (and unified) identity. Engagement in music surely can be broader than the dominant musical ideology behind the standard orthodox structures at work here, and it is my contention that any meaningful music education needs to start its proposals from a genuinely non-fixed, post-structural conception of musicality.

We will now look at different attempts by institutions to positively affect this situation by reforming music education, and explore some of the reasons behind why I think they fall significantly short of their objectives, and the ideological biases that underlie those objectives.

Music Manifesto

'Music Manifesto' was a government-backed 'campaign to ensure that all children and young people have access to high quality music education'.⁴¹ It encompassed a broad vision for ensuring 'first access' to music-making experience, broadening interests, and enhancing the support structures for music-making. MP David Miliband was at the forefront of the Music Manifesto initiative and of the scheme he said the following:

⁴⁰ Ibid, 194.

⁴¹ 23rd October, 2012. <http://www.icmp.co.uk/instituteUpload/research-pdf/2010%20-%20Music%20Manifesto%20Factsheet.pdf> – now defunct website.

Music Manifesto was deliberately inclusive...The scheme spans classical music to rock, right through to gamelan. It was not to pretend that all forms of music were equal but to say that all types of music have a relevance, and if they reach one person then they've done something big.⁴²

Miliband's choice of the word 'inclusive' here serves as a very useful way to continue and explore these issues. To say that a music education scheme is 'inclusive', but that the types of music it includes are somehow inherently unequal strongly implies that some types of music have more relevance than others. This model of 'inclusivity' is unfortunately a very typical one, in which practices which have been traditionally excluded are allowed in, but typically, only as a footnote, or as something 'exotic' from what would otherwise be considered 'music education'. It also repeats what I alluded to earlier, with a colonial conception of inclusivity, in which a dominant 'majoritarian' identity is retained at all times, while offering to be inclusive to all different forms, so long as they assimilate and integrate to that dominant identity. This is a particularly dangerous conception of inclusivity that has been allowed to gain influence through most mainstream versions of democracy in industrialised nations. It tries to say *look at us, look how advanced we are, we have a multicultural society of diversity and tolerance*, yet all the while perpetrating the same hierarchies and exclusions that marginalise those very groups whose differences must always be kept within the margins. As I will elaborate on later, the problem is not one of being pushed out necessarily, but more accurately, of being trapped *in, included* into a system which is inherently opposed to your very existence. I will further explore this concept of inclusivity, and argue that this very concept of inclusivity itself poses insurmountable problems, but for now, I want to further analyse the institutional efforts made to enhance and widen music education for young people. Other projects that were funded or inspired by the 'Music Manifesto' scheme were 'In Harmony'; 'Sing Up' and 'Wider Opportunities'.

⁴² David Miliband, in David Shave, 'Bittersweet Symphonies: What Will Happen to Music in Schools', *The Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/feb/08/schools-music-funding> (8th February, 2011).

'In Harmony' was an attempt to mimic a Venezuelan music project 'El Sistema', where children from 'deprived areas' were given access to orchestral instruments and free tuition on these instruments, and then encouraged to take part in community orchestral music-making. Although marketed as 'fully inclusive' and 'contrary to traditional music methods [as] children do not need to master their instruments before joining the orchestra',⁴³ the actual music-making (and development) involved retains the same core components of formal music education – with children learning from 'professional musicians and specialist music teachers' in order to perform 'standard repertoire [culminating] in 'meaningful music-making'. All of these terms are ideologically loaded – what classifies someone as 'professional' or a 'specialist'? Who decides what is 'meaningful music-making'? What difference does it make if a child learns the instrument before joining the orchestra if the same core components of disciplined music-making are continued? These questions do not get interrogated in this scheme, because all of these questions have been answered elsewhere, outside of the scheme, and not generally by the children making the music. Instead, orchestral music-making of a certain kind is utilised as the standard form of 'valuable' music deemed to be high-quality and therefore assumed to be of great value to 'deprived communities'. In fact, the aim of 'In Harmony' according to government literature was 'to inspire and transform the lives of children in deprived communities by using the power and disciplines of community-based orchestral music-making'.⁴⁴ Orchestral music-making is chosen because of a perceived dual quality of being both powerful and disciplined. Of course, the children involved may have been deprived of these instruments, deprived of this music practice, and they may have had wonderful, life-changing experiences as a result of this scheme. That would be excellent. But, that, in this instance, is not the end of the story. What I want to focus on here, is how there is firstly an assumption that 'deprived' communities are derived musically of particular musical traditions, and secondly a particular approach to inclusivity is again propagated which changes the terms slightly, switches some decorative features around, but retains the core components exactly as they were, and the same monistic conception of Music is further propagated, leading to short-term

⁴³ 'Sistema England: Changing Lives Through Music', <http://www.ihse.org.uk/how-it-works> (21st October, 2012).

⁴⁴ Department for Education: Schools, 'National Plan for Music Education' <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/a00200352/national-plan-for-music-education> (21st October, 2012).

celebratory accounts that do nothing about long-term change. This scheme, as its name aptly implies, does not adapt, change, or improve the components of formal music education, but rather, takes the dominant norm of formal music education and expands its reach, making more people 'in harmony' with it.

'Wider Opportunities' was a pilot programme, to try and meet the ambition that every school-child in the UK should have access to an instrument and free tuition for at least a year. The success of this scheme has been well-claimed, and its many benefits have been stated as improving the overall well-being of the child, a more enthusiastic commitment to music and more general benefits such as improved punctuality and discipline in the wider school environment. While this may be the case, and while the sentiment might seem positive and encouraging at first glance, the way the scheme is implemented limits it substantially. For instance, it is usually the case that one teacher will teach an entire class, and need to then split the groups into smaller sub-sets to teach the instrument's individual techniques, etc. It is also often the case that this instrumental tuition can only be afforded for a year. The money that goes into Wider Opportunities programmes is also inextricably tied between the choice of the instrument and the tuition of the instrument. In other words, in order to choose an instrument, there must be a recognised tutor available to teach the child that instrument (amidst teaching other instruments as part of a large group). This clearly popularises certain instruments over others, and while there may be a wide array of options, rarer instruments and non-conventional instruments may find themselves inevitably excluded from the scheme. With the limitations noted above, it will also inevitably be the case that non-conventional usage of the instruments will not be encouraged. Again, there is the same end result, that we have an attempt to expand what already exists in formal music education, with the same core components, and by doing this on a shoe-string budget, it requires further limitations that further constrain the 'width' of the opportunities available.

'Sing Up' is another programme which is designed to get all children involved with music, this time, specifically through the means of vocal generated sonic activity – 'singing' to be specific! Although there are some exceptions to the programme's 'Song Bank', there is little emphasis on non-conventional usage of the voice, and instead there is a sense of

hearkening back to a more traditional school place where singing is put 'at the heart of school-life', albeit with a wider range.⁴⁵ The 'Song Bank' that the programme utilises is 'curriculum-linked' and the whole programme is designed to respond to the recommendations by Music Manifesto.

All of these programmes and schemes respond to a growing desire to see formal Music Education changed. However, they are also quite noticeably institutional in their scope, design and implementation, and change very little, if anything, to the fundamental components that formal music education is based upon. As school teacher Daniel Bath says in reference to the Henley Report into Music Education (commissioned by Government) – 'The report is saying that we should have all the things that are already happening in music education in some places, but across the whole country.'⁴⁶ The problem is not identified as something within the system as it is, but only that not enough people have access to it. Shockingly low figures of GCSE Music uptake for instance are apparently overlooked. What we apparently need is more of the same, but to more people. What programmes like Music Manifesto promote are ones that can expand the reach of formal music education as it is, a kind of formal music education plus, with some added features but the same core components untouched.

Musical Futures

'Musical Futures' is a vision of Music Education originally influenced by Lucy Green. It defines itself as follows:

Musical Futures is a movement to reshape music education driven by teachers for teachers. At its heart is a set of pedagogies that bring non-formal teaching and informal learning approaches into more formal contexts, in an attempt to provide engaging, sustainable and relevant music making activities for all young people.⁴⁷

It claims to re-shape the primary focus of music education from score-based music practices and learning by 'formal' means, to popular music practices and learning by 'informal', practical means. I'll look a little more closely at what I see as an illusory

⁴⁵ <http://www.singup.org/about-us/> (21st October, 2012) Defunct Website.

⁴⁶ Daniel Bath in David Shave, 'Bittersweet Symphonies: What Will Happen to Music in Schools', *The Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/feb/08/schools-music-funding> (8th February, 2011).

⁴⁷ 'Musical Futures' <http://www.musicalfutures.org/about> (27th October, 2012).

division between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’, but for now I want to draw attention to the key aims of Musical Futures, described as such:

Students are motivated and engaged by music they value and that is relevant to them, before moving onto other musical and learning styles.

Technique, notation and other forms of written instruction are part of the process but are developed through practical playing.⁴⁸

Musical Futures has gained a good reputation for placing the value on children’s actual music interests, not on what teachers think they should be interested in. John Finney has described it as ‘a radical approach offering new and imaginative ways of engaging young people in musical activities, and working with successful models of music-making practices in evidence beyond school’.⁴⁹

It has also been implemented as part of the curriculum in many schools internationally. While it may seem like a step in the right direction, in the specific aim of including children in the generation of music-making activity, I would argue that it is also symptomatic of a certain market-driven ideology of providing misleading and illusory claims for choice and difference, while selling the same core product in ever-varying packages. What concerns me most about Musical Futures for our focus here is the question of whether it actually changes the destination of children’s music education, or, simply changes the route. In other words, it seems to agree fundamentally that children’s music education should be geared towards learning the musical structures that are taken for granted, but it simply re-frames how we should get there.

The following figures will illustrate attempts to integrate Musical Futures into UK National Curriculum, at Cramlington Learning Village, Northumberland, U.K:

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Finney, in Finney, Laurence, *MasterClass in Music Education*, 149.

Fig 1.1 ⁵⁰

Term 1		
Y 7	<p>Transition</p> <p>Project/Classroom</p> <p>Workshop</p> <p><i>Ben E King/Sean Kingston</i></p> <p>Four chord trick ?</p> <p>Whole class composition</p> <p>Large Ensembles</p>	<p>Landmarks</p> <p>Chords I, IV, V, VI</p> <p>Minim/semibreve</p> <p>Subtle dynamics</p> <p><i>Revisits transition unit from Primary</i></p>
	<p>Bands project</p> <p><i>Ting Tings</i></p> <p>Band Carousel ?</p> <p>Small group compositions</p> <p>Small Ensembles</p>	<p>Landmarks</p> <p>Syncopation</p> <p>Strophic Form</p> <p><i>New band instrumental skills, now composing in smaller groups</i></p>
Y 8 R 1	<p>Motivate a couch potato – Composing</p> <p><i>Needing You – David Morales</i></p> <p><i>Various exemplars for each style</i></p> <p>Whole class</p>	<p>Landmarks</p> <p>Regular/irregular rhythms</p> <p>Half time tempo</p> <p>Non-western instruments</p> <p>Synthesis</p>

⁵⁰ 'Musical Futures: Music Curriculum Overview and Mapping of Progression', <https://www.musicalfutures.org/resource/21/title/cramlingtonlearningvillage> (24th October, 2012).

workshops ? Small group compositions	Conducting
? Sequencing using Fruity Loops	Contrasts in texture
Techno, Samba, Salsa, Hip hop, Bhangra, Country, Ambient, Eastern, Funky	Structuring phrases
	Variation of phrases
	Instrumental ranges
	<i>Students working in small groups paying attention to stylistic conventions.</i>

Fig 1.2⁵¹

Primary Music (Wider still, and wider)

	Year Key Stage 1		Lower Key Stage 2		Upper Key Stage 2	
Pitch	High/Low	→	Steps/Leaps	Pentatonic Patterns	→	Major/minor
Duration	Long/short Steady Beat	Rhythmic patterns	Strong beats Weak beats	Metre Crotchets/Quavers	2,3,4	5,6,9 Dotted/ swung
Dynamics	Loud/quiet	Gradation	→	Strong contrasts	→	Accents & articulation
Tempo	Fast/slow	Gradation	→	Comparing tempi	→	Tempo for mood effects
Timbre	Exploring	Wood, metal, strings	→	Orchestral family timbres	→	Electronic sounds
Texture	One sound Several Sounds	Layers	Melody Accompaniment	→	Weaving parts	Chords
Structure	Beginnings Endings	Simple repeated patterns	Question & answer	Ostinato	Rounds	Ternary forms

Fig 1.3⁵²

Secondary Music at CLV

	Year 7		Year 8		Year 9	
Pitch	Harmony I IV V VI	Simple Intervals	→	Instrumental Ranges	Aural identification	Perfect/Imperfect Cadences
Duration	Minim, Semibreve	Syncopation	→	Regular/Irregular	Rubato	→
Dynamics	Subtle Contrasts	Building Tension	→	Responding to conduction	Sforzando	→
Tempo	→	Building Tension	Half time	Responding to conduction	→	Italian terms
Timbre	→	Consonance Dissonance	Non western instruments	Synthesis	Instrumental techniques	Vocal techniques
Texture	Aural identification	Building Tension	Contrasts	→	Homo/poly/mono-phonic	Vocal harmonies
Structure	Strophic	→	Structuring phrases	Variation	→	Middles

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

As can be seen by the figures above from the Musical Futures website, Musical Futures shifts how music classes are delivered, but can be easily accommodated to reach roughly the same curriculum goals and landmarks, as stipulated by government. Some commentators have suggested that this may not have been the original intention of Musical Futures, but I would argue here that the fact it can do this so easily and effortlessly, suggests that the content Musical Futures pays attention to is deeply rooted within structuralist understandings of music as a systematic unity – as a representative, fundamentally written form (even if the ‘written’ element isn’t technically notated in ‘formal’ terms). This correlates to the same fundamental insistence upon fixed conceptions of musical meaning and music that Green proposed earlier. The outcome then tends to be similar. Musical Futures wants to show children how popular musicians typically learn to play music, rather than how orchestral musicians typically learn. It elevates the chord sheet over the score, the electric guitar over the violin, etc. In doing this, it of course opens up more opportunities to produce music in a more readily relatable fashion, enabling children to learn the structures of songs and styles they already tend to know, and this can produce pleasing results. However, fundamentally, the destination remains the same. It is intended to teach children a structural understanding of music, in which making music immediately is never enough, it must always lead to composed, written pieces of music that can be represented in future (separate) performances. Free-form improvisation is still actively excluded and devalued. That is not in my view, radical (as Finney suggested earlier). Lucy Green has said herself that popular music ‘is not all that different to the classical style’,⁵³ when it comes to its relationship to notation and orthodox musical structures. This recognition by Green inadvertently points to the major flaw in these attempts to suggest popular music’s ‘informal learning’ is in any major way a departure from the orthodox destination of children’s ‘formal’ musical learning. Nonetheless, this particular method of ‘informal learning’ is deemed by many to be crucial to creating more inclusive child-centred curricula by its supporters.

In terms of the distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’, G. Folkestad is referred to by Green as someone who has pointed out that ‘the moment of informal learning is an

⁵³ Green, *Music on Deaf Ears*, 136.

orientation to playing and making music. The formal moment is an orientation to learning how to play music'.⁵⁴ I would strongly argue that these are not that dissimilar in the Musical Futures context, since the way 'music' is conceived here is strongly loaded with ideology. What is it to make 'music' in this context? The process of 'making music' in this context is inextricably tied up with 'how' to make music, so the distinction becomes completely false. It is in improvisation where it becomes possible to play and make music either without knowing 'how' to make it, or to disregard entirely that there is such a specific thing as 'how' to make music ('formal learning'). Improvisation creates the possibility for an obliteration of formal learning, or as free jazz saxophonist Ornette Coleman says of his own practice: 'I've been playing music since I was a teenager, and I wasn't composing then because I didn't even know that you had to compose music to play, I mean that composing music meant different from just playing'.⁵⁵ Now, Coleman too has clearly learnt 'how' to make music, but his sentiment here suggests in the clearest terms how improvisation could be the truest form of 'informal' learning, yet to disregard improvisation from Musical Futures, is to make meaningless any usage of the term 'informal' since the term 'informal' in the Musical Futures context has no real discernible difference to 'formal' learning, or, perhaps to put it another way, the 'formal' is tied to the 'informal' at every stage of its output. I would add at this stage, that the same goes for most, if not all other methods of 'teaching yourself' music, such as guitar tabs, chord sheets, etc. There is a dangerous myth that 'teaching yourself music' is somehow radically different from someone else teaching you music. Of course, you can modify the parameters, set the trajectory, change the route, go faster or slower, but you're always going to end up in the same car park, just parked in a different bay to the others.

The difference between formal and informal then, as pointed out by Folkestad, is in the case of Musical Futures an illusory one, since the structures the children learn in these forms of popular music *are* formal musical structures, the instruments are tuned a particular way, the songs are played in a particular key, and there is a general expectation that the music could and should be performed again; there is a cohesive, formal, unity to the material that is being learned which is clearly meant to indicate 'how'

⁵⁴Folkestad in Wright, *Sociology and Music Education*, 89.

⁵⁵ 'Interview with Ornette Coleman (part 2)' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdqRfHdbnXE> (23rd October, 2012).

to make music. If there is improvisation involved, again, it is seen as a stepping stone to the development of these crystallized structures. Generally, in 'popular music' (or 'informal') there is almost always the necessity to understand how to get from a to b, just as there is with 'classical music' (or formal), whereas in improvised music, you can quite happily go from a to c without needing to know anything about b. One could have an ignorant apathy about b. At the same time, improvisation can quite happily go from a simple a-b – improvisation can simply be the freedom to explore whatever you want, whether that is a-c, a-t, or a-b. B may, or may not be relevant to improvisation, but it is always necessary for non-improvisation and Musical Futures models. Folkestad does concede that with 'informal' learning of popular music, there is a moment when it becomes necessary to move into the formal mode, in order to ascertain how to get from a-b, but he makes the argument that the crucial difference between this mode of learning, as opposed to 'classical' models, is the 'un-alienated ownership of the music by the pupils themselves!'.⁵⁶ While this may seem like the case, I would again argue strongly that both a and b in this process are both historically situated within power relations and ideologies that none of us can 'own' as such, and we have conditioned ourselves to listen to a and b so heavily, that this very logical relation will always be at a slight distance from a truly anarchic and agentic interaction between individuals and music. Not only that, but it is misleading to suggest that popular musicians, implicated as they tend to be within the industry conditions of the entertainment industry are not also suffering significant amounts of alienation (albeit in different ways than that of 'classical' composers or performers). There are differences in the experience between learning musical structures from paper, or from hands-on instrument, but I think it is extremely hasty to separate these things to the degree here and to talk in terms of alienation, as this kind of term in this context obfuscates the fact much greater forms of alienation exist in musical learning that largely go unheard in these discourses, namely, as I have been suggesting, the elimination of improvisation as a viable process of music-making. It should be said that I am not necessarily suggesting here that improvisation should necessarily obliterate 'formal' learning (or the 'how to make music'), but just that it does not depend upon it for its validity in making music. Formal learning, in my view should always be something additional, chosen, or opted into, not a pre-requisite for making music.

⁵⁶ *Sociology and Music Education*, 89.

Before moving on, I want to draw attention to another example of a celebratory account of a Musical Futures style 'informal learning', taken from the book *MasterClass in Music Education*, and the chapter *An After School Rock School* by Joanne Cheetham:

They are told that they were not required to have any previous musical knowledge or skill and taught everything they needed to know. They grab some music from the internet, grab some chord sheets or lyrics and tabs...they sit around and set about trying to play it and we'll drop in on them and see how they're going.⁵⁷

Everything is made to sound ad-hoc, spontaneous, immediate – in short, improvisational. But, it's simply not the case. This is seriously misleading. To repeat the point for clarity - chord sheets, tabs, and other sources of musical structure, are just that. They are clearly forms of notation - forms of 'formal' teaching as to 'how' to make music. Learning a 'Ting Ting's' song for instance (as in Musical Futures) might seem 'cool' and different, but the curriculum 'landmarks' remain the same, as the children are learning standard musical structures, just delivered through different means. John Finney himself has drawn attention to the fact that if we look at this from a sociological analysis, the cultural capital that children aspire towards, is not generally the music that reflects middle-class bourgeois culture, as it may have been in a distant past, but 'in the 'cool Britannia' of Tony Blair's New Labour government, playing rock guitar [carries] more cachet for most than going to the opera. Indeed, the cultural capital which many pupils wish to acquire in a musical field is that of contemporary popular music'.⁵⁸ In other words an electric guitar and the associations that go with it represent the other side of a long-standing musical canon, one that retains privilege, status and hierarchy.

A sociological analysis of 'informal' learning and its effects on children ought to take a more rigorous line of enquiry than merely to compare with what went before and make simple conclusions. For instance, it is important to remember, that just because what went before was brutal, rigid, and oppressive, does not mean that what replaces it is automatically liberating in the long-term. For children in Musical Futures schools, this shift towards the 'popular' seemed to give them feelings of liberation, pleasure, and

⁵⁷ Cheetham in *MasterClass in Music Education*, 152.

⁵⁸ Finney in *Sociology and Music Education*, 229.

happiness, and while this is obviously good, I would caution that this response is inevitable given the absurdly rigid music curriculum they have been used to. I note in chapter 3 how similar feedback was given after an improvisation project I initiated. Furthermore, it still feeds into a fundamentally rigid conception of music that retains the core components and therefore gives children an unnecessarily limited education on music, therefore failing to offer long-term development or reform of music education. It is highly questionable whether such an approach would improve wider participation in music-making on a substantial level, because the core objectives remain on a fundamental level the same, so it will still always alienate those who don't subscribe to those objectives, or find themselves unwilling or unable to meet them. Unfortunately, those people are being prevented from access to a truly immediate interaction with music that can only be substantially realised by an engagement with free-form improvisation. It should be said that inclusion of free-form improvisation is in no way conflictual with popular music, and in many ways, offers a more direct and enjoyable route to playing popular music, as I will hope to illuminate later through the different possibilities involved with improvised approaches.

However, to come back to Green's position on this, and in particular her views on improvisation. She says the following: '[Improvisation]... is no more free than any musical mediation: otherwise, the result would not be counted as music...that is why improvisors, who nonetheless imagine themselves to be free from rules, find it necessary to impose rules all the time'.⁵⁹ There are various problems with Green's argument here, not least the repeating of the 'counted as music' statement. Firstly, to identify no difference whatsoever in improvisation's relationship to the 'rules' of orthodox musical structures is a substantial oversight and shows a lack of intricate awareness of improvised practice and its history (as is perhaps evidenced by Green's quote to support her argument coming from the liner notes of an album entitled 'free-improvisation'. 'Free-Improvisation' typically refers to a particular approach to improvisation derived from the European free-improvisation scene, as I will elaborate on in chapter 2). Secondly, it happens quite frequently that people perceive improvisation to not count as 'music'. This does not stop it from happening! Thirdly, should this matter? Green's

⁵⁹ Green, *Music on Deaf Ears*, 243.

assumption that music requires external justification and legitimation of it according to some externally imposed, generic conception is extremely troublesome, since in education such generic concepts can be particularly damaging as they don't attend to personalised learning models. As was discussed earlier, I believe this to be symptomatic of 'structural listening' imposing itself ideologically on conceptions of music, and therefore producing negative political consequences for what 'counts as music'. Worse than that, it seems to emerge from a somewhat bitter association with notions of difference, like the idea that some music might fundamentally exist differently than others is somehow a problem – *music must be all the same!* Or, the totalitarian insistence upon *strength through unity*.

It's important to see here that improvisation is politically excluded from the discourse on 'informal learning' primarily as a result of a bitter ignorance and fear towards its potential to go beyond unity and towards genuine informal and anarchic models of music-making that can actually allow individuals to self-define their own musical engagement, and for the purposes of music education reform, can allow children to define their own music curriculum, develop agency and guide their own learning (all pursuits Green and others regularly argue for).

As with a lot of the research into music education, most of it seems to think a lot about changing the route without doing anything about the destination. The whole debate seems to be polarised across a spectrum of access to an already-existent fixed account of musical meaning, and a battle between the two opposing sides over who should 'own' this knowledge (the popular/classical dichotomy). It seems that when Lucy Green did a study into teacher's perceptions of 'classical' music, and she asked them why they taught it, and found that most answered with a bemusement at being asked to justify its inclusion, insisting that 'surely the reasons must be OBVIOUS!',⁶⁰ one might reasonably suggest that these reasons would be mostly the same ones justifying popular music's inclusion: 'basic grounding; techniques; standard background to any other musical developments'.⁶¹ In terms of shifting conceptions of music and musicality on a fundamental scale, shifting the emphasis from so-called 'formal' to 'informal' here is a

⁶⁰ *Music on Deaf Ears*, 65.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 64.

red herring. There is absolutely nothing radical about the content of Musical Futures. I would argue that, at best, Musical Futures is a decent attempt at change, which offers significantly better opportunities for children to become enthusiastic and committed to music-making, but falls short of any radical change to the fundamentals of children's music education. At worst, there is a possibility with Musical Futures that it simply replaces one musical canon with another, inverting the polarised power hold and therefore reaffirming the underlying dominant canon of 'formal' musical learning. The argument I want to make in this thesis is that through engaging with particular expressions of collective improvisation, we can begin to have conversations about genuinely alternative musical knowledge(s) that de-territorialise the root of structuralist musical meaning itself.

Listening to Children – which children, and in what context?

Felicity Laurence is a researcher who shares similar research interests to Lucy Green and has done a substantial amount of projects and case studies with children based on 'informal learning' methods. Her case study article: *Listening to children: voice, agency and ownership in school musicking*, which was presented in the book *Sociology and Music Education* explores the extent to which human empathy can be seen to be drawn out from an engagement with Christopher Small's concept of 'musicking' and the extent to which individual agency can be drawn out by an emphasis on Charles Keil's 'participatory consciousness'. Laurence is clear that the overwhelming bulk of this 'musicking' was based on 'the composing of songs and singing'.⁶² Laurence describes Small's 'musicking' concept as being controversial for including any activity that is involved with a musical performance. However, she uses 'musicking' mainly as a way of interrogating the relationships that exist in the process of musical performance and composition, including such things as talking as a process of 'musicking', rather than as a way of interrogating or challenging the musical structures or forms. As such, the core components of standard musical structures do not get interrogated whatsoever in this study. Quite the opposite as it happens. The musical discussions are overwhelmingly governed by what is happening structurally, and what these structures *mean* in relation to the human relationships of empathy and dialogical communication. In other words,

⁶² Laurence in *Sociology and Music Education*, 252.

one gets a sense that relationships are under 'study' here, but the conceptions of musicality that these relationships are mediated by are taken for granted and are left untouched. This happens despite Laurence's claim that this project 'deviated profoundly from a prescribed curricular model'⁶³ – a claim that, again, is possible only to make because of the absurdity of the 'curricular model', which prevents children from getting hands on instruments and making sounds; but again, this is extremely misleading as it implies a radical departure from orthodox musical learning. This is far from apparent here.

Laurence's use of Keil's 'participatory consciousness' is interesting, since Keil articulates this concept and the term 'discrepancies' as a means to do more or less what I stated above, to interrogate musical materials and to suggest that 'music, to be personally involving and socially valuable, must be "out of time" and "out of tune"'.⁶⁴ Keil goes on to say specifically, that while the 'syntactic or structural aspect of all music...can [set up] relationships that involve the listener in the music' he asks the question: 'but isn't this involvement more analytic, sequential, conscious, rather than "participatory"?'⁶⁵ Keil, then, is suggesting that the syntactic and structural aspect of music sets up relationships that are more analytic than they are genuinely participatory; yet Laurence's study suggests that truly empathic and dialogical relationships are enacted through structural and syntactical musical learning that engages the children in Keil's 'participatory consciousness'. There is a conflict, then, between the use of the concept by Keil, and how Laurence utilises it in her study. While Laurence attempts to develop ideas around an 'active listening' in its relationship to 'musicking', I would argue, that, in her own words this is a process of 'musicking... as tuning-in',⁶⁶ quite apart from Keil's reference to participatory musicking as requiring 'out of tune' discrepancy. The children are giving access to an already-well-trodden path of musical learning, and they are 'tuned in' to this syntactic and structural engagement with music, rather than anything to do with a discrepant engagement, as Nathaniel Mackey calls it in his essay *Paracritical Hinge* which

⁶³ Ibid, 260.

⁶⁴ Charles Keil, Participatory Discrepancies and the Power of Music *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 2, No. 3 (Aug., 1987), pp. 275-283 (275).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Laurence in *Sociology and Music Education*, 254.

draws on Keil's work.⁶⁷ Laurence makes huge claims about the students developing their 'participatory consciousness' by becoming 'co-constructors of knowledge rather than recipients of a 'delivered' curriculum',⁶⁸ but the core knowledge that is being 'constructed' here has already been delivered before the project, and on a fundamental level, is as embedded into the curriculum as anything else. Furthermore, she says the children were 'released from the school curriculum', only to add in the next breath - 'albeit within a delineated framework of singing and composition',⁶⁹ with absolutely no interrogation or critique as to how the framework of singing and composition might be inextricably tied to the core assumptions and objectives of that curriculum in the first place.

The conceptual frameworks used to describe Laurence's method ('musicking', 'participatory consciousness', 'agency') are more closely related to methods that deviate, explore and interrogate musical structures, and because there is none of that happening here, this case study is an effective example of how, despite good intentions of reforming music education, critiques of structure and syntax in music can be completely ignored. It is so taken-for-granted that *this is what music is, this is what counts as music*, and it's all very well for a philosophical discussion, but the *real business of music is about songs and structures*.

The final element of this study I want to discuss are the conclusions Laurence makes:

It became apparent that it was the children's sense of agency, the reality of their ability to act, the opportunity to have their own voice represented, and their ownership of this musicking, which 'drove' their growing sense of the cognitive and affective dimensions of empathic process and practice.⁷⁰

I would suggest that here, as before, this experience when discussed in relation to past curriculum models imposes its own biases on the liberating potential of the method. If children are prevented from handling instruments, prevented from making their own music, then of course, this method will provide liberating results, but the celebratory

⁶⁷ Nathaniel Mackey, 'Paracritical Hinge', in Ajay Heble and Daniel Fischlin, *The Other Side of Nowhere* (Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 2004) 367-386.

⁶⁸ Laurence in *Sociology and Music Education*, 260.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Laurence in *Sociology and Music Education*, 255.

nature of these descriptions needs to be kept in context. Take for example, this comment from one of the children in the study: 'Children have an [opinion] in everything. Children should be able to express [their] feeling. Now the adults can see from [our] point of view maybe. To respect children more for what they have to say'.⁷¹ An environment which is intended to nurture children into adults should inevitably be concerned with their feelings, and should provide the conditions in which they can express those feelings, and music should provide an ample opportunity for them to do this, in whichever ways they desire, whether it be abstract or more representational. Obviously, in the absurd environment most children learn music within, this has obviously not been the case for most children, but the absolute absurdity of the previous musical model which denied children this opportunity obfuscates the fact that not much is actually changing here, but it seems huge and there are other much wider music-making opportunities in which to explore issues of agency. To ignore free-form collective improvisation is another glaring oversight, which perhaps points to a deep misunderstanding of its possibilities. There is also the implication, though, in Laurence's study that music is used here primarily as a vehicle for transmitting linguistic meaning (and as a consequence, the wider emotive content that springs from such linguistic meaning); and of course this can have its significant benefits, but, as Attali cautioned before, transcribing music into language or language into music reflects a certain desire to portray it as a universal semantic language that portrays the world in a particular way, therefore diluting its flexibility as abstract expression. This is a potentially dangerous usage of music in education contexts, as music can be used to serve political interests, be made to represent semantic meanings and to ultimately prop up dominating power wherever it lies. In truth (and what a good music education should be making clear) is that what makes music such a unique vehicle for expression is that it can say precisely what language cannot, or what language cannot get to. Such a unique ability enables music to be distanced from the particular power structures tied up with language production (though as we have seen there are particular power structures tied up with musical meaning production also). Music's potential distance from fixed semantic meaning can position it as a powerful political tool for resistance, to refuse to represent itself according to ready-made categories, but instead propose anarchism and abstract expression. If it is allowed to be

⁷¹ *Sociology and Music Education*, 259.

reduced to a simple representation of verbal language, then it becomes diluted into simple support for a message already in existence, losing its ability to support deeper modes of expression. I would argue such ability is most lucidly expressed through the dedicated engagement with improvisation.

Furthermore, what Laurence, Green and most of the other proponents of popular music education fail to interrogate rigorously, are the kinds of oppressive functions that act upon children within the wider context of a popular music governed by the entertainment industry. As Tricia Rose comments upon here:

Young people are beginning to see their own creativity through a marketing logic: how can I promote what I do, how can I sell what I do, rather than imagining what they do as a creative force that should be nurtured and expanded. They're figuring out how to fit into already existing marketing categories...And that is stifling not only creativity, but it's turning automatically cultural spaces into product spaces.⁷²

Commercial popular music is heavily involved in commodity-driven, product-oriented musical consumerism, and to place this within the context of institutional music education, is not radical, but expected, and it can end up turning educational spaces into product spaces. It is within this context, that it is damagingly misleading to merely 'listen to children' without paying any attention to the superstructure that they are networked and mediated by. I agree that we should develop the means by which to grant agency to children as authentic co-constructors of their own education, but I also believe that this agency cannot be taken for granted when they live in an environment governed by media networks, hyper-consumerism and the greatest advancement of social media we have ever encountered, all of which integrates dominant ideology in a variety of sophisticated, nuanced and effective ways. Education needs to be a critical and interrogative platform and children need to be encouraged to question the authority and ideology around them – to merely stand aside and allow ideology to envelop us all sets a dangerous precedent and assumes an autonomous, anti-social quality to music, again. I concede that the

⁷² 'Hip Hop Images Women and Exploitation', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7gUu4DYZO0> (24th April, 2013).

researchers and educators we have discussed so far would probably not identify popular music as deeply ideological as I want to suggest it is, but if those same educators would like to make the justification for popular music being a 'radical' alternative to the damaging ideological precedents set by Western art music, then the same levels of critique and rigor should be applied when deploying this music in educational settings. In many ways, what we see with the popular musical education proponents, is an analogy with conservative neo-liberal ideology, in which state-ideology is seen to be inherently 'out of touch' and inherently damaging to free-will or individual liberty and therefore, state-directed syllabus is downplayed in favour of the idea of a 'free-market' approach in which users of the system are perceived to be constructing their own knowledge creation, all the while significantly governed by market relations that dominate the terms and conditions of *who* can participate, *when* and with *whom*, and according to the ultimate goal: to transform labour into commodities. We send our children to the wolves and rodents by this way of thinking. To elaborate this point a little, if we go back to Karl Marx and *Capital* and look at the following description of labour and commodities.

The relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities.⁷³

If the Western art music model of education imposed on its pupils a restriction of social relations between individuals, and instead insisted upon their intellectual and physical labour being directed towards the analysis, interpretation and performance of scores and texts, then we should be under no illusion that in the popular music model (as proposed by Musical Futures and others), labour retains its direction towards the production of commodities, and the social relations are themselves directed towards and governed by the products that emerge, in this case, songs and the structural relations between them. This is not to say that *I've made my own song* can't become personally valuable and important for individuals, but that the entire entity we call 'song' is an already existent market category, and sub-divided into a multitude of other categories (genres), and the

⁷³ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy- The Process of Capitalist Production* [E-BOOK] (Cosimo, Inc, 2007) 83.

structures *required* in which to make a song are themselves of a product-oriented nature, as discussed earlier, *making music* is inextricably tied to *how to make music* and learning how to get from a-b is a form of labour learnt in order to use or exchange the outcome of that labour.

On the other hand, Attali has cited improvisation as a model of music-making that offers new forms of social relations:

The disappearance of codes...at first [opens] the way for the worker's reappropriation of his work. Not the recuperation of the product of his labor, but of his labor itself – labor to be enjoyed in its own right, its time experienced, rather than labor performed for the sake of using or exchanging its outcome.⁷⁴

The fact that so much music education research aims to enable agency for children, yet could glaringly miss out such opportunities seems absurd (though there are other possible reasons for this, which emerged during the 'creative music education movement' which we will come onto shortly). As usual, ideology is involved in complex ways in children's lives, both within institutions and in between the cracks of social and cultural spaces ; but promoting commercial, mainstream popular music as the core of music education is similarly problematic to situating Western art music in that position. Both are subservient to dominant ideology at work within the broader industrial apparatus governing our society at the time in which they become historically prominent. The popular/classical dichotomy in music education debates ends up being two sides of the same fundamental property - they just battle over who owns the keys. The dichotomy of apparent 'opposition' is misleading, since they actually share a deeper unity underneath this surface-level opposition. This is symptomatic of 'opposition' in general, as William Corlett discusses in his book *Community without Unity: 'Strategies that invert power differentials, while remaining locked in their oppositions, cannot take seriously the remainder, the difference that cannot be reduced to opposition'*.⁷⁵ Corlett goes on to make a political analogy in order to further elaborate the point that relationships of opposition are always stable as they are in a 'perennial struggle: as soon as one side piles up victories the other works to regain lost ground. The pendulum moves

⁷⁴ Attali, *Noise*, 142.

⁷⁵ William Corlett, *Community Without Unity: A Politics of Derridian Extravagance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989) xvii.

back and forth over time as it does between Tory and Labour parties in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. The rhythm of opposition is much more reassuring than the motion of difference'.⁷⁶ The popular/classical opposition as preserved in Musical Futures and the Popular Music Education Movement obfuscates the fact that this 'rhythm of opposition' actually reinforces orthodox beliefs and creates and defines the boundaries of what is deemed possible within music. By legitimising the discourse, it implies that whatever exists outside must be so mad and chaotic that we must ignore it. *Music* itself as a concept becomes defined by this opposition, therefore monopolising musical meaning entirely, ensuring the continued survival and legitimacy of each other's practices, while marginalising any outside influence of free-form improvised approaches. Again, unity is at the core of the problem:

The persistence of unity in any form reassures those who take it seriously, in that it permits sufficient order for one to think solely in terms of polar opposites. This is because thinking solely in terms of polar opposites requires that one allow the extremes of continua to signify the ranges of political possibility. This assumption allows one to forget about the forces of madness, oblivion, delusion, accident, or chaos because these elements of irrationality cannot find places along the lines of any continuum. Once reassured by this assumption, the principle of hegemony is simply a matter of taking sides...A political discourse seeing to supplement conservatism, without posing merely as its opposite, cannot rely even on temporal unity, cannot continue to reassure practitioners of its natural rightness, must instead create its own possibilities.⁷⁷

So, why has a practice like improvisation not been given a proper chance to create its own possibilities in state-school music education? Upon discussion of this with a researcher in the area, I was told that the question of improvisation and 'creativity' have been on the agenda for quite some time and my questions were rather dated! What this was in reference to was primarily a movement in the 1970's to try and introduce improvisation through the concept of 'creative music' or 'new music' into formal music education.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 44.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 71.

The Creative Music Education Movement

If the previous section outlined examples of attempts at transforming music education that retained the core components of dominant musical educational models and ignored more experimental and improvised practices, this section will now address those attempts to introduce these practices into the classroom in a broad manner. This section will act as a review of their efforts. We're not moving here in any kind of linear chronology, since most of the examples I'm about to outline were initiated during the 1960's and 1970's, and have (mostly) long since dissipated. Their failure to enact any long-term change says as much about their own inadequacies as well as the wider institutional ignorance to their potential.

We will be looking, in variable detail, at the work of R. Murray Schafer, Robert Walker, Brian Dennis, George Self, John Paynter and Peter Aston. What became known as the 'creative music education movement' had perhaps its strongest influence in Britain (although there were significant impacts also in Scandinavia, the United States, Canada and Australia). As you will tell from this list, and in the following sections, a lot of the people we will discuss will be unfortunately either dead white men, or living white men. R. Murray Schafer comments on the movement as a whole:

During this decade the teaching profession has demonstrated greater attunement for change. At first there were merely a few sparks of energy...Today we have a sizeable illumination, so that a few glintings have even transpierced the educational establishment...All the figures mentioned have one thing in common: they have tried to place creative music-making at the heart of the curriculum.⁷⁸

George Self was concerned that 'although many children use their creative energies in painting and poetry, their musical activities are usually confined to performance and listening'.⁷⁹ Self was applauded for his recognition that the combination of a performance-centric curriculum with an emphasis on conventional notation, and the study of music from a long-distant past had contributed towards an extremely restrictive

⁷⁸ R.Murray Schafer, *The Thinking Ear: Complete Writings on Music Education*, (Toronto, Bernadol Music, 1969) 238.

⁷⁹ George Self, *New Sounds in Class: A Practical Approach to the Understanding and Performing of Contemporary Music in Schools* (London: Universal Editions, 1967) 3.

and stifling music education sector that prevented children from utilising their creative energies. Self attempted to develop a basic notation, which he believed would enable the 'children to venture among a range of sounds and rhythms with considerable freedom to improvise, to perform that which would not be possible with conventional notation'.⁸⁰ These notations included symbols that gave certain instructions, as listed below (a small sample of the vast notated system):

A short sound without resonance

A sound whose natural resonance is allowed to die away

A two-note chord on a pitched instrument allowed to die away

An improvised group of notes (ascending) on a pitched instrument.⁸¹

Children would then be directed as part of an ensemble, and certain written symbols would correspond to these instructions. They would be expected to 'improvise' responses to these instructions.

Brian Dennis' work was significantly influenced by Self, and he extended the idea that a big problem with music education as it stood, was that it was not keeping up with recent trends in 'contemporary' music: 'The health of an art is in danger if those who teach it fall too far behind those who practise it. This book is written to help teachers who would like to introduce truly modern music to their classes'.⁸² This concern for the 'modern' is a theme re-iterated strongly by Schafer, and it is a theme we will return to shortly, not least in terms of what kind of 'modern' music it implies. In Chapter 2, I will explore the distinction between Afrological and Eurological approaches to improvisation, but suffice to say that in this case, this is a particularly Eurological approach at work here, which has its historical grounding in the work of Euro-American composers. Dennis's emphasis on 'modern music' is specifically cited to refer to composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky, Edgard Varèse, and of course American Modernist composers (drawing on the European tradition) such as John Cage and Charles Ives. The emphasis then for Dennis, as in Schafer, becomes primarily, a problem of tense. In terms

⁸⁰ Ibid, 2.

⁸¹ Brian Dennis, *Experimental Music in Schools* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) 23-24.

⁸² Ibid, 1.

of sonic emphasis, Dennis chose to emphasise the Cageian fascination with sounds and their interaction with each other, rather than, necessarily on relationships between people and the human interaction and organisation of these sounds: 'the mystery and complexity of individual sounds and the experience of these sounds is the most progressive feature of contemporary music'.⁸³ And, specifically in relation to children's engagement: 'Experimenting with sound satisfies one of the most fundamental drives in a young person – namely curiosity or the desire to explore'.⁸⁴ Children's interaction with each other is hardly mentioned. In terms of how this translates into improvisation in the classroom, Dennis's methods are structured according to the notation system devised by Self, as referred to above. They are used to initiate various forms of restricted, directed and guided ensemble performances in what is characterised as the simplest way for collective improvisation. There was an attempt by Dennis, Self, and others in England 'to standardise such a system'.⁸⁵

Robert Walker took influence from these practitioners and in his 1976 book *Sound Projects*, he outlined his own elaboration on this, devising new techniques and adaptations of classroom exercises, designed, again, to provide an accessible notation that can be learnt quickly, and therefore freeing up music teachers in their already constrained schedules: 'it takes years of constant and regular musical training to master even the basic skills of reading and performing music. What can the class teacher hope to achieve in half an hour a week?'⁸⁶ Improvisation here then becomes a kind of convenient time-saver! The philosophy behind Walker's ideas were based largely on similar principles as before: 'since art music of this century comprises many more different uses of sounds than before, and many new kinds of notational systems and sound producing agencies, an eclectic application for educational use is valid'.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Walker asserts that children 'should be encouraged to make their own music, to express their own thoughts too definite for words to express... the child explores first and discovers his culture as a result, and he starts with the present, to which he can relate, not the past to which he has only vicarious access. Musical training needs careful thinking about, and it

⁸³ Ibid, 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 3.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 23.

⁸⁶ Robert Walker, *Sound Projects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976)

⁸⁷ Ibid, 76.

should be recognized as a means to an end, not an end in itself'.⁸⁸ Here we have confirmation of the emphasis on child-centred music-making, derived however from an explicit focus on present tense Western art music and the idea that this contemporary Western art music provides the 'natural' path for children to express their 'natural desires' and fundamental curiosities.

John Paynter and Peter Aston's 1970 work *'Sound and Silence: Classroom Projects in Creative Music'* was significantly influential. This is their introduction into 'creative music':

What is creative music? First of all, it is a way of saying things which are personal to the individual. It also implies the freedom to explore chosen materials. As far as possible this work should not be controlled by a teacher. His role is to set off trains of thought and help the pupil develop his own critical powers and perceptions.⁸⁹

Paynter and Aston's work in music education was geared towards a shift in the emphasis on performance (of pre-written material) towards composition (of not-yet-written material): 'More often than not, school music has concentrated on the skills of performance. Even much so-called "creative music" is really only an extension of directed ensemble performance. Of course these skills are important. Performance is an essential musical activity; but it is not the whole of music'.⁹⁰ As the book progresses, it becomes clear that creative music is meant to assimilate into music education and respond and integrate into all of the usual orthodox structures involved with music education. Chapters are devoted to how creative music can be used to deal with topics of 'harmony', 'melody', 'heterophony', 'major and minor modes', etc. For instance, one 'creative music' exercise is described in the following way '[it] may be used as an approach to, or in conjunction with, a more formal academic study of harmony'.⁹¹ It is quite clear that with Paynter and Aston we get a prototypical example of the model for creative music in education, and what I mean by that, is this: there is an initial call for

⁸⁸ Ibid, 28.

⁸⁹ John Paynter, Peter Aston, *Sound and Silence: Classroom Projects in Creative Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 7

⁹⁰ Ibid, 5.

⁹¹ Ibid, 5.

opening up music to an exploration of all sounds, entirely defined by the participants themselves (i.e. the children), hinting strongly at improvisation, but then what is actually happening, is a filling of a gap in music education, which is the absence of ‘the classical music of our century’⁹². All of the pioneers of this movement make reference to the music of our time, and what they are referring to is invariably music of the Euro-American avant-garde, which deals with improvisation very differently from say the free jazz pioneers such as Alan Silva, Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane. As such, there is a logical sense of how this ‘creative music’ relates to the tradition (already existent in curricula) and how we can use it to refer to those traditions, and utilise the techniques of musical heritages, albeit, drawing upon a much wider sonic repertoire and a general exploratory attitude. In other words, there is a definite sense with the ‘creative music’ education movement, of a continuation of what was already in existence. Sadly, and in contradiction to the comments earlier that these approaches are current and therefore easier to relate to, this particular approach to improvisation tends to produce more isolated sonic pieces which, in their construction and guidance tend to produce sonic material that cannot be readily related to, due to its typical lack of rhythmic emphasis, quietness and restricted interaction between participants.

Cleaning Schafer’s Ears.

Our system of music education is one in which creative music is progressively vilified and choked out of existence... Any public school class will improvise uninhibitedly, but by the time they have reached grade 12 or 13 this ability has completely soured into nervous laughter at the prospect of playing four notes that weren’t given to them.⁹³

As with the other examples we have looked at, R. Murray Schafer’s interventions in music education were influenced by the trend in contemporary Western art music at the time, and primarily in response to John Cage’s impact upon the world of sound and music. However, if Cage’s definition of music was at least theoretically, ‘[any] organised sound’ or ‘sounds around us, whether we’re in or out of concert halls’⁹⁴, for Schafer, it

⁹² Green, *Music on Deaf Ears*, 69.

⁹³ R. Murray Schafer, *The Thinking Ear*, 40.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 153.

becomes *'any organised sound whether we're in or out of concert halls that is decided on by composers of music who have had their ears cleaned*. Or, in his own words: 'Music, is after all, nothing more than a collection of the most exciting sounds conceived and produced by successive generations of people with good ears'.⁹⁵ The elephant in the room when it comes to Schafer's 'creative music education' and the apparent inclusivity of it, is not just what 'creative music' is; but the ego and craft required of 'good ears' that have been 'cleaned' in order to facilitate such a project; just what constitutes 'good ears'; and who is qualified to 'clean them'? Schafer's 'ear cleaning' is meant to contrast with, and precede the traditional notion of 'ear training' that is based upon listening solely to the pitches, intervals, melody, chords and rhythms that are associated with traditional musical structures. Before anything like that could be pursued (and because there wasn't time in curricula to teach that effectively), Schafer argued, it was necessary to clean ears, due in part to the increasing 'new soundscape' that was becoming dangerously polluted by noise. He developed a binaristic thinking regarding noise/silence, and it was clear that the binary lines were drawn according to *who* creates the sound as to whether it is constituted as noise (bad) or silence (good). Leaving aside the patronising nature of that argument momentarily, Schafer was so concerned about this 'noise pollution', that he predicted it would be more beneficial for future music teachers to join the Noise Abatement Society than a Teachers Union.⁹⁶

Schafer's ear cleaning agenda then, could be outlined as an attempt to 'educate' pupils towards organising for themselves the sculpture of the 'new soundscape', which can technically include any, and all sounds, but there are creeping aesthetic biases that violate this open space constantly and that guide and define the pursuit of 'clean' ears. For example, more often than not, it seems that the sculpting of this 'new soundscape' becomes a simple imitation of the orthodox 'old soundscape': 'If...we are listening to the sound of leaves rustling and a bulldozer drives by, the teacher should not miss this opportunity to point it out as an example of bad orchestration, equally as egregious as when, in classical music, a viola is made to struggle against a timpani'.⁹⁷ This is clearly ideological and far too simplistic a model for education. To follow this model would be to

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 97,

⁹⁷ Ibid, 256.

insist upon a prescriptive model for 'creative music' that would surely strip the 'creative' impulse, which would decide in the moment whether indeed the listening to leaves rustling should be interrupted by a crude and insensitive bulldozer. Maybe in humanistic and dialogical terms, this can seem like 'bad' orchestration, but some of the most exciting music ever made has such unexpected contrasts.

Schafer was given the opportunity to work in music education through his teaching at the Canada North York Summer Music School and his work with the Canadian Music Centre which involved frequent visits to schools. He describes his primary concerns with regards to music education as follows:

1. To try to discover whatever creative potential children may have for making music of their own.
2. To introduce students of all ages to the sounds of the environment; to treat the world soundscape as a musical composition of which man is the principal composer, and to make critical judgements which would lead to its improvement.⁹⁸

Most of the classroom practical exercises are fundamentally - improvised music-making, albeit guided by routine interventions and clear pursuits of a certain kind of organised sound. Of improvisation, and improvisation exercises Schafer says:

True improvisation is a quest for form without ever finding it, and that is why we are wrong if we ever expect an improvisation to shape itself into a performance. Its vitality is in its ability to transform itself- nothing more.⁹⁹

[talking directly to the children] Now let's try to incorporate all the different things into a single spontaneous improvisation. I won't cue you. I want you to 'feel' your way into the music yourselves and react as you wish. You may agree with the others or disagree with them as you wish, though I would ask you to bear in mind that agreement is more desirable in the long run if the conversation

⁹⁸ Ibid, 243.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 45.

is to continue... Comment only when you have something constructive to add to what the others are saying. Don't just doodle.¹⁰⁰

It is difficult to decide whether the real value of an experiment such as [ear training exercises] is in drawing out latent talent for improvisation or merely as an exercise in ear training. Probably it serves both uses.¹⁰¹

These three separate quotes reveal what, for me is the most important aspect of Schafer's interventions in music education, and, to a large extent, of the creative music education movement as a whole. They tell us about motives and goals, the approach to pursue these goals, and what ideologies lay behind those motivations. If we agree with Schafer's problematic assumption that 'true improvisation' is a quest for form (whatever 'form' necessarily means), without actually finding it, then, as he says, its vitality depends on its ability to transform itself. I would argue that this aspect of a constantly transformational movement is dependent upon the participants being able to self-define and self-actualize that movement. They need to organise it themselves (even this is a culmination of exercises). Any conducting or guidance from a teacher or facilitator needs to be carefully crafted to avoid suggesting 'rights' and 'wrongs', or ideological investments in the aesthetic output of the groups sonic movement. Such acts would cut off the self-definition required. This, I feel, is precisely what Schafer resorts to. He routinely interrupts the 'spontaneous improvisation', in order to give his disagreement, and to shape this improvisation to his own fashion. 'No, I'm afraid it won't do! You're not listening to each other!'¹⁰² To 'resolve' this problem, Schafer gradually introduces restrictions to the improvisation, narrowing the options for the performers, until he is sure that they are 'listening' in the way he wants them to. This is a classic strategy for improvised workshops. In this particular exercise, it is an explicit attempt to use improvisation to represent dialogical conversation. He wants the participants to use their instruments as if they were 'saying something'. Schafer's instruction that being agreeable is the most desirable form of musical communication in the end implies that any disagreement (or dissonance) is best resolved in the end (by consonance), therefore resurrecting standard, orthodox musical relations, at least in the history of Western

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 39.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 33.

¹⁰² Ibid, 34

music. Schafer poses the question of whether these exercises bring out latent talent in improvisation, or as simply an exercise in ear training, and I would be inclined to disagree with his own answer that it does both. I would argue that it strongly favours the ear training pursuit, as the exercises in improvisation are so heavily governed by restrictive conceptions and particular guidance that they suffocate the actual movement required for collective improvisation to emerge from the collective itself. I would add to all of this, that Schafer's position that improvisation never reaches 'form' as such, is also slightly misleading, since surely the very definition of 'creative music' as its proponents have discussed it, are to be free to explore all possible sonic options available, and among those options are to create form, even if temporary and unstable.

The creative music education movement, as I have already alluded to, is tied to a particular Eurological conception of improvisation which more often than not (despite claims to the contrary) practices a negative freedom that is more concerned with getting away from what it sees as problems or limitations than it is with allowing for the free exploration to experiment with the sonic possibilities available. If this is what counts as having already explored issues of improvisation in state-schools, then, we need to start again, because the movement as a whole has perhaps done more damage than good by misrepresenting improvisation's possibilities, and therefore misrepresenting the potential for an alternative pedagogy that a more Afrological improvised practice can offer.

Schafer's intervention in music education are of crucial significance here because I think they offer the best glimpse yet, into how a camouflaged ideology remains embedded in the way experimental, improvised (or 'creative') music is conceptualised and disseminated, that must be kept always under the watchful eye of those with a view towards genuinely accessible and anarchic collective improvisation making inroads into music education. In Schafer's own words:

“Where does it all lead?”, the principal had asked after one of our more daring sessions, and looking desperately around the class at the debris, I fixed my eye on him firmly and said “Anarchy, anarchy.” A totally creative society would be an anarchic society. The possibility of whole societies becoming self-actualized

remains, nevertheless, slight, due to a persistent terror of original acts of all kinds. It is easier to remain Mr Smith than to become Beethoven'.¹⁰³

I agree with him, that this is where it can (and should) lead, but his own methods for doing so were inconsistent with anarchist organisation, not least in the lack of recognition that the aspirational individualism of Beethoven worship/Mr Smith dismissal disregards some fundamental tenets of Anarchist thinking.

The Child as Modernist

I now want to pause to reflect momentarily on some questions that are raised by the previous examples. In particular, I want to draw attention to the way in which a particular form of experimental music practice, and a particular ideology prominent at that time came to assume dominance over the very concept of 'creative music education' (and improvisation) – principally, a Eurological conception of Modernism expressed through Euro-American 'art music'. The emphasis on present tense is prominent throughout, as is the interpretation of Modernism as something that 'blows up the past',¹⁰⁴ and therefore must be moved beyond in a linear progression. The 'new' is always the utmost moment of progression and value and it's this particular practice of the Euro-American avant-garde which apparently represents the pinnacle of musical progress. It is this musical system and its cultures that we must apparently follow in order to make music education meaningful. This is a hijacking which prevents recognition of the much broader educational possibilities involved with improvised approaches. Of course, there are exceptions to this, and moments of philosophies outside the Euro-American mind-set that do reach these thinkers and their practices, but overwhelmingly, the dominant ideology of the Creative Music Education Movement is one synonymous with the origins and legacy of European-derived thought and practice. African-derived musical traditions are largely ignored or damagingly misrepresented and diluted (this goes for most examples we've discussed throughout this chapter).

Furthermore, a damaging effect of this movement has been the reintroduction of the binary between 'serious' and 'popular', with improvisation being attached to the 'serious'

¹⁰³ Ibid, 239.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Attinello, 'Passion/Mirrors' in Andrew Dell' Antonio, *Beyond Structural Listening: Postmodern Modes of Hearing* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004) 156.

side of that polarity – a dangerous and misleading association. There's no actual reason for this association, because improvisation is much more closely linked and crucial to the African-American popular music forms of jazz and hip-hop than the Euro-American Western art tradition. Schafer however didn't want improvisation to have anything to do with 'pop music'. For instance, in response to the unrealistically high-standards insisted upon in past forms of music education, Schafer was equally condemning of popular music's introduction into the classroom:

There has arisen an equally disappointing tendency, particularly in America, to substitute for impossibly high standards none at all. The introduction of pop music in the classroom is an example of this slovenliness, not because pop music is necessarily bad, but because it is a social rather than a musical phenomenon and is therefore unsuitable as an abstract study, which music must always be if it is to remain an art and a science in its own right.¹⁰⁵

It is ironic that Schafer, and to a large extent, the other thinkers behind the Creative Music Education Movement, who insisted so heavily on 'present tense' music – music that was *relevant* to the time in which children were studying, would also insist upon such a particular manifestation of abstract, 'anti-social' music. This particular idea that music and the social are somehow alien to each other is a bizarre retrenchment of the idea of musical autonomy, ignoring of course the fact music could not exist as anything other than a social phenomenon! How would this even be possible? Schafer's comments bring us all the way back to the original conception of the structural membrane of music's dominant ideology, as requiring an internal (and in this case, scientific) unity. It could be quite easily argued that musical autonomy in education is a big part of the problem, so it is hard to see the value of a continuation of this idea, which removes the very value of music as a social phenomenon. For all of the suggestions of a radical departure from orthodoxy and dominant ideology, it is more accurate to say that the creative music education movement was merely filling a gap in the continuation of the Western art tradition.

¹⁰⁵ Schafer, *The Thinking Ear*, 239-240.

Panagiotis A. Kanellopoulous is a scholar in the field of Music Education, with particular focus on musical improvisation and informal learning. His contribution to the book *Sociology and Music Education* was exemplary in its critical analysis of aspects of the creative music education movement. The section of that article entitled 'The Child as Modernist: The Contribution of the Avant-Garde' is what I will draw upon. Kanellopoulous further embellishes the argument that the avant-garde's interest in children's music education was synonymous with a modernist ideology, especially relating to the European Romantic conception of genius as 'an otherworldly creature in search of divine naïveté'.¹⁰⁶ Kanellopoulous draws upon comments by Charles Baudelaire that illustrate how the Euro-American modernist avant-garde could see children as embodying the possibility for 'everything in a state of newness' because 'Genius is nothing more or less than *childhood regained* at will'.¹⁰⁷ Kanellopoulous goes on to say that 'children's musical exploration was seen as analogous to that of the experimental composers; that is, as a search for the unknown'¹⁰⁸ and that John Paynter's reference to children's 'excitement with the raw material' (of the avant-garde musical aesthetic) did not take into account that 'the very possibility of talking about 'raw' material is not a self-evident given, but presupposes the emergence of the avant-garde aesthetic. There is a sense here that beyond the cultural features of different forms of musical expression there lies a unity on a deep level'.¹⁰⁹ There are certainly a particular set of parameters and pre-defined guidelines here, of good and as Schafer said 'bad orchestration'. This is not to say of course that value judgements should be kept out of improvisation, but more that they shouldn't be fixed, pre-defined and set by people outside of the performance group themselves. Kanellopoulous argues that 'musical experience is not a 'natural' category'¹¹⁰, but, drawing on Henry Kingsbury, is a product of 'social actors in social situations',¹¹¹ and therefore 'composing and improvising can only be studied as situated practices and not as ossified cultural forms' (as Schafer would have it).¹¹² The creative music education movement was found to feature a fatal flaw, that the radical harboured

¹⁰⁶ Panagiotis A. Kanellopoulous, 'Towards a Sociological Perspective on Researching Children's Creative Music-Making Practices' in Ruth Wright, *Sociology and Music Education*, 125.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Baudelaire in *Sociology and Music Education* 125.

¹⁰⁸ Kanellopoulous, *Sociology and Music Education*, 127.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

the conservative underneath, and the following quote from John Paynter I think says something broader about the structural membrane we outlined earlier:

Music is able to mean anything anyone wants it to mean only because at root it means the same thing to everyone: we assume that all music will behave musically.¹¹³

Although unity, integration and talk of 'global villages' can all sound rosy at first glance, there is an underlying terror to this idea that everything means the same thing to everyone (a product of a colonial conception of inclusivity) and I'd argue that it is a highly problematic place to start for a vision of music education, when, on the contrary, what we absolutely should be pushing for, is a recognition of the genuine differences between people and the different approaches to music and music-making.

The Creative Music Education movement did certainly have a significant impact at the time, but as per its motives, it exists now as a 'trend' in the history of music education, and any sign of long-lasting impact and significance is vague at best; perhaps the terminology used for curriculum has changed to meet visions of child-centred music-making, and there have definitely been shifts from performance (of pre-written composition) to composition (at least in the UK), but as Robert Walker said in 1983, 'experimental music is still regarded as "experimental"; it is by no means institutionalized in the sense of being accepted as a valid educational activity, and has made few real inroads into the school music curriculum'.¹¹⁴ I think if you asked most teachers today about the actual music that is practiced in schools, there would be a very similar conclusion. In fact, Lucy Green has done some invaluable research into this specific area, and although it was a very small study, what she found is consistent with these hypotheses. Out of 18 teachers, 11 did not even know what avant-garde music was; and their comments revealed a general sense of negativity:

¹¹³ Paynter in Ruth Wright, *Sociology and Music Education*, 128.

¹¹⁴ Walker, *Sound Projects*, 88.

I can see very little value in this sort of approach which is concerned only with sound rather than organised sound (Music) using traditional notation.¹¹⁵

The sooner pupils come to terms with the tools of the trade the better¹¹⁶

I have yet to be convinced that this can be termed music at all¹¹⁷

No time no space no patience.¹¹⁸

Green concluded that ‘the avant-garde was not seen like popular music, as in opposition to classical music, but more a kind of growth, best concealed under a bandage, disliked, not understood’.¹¹⁹ Perhaps one of the main reasons it is perceived this way, is that the avant-garde hints at things that could genuinely outgrow orthodox conceptions of musicality, but the Euro-American avant-garde (which is usually taken to mean ‘avant-garde’ in its entirety) approaches music in such a way as to radically divorce from the past, meaning people tend to immediately react in an antagonistic manner that understandably is confused and frustrated at what is being presented. As I will suggest in chapter 2, there are alternative approaches to what may be termed ‘avant-garde’, not least avant-garde jazz, which, if deployed in the same setting may produce different responses from music teachers and the wider public. In terms of situating the avant-garde as specifically *not* being like popular music, because it wasn’t seen as ‘opposed’ to classical music, again, this is unfortunately due to the avant-garde being associated with the Euro-American avant-garde, which of course grows directly out of Western ‘classical’ music anyway. Furthermore, this is an unfortunate and frustrating process for those who know improvised practice has so much more to offer and is in no way conflictual with a progressive, open-ended popular music curriculum. What we have seen here in general is a hijacking, misdefining and misrepresenting of what is possible through improvisation and avant-garde approaches to pedagogy, and the opportunity still exists to apply socially relevant improvised practices to state-school music education. I was fortunate

¹¹⁵ *Music on Deaf Ears*, 70.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

enough to have an opportunity to practice such a thing as a case-study for my research, and I will discuss this in chapter 3.

Alternative Communities

What I want to explore now, is a demonstration of the pervasiveness of dominant musical ideology outside of so-called, formal, state/institutional settings. In the following snap-shot examples, I'll highlight how damaging understandings of music are practiced in various informal ways through organisations and places where it is assumed that music communities are acting out alternative conceptions of musical practice. In reality, they are continuing the long-history of institutionalised power, only in deceptive-looking non-institutional settings, such as local 'folk' pubs, derelict damp rooms, and art spaces. These spaces contribute directly into the general education on music, since they back up the dominant musical ideology disseminated in institutional settings. In addition to this, I will want to expose the ways in which a particular conception of the avant-garde (a broadly speaking Eurological one) forms models of community based on specialism as well as supposed radicalism, and how even in improvised, experimental scenes, the same dominant ideology of professionalism, hierarchy and specialism pervade and are valorised.

Cumberland Arms, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Home to a thriving folk music scene downstairs in its public lounge – various music sessions are made possible and the locals encourage these sessions. One Sunday afternoon, a sign is placed on all of the tables in this room – 'RESERVED FOR MUSICIANS'. No-one other than these specified musicians are allowed to sit at the tables. The folk session starts. People are encouraged to sing along – if they know the song. I am in the room with my young 2-year old Daughter. She is fascinated and excited by the sounds. She toddles around the room, at times coming close to the instruments, but not trying to touch them at this stage. The musicians grab their instruments, scurry, turn their backs,

take the instruments immediately out of sight. They become extremely precious and protective of their prized property, despite there being extremely little threat to it.¹²⁰

The Cumberland Arms has a rich history of the Folk tradition and communal music gatherings that are born from a spontaneity in spirit, albeit not necessarily a spontaneity in practice. However, the particular practice of reserving a room for ‘musicians’ in the downstairs lounge created some problematic implications. Firstly, it obviously reinforces a rigid divide between those that are, and those that are not musicians. This cannot be underestimated, as it suggests a particular kind of community in which people gather with clear divisions of labour set in place from the outset. This restricts people from existentially defining for themselves the meaning of their labour, their time, and their creative participation in what may or may not be called music. Secondly, it elevates the musician as someone who must possess and own privileged access to space in which to do ‘their job’, it rules out the possibility of a truly spontaneous communal music space, in which musicians may, dare I say it, sit on the floor, or stand for instance. Such is the privileging of the musician that he/she must have a comfortable seat at all times! The most important point here is how a particular idea of communal music-making can be disseminated which promotes itself as egalitarian and inclusive, and for the ‘people’, yet in practice reveals itself as deviating significantly from those ideals.¹²¹

Improvisation and Ear Training workshop with a ‘renowned’ local improviser.

The following is an advertisement for a series of ‘Improvisation and Ear Training’ workshops run by a local improviser (who will remain anonymous) followed by an e-mail conversation regarding who can come along.

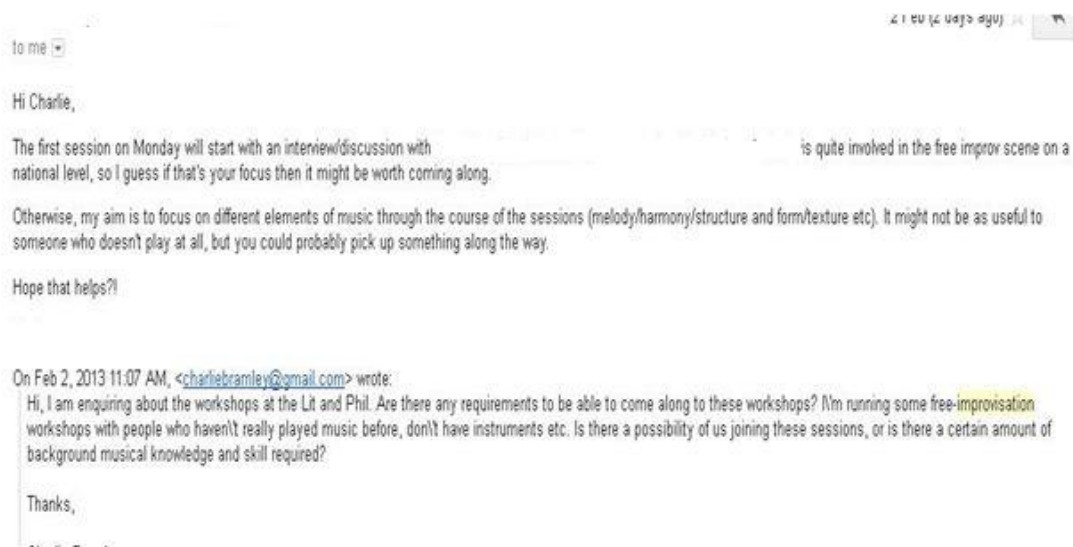
¹²⁰ Personal Observation.

¹²¹ It should be noted that the Cumberland Arms does have a venue upstairs designed for organised gigs. The downstairs lounge has a piano in it, and it is implied that music sessions may spontaneously emerge. This is the primary problem here, in how a space can be promoted as a proxy public space, yet go to specific lengths to restrict this possibility from emerging.

Fig 1.4¹²²



Fig 1.5¹²³



What interests me most about these workshops is how, despite claiming initially an inclusive agenda: 'This is not just a course designed for jazz musicians or enthusiasts' (let's leave aside the generalised assumption about jazz for now), it goes on to reinforce the stated desire of creating a 'sophisticated approach to improvisation', which is supported by the sense of professionalism enforced by the description of Paul as 'one of the finest Pianists in the North-East'. Although Paul is clearly trying to not exclude anyone in his response to me, it is clear that his claim that 'the different elements of music' are somehow automatically equated with 'melody/harmony/structure and

¹²² Facebook Promotion.

¹²³ Personal Correspondence.

form/texture’ creates a set boundary in which the fundamental conception of musicality goes untouched here. ‘Ear training’ also has a very definite history within orthodox music education, and applying it here in relation to improvisation creates a very ideological understanding of improvisation, as something that ‘naturally’ provides access to a scale of knowledge that can be ‘trained’ according to, once more, orthodox musical structures.

‘Free-improvisation workshop’ with London-based ‘renowned’ improvisor.

The workshop leader talks the group of music students through his particular approach to free-improvisation and insists that whenever the group are playing together, they must always try and hear every other individual. After the group finish playing a particular collective piece, he explains to everyone that for a moment or two in the piece, 3 or 4 players began to initiate a very short rhythmic groove, and this, he felt ‘shut the others out.’¹²⁴

One of the aspects of free-improvisation that puts so many people off is its all too common resistance to anything that resembles interaction with past musical form or structure, i.e. steady rhythm, melody, harmony etc. This model of free-improvisation emerges out of a Eurological approach, which responds to dominant musical ideologies by inverting them and then imposing its own restrictive and dogmatic insistence on a particular conception of ‘freedom’. Performers *must* be ‘free’ according to some externally imposed understanding, and must, like in the Schafer manner, have the trained ears to listen attentively to whatever specific and rigid sonic guidelines have been set out. This particular workshop reflected this model accurately, as the workshop leader was extremely aware immediately after a rhythmic groove was initiated, and it was his suggestion that this groove ‘shut others out’ that was particularly of concern. This seems to initiate an incredibly restrictive notion of community, in which the slightest connection between people and their histories is said to create irreparable conflictual relations and rhythm is deemed to be an inherently oppressive force. What is aimed at instead, is a terrifying totalitarian unity of detached collective soundscape, agreed upon through coercive consensus – a sense that ‘you **must** and you **will** be free from oppression’. A dictatorship of freedom. Much more on this in chapter 2.

¹²⁴ A one-off workshop that is in no way intended to indicate a particular stream of thought. In fact, inviting people to do workshops allows students to see a variety of different ways of thinking about music.

Event promotion for 'A Better Noise', Morden Tower, Newcastle. An organisation for improvised, experimental and exploratory music

Konk Pack brings together three *major* figures in contemporary music.

He has collaborated with many of the *finest* European & international musicians.

A trio of some of the *best* improvising musicians ANYWHERE!

This really is one you can't miss!

All three of them are *key* figures in Beirut's burgeoning experimental music scene.

Improvisation from local duo deploying double bass, clarinet and laptop.¹²⁵

A Better Noise is an organisation that promotes and hosts improvised and experimental performance events; but as their name suggests, they primarily host 'established', 'renowned' or 'better' performers who have made a name for themselves through various improvised scenes across the world. For a significant period (during most of the time this research was prepared/carried out) they hosted gigs inside the extremely inaccessible and damp ancient Morden Tower, which holds around 30- 40 people maximum. I would like to draw attention to how, despite promoting an experimental framework that supposedly challenges dominant hierarchies within music generally, those same hierarchies can be allowed to not only persist, but actually drive the very organisation's 'selling point'. For example, note how travelling improvisors with a bigger 'name' are given an elaborate description and words like 'major', 'finest' and 'key' are used, yet when it comes to describing a local improvising group, the simple description of 'local duo' is allowed to suffice. This organisation enjoys a regular community of audience members (albeit small) which frequently pay £6-8 for each gig.

¹²⁵ Personal Facebook Correspondence and Promotion via the 'A Better Noise' Facebook Group.

Fig 1.6¹²⁶

MOPOMOSO at Newcastle (hosted by A Better



Noise)

A Better Noise recently hosted the free-improvisation group Mopomoso in Newcastle who were on a national tour and needless to say, the promotion for the show was hyped: 'A major gathering of some of the foremost players in free improvisation... celebrating 21 years of the best of free-improvisation'.¹²⁷ An audience member had said this about the gig: 'Extraordinary musicians with extraordinary skills sets creating an extraordinary and revelatory language!'¹²⁸ Mopomoso have made quite a lot out of their interest in inclusivity and accessibility – as such they have received Arts Council funding, and they perform a monthly performance event in London, and have done so for the past couple decades, documenting live improvised performance in mammoth quantities. This is all welcomed, but of course it plays into an already-existent London-centric cultural structure that still is thought of as preserving elite cultural products (Café Oto for instance). This tour, then was their first outside of London as a group, and they made a big thing of how their inclusivity aesthetic would be beneficial to others, as it would allow local players to play alongside them, and the tours would co-exist with workshops by John Russell (event £10, workshop £10).¹²⁹ These workshops, it was said would be beneficial to the local cities, as it would help to introduce local players to each other. It is staggering to me, that such a well-respected group of figures in improvisation, the 'best of free-improvisation' would have such an ignorant perspective of the various improvisation 'scenes' across the country, that their ego's would insist that these scenes

¹²⁶ Facebook Promotion

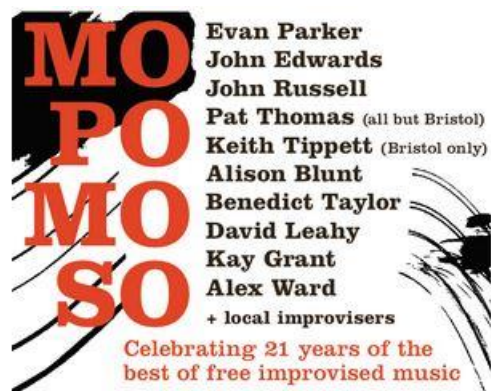
¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

would yearn for Mopomoso to help them by introducing players to each other, when, in the various cities that Mopomoso played, improvisation and experimental music is a thriving form with events happening almost on a daily basis. This also reveals broader problems to do with how power relations work when it comes to cultural capital; EVERYONE is expected to know Evan Parker, but does Evan Parker know about Dan Dixon?¹³⁰ In the actual performance itself, it was mostly the classic non-idiomatic model as demonstrated by the workshop example I highlighted earlier (which was given by one of these Mopomoso improvisors), and that same focus on intense listening in the Schaferian sense with an unspoken assumption of the incredibly proficient musicianship required to achieve such remarkable performances. This was made blatantly apparent, when a kitchen worker dropped a few glasses and John Russell had an enormous and ridiculous huff at the cheek of the mistake!

Fig 1.7¹³¹



+ local improvisers (lowercase and de-emphasized).

Dutch Impro Academy

Six top musicians from dOeK musicians' collective and the Instant Composers Pool (ICP) will come together to teach, work and play with participants from all over the world... Interested musicians can apply using the application form below. Participants will be selected on the basis of their cvs, recordings and letter of motivation...Rates 2014:

¹³⁰ Dan Dixon is a local improvisational drummer who plays frequently in various groups around the city.

¹³¹ Facebook Poster Promotion

€ 400 normal rate

€ 350 early bird rate, valid until July 1, 2014

€ 350 participants of previous DIAs and Dutch conservatory students.¹³²

Despite having a huge promotional poster that simply says PLAY on their website, the 'esteemed' Dutch Impro Academy somehow convince people to pay €400 for the chance to play with a select group of 'top' musicians, only after they have been 'selected' on the basis of their CV, recordings and letters of motivation, meaning assumedly they have to already be musicians and have sufficient motivation for expert training in 'impro'.

The Improprofessionals – Impro Academy in Paris

The Home of Good Impro in Paris! Impro Academy is the improvisation school of the Improprofessionals- the international impro theatre troupe in Paris. *Experience good impro, go see THE IMPROFESSIONALS!* Whether it's for stage purposes or just for your personal pleasure - anyone who wants to become a better improviser is welcome at the Impro Academy.¹³³

This particular group carries on the same ethos as the Dutch Impro Academy, by attempting to institutionalise and instill and re-embed hierarchy into improvisation, re-constituting it as 'just as serious' as the other stuff. I think it says something symbolic about the modes of operation here and the continuation of hierarchy, specialism and professionalism through apparently alternative modes of practice such as improvisation.

Tusk Music: Claustrophobia is Cool?

Tusk Music is an Arts-Council funded organisation who produce an annual festival of experimental music in Newcastle upon Tyne. Because the arts council tend to favor funding bids that have a community benefit - the words inclusivity, community engagement or participation have become funding buzz words in recent years; Tusk is an interesting example to look at momentarily, in terms of the type of community that is fostered by this approach to experimental music programming. Over the past 3 years that Tusk has been funded, the festivals they have produced have typically centred on

¹³² 'Dutch Impro Academy', <http://www.dutchimproacademy.nl/register-rates/> (15th December, 2013).

¹³³ 'Impro Academy Paris', <http://www.improacademy.com/about.html> (14th December, 2013).

the various sub-genres and off-shoots of noise music, laptop-and tabletop-based experimental electronics. This has catered to a city that has a long-history of noise-worship, so, in one sense, there is a community there who want this stuff, and all of the festivals have been popular (or sold out). Because the vast majority of people coming to the festivals are people already into the music, there is the ironic question – to what extent is it still noise, experimental or challenging, if everyone knows what to expect? The secondary question returns back, but to what extent would it be unethical if people wandered into an environment which may be extremely intimidating and uncomfortable? I bring this last question of ethics up, because this year (2014), Tusk staged a mini one-day event in July in addition to their usual October festival, and on this event they hosted both Leeds-based Bongoleeros and ‘Shanghai Noise Monster’ Torturing Nurse. The Bongoleero are described by Tusk in the following way: ‘voted the worst band in Leeds, they continue to play primitive and remedial DaDa rockabilly in small towns across the land’.¹³⁴ A direct reference to Dada and the European avant-garde and also a celebration of the kind of social alienation in which so much Western art immerses itself. The Bongoleero’s are known for their intense performances, wandering from venues onto streets and into public places, most famously perhaps the Bradford indoor market where they were eventually ejected. Their willingness to force their performances into social spaces and onto people who may not want it sets up an aesthetic that I believe will never achieve a positive or revolutionary agenda. About the gig, Tusk say the following: ‘West Yorkshire’s infamous Bongoleeros join the TUSK Mini line-up for a series of up-close-and-personal performances in the claustrophobic confines of Blank Studios, across the road from the Star & Shadow. There will be 3 Bongoleeros sets through the afternoon for a small number of TUSK Mini attendees and available strictly on an advanced booking basis’.¹³⁵ So, what we have with this description is a peculiar thing – a celebration of the claustrophobia of being in a small place for a group that is ‘infamous’ for its intense , unpredictable and intimidating performances – more than that, a celebration of scarcity for such a thing, a celebration for the same kinds of high-status, low-availability demand that mainstream commercial ‘pop’ performers and conglomerate industry executives are known for exploiting. Who will attend this show

¹³⁴ ‘Tusk Music Presents Tusk Festival 2014’, <http://tuskfestival.com/artists/bongoleeros/> (16th May 2014).

¹³⁵ Ibid

other than the small number of aficionados and specialists that know about and welcome this particular niche-market cultural product so they can idolise in a like-minded community? What we have here then, is a glaring similarity to the kinds of ideologies of both Western Art Music, and commercial popular music strategies.

The second group who I want to draw attention to playing at Tusk Mini 2014 are Torturing Nurse. Described by their leader in his own words as the following: 'most people in Shanghai can't take the kind of noise that we make. To be honest, most people can barely accept things that are anti-rhythm and anti-melody, let alone the kind of violence that is contained in the noise we make'.¹³⁶ A deliberate anti-rhythmical and self-proclaimed violent aesthetic feeding upon the long-history of harsh noise and pure noise, itself influenced by what became known as 'danger music', the idea that there may be some harm to either listener or performer, or in the case of the band Hanatrash (an influence on Torturing Nurse), cutting a dead cat in half with a machete. 'Danger Music' is also implicitly and sometimes explicitly linked to the European avant-garde through the Fluxus movement, especially Dick Higgins who wrote a number of works entitled 'Danger Music'. Newcastle isn't new to this, having hosted various performances like this, from performances where a performance-artist inserts needles into himself on stage, bleeding profusely, or smashing a tree bark in a 30-capacity damp, moldy room, with bits of wood and dust flying off everywhere, almost setting off an asthma attack from an audience member, all the way to an infamous GG-Allin styled performance in which the performer defecated on stage and attempted to wipe it on members of the audience, subsequently getting arrested and the show being shut down. Torturing Nurse don't go that far, in fact they are probably quite mild in comparison. What they do however is sometimes walk around the audience with portable amplifiers on maximum volume forcing it into people's faces and ears, sometimes cut themselves or otherwise harm themselves on stage, and as a Guardian review states: 'Men wearing pyjamas tie each other into bags, secure mic-ed up bodies to tables and tie naked members of the band to chairs'.¹³⁷ Although they say explicitly that 'we don't perform with the intention of

¹³⁶ 'Torturing Nurse at Tusk Mini 2014', *Tusk TV, You Tube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4d8-PV-R8eg> (1st November, 2014).

¹³⁷ 'Scene and Heard: Noi Shanghai', *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2010/apr/26/seen-heard-noi-shanghai> (22nd December, 2013).

shocking people, we just like doing this stuff – but most people can't take it',¹³⁸ the fact is Tusk Festival know it will inevitably shock people, and that most people will be shocked, so they book this act to either intentionally shock people, intimidate and make people feel uncomfortable, or more realistically, to create a kind of neutered shock factor whereby only the initiated will be in the room and therefore retain the ultra-specialist atmosphere of the avant-garde's extremely lofty history. People pay to enjoy the pseudo dis-enjoyment of the performance. If violins are replaced with mic'd up faeces but the culture retains its specialism, in what ways is this avant-garde, experimental, or in any way a socially-relevant practice? It certainly has nothing to do with revolution.

The intention of bringing together these seemingly disparate accounts then, has been to illuminate the pervasiveness of dominant socio-musical ideologies and hierarchies, and how these ideologies and hierarchies can be just as persistent (albeit sometimes camouflaged) in so-called experimental platforms as they are in so-called orthodox ones, especially when it comes to certain cultural capital that is ascribed according to values that are themselves based on ideas of innate musicality - or in the noise examples, an explicit disavowal of musicality that is then revered. I have also wanted to draw attention to particular conceptions of so-called 'alternative' communities, which say they are 'inclusive', 'experimental', 'rebellious', 'transgressive', etc, etc, only to enact terrifying inertia and social irrelevance in practice. More specifically, it is of significant concern that the power relations that revolve around the binary of 'musical' and 'unmusical' seem to go deeper than orthodox musical structure (melody, harmony, etc.), but actually extend into the fibres of abstract, experimental music where internal hierarchies can often go unchallenged and seep into the dissemination streams of how that music is received, thus creating the impression that such music rebels against the ideology of orthodox music, when more often than not, it simply rebels against the surface-level content (as in many of the improvisation scenes). Furthermore, because the overwhelming majority of music practitioners and critics have gained structural knowledge and training in music, it is easy to forget the impact this can have on the internal hierarchies of experimental music (Torturing Nurse for instance follows a long-line of practitioners who has a conventional training and a history of playing in traditional music groups but now wants

¹³⁸ 'Tusk Music presents Tusk Festival 2014', <http://tuskfestival.com/artists/torturing-nurse/> (16 May, 2014).

to sacrifice it all in a severe destruction of the conventional – contributing still to a music for musicians aesthetic despite the apparent lack of music in the music!) For instance, those who hold the keys to knowledge over musical structure hold a certain power over those who do not, and the way this power is exercised can sometimes be subtle and nuanced, but in the case of organisations who claim to be experimental or inclusive, it is of huge significance when further hierarchies and exclusive ideologies are embedded into their operational structure (A Better Noise, Mopomoso, etc.) Even when these hierarchies are distorted so as to create the impression that they are revolting against orthodox and elite musicality, they nonetheless represent inverted hierarchies that prop up specialism in the form of fecal matter (Aktionist or Danger Music performance-art aesthetics for instance). The majority of experimental musical practice is still propped up on the basis of a ‘learn the rules before you break them’ mentality, and of those areas that are not, in its place is a kind of destructive reverie for the inverted hierarchy of an anti-music, with the rules and skills in the bag of course! The perspective of the unmusical and non-musicians within these areas of discourse is extremely underrepresented, and even less represented is what I will refer to later as the potential for the untrained idiomatic - most simply, because the unmusical and untrained mostly believe in their unmusicality. However, what is important to remember, is that these power relations only remain in place so far as those without the ‘power’ subscribe to the validity of the knowledge they apparently lack. As is usually the case with power differentials, those without the power find it difficult to find an outlet amidst the haze of institutional and cultural ideology. We will return to this area of enquiry in depth in Chapter 3 as I discuss the case study ‘Unmusical’.

Music is too important to be left to the musicians

Music is too important to be left to the musicians, and in recognizing this fact we strike a blow at the experts’ domination, not only of our music but also of our very lives...to control our own musical destiny, provide our own music rather than leaving it altogether to someone else to provide.¹³⁹

Christopher Small was a writer and researcher working primarily in the areas of musicology, ethnomusicology and music education who has had significant influence,

¹³⁹ Christopher Small, *Music, Society, Education*, (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996) 214.

and whose work has been exemplary in its critique of the specifically post-Renaissance European nature of dominant musical ideology and its implantation within Western art music's on-going legacy. Small's work is very much focussed on a critique of how this dominant culture is responsible for what he calls the 'evil effects of the excessive professionalization of music', which he says 'might be tolerable if it applied only to the training of the professional musician, but the training of professionals is unfortunately taken to a very large extent as the model for music in education generally'.¹⁴⁰ Small sees this professionalization a result of the broader intentions of education to be a training institute for an industrial work-force, rather than anything which could promote spiritual well-being, emotional development, or the pleasure of exploration and discovery: 'our culture's will-o'-the-wisp promise of future satisfaction in return for sacrifice of present pleasure becomes imprinted very early in children's minds, and yet another generation is conditioned into the industrial philosophy'¹⁴¹ Or, as the teacher quoted by Lucy Green earlier said, the quicker children *learn the tools of the trade the better*. There's nothing I can imagine could be worse than to associate music as simply being a trading of tools for some kind of exchange value later on.

Of all the significantly influential writers in this field, Small goes furthest in his damning critique of dominant musical ideology, and because of his recognition 'that any theory of aesthetics that confines itself solely to the musical experience of post-Renaissance Europe will be incomplete or even seriously misleading',¹⁴² we can place him in a significantly different world to the thought that emerged from both the creative music education movement and the popular music education movement. Though Small focussed more on the introduction of popular music into music education, he was also clearly aware of the positive influence improvisation could have, not least because one of his main focusses was to revive African-derived modes of socio-musical organisation, which tend to feature improvisation as a deeply embedded core principle (and importantly, not necessarily distinct from popular music). I want to explore a crucial question Small asks before moving onto chapter 2:

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 194.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 185.

¹⁴² Small, *Music, Society, Education*, 219.

Is there something built into the nature of the works of that repertory that makes performing and listening to them under any circumstances go counter to the way I believe human relationships should be? ¹⁴³

While this quote is in specific reference to a particular repertory of Western Art Music, I think it is an important question that can be asked about much broader socio-musical organisation, but in particular all forms of musical organisation that explicitly remove any real-time human interaction between individuals in the process of making music. While I don't want to be too explicit or dogmatic about how human relationships 'should' be, I won't hesitate in saying that a revolutionary step forward for the purposes of this thesis' agenda would be to work towards organising music-making according to existentialist-anarchist ideals that utilise music as a social energy- collective and collaborative, but not unified and oppressive. To that end, and for the purposes here, the agenda throughout the thesis is to try and articulate such a model as a type of existentialist-anarchism, as follows: if anarchism is the absence of authority and the subsequent opportunity for individuals to organise themselves and their social relations, then existentialist-anarchism is the insistence that for that situation to be authentic to the ideals of 'freedom' wished for, individuals must exercise that freedom and their ability to define the meaning of their lives in ways that do not infringe upon others' ability to do the same. This is not a fixed, static situation of collective relations, but relies upon a constant working through of difficult, conflictual, ambiguous relations and hence it can be experienced through micro-communities for now rather than anything broader. The human relationships involved in an ideal collective improvisation are based upon the requirement that each individual is able to exercise an *authentic* spontaneous expression of their existence without that expression denying, intimidating or hindering the next individual from doing the same. In fact, this is a big part of what living *authentically* must be, in existential terms. In chapter 4 we will address in more detail the extent of this, and how these conflicts are worked through, but for now I want to suggest that in standard musical structures, all of these human relationships have already been decided on in advance, so that everyone knows their position within modes of hierarchies, and

¹⁴³ Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University Press, 1998) 16.

there are certain provisional rules for inclusion (knowledge of structures etc). This actually denies the possibility for existentialist-anarchic relations, as it relies upon an authority and a unity imposed on those relations (let's not pretend democratic vote avoids this authority), and it insists that 'outsiders' must assimilate into these relations in order to participate. As such, conflicts don't actually get worked through in creative practice, as much as they get conveniently avoided before relations are initiated.

All of which is not meant to suggest that those involved in these standard musical organisation are in necessarily unhappy or unwilling situations (I'm sure they would confirm this is not the case), but it is to suggest, that within the broader social structures of how human relationships operate, non-improvised music-making restricts the kinds of agency, change, self-definition and spontaneous development necessary for existentialist-anarchist organisation, or, even as a genuine socio-musical organisation and returns the performance of this music to a kind of waxwork musical autonomy, which removes real-time human interaction from the performance of the music, and hides the process of making music completely from view. As such, it represents a step in the 'wrong' direction towards existentialist-anarchist agendas.

For the purposes of this chapter, I think all of this says something really significant about the way dominant political ideologies become embedded in the ways we educate people in music. Think of the way Lucy Green's system of musical meaning transforms music into political ideological space, and as it does, merely reproduces how dominant music educational ideology operates: in order to participate (or enjoy) meaningfully as performer or listener, one must already have ascertained provisional knowledge to access such spaces of meaning. Throughout this chapter, we have also seen examples that promote communities of unity, that is to say communities (or modes of musical organisation) which allow unity to become the foundation for communal spaces to emerge. I've already quoted at length from William Corlett's *Community without Unity*, but it becomes necessary to do so again, in order to articulate the pitfalls of communities that rely on unity as their foundation, eliminating as it does those modes of difference that cannot, or will not, be reduced. Also, with a few of the words changed the following statement could also be a description of this thesis:

This book attempts to celebrate both community and difference...Our serving and defending one another without pretending that these communitarian practices bring unity to the global village or any other habitat. Bringing unity seems always to require silencing the so-called parts that do not fit the holistic vision, and I want no part of that.¹⁴⁴

To finish this chapter ,for now, then, a nodding repetitive glance back towards Jacques Attali who argues that throughout history, music has been subject to various attempts to stratify it into those who 'can' and those who 'cannot'; professionals' and 'amateurs', 'musicians' and 'non-musicians', 'musical' and 'unmusical'. Attempts to justify this have been made on the grounds that there is a universal consensual musical language encapsulated by orthodox syntax and lexicons which also allows for the production of a consensual representation of the world. Attali insists that this attempt to define music in terms of its 'rational use of sounds' and reduce it this way is to confuse it with a pure syntax and he draws on the work of Michel Serres to remind us instead that 'beyond syntax there is meaning'.¹⁴⁵ What I will want to argue later is that there is a further *beyond* to be encountered, which re-engages with all possible sonic material - syntax or no syntax. With this in mind, we go to Attali to close, and his dual critique of the representative nature of dominant musical structures, and his damning historical analysis of the way power uses music to educate people towards certain desired ends.

Make people believe. The entire history of tonal music, like that of the classical political economy, amounts to an attempt to make people believe in a consensual representation of the world...in order to stamp upon the spectators the faith that there is a harmony in order. In order to etch in their minds the image of the ultimate social cohesion, achieved through commercial exchange and the progress of rational knowledge.¹⁴⁶

When power wants to make people forget, music is ritual sacrifice, the scapegoat; when it wants them to believe, music is enactment, representation; when it wants to silence them, it is reproduced, normalized, repetition...today, in

¹⁴⁴ Corlett, *Community Without Unity*, 6.

¹⁴⁵ Attali, *Noise*, 9.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 46.

embryonic form, beyond repetition, lies freedom: more than a new music, a fourth kind of musical practice [which] heralds the arrival of new social relations.¹⁴⁷

This embryonic music beyond 'new music' is the very stuff of this thesis, and we will continue to explore it in the subsequent chapters.¹⁴⁸

Summary

I started this chapter by outlining a dominant understanding of music as it is deployed in music education contexts (both formally and informally). I said the following: 'Music, according to its dominant conception is defined in terms of a systematic unity whose purpose is generally its notation, or more broadly its preservation as representation – a system of organising sounds so as to be able to perform (represent) them again'. I focussed significant attention to how Lucy Green's theoretical framework regarding 'inherent musical meaning' constituted certain assumptions which were tied to generic understandings of musical meaning that reflected an example of the 'structural listening' model outlined by Rose Subotnik. I then explored how this particular conception of music was being introduced to successive generations through the formal education system, paying particular attention to the U.K. state-school system and the various developments, programmes and movements that have constituted key aspects of its history. I outlined what I saw as flaws in these historical moments, and how their fundamental assumptions of musical meaning and musical development have hindered recognition of improvisation as a meaningful musical approach. I focussed on Karl Maton and Alexandra Lamont's 'Legitimation Code Theory' and how their studies had found a significant perception in children of music as an 'Elite Knowledge Code'. Throughout this, I also questioned the binary between 'formal' and 'informal' learning, with regards 'popular' and 'classical' models of music education, and suggested that these two approaches, when analysed closely, appeared to share the same fundamental objectives. I then carried out a focussed analysis of the 'Creative Music Education Movement', which although attempting to bring in improvised and avant-garde approaches to music

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 20.

¹⁴⁸ Though Attali controversially terms this music *composition*, it is widely recognised he is talking about improvisation, but intends to reclaim the term composition.

education, ultimately presented a continuation of the Western art tradition and perhaps damaged the possibility for improvisation's relevance in music education by defining improvisation in a narrow and flawed manner that did not lend itself well to radical music education reform. I surveyed various snapshot examples of cultural organisations who claimed to offer experimental, improvised or just alternative means of socio-musical organisation, but in different ways, ended up offering a reproduction of either the same dominant musical ideology based on systematic unity, or the more deeper and camouflaged modes of professionalism, hierarchy and specialism that I argued broke with any meaningful social change or revolution. I referenced Christopher Small's work, and in particular, his attack on the 'professionalization of music', in order to introduce the argument that music education in all of its guises needs to move towards a more non-specialised, non-professionalised approach if it is to progress meaningfully towards a more existentialist-anarchist model that seeks to change people's perception of music as an out of reach 'elite knowledge code'.

Discrepant Anachronism 1 -Interview between Suzy Spleen and Slack Nutella

All characters appearing in this section are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.

Meet Susy Spleen. At this reinvented moment in time, she is aged 40. Fed up with the orthodoxy of music and music education through 'classical' methods, she decides to pursue alternative means of organising the educating of our children into the possibilities of music-making, largely through popular-music based methods. Despite the good intentions of her pursuit, she allows for the continuation of rigid assumptions about musical meaning that prevent the recognition of how both the 'classical' and 'popular' share really important fundamental similarities in output. Through a dedication to the M.F.P.P - funded 'What Counts as Music' programme, Spleen decides to completely ignore the *non-music* usually identified as improvisation or the avant-garde and in

doing so, fails to make the argument for any substantial change in the destination of children's music education, at least in the view of certain scholars in the field of musical political economy, such as the French writer Slack Nutella, who for the first time is asked to answer questions by Spleen on why he takes such a radical perspective.

Meet Slack Nutella. At this real moment in time, he is aged 28. Young, ambitious and French, trying to change the world, a self-proclaimed revolutionary. Not only championing the very most radical forms of improvised music as the revolutionary art forms that will change all of our futures, but blazingly changing the meaning of the word 'composition' to mean improvisation or, more simplistically, to simply 'put stuff together', something anyone can do. It is this act, this act of blasphemy against the very fundamentals of music meaning that makes Nutella a dangerous and naïve writer, according to academics such as Suzy Spleen, who in this interview, will get a chance to interrogate Nutella and ask him to account for himself on various issues.

December 14th, 2015. In bizarre circumstances, Spleen is appointed the editor of the new academic journal 'radical, radical, keep saying radical' and will need to approve Nutella's work before it can be published.

Suzy Spleen: Hello Mr Nutella, I'd just like to say thank you for meeting me, so soon after the submission of your new work. While I'm sure you must be keen to move past this recently completed work, I feel it is my place to ask you some questions on this before it can be published in this new but highly esteemed journal dealing in radical musicology. Would you oblige me in doing so in person?

Slack Nutella: Get on with it then.

Suzy Spleen: I'd like to remind you Mr. Nutella that such an attitude will not go down well with the panel at my highly esteemed board committee who will assess this work before it can be passed on to publication.

Slack Nutella: I'd just like to focus on the specific questions you have, rather than the bourgeois killer polite attitude surrounding them.

Suzy Spleen: Very well, then. I'll get right to it. In this chapter, you make a big argument around how incredibly liberating it would be for children to have the opportunity to improvise, but can I just ask what if some children just want to learn how to write music or copy their favourite musicians - is that not OK? Who are you to say what they want, and furthermore, isn't it a bit condescending of you to talk of most music consumers and producers as representing 'pig-music'?

Slack Nutella: OK, well of course there will be some children (many even) who will just want to learn how to compose their own music and learn the skills to be able to perform it again and again, to be able to learn the music of their favourite musicians etc. Of course that is OK. More than OK. But there's two important contextual things to consider which I have tried to highlight. The first of these is that there needs to be alternative options for those whose excitement and desire to play music lies outside of that somewhat narrow model. The second is that a crucial imperative of a good music education should be getting the right balance between attending to pupil's current interests, as well as introducing them to a broader understanding of musical approaches in a way that critically engages with their musical backgrounds and the wider entertainment industry which dominates so much perception of music. In other words, as well as meeting the needs of what children want to learn, based on their

own perspectives, we also need to be showing them the benefits of understanding other perspectives and other approaches.

In terms of the potentially condescending nature of 'pig-music', this analogy is a deliberate attempt to articulate how a dominant education on music has attempted to constrain the movement and flexibility of musical approaches and musical knowledges. It is a criticism of the production and producers, of the system itself, of the way in which farming pigs for instance in this way, in particularly awful conditions actually changes the identity of the pig itself in the perception of most people. Same with music. The entertainment industry, the education systems, the universities, the alternative music scenes- almost everywhere music is defined according to extremely narrow and limited domains, and as such, music and musicians come to be defined by these conditions.

Suzy Spleen: But if the identity of music is perceived to be a certain way by most people, doesn't this mean it is your perception of music which has been distorted by certain ideologies of the avant-garde for instance that have provided an alienating and socially irrelevant model of what people actually want from music?

Slack Nutella: No, because what you're doing there again Suzy is adhering just to the whole 'What Counts as Music' programme agenda. And while I see the importance of understanding as I said what people are currently into, 'what counts as' is a seriously ideological proposition informed by so many social constructions, that have become in my view tyrannical. I mean would you argue that because most people in a particular community believe in a discriminatory conception of minorities that this is the basis by which we should form our opinions on minorities and work with minorities in the future?

Suzy Spleen: I would appreciate it if from now on you address me as Mrs. Spleen rather than Suzy to maintain the necessary professional nature of this encounter. We are dealing with a serious matter here Mr. Nutella, the passing onto publication of your completed work and at the moment I'm not feeling like you are respecting the seriousness of this occasion. And also, I ask you to recognise that at this moment in time it is my turn to ask questions. With that said, I'll now move on to the next question. You said 'it's surely not possible to conceive of 'musicality' as both a social construction *and* to insist upon such a fixed conception of 'musicality' from which different degrees of competence and abilities adhere', but surely everyone cannot be equally as good or valuable as each other when it comes to music? How do you account for the fact that musicians within the same genre with same training etc. outsell others, or in other genres, how certain artists are privileged above others?

Slack Nutella: As you like Mrs. Spleen. A social construction implies that what has been constructed is not essential or inherently fixed in its identity or meaning. As such, different degrees of ability would always be dependent upon non-fixed categories of judgement and value. With that said, of course in different contexts and for different reasons, it can make sense to say one person is better or worse than another at a particular thing, but it is equally important to remember that this is always partial, contextual and dependent upon changing circumstances. For example, if I was wanting to make some comment about the nature of revolutionary music in Newcastle, I would have certain ideas about what revolutionary should mean, and I would therefore judge some people to meet those values more so than others, and therefore be better or worse accordingly, but this is always partial!

Suzy Spleen: Surely you're joking though about everyone being expected to know Evan Parker, but no-one knowing about Dan Dixon – how could they?

Slack Nutella: It is intended to be slightly humorous, but also with a serious point at its core. The way that Deleuze and Guattari were able to situate language as stabilising around a power capital is an incredibly important political tool that we can use to uncover the ways in which the same processes happen in music. For instance, there's no inherent reason why Evan Parker is more important than Dan Dixon. There's no inherent reason why London is more important than Newcastle. There's no inherent reason why money flows into one area and not the other. At the same time, there's plenty of stupid reasons why it does, and why people's heads are turned in one way and not the other. It's an elaborate way of saying to people, switch it up, let's get high-profile performers to ditch London and the big cities completely from their tour dates. Let's get the inhabitants of big cities to travel to small-towns, and demand that the councils in those small towns build the infrastructure to support such emerging activities, subsequently improving the recognition that local musicians encounter.

Suzy Spleen: OK, I can understand that, thanks for explaining that point Mr. Nutella. I am more than a little uncomfortable however, with how easily you have equated the 'popular' and 'classical' approaches to music education. With relatively little background research you've made big, bold claims regarding their similarities, when there is significant existing research to suggest their crucial differences.

Slack Nutella: Yes, there are crucial differences for sure. But, most of the research which would point out these differences is done from within the continuum of a fundamental agreement on inherent musical meaning. What is usually meant by 'crucial

differences' is usually the route by which these goals are achieved, and while this can provide very important differences in learning, enjoyment and engagement, it was necessary to cut through a lot of that research by focussing the reader's attention on the destination of music education and how we need to move beyond both models of music education if we intend to really transform music education.

Suzy Spleen: You quoted Robert Walker as saying 'experimental music is still regarded as "experimental"; it is by no means institutionalized in the sense of being accepted as a valid educational activity, and has made few real inroads into the school music curriculum'. But it's not clear at this stage whether you want 'experimental' music to be institutionalised in the sense of being accepted as a valid educational activity - wouldn't the very premise of what you are proposing always lie outside of institutionalisation and standardisation?

Slack Nutella: I think it needs to be seen as valid and therefore introduced in educational contexts, but at the same time it needs to retain an important distance from anything approaching standardisation. I believe there is something crucial to the kinds of un-Musical/free-form models of improvisation that will always be difficult to incorporate into a classroom in a way that retains its core elements, that of anarchist organisation and existential individualism, but at the same time it needs to be a part of the conversation and curriculum in order to show children that there are alternative routes, even if those routes cannot be fulfilled properly within the classroom.

Suzy Spleen Your critique of the well-respected scholar Lucy Green's suggestion that improvisation is no less mediated than other musics, otherwise it wouldn't be made to count as music, is slightly hypocritical is it not, in light of your general pursuit of the wider public accessing and self-defining musical

knowledge(s) – surely the fact that the wider public wouldn't count most improvisation as music serves a damning critique against its usage as accessible and revolutionary?

Slack Nutella: I know this 'what counts as music' issue is important to you, but as I said in my response to the earlier question, while it's very important to my argument to properly take into account what social relevance improvisation actually can have right now, it's obviously also the case that the current situation is only half the story, so it's about creating models of improvisation that do enough to be accessible, but also encourage participants to go on musical journeys that are transformative and provoke new alternative understandings. It's also the case that 'counts as music', is, as I have already argued, a profoundly ideological position, which is not inherent and is instead extremely changeable depending on circumstances. With that said, it's also important to not dismiss what people think of as music, as the 'non-idiomatic' models have done, because it's hardly going to be a revolution for people if they cannot connect any meaningful link between what they experience as music most of the time and what improvisation tells them it is. This is why I have tried to articulate models of improvised practice that offer meaningful links through rhythm and various stylistic and idiomatic references being retained but through spontaneous means which I think crafts a middle-ground, in which people are given a bridge to cross, albeit a slightly unstable one!

Suzy Spleen: I just want to make sure that you have a firm enough grasp on the importance of this issue and how important I think it is that you deal with the consequences of your argument here. Moving on then. When you go through the critique of 'reserved for musicians', and the preciousness of instrument property, I'm left wondering whether the logical conclusion to your argument would be that there would be no distinction whatsoever between a musician

and a listener, or a performer and an audience, that we wouldn't actually have any non-improvised music, all music would be improvised and that instruments would no longer be cherished or looked-after. Wouldn't this also eradicate the idea of one's 'craft', of each individual offering something distinctive to a particular thing?

Slack Nutella: Like anarchism itself, I think that's ultimately the direction we need to be headed. If such a thing sounds crazy or bad, I would argue that's only because of how ineffective improvised music communities have been at crafting meaningful propositions for revolution. Free jazz offered probably the closest, but ultimately failed by its inability to see how its practice could be extended well beyond the specialism it was born from. Once a model of improvisation becomes recognised and makes itself heard properly, which offers people the possibility for everything they already have, but accessible to all, I believe at that stage, it may no longer be necessary to pre-compose again. I say 'may', because of course, within the perspective of an anarchist organisation, it has to be possible for people to pre-compose music, it may however be, that such a proposition will become so blatantly irrelevant socially that it will lose the power it has had. We can hope! Such a proposition however wouldn't remove the audience, it would just change who that audience are, from a passive consumer most of the time, to an active contributor.

Suzy Spleen: And what about 'craft'?

Slack Nutella: Oh yes, well 'craft' is a tricky concept. Similar to 'practice', it is often seen as something which requires a commitment to specific skill-sets and learning, but in reality there's no reason it has to be this way. The above propositions needn't remove 'craft' as much as they needn't remove 'practice'. Of course someone can develop their 'craft', can build a

relationship with chosen materials in whichever way they wish, it's just that their options can be significantly wider than they currently are.

Suzy Spleen: Ok, well that's it from me, thanks for your time Mr. Nutella. We will be back in touch soon with an outcome.

Slack Nutella: Thankyou Suzy. Oh, I mean Mrs. Spleen.

Chapter 2 – Power, Politics, Ideology: Revolving, Re-visioning and Revolutionising the Avant-Garde

The previous chapter was intended to give a broad outline of the way in which dominant conceptions of music have been disseminated and preserved both institutionally and culturally, through various pervasive spaces. This chapter intends to extend this by exploring various attempts to move beyond this situation through key historical antecedents to improvised, avant-garde and free music. The history of a music that has been termed ‘free’, ‘experimental’, ‘avant-garde’, ‘art’, ‘new’, ‘contemporary’ (and probably others too) is a complex, long story, with confused, misunderstood and often misleading accounts of the context of such practices. I’m not therefore going to attempt a rigorous outline of that history in the space here, but instead I’m going to focus on key strands of these histories which have developed according to varying principles of musical freedom and experimentation. I will focus particular attention on what these practices may or may not offer us in terms of their social relevance and what models of community and socio-musical organisation they reflect. The discussion will begin with what George Lewis has termed ‘Eurological’ models of experimental practice, focussing on key principles and explored through certain artists, ideas and practices of the more broad Euro-American ‘avant-garde’ and the European free-improvisation movement. The discussion will then look at what Lewis has described as ‘Afrological’ models, which has included practices such as free-jazz, avant-jazz and others, but here I will focus overwhelmingly on the exceptional model offered by the thought and practice of William Parker. Lewis’s advancement of the dual categories of ‘Eurological’ and ‘Afrological’ are intended to denote two distinct (but not rigidly binaristic) ways of thought and practice with regard to improvisation. As Lewis himself says, these categories are ‘historically emergent rather than ethnically essential, thereby accounting for the reality of transcultural and transracial communication.’¹⁴⁹

Eurological: Modernism, the Euro-American Avant-Garde and Blowing up the Past

¹⁴⁹ Lewis in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 133.

The following examples will be given in order to draw out key aspects of what has been termed a Eurological approach to music and improvisation.

John Cage.

When Cage opens the door to the concert hall to let the noise of street in, he is regenerating all of music: he is taking it to its culmination. He is blaspheming, criticizing the code and the network...He is announcing the disappearance of the commercial site of music: music is to be produced not in a temple, not in a hall, not at home, but everywhere; it is to be produced everywhere it is possible to produce it, in whatever way it is wished, by anyone who wants to enjoy it.¹⁵⁰

This account of John Cage's infamous 4'33" performance by Jacques Attali presents a typically romanticised version of Cage's impact and his intention. It is certainly the case that Cage's work, not least in 4'33" presents an influential criticism of certain aspects of dominant conceptions of music, and it presented a radical challenge for Western art Music in terms of where music is allowed, who can participate and how we even define Music itself. However, the second part of this quote by Attali attributes an anarchical attempt to go beyond all restrictive notions of musical participation and open music up to all sounds. But, in the very next sentence, Attali quotes Cage as saying the composer of music should 'give up the desire to control sound, clear his mind of music, and set about discovering means to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments.'¹⁵¹

This description by Cage introduces a more accurate account of a certain set of restrictive ideologies Cage himself imposed upon his conception of music, to which he tentatively termed 'organised sound'.¹⁵² Or, as Douglas Kahn says of Cage: 'When he hears music everywhere, other phenomena go unheard. When he celebrates noise, he also promulgates noise abatement. When he speaks of silence, he also speaks of silencing'.¹⁵³ Kahn's primary criticism in this regard is that despite appearing to open music up to all sounds, he remained rigidly contemptuous of what he deemed expressions of the ego,

¹⁵⁰ Attali, *Noise*, 136-137.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 137.

¹⁵² John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Hanover, Wesleyan University Press, 1961) 3.

¹⁵³ Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, Mass, 1999) 163.

self-identity, or self-expression. Of Beethoven, he asks 'Are sounds just sounds or are they Beethoven?'; of Varese he says 'Rather than dealing with sounds as sounds, he deals with them as Varese'.¹⁵⁴ On his restrictive notion of 'jazz', Cage critiques self-expression and identity: 'the form of jazz suggests too frequently that people are talking...If I am going to listen to a speech then I would like to hear some words'.¹⁵⁵

George Lewis's critique of Cage is on multiple fronts, but his identification of Cage as betraying his own, as he calls it, 'rhetorical' principles, is exemplary. At various points, Cage expresses sentiments that would seem to be in keeping with Attali's presentation of an opening up of music to all sounds, all people, all things. For instance, when he says 'when I think of a good future it certainly has music in it but it doesn't have one kind ... it has all kinds',¹⁵⁶ and that 'it goes without saying that dissonances and noises are welcome in this new music. But so is the dominant seventh chord if it happens to put in an appearance'.¹⁵⁷ Lewis is of the mindset that these types of comments are rhetorical devices, but in practice they do not find voice in Cage's application. Instead, there is an overwhelming suffocation of restrictive ideology imposed upon musical engagement based as it is within Cage's 'campaign against ego investment'.¹⁵⁸ For Lewis, 'it is clear that Cage has drawn very specific boundaries, not only as to which musics are relevant to his own musicality but as to which musics suit his own taste'.¹⁵⁹ The rhetorical devices are such that they allow the theoretical inclusion of certain musics in the soundscape, but not within Cage's own remit. His 'all sounds' agenda is more realistically *some sounds for me, some sounds for others*, in a similar way to how the London-centric political and media economy in the UK define The North as a nice place for *other* people to live. I digress. More specific to Lewis's argument however, is the relation Cage has to the primarily European tradition in which he studied, critiqued, and composed. Lewis makes his argument as such:

In terms of social location, composers such as Cage...located their work as an integral part of a sociomusical art world that explicitly bonded with the

¹⁵⁴ Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 164.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ George Lewis, 'Improvised Music after 1950' in Ajay Heble, Daniel Fischlin, *The Other Side of Nowhere* (Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University Press, 2004) 223.

¹⁵⁷ Cage, *Silence*, 11.

¹⁵⁸ Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 165.

¹⁵⁹ Lewis in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 138.

intellectual and musical traditions of Europe. The members of this art world, while critiquing aspects of contemporary European culture, were explicitly concerned with continuing to develop this "Western" tradition on the American continent.¹⁶⁰

This is a very useful critique to explore, since Cage is so typically romanticised as a champion of critique against the fundamental structures of Euro-centric Western Art Music, yet contributes pivotally to what becomes a Euro-American conception of the avant-garde. It is relevant then to now look at the concept of 'Eurological. Lewis explains that the concept of Eurological on a fundamental level, grows from a notion of composition that relies on a fixity of sonorous material into purely written, notated form. This concept receives a prototypal example in Carl Dahlhaus' notion of composition, which he himself identifies as 'European' in nature and states that it must comprise of five different parts in order to be legitimately called composition: 1. An 'individually complete structure in itself', 2. 'This structure must be fully worked-out', 3. 'It is fixed in written form', 4. The performance must be made up of this written form, 5. 'What is worked out and notated must constitute the essential part of the aesthetic object that is constituted in the consciousness of the listener'.¹⁶¹

That John Cage forged an initial critique against this particular notion of fixed composition is without doubt, but what Lewis articulates is an underlying belief system that ties Cage to a certain Eurological mind-set, a mind-set that allows him to reconstruct aspects of this system of composition, resurrecting Eurological modes of thought in the process. Cage's work as a whole seems to initially create oppositions to Dahlhaus' notion of composition. Cage presents compositions and performance pieces that are deliberately intended to not be complete in themselves, but to be completed by the environment at the time of performance; by virtue of this, the structure this takes will only be worked out at this time; while aspects might be in written form, often the performance is not made up of this as such. However, as we saw in chapter 1, to create oppositions is not necessarily to create difference. It is perhaps easy to romanticise the radical opposition Cage creates in response to the Western art tradition (in which he

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 136.

studied). However, by focussing on this opposition, we fail to see the underlying similarities and affinity with that which it 'opposes'. For example, in *4'33"*, despite the surface level aesthetic of spontaneous engagement with 'silence', it is ultimately the fully worked out aesthetic 'idea' of *4'33"* that is overwhelmingly discussed and considered the essential object for the listener. There is also an internal unity to the compositional concept and idea that remains completely static and fully worked out. Who actually talks about or engages with the sounds or music in a *4'33"* performance? If anything the audience tend to be even more silent than they are in a conventional performance. One could argue that this reception betrays Cage's intention, but what else could he have expected? To remove the importance of real-time agency, interaction and history, focussing instead on 'sounds themselves', people will of course feel like they should be as uninvolved as possible. What results may not be a literal silence (such a thing being of course impossible), but instead you can often hear a more manufactured silencing of people.¹⁶² What results is a conceptual piece with little evidence of social relevance for communities involved with socio-musical activism.

This way of working for Cage allows him to challenge certain conceptions of Eurological composition, while re-enforcing others. For instance, where does this leave improvisation? Attali spends most of his book making the case for improvisation as the key site for socio-musical activism, yet doesn't appear to see the significance here of Cage's relation to it. Cage hated improvisation, at least the Afrological approach. He hated the idea of sounds reflecting personality, sounds reflecting histories, styles, memories. He sought 'the new' through an eradication of individual agency and human-centred sonic interactions. Take these comments from an interview with Cage:

When I hear what we call music, it seems to me that someone is talking, and talking about his feelings or about his ideas...but when I hear traffic...I don't have the feeling that anyone is talking, I have the feeling that sound is acting, and I love the activity of sound. What it does is it gets louder and quieter and it gets higher

¹⁶² 'John Cage – 4"33', *You Tube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY7UK-6aaNA> (14th December, 2013).

and lower and it gets longer and shorter. It does all of those things, which I'm completely satisfied with. I don't need sound to talk to me.¹⁶³

While some will claim that the historical circumstances of a post-war European emphasis on forgetting the past may be the influential factor in such Euro-American avant-garde ideas such as these. However, such a position in its attempted silencing of voice is an all-too convenient, all-too privileged ability to allow the past to be forgotten. It is such a position that leads Paul Attinello to say the following about what became known as the modernist avant-garde:

So much avant-garde music of the 1950's and 1960's, which was said to be designed to leave behind the past (whether the past of music, the past of Europe, or the past of bourgeois stability), is more a constantly refashioned attempt to blow up that past.¹⁶⁴

I would suggest that to 'blow up the past', is a particularly self-indulgent rhetoric from a Euro-American perspective which has a past to hide, the legacy of slavery, colonialism and fascism. To conceive of the avant-garde and of modernism through these terms is to engage in an exnomination,¹⁶⁵ which paints it as white Euro-American only, while simultaneously pretending the situation is 'just the way it is' objectively. To include Afrological free jazz for instance of mostly black African-Americans in this would mean dealing with the traditions you've just negated, the past you've just blown up! Cage's approach (and the Eurological approach in general) obscures Afrological approaches to the avant-garde, whose histories are automatically viewed as expendable and inferior to the histories of mostly Europeans which can now be reinvented (with the past a figment of collective amnesia). In Cage's dogmatic pursuit of an erasure of 'intent', 'ego' and a disavowal of human past, we see in his musical approaches a lucid example of the Eurological approach to modernism and the avant-garde.

This approach is in my view not at all a radical departure from core principles of Western art music, but more accurately the logical extension of a history that had culminated in

¹⁶³ 'John Cage about Silence', *You Tube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcHnL7aS64Y> (14th December, 2013).

¹⁶⁴ Attinello, *Passion/Mirrors*, 156.

¹⁶⁵ Another core concept explored by Lewis in 'Improved Music Since 1950'.

the work of Arnold Schoenberg (with whom Cage studied), who himself, guarding against claims that serial music wasn't 'musical' said that what he was doing was the logical development of tonality and was 'perfectly musical, and one day you will catch up and understand me.'¹⁶⁶ He was absolutely right of course - Schoenberg's musical system worked according to the same fundamental principles of internal unity and representative form that is required for the standard Dahlhaus' conception of Eurological music. Cage took this a step further of course, but ultimately provides a retrenchment and reconstruction of an even deeper core principle of Western art music, the composer's conceptualisation of the autonomous aesthetic object, to the extent that the framing of every performance has been pre-determined and since the specific instructions are for the performers' impact to be diminished, and since the audience are still situated within their traditional role as silent observers, Cage's pieces still reflect the orthodox definition of composition referenced earlier by Carl Dahlhaus: *What is worked out and notated must constitute the essential part of the aesthetic object that is constituted in the consciousness of the listener*. Although the notation element is not necessarily important here, the worked-out aspect is very much the essential part of the aesthetic object and constitutes the consciousness of the listener throughout. I would therefore conclude in contrast to Attali, that 4'33" in particular, is far from blaspheming and allowing anyone to make music anywhere they want, but instead, Cage merely continues the tradition of musical autonomy in which music is deprived of any meaningful social value. All of the danger of real-time chaos has been removed in advance. Cage intends, in my view, to get 'accidental' sounds from the audience, and from the social environment.¹⁶⁷ Their discomfort is more important than their comfort, enjoyment, or engagement in making their own music. In doing so, he places more pressure on their disengagement with producing sounds, on their 'silence'. As an idea it becomes an interesting museum artefact, a conceptual piece for those with that bourgeois sensibility it was meant to 'blow up' to discuss over vintage wine, but as a piece that would do what Attali thought it could do, it monumentally fails, because its social relevance is (I would argue intentionally) made redundant from the start.

¹⁶⁶ Arnold Schoenberg in Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1962) 15.

¹⁶⁷ Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage* (New York, Routledge, 2003) 70.

Chance and Improvisation

In the article 'Improvised Music after 1950' George Lewis makes the point (and cites Anthony Braxton and Tom Johnston doing the same), that Cage's usage of terms like 'Chance', 'Aleatory' and 'Indeterminism' are almost deliberate attempts to not use the term 'improvisation', as Johnston says: 'Cage began referring to work indeterminate of its performance because to have called his work 'improvisations' would have implied that the performers were not guided by goals and rules.'¹⁶⁸ Again, this might help explain those aspects of Cage's compositions that reinforced Eurological modes of fixity on a deeper level, all the while appearing to challenge them on the surface. What's more static and predictable than the super-rule that says break all rules? Lewis and Braxton suggest that chance and improvisation are more closely linked than Cage seems to think. However, Gary Peters takes an entirely different point of view in his book *The Philosophy of Improvisation* and on this issue I tend to agree with Peters. He argues that if chance aims to emancipate the contingency of art, its method of doing so is intrinsically limited by virtue of not being improvisation:

Surely, in spite of all claims to the contrary, it is precisely chance...that fails to emancipate contingency, fails, that is, to emancipate it from itself. Contingency is emancipated not by stepping aside and leaving it to the determination of fate, but, rather, by setting it free into a situation that is fundamentally set against the contingent, as is improvisation. If (as he does) Berio finds Cage's work boring this is because it does not emancipate contingency but leaves it imprisoned within the fixity of its own pointless and all-too-predictable unpredictability...Of course, improvisors themselves are often guilty of confusing their own art with the aleatoric, a fact that can obfuscate the actual role of chance within improvisation, which should always be thought of as a beginning rather than an end.¹⁶⁹

Peters goes on to add that unlike 'chance', in improvisation it is the performer who tends to negotiate the content of the performance (albeit in varying degrees of control and conscious reflection), the performer who makes the decisions from one moment to the next – 'anything could happen but only certain things will, everything could be different

¹⁶⁸ Tom Johnson in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 154.

¹⁶⁹ Gary Peters, *The Philosophy of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 111.

but this time it will be like this'.¹⁷⁰ Eurological thinkers tend to view this as a fatal flaw, trying to build systems that forego the individual habits and predilections of each player, while Afrological thinkers tend to view this as a key part to finding your 'sound' through the various individualities in each group. If the aim of chance music is to allow the 'alterity of art the space to play', the way of doing this is not, as said earlier to imprison it within itself, or to stand outside of the work and point at it (as in Cage or Gavin Bryars), but to enter 'the space of the work and working ceaselessly to "unravel" it, with an ironic agility able to keep the permanent parabasis aesthetically productive and disruptive'.¹⁷¹ At the core of Peters' conception of improvisation is the idea that chance is only part of the process, as in most art works, but in improvisation it serves as a beginning, a starting point, from which the improviser responds in a constant attempt to preserve this beginning. If Cage is reluctant to use the term improvisation to refer to his experimentation with chance and aleatoric music, it could be because he already recognises (correctly I'd say) that they are substantially different. Lewis and Braxton's argument that this is somehow an intentional attempt to distance himself from improvisation, in some ways deviates from the more disturbing reality, that Cage perpetuated a mode of practice that not only wanted to strip performers of agency, history and memory (while bizarrely managing to retain the 'composer-god' conceptual complex as the essential aesthetic object) but also brought the dominant idea to Western 'art' music that 'chance' brought something more radical and unpredictable than improvisation could, when in reality the opposite in my view is clearly the case.

Stockhausen: Intuitive Music

In Intuitive Music, I try to get away from anything that has established itself as musical style. In improvised music, there is always, as history has shown, some basic element rhythmic, or melodic or harmonic on which the improvisation is based.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 109.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² 'Stockhausen: Questions and Answers on Intuitive Music', http://www.stockhausen.org/intuitive_music.html (15th December, 2013).

In this comment from an interview, Karlheinz Stockhausen displays the typical description of a certain perspective on improvisation that comes out of the perceived 'high-culture' of the European-centric Western art tradition. As we will look to later, this is also almost the exact same description of 'non-idiomatic improvisation' that Derek Bailey pursues. The interview as a whole reveals some very relevant ideas and perspectives on improvisation. The initial problem I have with this comment is, firstly, that getting away from 'anything' that resembles musical style is more than likely impossible when you consider the huge history and weight of cognitive musical input over a lifetime. To expect people to be able to switch off from their histories, memories, pleasures, instincts, sensual interactions is a highly improbable task, regardless of their training. More than that, why would they want to - to what end would Stockhausen like us to do this? His comments regarding 9/11 as 'the greatest work of art imaginable for the whole cosmos. Minds achieving something in an act that we couldn't even dream of in music'¹⁷³ are not only, obviously inflammatory (not at all softened by the full context and the attribution of the acts to Lucifer), but revelatory, in that they illuminated a perspective on art that, in much the same way as Gavin Bryars and John Cage would have it, the 'author' of the work stands to the side, outside of it, detached, pointing at its aesthetic value, shirking any responsibility from its production or social connection, while at the same time not realising that given the lack of agency attributed to performers, they, the composers automatically re-maintain the 'author-god' status. This is the binding factor in most of these examples - the removal of the performer's history, personality and idiosyncrasies from a rigidly pre-prepared performance space. That, in this instance, the 9/11 'performers' are victims 'dispatched to the afterlife' by an 'author-God', means that the 'art' becomes a crime for Stockhausen, relying as it does on victims who did not consent to losing their lives. Nonetheless, Stockhausen can relate this principle to 'art' as 'artists, too, sometimes try to go beyond the limits of what is feasible and conceivable'.¹⁷⁴ Re-imagining this act as some kind of final taboo of art says probably all that needs to be said about the destructive anti-social culmination of the Euro-Centric Art Music aesthetic.

¹⁷³ 'Documentation of Stockhausen's Comments re: 9/11', http://www.osborne-conant.org/documentation_stockhausen.htm (14th March, 2013).

¹⁷⁴ 'Documentation of Stockhausen's Comments re: 9/11', http://www.osborne-conant.org/documentation_stockhausen.htm (14th March, 2013)

The secondary problem is that when asked about the technical requirements for such 'intuitive music', Stockhausen said highly trained musicians were required to reach the level of 'intuition' required for 'intuitive music' and to avoid 'rubbish': 'for example, when one plays awkwardly, the intuition cannot work well; the tool, the instrument is not trained...then rubbish again results'.¹⁷⁵ Not only does Stockhausen again insist upon the standard tradition of performers being so technically proficient that their performance cannot allow for the slightest 'natural' accident emerging, but he also seemingly can't see the significance of how using only highly trained (or 'experienced' as he calls it) musicians will inevitably result in a certain production and standardization of musical style. As it happens, Stockhausen seems to inadvertently concede this point, in the following exchange:

Question: What I heard on your tape recording today was Western classical music. I could tell that it was played by people whose training was in classical music.

Stockhausen: What do you mean by "classical"?

Question: I could tell by the gestures that the players were socially sophisticated, people who come from this particular culture in which we now find ourselves.

Stockhausen: That is obviously the case. What shall I say now? I mean I cannot change the situation.¹⁷⁶

The fact Stockhausen accepts his 'situation' as inevitable, yet when talking about free jazz he says the following: 'It is "free jazz" because the word "jazz" means that a certain style is aimed at. Something specific is desired, which sets into motion that which is being played'.¹⁷⁷ Stockhausen's resistance to challenge his own situation, his own tradition and the self-definition of it, matched with his over-eager willingness to challenge other traditions, other cultures and their definitions shows a disturbing sense of what George Lewis identifies as a process of 'exnomination', whereby the dominant culture, in this

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

case the Euro-American canon avoids self-definition/self-identification by always looking outward at a target from outside of that culture. In most cases, this results in that old, dated divide between 'serious music' and 'jazz' or 'popular musics'. More specifically, a hierarchy is built between different conceptions of improvisation. Lewis cites John Fiske who explains the process of exnomination, as related to the use of 'whiteness' as a tool of power (but the framework of exnomination can be applied to other sources of power too):

Exnomination is the means by which whiteness avoids being named and thus keeps itself out of the field of interrogation and therefore off the agenda for change. ... One practice of exnomination is the avoidance of self-recognition and self-definition. Defining, for whites, is a process that is always directed outward upon multiple 'others' but never inward upon the definer.¹⁷⁸

I would argue that this same process is used by the wider dominant culture of the Western Art Tradition as it seeks to maintain and preserve a certain stratification of the musical environment through its elitist and restrictive musical ideologies, assuming always that its conception of music should be taken for granted and never questioned. Stockhausen's perspectives here continue to represent a particular conception of the avant-garde as Eurological, which specifically sets up exclusionary devices which diminish the relevance of non-Eurological approaches. We'll now turn to Derek Bailey and 'non-idiomatic improvisation'.

Derek Bailey: Non-Idiomatic Improvisation.

According to Larry Solomon, the 'fundamental ideal' of Eurological improvisation, is 'the discovery and invention of original music spontaneously, while performing it, without preconceived formulation, scoring, or content'.¹⁷⁹ As George Lewis says, 'buried within this Eurological definition of improvisation is a notion of spontaneity that excludes history or memory'.¹⁸⁰ The idea of an improvisation that creates 'originality' out of thin-air with conscious lack of reference to what went before. This is the crucial element of

¹⁷⁸ Fiske in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 140.

¹⁷⁹ Solomon in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 147.

¹⁸⁰ Lewis in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 147.

Eurological thinking on improvisation, that there is a conscious pursuit of 'the new' through a deliberate disengagement with stylistic frames of reference, or with what impulse or your sense memory might urge you to do. In this sense, it is a kind of overt attempt to retain a fixed cerebral control over the overall content of what is to come, a kind of meta-narrative, a super-rule that trumps all other rules, a dictatorship of freedom – *the only rule is that there are no rules – you must be free!* In this regard, "real" improvisation is often described in terms of eliminating reference to "known" styles'.¹⁸¹ It should not go unnoticed here that 'real improvisation' is also the terminology used by Theodor Adorno in his critique against what he saw as some kind of 'false' improvisation of Jazz.

Derek Bailey was a musician who had encountered, enjoyed and respected the musics of various cultures and traditions, and his book *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* (while being problematic in ways I will explain later) surveys various ways in which improvisation is used in idiomatic and non-idiomatic platforms. So, for Bailey, 'non-idiomatic improvisation' was just *one* way of improvisation, and his plurality of understandings regarding improvisation reflects the background of his musical experience. However, he is ultimately known for his promotion of this musical approach that is synonymous with the Eurological model that dominates most accounts of 'free music', implicitly and explicitly downplaying the significance of Afrological approaches to 'free music'. This is how Bailey chose to describe 'non-idiomatic improvisation':

It has no stylistic or idiomatic commitment. It has no prescribed idiomatic sound. The characteristics of freely improvised music are established only by the sonic-musical identity of the person or persons playing it.¹⁸²

This account presents the same problem that Stockhausen's account of 'intuitive music' does, though coming from different angles. Here, we see the same assumption, that it is possible to have 'no' stylistic commitment, and that the sonic-musical identity of the persons can somehow become 'empty' during performance. In some ways, at least Cage realised that this was impossible and so removed agency from the performance, whereas

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Derek Bailey, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* (Cambridge, Mass, Da Capo Press, 1992) 83.

Bailey's conception of free-improvisation is one that thinks emptiness of style, history, and memory is either possible, or at least a desirable pursuit during performance. There's a certain hypocrisy or at least contradiction in this model of improvisation, since Bailey makes a point of emphasising the importance of the sonic-musical identity of the performers, while at the same time insisting upon the pursuit of a 'non-idiomatic' performance, which automatically insists upon a certain conception of identity which leaves no room for pursuing a particular style or a particular musical memory. Also, 'idiom' if we go with the etymology seems to derive from 'one's own style', so it's difficult to see how something which is meant to have 'no idiomatic commitment', can also be 'established by the sonic-musical identity of the persons playing it'. Although we will come onto this later, it's important at this stage to say there is a huge difference between specifically saying the negative: *no stylistic or idiomatic commitment* and on the other hand, the more positive position of saying : *any and all stylistic or idiomatic commitments*. The negative makes a rule or a prescription from the offset that there should be no rules or prescriptions from that point onwards. This instigates that same kind of conscious disengagement with style, ensuring a kind of predictable unpredictability that ultimately diminishes rather than heightens individual agency. Again, like with Cage's *4'33"*, the pre-determined idea constitutes the essential aesthetic object, guiding proceedings, and to all but the very narrow, specialised circle at the core of these groups, the identity of each player would be readily interchangeable without much notice at all. I should say, though, that this narrow, specialised group probably have had their ears cleaned and trained by Murray Schafer himself, and of course have fully groomed beards to stroke efficiently.

While many people have made the argument for the apparent 'inclusivity' of this approach, since it seems to eliminate a lot of the orthodox musical rules that might restrict access to music-making, in practice, what tends to happen is that because there is little to no enjoyment that comes from the immediate reception or engagement with this music for total newcomers, it feels immediately alienating and abstract to new listeners, and so rather than being 'inclusive' it usually serves the opposite agenda. There emerges a huge gap between what the practice is said to do, and what it actually does in practice. It often becomes a site for highly trained musicians, a very narrow specialist

group of people to self-indulgently immerse themselves in their own concerns, an isolating, exclusive activity, often found in postgraduate communities of music departments.

John Stevens and Maggie Nicols

Search and Reflect, Community Music and Insect Improv

John Stevens was a major figure on the European free-improvisation scene since the 60's and his group the Spontaneous Music Ensemble were known for their prototypical Eurological quiet, disjointed and arrhythmic sound that consisted of lots of tiny sonic gestures and lots of space – sometimes referred to colloquially as *insect improv*. Stevens took this approach into his work with Community Music, where by this time he had developed a wealth of improvised exercises designed for workshops, later to be collated into the music workshop handbook *Search and Reflect*, which I have personally encountered at various workshops. Community Music was a youth music engagement project designed to develop young people's engagement with music through various outreach programmes and workshops in London estates, disability centres and various other community settings where people might not have had a chance to learn about or develop their musical engagement. Stevens' handbook of exercises however, as referred to, were largely contained within the domain of Eurological 'non-idiomatic' approaches. For example, Stevens introduces the 'Click Piece', in which the aim is to play the shortest sound you can, while the 'Sustain Piece' is aimed at taking deep intakes of breath and exhaling with a long sustained sound. Stevens also introduces notions such as 'scribbling' to try and encourage a kind of subconscious playing where the individual is not really thinking about what they are playing, and alleviates their self-conscious anxiety about what to play. All of these exercises, and more, are generally reflective of an approach to community music workshops that produce a detachment from familiar musical styles and/or habits. This 'freeing-from' what you already know about music is a classic Eurological tendency and in practice, Stevens' exercises in *Search and Reflect* tend to re-produce these characteristics.¹⁸³

The Gathering

¹⁸³ <http://www.efi.group.shef.ac.uk/mstevens.html>

Maggie Nicols is another key figure of the European Free-Improvisation movements' foray into educational workshops, utilising the exercises of John Stevens.¹⁸⁴ Nicols has hosted the long-term 'Gathering' since 1991 in which participants turn up and take part in informal playing in small groups. Nicols is closely associated with Stevens and the British and subsequent European free-improvisation movement of the 60's, 70's and onwards.¹⁸⁵ Again, Nicols style, approach and musical content is largely synonymous with the Eurological tendency to produce disjointed, arrhythmic and anti-stylistic pieces that are at odds with the kind of Afrological freedom-to embrace stylistic habits and clichés that is of primary interest here. In practice, you can often hear in recordings of The Gathering, moments of rhythmic structures being developed, a guitar phrase being repeated and even melodic vocal lines coming in, only to be disrupted almost as soon as they have begun (or perhaps when the performers have consciously realized what is occurring).¹⁸⁶ This is a classic and ironic tale of the Eurological – the only thing that is predictable is that the music will insist on being unpredictable!

Afrological: Cleavages of the Past, Living Through the Horn and Being Present in the Present.

The elimination of memory and history from music, emblematic of the Cageian project, may be seen as a response to postwar conditions... In such an atmosphere, the postwar modernist emphasis of musicians such as Cage on "the present," deemphasizing memory and history, would appear to be a natural response to the impossibility of discovering such antecedents on the part of those for whom the preservation of European purity of musical reference would be a prime concern. This response to historical conditions, moreover, may be viewed not only in terms of the more usually theorized postwar modernist desire to be made new through "negation of the principles of the previous tradition" (Born 1995, 40) but, again, with respect to the quintessentially American myth of the frontier, where that which lies before us must take precedence over "the past." On the other hand, the African-American improviser, coming from a legacy of slavery and oppression, cannot countenance the erasure of history. The

¹⁸⁴ <http://create-ahh.org.uk/4-2/teaching-and-facilitation/>

¹⁸⁵ <http://www.squidsear.com/cgi-bin/news/newsView.cgi?newsID=212>

¹⁸⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5bBKzG_UU4

destruction of family and lineage, the rewriting of history and memory in the image of whiteness, is one of the facts with which all people of color must live. It is unsurprising, therefore, that from an ex-slave's point of view an insistence on being free from memory might be regarded with some suspicion: as either a form of denial or of disinformation.¹⁸⁷

Lewis goes on to embellish upon important distinguishing features of the concept of Afrological practice, that differentiates it from the Eurological in fundamental ways:

Performer choice and “intuition” systems, as promulgated by Stockhausen and other Eurological composers, do indeed turn out to be somewhat different from improvisation in the Afrological sense. These systems...are designed to [mitigate], for the performer, the “terrifying prospect of being free to play whatever comes to mind”.¹⁸⁸

This quote in the final sentence by Christopher Small in his book *Music of the Common Tongue*,¹⁸⁹ illuminates the Afrological perspective and its emphasis on the freedom of performers to be given the existential agency to determine the direction of what to play, distinguishing it in important ways from the Eurological insistence on pre-defined concepts that dictate and impose certain systems or constraints, which frame the possible outcomes. Afrological improvisation is characterised primarily by the emphasis on personality and history upon one's own sound. And ‘finding one's own sound’ is crucial to discourses around Afrological improvisation, notably, in jazz. It is true that in creatively redundant areas of jazz, in which inspiration has been stifled by reductionism, players are valued typically according to whether or not they ‘sound’ like one of ‘the greats’. Derek Bailey critiques this side of jazz in his book and it is a common criticism by others with a Eurological mind-set. However, this is only part of the story of jazz, a very upside down, reductionist aspect of a practice whose emphasis on finding one's own sound, is more accurately an attempt to find one's own individuality. Sure, some people might say that such an emphasis on individuality will tend to lead to glorification of certain individuals over others – ‘the greats’, leading inevitably to imitation over

¹⁸⁷ Lewis in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 149.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 155.

¹⁸⁹ Small, *Music of the Common Tongue*, 302.

invention. However, consider these comments from free jazz bassist William Parker, for instance, who says: 'finding your sound is like finding your nose – all you have to do is not have it torn out of you...don't be intimidated by history, by all these greats – [people will say] "but how can I make a contribution", but [they] can't play what you do, they can't do what you do because you have a musical D.N.A...no matter how bad you sound, nobody sounds like you'.¹⁹⁰

Parker's sentiments reflect what I would argue is the core of the Afrological perspective, much deeper than any surface-level manifestation of hierarchy and competitive individualism. It is about nurturing and expressing what makes you distinctive. Such a proposition can be misinterpreted and misunderstood, but at its best, such thinking amplifies the idea of valuing difference, not by placing certain individuals on a pedestal above the rest, but listening closer and valuing what makes each individual different from each other. Take these further comments from Parker:

Is Charlie Parker one of a kind, or can we produce another Charlie Parker at will?
...yes, Charlie Parker is one of a kind...no, we cannot produce another Charlie Parker. We also cannot produce another you...we fail musically when we try to be something other than ourselves.¹⁹¹

This last line – *we fail musically when we try to be something other than ourselves* is the epitome of the Afrological approach at its core, especially the free and avant-garde jazz which came out of the 1960's. Earlier than this however, a storm of radical thought and practice was approaching jazz with new ideas that to this day remain at the core of what I see to be the revolutionary edge of an Afrological approach to improvisation. When Ornette Coleman came to New York in the 1950's and started talking about his musical approach to jazz being not about thinking 'in terms of chords, keys and scales, but only sound',¹⁹² and when he translated this through his quartet into a residency at the Five-Spot Café, this 'new thing' caused the kind of outrage, hostility, fear and excitement that, if it were part of European musical history, would have been the stuff of legend, akin to

¹⁹⁰ 'Billy Bang & William Parker - workshop at MOZG -part6', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OsO1NXXJERs> (6th January, 2014).

¹⁹¹ William Parker, *Who Owns Music* (New York, Buddy's Knife, 2008)66.

¹⁹² 'The Adventure: On Free Jazz and Ornette Coleman', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swJ-BZyClh8> (14th January, 2014).

Stravinsky's 'riot' for instance. Coleman was slated by some, punched by others (a famous backstage incident involving Max Roach) and celebrated by most, eventually. This celebration took its time. Many in the jazz world were suspicious. Charles Mingus, for instance, said this: 'if the free-form guys could play the same tune twice, then I would say they were playing something...Most of the time they use their fingers on the saxophone and they don't even know what's going to come out. They're experimenting'.¹⁹³ Writer Albert Murray said this:

Ornette Coleman came up and said this is free jazz, but what is freer than jazz...why [would] anyone would want to free it, because the whole idea of art is to create a form which is a bulwark against entropy or chaos. That is the function of jazz, it is not to be form less, and be totally self-indulgent, I want to go this way or that way, that is like embracing the waves in the sea, you cannot embrace entropy, you cannot embrace chaos¹⁹⁴

This was precisely the kind of criticism Coleman and the free jazz movement was to suffer, the idea that this approach was deviating from the entire function of jazz, music and art, which is to create a form, a solid structure, an internal unity, all of the things we discussed in chapter 1. More than that, the idea that you cannot and should not 'embrace the waves' as Murray puts it. Ironically, William Parker has addressed this very analogy, but unsurprisingly, takes a different position on it:

When we start the concert...all the pre-thought gets washed away immediately, and then you're left out, like on the ocean without a boat...that's the feeling, like this big wave- what are you gonna do? Sometimes you wait for someone to do something, and they don't do anything...so then you do something, but you don't think about it, it just happens...And then somebody else does something... And then somebody else does something and the next thing you know, you've built a boat, in fact you've built a submarine, and then you're sailing these waters. And

¹⁹³ http://jazzmusic.in/body-and-soul-mingus-video_91918d05a.html

Although this quote is widespread on various websites, I have been unable to locate the direct source for this quote. However, given my research for this subject, I believe it is highly likely to be accurate, because a very similar argument is made from Charles Mingus and is quoted in the 2013 University of California Press book *Mingus Speaks* by John.F. Goodman.

¹⁹⁴ 'The Adventure: On Free Jazz and Ornette Coleman', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swJ-BZyClh8> (14th January, 2014).

as you go on, someone builds a sail, and then someone makes a telescope, until finally, you sight land.¹⁹⁵

These comments from Parker really sum up the kind of combination between taking the form of music as far as it is possible to take it, to the farthest reaches of chaos and unpredictability, while at the same time reconstructing and building spontaneous means of meaningful sonic organisation that can be enjoyable and relevant to people on a much broader societal level. This is what makes it a genuine alternative that standard, dominant Eurological approaches can't get to. It is a threat to the orthodoxy because it reveals at its core, the possibility for music to be both: truly anarchic and accessible; chaotic and popular; ambiguous and celebratory; radical and pleasurable. This is really what the core of jazz was always meant to mean. The history of the term jazz is contested, but etymologically, it seems probable, as most black music terms do, to originate in an active *doing*, in this case, a strenuous activity, perhaps sexual:

by 1912, American English, first attested in baseball slang; as a type of music, attested from 1913. Probably ultimately from Creole patois *jass* "strenuous activity," especially "sexual intercourse" but also used of Congo dances, from *jasm* (1860) "energy, drive," of African origin (compare Mandingo *jasi*, Temne *yas*), also the source of slang *jism*.¹⁹⁶

The function of jazz then, according to this origin has been hijacked, not by Coleman, Coltrane and William Parker, but by the likes of Albert Murray, Stanley Crouch and the conservatives who transformed it into a commodity form, packaged and properly put together, a solid noun rock to ward off the impending energy of the liquid verb ocean of what was more commonly called 'the new thing'. Coleman's beautiful and eloquent statement that 'sound has no parents - that alone puts everyone in the same room'¹⁹⁷, speaks volumes as to the particular approach to freedom that this Afrological 'new thing' pursued. As Burton Greene says of his work with Alan Silva's 'Free Form Improvisation Ensemble' of the early 1960's:

¹⁹⁵ 'Inside out in the open clip', *You Tube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Tw-Jdl-EVY> (18th January, 2014).

¹⁹⁶ 'jazz (n)', *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=jazz> (21st January, 2014).

¹⁹⁷ 'Interview with Ornette Coleman', *You Tube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CoPGDfMWfc> (21st January, 2014).

We laughed and smiled at each other and said “we don’t need a script do we to make music?” Not at all, no fly shit on the paper...we just sat down... listened and gone, and that was the glue in that music and still is the glue in the music. If you don’t know how to listen you don’t know how to play. You’ve got to get past your old little bags of tricks and your own clichés. They’re there to support you...but you’ve got to let them go. And that’s when spontaneous improvised music starts to happen.... As they say in theatre, you can’t be afraid to fall on your face. And maybe you do fall on your face...that’s when it starts to happen. Mistakes are pregnant with ideas.¹⁹⁸

Central to Greene’s argument here is the idea that spontaneous improvised music, no matter how crazy or chaotic it gets still depends upon an idea of *playing music* – a script isn’t needed to play music, but *play music* we still will do. In other words, there is retained in the free jazz aesthetic, a loose, idiomatic desire to *play music*. What that ‘music’ is can be very loose indeed, and not even articulated verbally, but the fact it remains as a vague idea, and the fact the music is open to so many possibilities, mistakes and opportunities through its dedication to improvised collective expression, is what gives free jazz its distinctive musical approach, quite apart from the Eurological. The title of this section for instance comes from Charlie Parker who says ‘music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don’t live it, it won’t come out of your horn’.¹⁹⁹ When people do this collectively, without the constraints of scripts, scores and fixed concepts, then you’re really talking about Afrological free jazz.

Afrological improvisors, as alluded to in the lengthy quote from George Lewis to start this section, view this interaction between past tradition and future innovations as crucial to the core of the music – as Coleman said, the point of the free jazz approach is to ‘strive beyond what we’ve inherited’.²⁰⁰ As such, there is a direct relationship between the core of the musical approach – living through the horn as it were, and that life’s particular social and historical context. As saxophonist David Murray says here:

¹⁹⁸ Inside Out in the Open Clip 2’, *You Tube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBHyWP5UTj0> (21st January, 2014).

¹⁹⁹ Lewis in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 158.

²⁰⁰ ‘The Adventure: On Free Jazz and Ornette Coleman’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swJ-BZyClh8> (14th January, 2014).

I strive to be, somebody that, 100 years from now, people would say...I heard David Murray, I heard Albert Ayler, I heard John Coltrane, I heard Archie Shepp and each one of them, they spoke of their generation at the moment they were alive...I hope, if I'm lucky, I can represent what's happening right now.²⁰¹

David Murray's comment above reveals some interesting things about Afrological improvisation. Provoking a departure from the Eurological perspective that the 'present' must become somehow empty of social and historical context, the Afrological perspective insists upon embracing it, that it must be lived through and through. For Murray, reflecting what is happening 'now' means being 'present' as a person in the sound that is being created, reflecting something of the energy and personality of the time in which you exist, which of course includes the history and memory that produced that existence. That feeling of *being present in the present* is something which is sharply denounced in the Eurological mind-set. What is key about this Afrological understanding of personal identity and personality, is that despite the individuality it presupposes, it is also deeply embedded with that individual's social situation – where they find themselves, their history, their body, their environment, their life. At times, Afrological improvisation can be so firmly in pursuit of place and time, that it is in danger of becoming rooted within it, and so for the improviser in these practices, the challenge is to remain agile enough to maintain distinct modes of expression that retain one's individual 'sound', while also reflecting the social situation in which they find themselves.

Again, as I alluded to earlier, these comments reveal how the Afrological and Eurological provide different interpretations on Modernism and the Avant-Garde. Afrological approaches for instance, as we have seen tend to seek originality and 'the new' through an interaction, development and extension of inherited traditions, emphasising performer agency and excavating past styles, using them to invent new futures, and ultimately, as Ornette Coleman has said, 'striving beyond what we inherited'.²⁰² This reflects less of a 'blowing up the past' as Paul Attinello has said, and more a kind of

²⁰¹ 'David Murray Documentary I am a Jazz Man', *You Tube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0d7riNjGI> (23rd January, 2014).

²⁰² 'The Adventure: On Free Jazz and Ornette Coleman', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swJ-BZyClh8> (14th January, 2014).

'cleavage of the past', as Will Edmondson has said.²⁰³ 'Cleavage' here reflects a parting of the past, which opens it up and allows its materials to split themselves apart and to form new futures. 'Cleavage of the past' in an Afrological perspective of Modernism then would be better defined as an "action of splitting along natural fissures"²⁰⁴ This etymological definition of 'cleavage' also has the useful inclusion of the word 'fissures'. I say 'useful', because, as I will go on to describe later, Kodwo Eshun has gone to great length to describe how certain jazz practices in the late 1960's and 1970's, which experimented with past jazz traditions and combined them with new electronic effects and technology was allowed to subside into the mainstream as 'jazz fusion', but the earlier, more underground aspects of these practices were more accurately described as what he terms a 'jazz fission': a splitting apart of two previously bound elements. This process I would argue is, on a broader level what is at work in the most radical of Afrological approaches to improvisation, especially the free and avant-garde jazz of the 1960's and 1970's. With that said, I would like to now take this opportunity to focus on what has been termed the absence of the black avant-garde, with regard to a combination of black musics that share an Afrological approach to Modernism and the avant-garde which have been marginalised or completely written out of the history of what has been dubbed a white-only space.

The Absence of the Black Avant-Garde

The comments from Paul Attinello that I quoted earlier regarding avant-garde music of the 1950's and 1960's 'blowing up the past' of Europe repeated certain dominant assumptions regarding the musical avant-garde that have consistently left out important black musical contributions. While assumptions such as these are sometimes not intended to deliberately leave out important contributions, they are at best a symptom I would argue of a system of ideology on auto-pilot, and at worst, a deliberate attempt to frame the avant-garde according to particular Eurological frameworks, which would be contested by Afrological influences. In terms of this idea of a deliberate attempt to frame the Avant-Garde in the image of whiteness, and in the image of a Euro-American canon, I

²⁰³ Will Edmondson, Lecture Notes, *Modern and Postmodern Musics*, Newcastle University, 2014.

²⁰⁴ 'Cleavage(n)', *Online Etymology Dictionary*,

http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=cleavage&searchmode=none (23rd January, 2014).

want to briefly return to George Lewis' critique of John Cage. Lewis identifies a sinister, disturbing character to Cage's critique against jazz. Firstly, reflecting the dominant ideology of the time, Cage re-enforces the dichotomy between what has been called 'serious music' and jazz' when he says: 'jazz per se derives from serious music. And when serious music derives from it, the situation becomes rather silly'.²⁰⁵ Lewis then goes on to reference a published interview between Cage and Michael Zwerin, in which Cage openly identifies at the start that 'I don't think about jazz, but I love to talk' before going on to state that 'jazz is still young, and still evolving; jazz could benefit from serious study of "our" models'.²⁰⁶ Lewis describes this as not only a 'blunderbuss attack on black musical culture' but an explicit attempt to 'exnminate' these biases by actually re-enforcing so-called objective musical terms and conceptions.²⁰⁷ As much as one might think that the historical ignorance and/or denial of African-American influence on Modernism and the Avant-Garde as an accident, or just 'how it developed', nothing could really be further than the truth in this particular instance. Writing jazz and Black music out of these histories was a prime concern to a lot of influential figures of the Euro-American canon, starting with of course Cage and Stockhausen. George Lewis also cites Paul Rosenfeld, perhaps the most influential American critic of the period who railed continually against jazz as he called it 'the greatest threat' to the American concert idiom. He said 'American music is not jazz...Jazz is not music. Jazz remains a striking indigenous product, a small, sounding folk-chaos'.²⁰⁸ And it wasn't just Cage who shared this sickening thought amongst composers of the time. Henry Cowell and Charles Ives also wanted to create the impression that jazz was somehow a deviant of American music. 'As a matter of self-preservation, Cowell and Ives both publicly and privately created competition for the minds of Europeans between American classical music and American jazz'.²⁰⁹ A letter from Cowell to Ives reads: 'It is unfortunate that we have gained the reputation in Europe of being able to produce only jazz – or conventional imitations of European music and music of a rather trivial order'.²¹⁰ There was a definite sense amongst key elements of the high-cultural Euro-American avant-garde that jazz was inferior and should be

²⁰⁵ Lewis in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 138.

²⁰⁶ Cage in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 143.

²⁰⁷ Lewis in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 143.

²⁰⁸ George Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009) 373

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 372.

²¹⁰ Henry Cowell in Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself*, 373.

demoted or written out completely. This can also be seen historically in the way in which terminology and musical categories come to be defined objectively Euro-American (and white), as Lewis points out:

Coded qualifiers to the word “music” – such as “experimental”, “new”, “art”, “concert”, “serious”, “avant-garde”, and “contemporary” – are used...to delineate a racialized location of this tradition within the space of whiteness; either erasure or (brief) inclusion of Afrological music can then be framed as responsible chronicling and “objective” taxonomy.²¹¹

Lewis points out something crucial here, that we have been taught a version of history that is damagingly misleading to the extent that it is primarily written from a white male perspective about white males (usually European and certainly Eurological) excluding or minimizing any notable Afrological or female influence and then ‘exnominating’ the political bias in this process, so that such interpretations just seem inevitable, the way it is, objectively (I will elaborate on the gendered nature of this situation later in this chapter). There have been many key writers that have been doing important work in showing us that it certainly is not the way it is, and their writing has uncovered a significant body of work that offers us a different take on the avant-garde aesthetic. Before I discuss this contrast, I want to explore the findings of Kodwo Eshun and Samuel A. Floyd in particular. If Lewis’s point that many texts on experimental music since 1945 amount to ‘an attempted erasure or denial of the impact of African-American forms on the real-time work of European and Euro-American composers’,²¹² then we should explore some of what is missing from these histories.

The AACM, The Art Ensemble of Chicago, The Black Artists Group, The Black Arts Movement, The Experimental Band, the New York Art Quartet; the Free-Form Improvisation Ensemble, George Russell, Alice Coltrane, the entire free jazz movement and the many varied composers that Samuel A. Floyd references in his excellent book *The Power of Black Music*.²¹³ These are just a fraction of the names not usually associated with ‘the musical avant-garde’ or any of the other terms previously outlined. Floyd’s

²¹¹ Lewis in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 141.

²¹² Ibid, 132.

²¹³ Samuel A. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

purpose then, with regard to the avant-garde is to explore the work of 'black composers within the context of the Americanist, neoclassical, and avant-garde ideas of the 1920's through the 1940's, and setting the stage for discussion of the works of black composers of the 1950's through the 1980's.'²¹⁴ More specifically to the discussions here with regard to what has come to define the European Avant-Garde, Floyd goes on later say that 'by the 1960's, several African-American composers were creating successful serial, aleatoric, and electronic works...the diversity of style and media in the concert-hall music of African-American composers of the 1960's is wide-ranging'²¹⁵ He goes onto reference various composers including William Grant Still, Hale Smith, Ulysses Kay, Olly Wilson, Wendell Logan, T.J. Anderson, David Baker Talib Rasul Hakim and Alvin Singleton. In other words, there were various African-American composers in the 1950's, 1960's and beyond working within the context of the aleatoric, the indeterminate as well as within the free jazz improvisatory experimentations.

Kodwo Eshun's chapter 'World 4 Jazz' in his outstanding book *More Brilliant than the Sun* explores histories of jazz music between 1968-1975 that created intersections between the traditional domains of jazz and those of electronic music to create what he calls 'Jazz Fission' (an undercurrent revolt against the more fashionable and mainstream 'Jazz Fusion').²¹⁶ The chapter focuses particularly on the work of Alice Coltrane, George Russell and Herbie Hancock (his most stylistically adventurous 1970-74 works, especially *Sextant*). Their music during this period is said to have 'generated the most audacious, ambitious and awe-inducing music to emerge from America. But today in '98... it is as if [it] never existed. Music has utterly retreated from the towering, overwhelming ambition of this era - just like Techno, Jazz Fission - America's greatest moment - has been utterly disappeared'.²¹⁷ The 'mutant textures' of 'world 4 jazz' is discussed in beautiful detail by Eshun, who suggests its creative effects would 'liquefy the stratification of sound'²¹⁸, by acting as a 'transmolecularizer' which fluctuates the steady states of organized sound. Seeping in from the 'futurepast', it feeds forward into the present, anachronizing

²¹⁴ Samuel A. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 11.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 207.

²¹⁶ It should be noted that Eshun creates his own 'fission' of experimental neologisms throughout the text and some will be referred to here

²¹⁷ Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun*. (London: Quartet Books, 1998) 01 (001)

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 01 (007)

everything it reaches'.²¹⁹ In other words, 'Jazz Fission' represented a particular period in jazz history which attempted to push beyond not just the dominant culture's oppressive restrictions, but beyond certain restrictions from its own musical traditions by helping to 'melt the hierarchies which jazz tradition works so hard to maintain'.²²⁰

Eshun's project is slightly different, if not contrasting from Floyd's, in that Eshun specifically refers to 'Jazz Fission' as liquidating certain solidifying (rooted) aspects of black music: 'unlike the Art Ensemble's declaration of jazz as "Great Black Music", Futurhythmic Fission treats the Tradition as *effects*, inputs to be fed into its giant Connection Machine'.²²¹ The traditions of black musical history are pulled open, revealing futuristic technologies in the most ancient of practices. As Eshun says the point is to 'groove-rob not ancestor-worship'.²²² This *melting, liquefying* of sound away from stratification would undoubtedly be interesting content for avant-garde musical histories, but as Eshun points out, these musics go largely unnoticed. For instance, Herbie Hancock's early 1970's work, in particular the 1973 track 'Hornets' from the album *Sextant* is singled out in the following way:

Seething, treacherous 19 min 36 sec futurhythmaze exemplifies the mutagenic matrix... Moving through the echoplex, constriction is cloned from a singular sensation into an environment that dunks you headfirst in a horde of heat-seeking killer bees. Listening becomes a chase through the thickets of percussion. Motile tonalities, origin unknown, swarm after you, bugging you out as they disappear around the edges of the rhythmaze, obscured by overgrowth.²²³

Eshun goes on to say that Hancock's 1974 piece 'Nobu' from the album *Dedication* 'invents hi-tech fusion, Techno before the event that opens a new plateau in today's electronics. Ignored on its release, *Nobu* compels a switchback in time as its forgotten past arrives from the future to scramble the present'.²²⁴ Eshun asks us to suspend belief

²¹⁹ Ibid, 01 (012)

²²⁰ Ibid, 01 (002)

²²¹ Ibid, 01 (002)

²²² Ibid, 01(014)

²²³ Ibid, 01 (006)

²²⁴ Ibid, 01 (011)

in a European lineage of late Twentieth-century electronic music (what he terms Alien Music) when he says:

Dissolve Techno's faith in Kraftwerk as the foundation of today's electronics, and Alien Music's lines of inheritance break up, go Wildstyle. With the collapse of Kraftwerk's consensual future, Techno doesn't die. It just loses its sense of itself as the definitive, single direction of music's future. Atlantic Futurism is always building Futurhythmachines, sensory technologies, instruments which renovate perception, which synthesize new states of mind.²²⁵

What's important here is the historical sense we have had imbedded, a belief in a definitive, single direction of experimental music's future, drawn as it is from a definitive, single, Euro-American lineage. This, I am arguing is false, and dangerous on a number of levels, some of them racialized. A significant danger here though is the basis by which particular conceptions of music, improvisation, freedom and community are defined through this biased history; the ways in which Eurological modes of operation are privileged at the expense of Afrological ones; and the ways in which this binary is allowed to become necessary in the first place. Before an analysis of how we move beyond this binary, I want to explore one other piece of work mentioned by Eshun. George Russell and his 1968 work *Electronic Sonata for Souls Loved by Nature*. Again, any description by me would be much less informative and interesting than Eshun's own beautiful writing:

Listening to the *Electronic Sonata, Events I-XIV* is like growing a 3rd Ear. The perpetual palimpsest of impossible events demands a new neuromuscular interface. You become a human Oncomouse, ear sprouting from your neck in a fleshy umbrella. Applied intensively, electrons confuse solids with signals and metal with information, mystifying the ear as sounds escape their acoustic body and shed their envelope to become formless. Space coagulates then crinkles, altering its density, convoluting perspectives until sounds reach you in

²²⁵ Ibid, 01 (011-012)

fractions and fragments. Your powers of recognition are shot to hell as you move through a baffling republic of indistinct matter.²²⁶

What is interesting in particular to me about this work is how it is clearly situated within an avant-garde, experimental framework of composition, but it uses the advancements in technology mixed with traditional African musical materials to signify upon, as well as depart into, distinctively new and interesting sonic worlds. These characteristics give it a distinctive quality amidst the Eurological dominance of this sound world, and as such, it is startling in its omission from that repertoire of musical history and most historical accounts. Russell himself is quoted as saying:

The thing that sounds like a marimba is actually an old African man and his two sons. An African lute is being used. A friend brought me a tape of Ugandan folk music so we just ran that through some ring modulators.²²⁷

And Eshun elaborates:

Electronics doesn't decant tribes from tradition into the present, because, Trad sonic technologies are *already* futuristic.²²⁸ The classical musics of the Ghanaian drumchoir, Balinese gamelan orchestras, Indian and Jajouka master musicians are what producer Kirk DeGiorgio terms ARTs - Advanced Rhythmic Technologies - already centuries old. The older the Rhythmachine, the more futuristic it is.²²⁹

There is a powerful association here then, between how an Afrological composer's sensibility informs their relationship with past materials in ways that do not attempt to 'blow up the past', but use it to go forward, to provoke a 'cleavage of the past'. The 'tradition' isn't used to root or trap the music into itself, stifling its growth and restricting its movement the way that someone like Wynston Marsalis might, but instead the tradition is used as 'effects', as a history to be worked with, as material for a future that is here now. To keep the music as a living force, a verb, not a noun. Hip-Hop sampling is just one fine example of this - there are many others.

²²⁶ Ibid, 01 (00-004).

²²⁷ Ibid, 01 (004).

²²⁸ Ibid, 01 (005).

²²⁹ Ibid, 01 (005-006).

What these writers and these forgotten histories give us, is a reminder that music is extremely susceptible to political and ideological histories that privilege certain ways of thought and practice over others; in this case a Eurological over an Afrological sensibility. Eshun's conceptual linkage between how these musics eventually changed their existence from a dynamic liquidating fission to a static solidifying fusion is reminiscent of Nathaniel Mackey and Amiri Baraka's usage of music as noun and verb. Baraka talks of the various ways in which throughout recent black musical history, what starts off as a genuine black music movement becomes commoditized by white musicians who shift its usage from an original relation to music, towards a relation to the market in which it is situated; from its musical use value towards its market exchange value:

Swing, the verb, meant a simple reaction to the music (and as it developed in verb usage, a way of reacting to anything in life). As it was formalized, and the term and the music taken further out of context, swing became a noun that meant a commercial popular music in cheap imitation of a kind of Afro-American music.²³⁰

As Mackey says:

"From verb to noun" means the erasure of black inventiveness by white appropriation. As in Georg Lukács's notion of phantom objectivity, the "noun," white commodification, obscures or "disappears" the "verb" it rips off, black agency, black authority, black invention. Benny Goodman bought arrangements from black musicians, later hired Fletcher Henderson as his band's chief arranger, and later still brought black musicians Teddy Wilson, Lionel Hampton, Charlie Christian, and Cootie Williams into his band, but for the most part black musicians were locked out of the enormous commercial success made of the music they'd invented. The most popular and best-paid bands were white, and the well-paying studio jobs created by the emergence of radio as the preeminent medium for disseminating the music were almost completely restricted to white musicians. "From verb to noun" means, on the aesthetic level, a less dynamic, less improvisatory, less blues-inflected music and, on the political level, a containment of black mobility, a containment of the economic and social advances that might

²³⁰ Amiri Baraka in Ajay Heble, Rebecca Caines, *The Improvisation Studies Reader: Spontaneous Acts* (New York: Routledge, 2015) 244.

accrue to black artistic innovation. The domain of action and the ability to act suggested by verb is closed off by the hypostasis, paralysis, and arrest suggested by noun, the confinement to a predetermined status Baraka has in mind when he writes: "There should be no cause for wonder that the trumpets of Bix Beider-Becke and Louis Armstrong were so dissimilar. The white middle-class boy from Iowa was the product of a culture which could place Louis Armstrong, but could never understand him". This confinement to a predetermined status (predetermined stasis), the keeping of black people "in their place," gives rise to the countering, contestatory tendencies I'll be talking about as a movement from noun to verb.²³¹

What we have here then is a claim that as well as certain musics being left out of written dominant histories, even when they are apparent, the musics themselves get changed; from fission to fusion, from verb to noun; from the interactive and improvised to the detached and pre-conceptualised. What I am suggesting, here, is as Mackey suggests, that, what gets lost, amongst other things are the improvised elements of the music; improvisation becomes a key site for political struggle in musical meaning and representation. In Attali's terms, it is seen as a threat, a potential murderer of music. So, if it seems like I am simply carrying out an inversion of a privileging of a particular representation of musical value, in some ways I am, while in others I do not intend to. This is, firstly, about re-balancing the scales, and as William Corlett has said about gender equality, sometimes when the power balance is restored to something approaching equality, those previously enjoying privilege immediately scream 'injustice': 'When women and men students begin to participate equally in the classroom, some overprivileged men feel that the women are taking over the class until they can learn how not-being-dominant can differ from 'being dominated'.²³²

If anything, this whole process is about resisting domination wherever it exists, and in music that means not allowing one position to come to define music itself. With that in mind, I want to quote yet again from George Lewis with regard his primary objective in his research:

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Corlett, *Community Without Unity*, xvii

To bring to the surface strategies that have been developed to discursively disconnect African American artists from any notion of experimentalism or the avant-garde...to shepherd young African American artists through the convolutions and contortions that were needed to construct this ethnically cleansed discourse [and] to reassure young black artists that if you find yourself written out of history, you can feel free to go ahead and write yourself back in, to provide an antidote to the nervous pan-European fictionalizations that populate so much scholarship on new music.²³³

Before moving onto the next section, I want to discuss briefly some of the ways in which differing perspectives on the avant-garde can impact socially and more specifically, the different ways that the Afrological and the Eurological seem to equate experimentalism with the social.

So now we go to the Parker dictionary of music, where I've asked for years everyone to redefine all musical terms...you take it apart and you define every term in that dictionary to fit your needs, because no-one owns music – nobody - nobody owns music.²³⁴

Perhaps William Parker is the best example of a free jazz artist that reflects the Afrological motivations and histories while ceaselessly attempting to expand roots and work towards the activist potential of this music to not only reach into new sonic territories but also, on a social level, to reach beyond specialised audiences. Parker, a double-bassist from New York is concerned with the social impact of this music and what can be done to dismantle specialism and exclusive notions of music. This is done exceptionally and poetically in the book *Who Owns Music?*

The following quotes from Parker say more than I can about his conception of free jazz:

How come a family can't go to a concert together, why is it always the aficionados and the die-hards, because they don't know that we exist...they have no idea how many ways a trumpet or drums can be played or the combination of words that

²³³ Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself*, xxxii

²³⁴ William Parker, Keynote Speech, '2013 Guelph Jazz Festival Colloquium', McDonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, 2013.

can be put together to really enrich their lives...we don't get a chance to speak to them.²³⁵ There's always a thing about trained and untrained musicians. I have nothing against anybody who picks up a bass. They want to make a gig on Tuesday; be my guest. It's not for me to say, you haven't trained, you don't know music. That's your business. If you can play the instrument and it works, go ahead and play. There's no fear of the mysteries that you will find in music. It can only be a joy when someone else is trying to participate in the music. Either the music will fly or float, and no matter what I say or don't say. Many people are saying he's playing by ears, he's just improvising, but little kids all over the world are picking instruments and just playing. There's no such thing as music police, saying this is music, this is not music. Everything is valid.²³⁶

This recognition of music's social relevance (or lack of it in most cases) and the recognition that this music should not be kept away from wider audiences because of a perceived inaccessibility, but should instead be encouraged more in social situations precisely because of what it can offer in terms of accessibility, is the exemplary position of Parker, something that is sadly too rare a perspective, even within free-jazz circles. Free jazz is after all overwhelmingly played by highly trained musicians. Parker however reflects the kind of revolutionary perspective on music and social impact that I'll be wanting to explore more of as we progress.

To briefly return to the Eurological, the social aspect of experimental music derived from either the Euro-American avant-garde, or the European free-improvisation movement tends to be either non-existent, or experimental in a kind of objective sociological or scientific manner, meaning there is some kind of experiment happening upon social participants. Cage's 4:33" is an obvious choice already discussed. There are countless others. For instance, the student orchestra Portsmouth Sinfonia (co-founded as an art project by then-lecturer Gavin Bryars at Portsmouth College of Art in 1970) deliberately tackled iconic examples from the European Classical repertoire (e.g. Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture) with little or no instrumental training. Although Bryars made it clear he wanted

²³⁵ 'Rise Up Town Hall Meeting: William Parker Opening Remarks', *You Tube*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJZhrvjr8_A (16th January, 2014).

²³⁶ 'William Parker: Everything is Valid', *All About Jazz*, 2005, <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/william-parker-everything-is-valid-william-parker-by-eyal-hareuveni.php?&pg=2#.VCAagvldWSo> (21st April 2012).

the participants to try and play it as well as they could, and not to deliberately play badly, there nonetheless ended up a kind of tongue-in cheek element, with a chart single, L.P. and a performance-art aesthetic emerging into the popular domain as a kind of parodic gimmick more than anything else. As such, it belongs much more to a British comedic tradition that includes Monty Python and Fawlty Towers than it does to any socially-progressive musical revolution. Cornelius Cardew's 'Scratch Orchestra' is another obvious example, but again, limits itself largely to the Euro-Classical tradition in terms of aesthetics and discipline. Also, in setting up a kind of politicised opposition to the content of orthodox orchestras, while at the same time insisting on the retention of the orchestra super-structure as the guiding principle of organisation, he succumbs to the same terminal problem that Corlett outlined earlier, that of creating the ultimate assurance and stability of opposition without creating any genuine movement of difference. This particular kind of detached experimentation with the social is a classic method of Eurological practice, as it typically rejects outright the Afrological need for an embedded sociality to the practice. The social is mostly kept safely at arms-length, which is a terminally fated position to take if there is a genuine interest in revolt, rebellion, or a re-visioning of music in any socially-relevant, revolutionary way.

Free-to/Free-from

Keeping in mind the Afrological/Eurological duality then, I want to now explore another duality, which refers to different conceptions of freedom formed from the Afrological/Eurological duality itself. Despite this binaristic nature, it begins to open up what I see to be dialectical progressions beyond orthodox notions of musical freedom. It should be noted in order to make it abundantly clear, that the binaries of Afrological/Eurological as well as not being ethnically essential, they are also not intended here to represent two absolutely fixed categories with which all improvised practice must adhere to. They are simply two historical ways in which improvised practice has tended to be based and recognised, and later, I will explore in detail my own specific model of improvised practice which will think through its own perspectives, which draw upon, but hopefully extend beyond this binary.

Free-from

What Eurological improvisation is in pursuit of for the most part is a freedom-from what it sees as the constraints of various musical structures, styles and histories. Derek Bailey's 'non-idiomatic improvisation', or Karlheinz Stockhausen's 'intuitive music' are good examples of this. These Eurological approaches seem to be informed by a more broad, European-derived interpretation of the Modernist avant-garde as an attempt to move past aesthetic discourses of 'Author-God', 'Lone Genius' and 'The Greats'. While this can certainly be a useful creative approach to dismantle some of the hierarchies of authorship and ownership that can emerge, more often than not, it seems to fail monumentally, I would argue, by resurrecting its own re-generated hierarchies (sometimes looking extremely similar to those very aesthetic discourses intended to be left behind). In other words, often what ends up happening is that the 'author-god' complex is severed harshly from performers, removing yet more agency from their already limited stock, while resurrecting more trenchant authority in the composer, as in Cage and Stockhausen, or in the concept itself, as in Bailey's 'non-idiomatic improvisation'.

Take Cage's *4'33"*, which should technically 'on paper' be a radical statement that would give power to the audience to make their own interpretations and their own music, yet it remains Cage the composer and his aesthetic, a conceptual idea which is overwhelmingly identified with the piece and perceived as holding the value of it. In terms of the musical freedom-from in these approaches, I would argue, again, that more often than not, what is produced and given to the world through these examples, is theoretically promising, but practically redundant in most cases. Free-Improvisation has overwhelmingly taken place in fairly isolated and isolating environments, from postgraduate music communities, to damp disused performance-art spaces, to invite-only house gigs. More often than not, this practice remains a music for musicians' specialism, in which any audience member is almost always an aficionado of the practice, already initiated. What results is typically a kind of tightly-knit community, within which technically anyone could join, but the modes of operation and the musical content is such, that no-one outside tends to want to. This has been the nature of realisation for me and the reasons behind free-improvisation's spectacular fall from grace in my head as a potentially revolutionary practice whose freedom lacks wide social meaning and value. The term 'free-

improvisation' has been so inextricably connected to 'non-idiomatic improvisation' that it becomes very difficult to change this perception in people's minds, and the freedom-from, instead of being liberating, tends to be a deceptive set-up from the start. I mean by this, that you are only liberated by this if you already feel constrained by whatever musical structures and styles have been inhibiting you, meaning you are a trained musician, probably highly-trained and sick of the rigid technicality of your experience as a session musician or whatever other 'professional' job you spend your time on. This was precisely Derek Bailey's experience and inspiration for this approach. What I'm getting at of course is that the scales are tipped from the start. The proponents of Eurological free-improvisation have developed a system for playing, which on the surface looks extravagant and revolutionary, but on a deeper level reflects a maintenance of modes of operation that suit the agenda of tired 'professional musicians' but do little to suggest this music could have any major revolutionary impact as socio-musical activism.

Eddie Prévost's weekly improvised music workshop for instance is a great example. It is a tremendous achievement that this has been going for nearly 15 years, and in principle anyone can turn up and play, regardless of experience or training, which should in principle be worth celebrating. However, in many ways, this very idea of technically opening the doors to anyone to join a group whose very modes of operation are initially antagonistic to them and show very little sign of having any long-term relevance to them is more damaging in some ways than just leaving the door closed in the first place. I say this because politically you then create the impression that this is what 'outsider' music is; this is what the 'outside' is defined by; this is what is possible to do on the 'outside'. This damages people's perception of what improvised music can offer them, and therefore damages the potential of improvisation as socio-musical activism. The following quote from Prévost on 'free jazz' reveals in a more direct way the conflict between the contrasting musical approaches of these two approaches to free-form improvisation, in terms of the free from/free-to duality:

Some exponents of "free jazz" clearly use a fiery declamatory technique to try and push themselves beyond conscious formulation. There are other ways of doing things. And the fact that, in my opinion, free jazz is now a rather tired medium perhaps points to the redundancy or inadequacy of this technique. I would rather

take the creative situation to another place. A more thoughtful, a more reflective engagement.²³⁷

Prévost is articulating here in musical terms the tendency for free jazz, especially in the 1960's and early 1970's to respond to the positive freedom-to in ways that typically were expressed with high-intensity, as opposed to the more spacious sound-world that emerged from the European free-improvisation movement at the same time. It is possible to accept that the positive-freedom model of free jazz could at its worst end up with an extreme and off-putting approach, but this would be the exact same way of saying the negative freedom-model at its worst also ended up with an extreme and off-putting approach. At least that's a diplomatic way of commenting upon the above quote, which in reality is a dangerously misleading and inaccurate account of the situation. Firstly, Prévost's whole elevation of a more 'thoughtful', 'reflective' and cerebral approach plays into that old idea of a 'serious' music and is ultimately a very offensive and condescending remark, given the hugely impressive skills and ability involved with free jazz's negotiation between tradition and innovation. Furthermore, it also re-instigates the old divide between 'mind' and 'body', suggesting that the body can and should be limited from the excesses it can instigate, and that what makes improvisation superior or special is its ability to communicate and express what makes humans themselves above 'the beasts', as Sebastian Lexer (a European improvising pianist), drawing on the work of Giorgio Agamben (an European philosopher), says: 'what separates us from the beasts is our ability to not do, to be free not to actualize any given potential, to choose the path that isn't inevitable... As visceral as improvisation often seems, it's a considered process, not mere instinctual reaction'.²³⁸ This re-separation of mind/body, is both a naïve understanding of the well-stated integration of mind/body (something I would argue is lucidly expressed through a practice such as free jazz), but also imposes further unnecessary restrictions, which bizarrely hinders development and experimentation by restricting the ability to negotiate complex relations between improvisation and groove. As Kodwo Eshun says here (though not talking about the specific practice of free-improvisation), regarding how such approaches:

²³⁷ 'Eddie Prevost: Master of Disorientation', *Vanita and Joe Monk's Monastery*, <http://www.monastery.nl/bulletin/prevost/prevost.html> (16th January, 2014).

²³⁸ 'Sebastian Lexer: Impossibility in its Purest Form' <http://sebastianlexer.eu/audio/impossibility/> (17th January, 2014).

Resurrect the premodern opposition in which the mind is bizarrely superior to the body. By frustrating the funk and impeding the groove, clever music amputates the distributed mind, locks you back in the prisonhouse of your head. Far from being futuristic, cerebral music therefore retards you by reimposing a preindustrial sensory hierarchy that shut up your senses in a Cartesian prison.²³⁹

Ironically, this specific idea of impeding the groove is often stated in free-improvisation circles, as I referenced earlier in a workshop I attended by John Edwards who had a huge problem with some participants initiating a short groove, or the lecturer who told students on an improvisation module that using a drum machine would make things 'banal'. Interestingly, this is the exact same terminology used in the liner notes to free-improv group AMM's album *Pueblo, Colorado* when a repetitive disco track interrupts the improvised session: 'a first take of "Radio Activity" had to be abandoned when a disco troupe piped up with something too banal even for comic deployment'.²⁴⁰ Practitioners of Eurological improvisation hardly ever engage in consistent repetition, even sneering at it in comical, derisory terms and instead consistently enacting the pressure of negative freedom's insistence on being free-from repetitive structures. The various 'free-improv' scenes are overwhelmingly dominated by examples where performers are consciously and actively denying groove, repetition and style constantly. So many performances happen like this. I remember one in particular, which is still painful to think of, because to watch someone like Han Benink (who is known for a much less serious performance aesthetic, and for exploring groove and repetition) to fall into a groove, only to extract himself violently at the quickest opportunity is, for me, a sad conclusion to what free music can be, and what Benink himself often avoids.²⁴¹ Such thinking makes a mockery really of the very concept of spontaneity and free music for most newcomers, as it creates a situation where, again, the concept or pre-defined system prescribes the parameters for what will happen. The pre-defined musical concept decides what will happen, and it becomes so predictable that the performers will always be at a slight distance from the impulse of groove, that they will always detach and disconnect from it at the earliest point. They seemingly have to show that they are above

²³⁹ Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun* (02 [022])

²⁴⁰ 'It had been an ordinary enough day in Pueblo, Colorado (1979)

liner notes' *Matchless Recordings* <http://matchlessrecordings.com/node/285> (15th March, 2013).

²⁴¹ Personal observation of gig at Newcastle's Literary and Philosophical Society, November 18th 2011.

it – above the ‘beast’ of an impulsive embrace of both repetition and agency, which is the same old high-cultural debris of the Euro-American avant-garde. This denies the very spontaneous agency that this approach is *meant* to exemplify. What if the best thing right now is to hijack this musical snobbery and re-route it to a warehouse rave, or a basement techno night?

Keeping this issue in mind let’s now return to another section of the original quote from Prévost: ‘free jazz is now a rather tired medium perhaps points to the redundancy or inadequacy of this technique.’²⁴² I wonder hopelessly as to what Prévost actually means by saying free jazz is a ‘tired medium’ whose techniques are ‘redundant’ and ‘inadequate’ - tired for whom? Redundant to whom? Inadequate to whom? Certainly not tired, redundant or inadequate to those in New York, Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Houston, Guelph, Berlin or Newcastle, where the free and avant- jazz approaches still play a central part in thriving scenes and organisations. For instance, David Dove’s ‘Nameless Sound’, which uses avant-garde improvised jazz to develop community workshops in homeless shelters, refugee communities and with school-children, most of which have no explicit musical training;²⁴³ or Montreal’s weekly open-air summer improvised drum-circle sessions, which have been running for over 40 years and attract thousands of people to the park, to join in with whatever sounds they want, to dance, to form splinter groups elsewhere, and morph into an improvised music and arts festival across the whole park; or in Guelph, where the annual Guelph Jazz Festival dedicates itself to music whose basis has a core intimate relation to the free jazz approach, and whose parent organisation the Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation has been running for over 20 years (and will continue to run for at least another 10, having just secured a further 10 year grant), offering various community based improvised workshops for people from different backgrounds. All of these scenes regularly attract interest from the general public outside of specialist avant-garde fans.

The way that comments like those by Prévost can go completely unchecked in European improvised circles is astounding. What makes them even more shocking is in reality, the

²⁴² ‘Eddie Prévost: Master of Disorientation’, Vanita and Joe Monk’s Monastery, <http://www.monastery.nl/bulletin/prevost/prevost.html> (16th January, 2014).

²⁴³ ‘Nameless Sound: Creative Music from the Stage to the Community’, <http://www.namelessound.org/> (18th January, 2014).

opposite is a much more accurate account of things, when you consider the social impact that negative free-from European free-improvisation continues to lack, in terms of extending beyond specialist music communities. Sure, the techniques of free-improvisation are still relevant as small-scale museum artefacts for aficionados and university lecturers, but as a socially relevant practice that widens interest from outside of those communities, this technique could easily and accurately be described as completely redundant and inadequate. More broadly, when you look at the kinds of community model created by organisations such as Tusk Festival, the Eurological insistence on the most radical, aggressive, violent, socially awkward performance environment means that you either have newcomers being invited into a space in which they will be made to feel uncomfortable without being prepared, or, much more likely, the only people willing to enter are people who already know about the conditions of the space, meaning that it is both totally specialist as well as totally redundant as a radical art strategy. To recap then, and to move on in some simple clarification, this approach to musical freedom of Eurological free-from improvisation generally consists of an assumption that no-structure, no-style, no-idiom is 1) possible through rigorous and conscious dedication to the pre-defined concept and, 2) desirable as an approach for performers who are interested in detaching themselves from their musical histories, styles and habits. Afrological free-to improvisation sees it differently and by consequence sees freedom differently:

Free-To

The definition of what free music is that you are free to choose whatever style you wanted to play, and it broke down to that it wasn't about style, it was about music itself....It's not no-structure, it's free to use any structure that you want to use.²⁴⁴

Most musicians don't like labels. They are more concerned with playing music than boxing it in a corner called style. The language is called freedom, the freedom to use all the sounds, all the rhythms, melodies, motifs, textures and

²⁴⁴ 'William Parker: Everything is Valid', All About Jazz, 2005, <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/william-parker-everything-is-valid-william-parker-by-eyal-hareuveni.php?&pg=2#.VCAagvldWSo> (21st April 2012).

colors that exist. Using them the way they hear, responding, interfacing, breathing together.²⁴⁵

These comments by William Parker suggest that not only can we find ‘freedom’ within structure, but that this conception of freedom is not about blowing open or forcing beyond structure the way Prévost seemed to suggest before, but more about having the space and movement to explore any structure that is needed, on the basis that this relationship with past styles allows us to relate to each other and our past. Does this interaction with structure restrict our possibilities or limit who can participate? Not according to Parker, who is talking here about what he enjoys most about ‘free music’:

The increased possibilities of what can be used in the music. When it is working, I can play almost any melody, rhythm, harmony, or sound at any time for however long or short a duration. I can superimpose layer upon layer of sound, change keys as I feel it necessary, in order to bring the music to life.²⁴⁶

The idea of a positive freedom-to explore any structure and any stylistic palette is a sharp difference from the typical Eurological negative-freedom from any structure and stylistic palette. In truth, it is not the opposite side of the same coin. As I’ve been saying, being opposite would only reinforce the fundamental notion of freedom. Instead, what I want to argue is that the positive freedom practiced by this aspect of free jazz begins to articulate a notion of musical freedom which works towards extending beyond freedom itself, since being free-to explore everything is not, as Prévost (and others) have said, an inherently ‘fiery’ freedom that has to force its way past constraints, but when taken to its logical conclusion can actually mean being free- to not be free, free-to not work towards the pressures of any particular conception of freedom. This however can also be distorted and interpreted to mean being free-to dominate, oppress or impose, and such a distortion is a betrayal by those communities who practice in that way. However, what typically precludes such oppressive forces emerging is the very premise of being free-to within the context of collective improvisation which requires that to be sustainable in the long-term, each individual must share the same opportunities for expression, or else the

²⁴⁵ ‘Balance Point Acoustics: William Parker Liner Notes’, *Bandcamp*, <http://balancepointacoustics.bandcamp.com/album/bpa-015-from-to-from> (21st January, 2014).

²⁴⁶ William Parker, *Who Owns Music* (New York, Buddy’s Knife, 2008) 61.

organisation will self-destruct. This is the same impulse that gives hope to existentialist-anarchist organisation in general, that there is a mutual benefit to keeping each other's freedom intact. As Thomas Flynn has said of Existentialist freedom and the interpersonal ethics of such a positive freedom-to:

My freedom is enhanced, not diminished, when I work to expand the freedom of others....my concrete freedom requires that, in choosing, I choose the freedom of others. And 'freedom' in this concrete sense means the pursuit of the 'open future' of others, that is, the maximization of their possibilities as well as my own. On this account, it would be 'inauthentic' to leave others in slavery or a state of oppression... a freedom wills itself authentically only by willing itself as an indefinite movement through the freedom of others.²⁴⁷

Or, to put it another way, because it starts from a positive, starts from where people are, starts by giving pleasure through exceeding past musical traditions, or 'striving beyond what we inherited'²⁴⁸, it enacts a fundamental revision of negative freedom and transforms that negative into a positive. As I argued earlier for instance, Eurological improvisation hardly ever allows for an ongoing repetitive structure to emerge for very long, but for Afrological improvisation, especially in the free jazz or avant-garde jazz scenes, this isn't the case. For instance, free jazz drummer Hamid Drake, who in his many partnerships, not least with William Parker, can be consistently heard engaging in a kind of groove and repetition that begins to approach something like Hip-Hop. Practitioners of Afrological improvisation enact a greater variation which shows a more fluid conception of freedom. The original free jazz movement, for instance, centred around the New York scene of Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Albert Ayler, Cecil Taylor (and their many band members and associates) who made their name through those kinds of 'fiery' positive-freedom performance styles; yet Chicago's A.A.C.M. responded by extending the principle of freedom set out by these musicians to a more all-embracing approach that had as much room for 'composition' as improvisation, but, crucially, using it as a means to expanding the field in which an improvisation, devoid of any stylistic constraints or

²⁴⁷ Thomas. R. Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 79-80,

²⁴⁸ Ornette Coleman in 'The Adventure: On Free Jazz and Ornette Coleman', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swJ-BZyClh8> (14th January, 2014).

anti-stylistic dictates, can be allowed to function more freely. A good example of this approach in its mature, relatively established state, would be Roscoe Mitchell's 1980 recording *Snurdy McGurdy & Her Dancin' Shoes*, which moves effortlessly between various passages of stylised pastiche, straight-up R&B funk grooves and the most austere extended free-form improvisation. I want to now look at some of the criticisms of this positive free-to freedom, whose key principles seem to antagonise these critics in the same way as anarchism does. Lots of people have become afraid of the word anarchy, I would suggest because of a significant misunderstanding of its principles and potential modes of operation. We will look at some of the criticisms people have made towards positive freedom improvisation based on this kind of fear, in order to try and dispel some of the myths and misleading interpretations that I believe stem from these criticisms. Anthony Braxton, an African-American multi-instrumentalist and professor (and erstwhile member of the AACM) who practices in the field of free and avant-garde jazz himself, has often criticised positive free-to improvisation, and tended to identify more closely with the A.A.C.M. than he did with the New York free jazz style emerging from the 1960's (although he has frequently played in this area too):

One of the problems with collective improvisation, as far as I'm concerned, is that people who use anarchy or collective improvisation will interpret that to mean "Now I can kill you"; and...[that] so-called freedom has not helped us as a family...[this notion] of freedom that was being perpetrated in the sixties might not have been the healthiest notion.²⁴⁹

Braxton is here quoted by Gary Peters in his book *The Philosophy of Improvisation* and although Braxton is regularly involved with players and thinkers from what would be associated with the Afrological perspective, Braxton is more sympathetic with a negative freedom – what is labelled as: 'the freedom-from freedom itself: the freedom-from the freedom to'.²⁵⁰ I think this is a misguided statement, since the sentence could just as easily be re-formulated to say 'the freedom-from the freedom-from', which would imply the kinds of oppression and dictatorship involved with something which imposes all kinds of restrictions from the offset. On the other hand, there is no inherent, pre-determined

²⁴⁹ Gary Peters, *The Philosophy of Improvisation*, 22.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

pressure, domination or oppression involved with the freedom-to -just because someone can scream into a horn for 45 minutes non-stop while not hearing anyone else doesn't mean that they will, or that there is any inherent pressure to do so. In these circumstances, small-scale interventions in the form of conversations can be as useful to change things as any – being free-to disagree then would be a similar gesture as being free-from being agreeable. However, being free-to disagree doesn't preclude also being agreeable when desired. This is a subtle, but crucial difference. It is said that the primary problem of positive freedom is the dangers of rampant individualism in the face of an absence of unity or collective frameworks guiding communal relations; or, in Braxton's terms, anarchy leads to the potential to murder someone. Again, I'll say that the possibility for murder is there always, anarchy does nothing to add to that threat. Just because someone 'can' kill someone, doesn't mean they want to, or will. This presumes a rather fated, deterministic account of human relations that doesn't take into account the possibility for individuals to recognise the mutual benefit of keeping each other alive. Of course, I'm using 'alive' here as a reference to the political and pragmatic fear of actual murder, but also as a musical analogy. Being 'alive' in collective improvisation can mean having a voice, being heard, without needing to impose that voice on others as means of oppression, but feeling able to contribute meaningfully. It can also mean allowing others to do the same, it can mean mutually contributing to a process bigger than yourself. The Eurological conception of free-improvisation as a double negative 'free-from –free from' seems to push itself into a corner in which it has to continuously keep pushing things away from itself, in order to remain 'free'. However, from the positive perspective, it is a more open process, being free-to connect to a collective experience that each individual directly contributes to in their own distinctive expression, as John Coltrane said about Albert Ayler and 'finding you're sound': 'It's not that I sound like Albert or Albert sounds like me; it's that we both sound like something that is bigger than the both of us, a cosmic sound'.²⁵¹ This something - this being open to the elements, to the waves, to the collective musical experience that is at once bigger than any one individual, but at the same time made up completely by the distinctiveness of various individuals, is the most crucial element of any anarchist organisation; the pursuit of the existentialist ideal of the maximisation of individuals' possibilities within a community that needs to retain this

²⁵¹ William Parker, *Who Owns Music*, 62.

ability for every individual in order to meaningfully survive – *none of us are free until we're all free.*

This all still sounds a bit too rosy though, I suppose. Of course, I understand Braxton's concerns and I know exactly what he is getting at. I've organised sessions where one person will dominate and oppress everyone else by sheer volume and ignorance. I've watched anarchist collective spaces become ruined by one person's desire to rule or oppress that space. I was recently at a concert in London featuring William Parker on Double Bass and Wooden Flute, Hamid Drake on Drums and Percussion, and John Dilkeman on Saxophone, and unfortunately, Dilkeman created a constantly oppressive sonic space by blowing into his horn at full intensity almost from the very start, right till the end, despite the other two players not really playing in this way. Or, another example would be the drummer who used to turn up to a weekly improvised session I organised and would play at full volume without hearing anyone else for 45 minutes, and then when confronted by the fact there was an unamplified violinist, responded by saying: 'well he needs to plug in'. Arms race, then. This shows in musical terms the kind of fear that Braxton was concerned about.

In social terms, take an obvious example like GG Allin, notorious for extreme Aktionist-style performance-art techniques, where he would routinely defecate on stage, eat his own faeces, throw it in the audience, physically assault the audience and self-mutilate, promising to commit suicide on stage (an act he didn't ever get to do, due to repeated time spent in jail for off-stage violence, against women mostly, and then an accidental heroin overdose which killed him off-stage). Here are some comments from Allin about his technique: 'rock n roll is not to entertain but to annihilate. I go through my mind like a machine gun. My body is the bullets and the audience is the target. I'm trying to bring danger back to rock n roll and there are no limits and no laws. I'll break down every barrier until the day I die'²⁵². As Jason Williamson in the group Sleaford Mods has said in the song 'Liveable Shit': 'GG. Fucking Allin - gestures of violence to anybody that can't see or hear them – that kind of prick, that kind of shit'.²⁵³ Sure, Allin and his followers might point to the political nature of his technique, but ultimately, the point of political 'action'

²⁵² GG Allin on Geralde (full show), *You Tube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wbej9YNg1yg> (25th January, 2014).

²⁵³ Sleaford Mods, 'Liveable Shit', *Divide and Exit* (Harbinger Sound, 2014)

is to *do* something, *change* something; but what did this technique produce, other than the usual intimidation, violence and oppression against the usual people (Allin was known for controversial comments of misogyny, racism and paedophilia). In other words, keeping the same fundamental power relations static, music used as a tool to continue to intimidate, oppress and be violent towards people. But what kind of 'freedom' is Allin practising here then? Braxton would surely point to an example like this as proof of the dangers of positive freedom and why a more negative model is ultimately more productive and protective of universal liberties and community. He's right in one sense that we need to avoid this model of freedom as much as possible. We need to rid it from our conceptions of the avant-garde and from 'free' music, from our lives and from our communities. At the same time, this is an extreme, and I would argue, distorted version of positive freedom. Like the Tusk festival example from chapter 1, all of those examples I gave, as well as the Viennese Aktionist performers, or the Futurist glorification of war, or various harsh noise scenes were all coming out of Eurological traditions and influences - we can see real practical oppression in both extreme forms of negative and positive freedom. For instance, one example of this in practice was an improvisation music module at Newcastle University very much in the mould of the Eurological free-from 'non-idiomatic' model. The idea was that students would take it in turns to 'lead' each session. One such session was led by a young African-American trombonist and percussionist whose training is in jazz. She devised a rhythmic exercise leading to a 'jam session', but discussions soon ensued and she was told by most of the other students that this wasn't appropriate, as set rhythms shouldn't be a part of improvisation, as it 'breaks with the sound continuum'.²⁵⁴ A heated debate ensued leading, ultimately, to her dropping the module, yielding a scenario wherein the remaining members of the class were thus cut off from a much wider perspective of what improvised music could be. Similar to the workshop example from earlier, this apparently ethical model of improvisation had intimidated someone from a jazz improvisation tradition from taking part by creating a fixed and rigid oppressive structure that she was excluded from. This is extreme of course, but it serves to highlight how this model of 'free-from' improvisation can enact similar forms of dictatorship and oppression as the positive 'free-to' models.

²⁵⁴ Anonymous postgraduate student comment, made verbally.

Perhaps then, what should be concluded from this, as I have said is that both models of 'freedom' have the potential for oppression and exclusion, and for damaging interpersonal relations. Maybe what is needed then is a more subtle, nuanced trajectory beyond both – a third space, that is influenced by biases towards and against the previous two models, but becomes distinct through its unwillingness to accept that enough has been done (at least with regards the pursuits of an un-Musical activism). Gary Peters has explored a similar possibility in his exploration of this division between positive and negative freedom. Regarding negative freedom, he says at its best 'such a pursuit can produce improvisations of great sensitivity and delicacy' while at its worst 'there can be witnessed what might be described as an escalation of sensitivity where virtually every mark interferes with or intrudes into the marked space of the other', producing a kind of 'suffocating harmoniousness'²⁵⁵ On positive freedom, he says at its best offers 'an approach to improvisation that does not stand on ceremony or wait nervously to be invited... but which is decisive, determined and often disruptive of cozy, considerate communities'.²⁵⁶ At its worst, however, it showcases an 'obliviousness to the other that also rushes headlong into boringness'.²⁵⁷ Peters posits a kind of third space, a rethinking of the positivity of positive freedom outside of these already-existent forms in the form of a 'nondialogical listening'.²⁵⁸ With this in mind, he concludes by saying the following:

It would no doubt be possible to judge the success or failure of actual improvisations in terms of their ability to originate and sustain dialogical forms that steer clear of the negative and positive poles of boringness that await timidity and arrogance alike.²⁵⁹

Peters' position offers us a useful way of negotiating these different conceptions of positive and negative freedom, by allowing us to see the potential internal oppression and dangers of both. However, his positing of a 'nondialogical listening' refers to listening not to the other performers as an 'artist/improviser', but instead to try and listen 'to the

²⁵⁵Peters, *Philosophy of Improvisation*, 54.

²⁵⁶Ibid.

²⁵⁷Ibid, 55

²⁵⁸Ibid, 56.

²⁵⁹Ibid, 56.

otherness of art itself, the silent alterity prior to all dialogue'.²⁶⁰ I think this idea veers off the radical path it begins on and I would suggest that instead of listening for the abstract concept of 'art itself', we become immersed into the sensual deep pleasure of beats, breaks, rhymes and every other infinite resource music has to offer. This could sound like the bridge of Lady Gaga's 'Just Dance', as much as it could sound like Frank Wright's 'Church Number Nine'. Total, anarchic collective improvisation, as deployed by an un-Musical practice recognises that 'doing what feels good' is the simplest and most effective place to start (this will of course be explored more comprehensively in chapter 3).

To go back to the contrast then between the views of Anthony Braxton and William Parker, I should add that I am using the words of these musicians and thinkers in order to create a trajectory for this discussion and I am of course aware that Anthony Braxton has played with William Parker many times, and I wouldn't want to create the impression that their views on collective improvisation are divisive or fatally conflictual. Quite the opposite as it happens. Improvisation, especially within free and avant-jazz communities has a knack for converging over differences much more than most social practice. People communicate their interpretations on collective improvisation and what it means to them in different ways, but it remains interesting to me that the way Parker articulates this seems to recognise a more progressive social politics towards activist ends, in particular the possibility of a productive anarchy, much more so than the slightly negative, deterministic view that Braxton seems to take.

To try and conclude upon this discussion of negative and positive freedom, both negative and positive can suffer from the pressures of freedom itself, the pressures to either be free-from certain superficial constraints, of structure, style and habit, or the pressures to be free-to explore everything all at the same time (chaotically). However, as I will argue later, because the free-to position starts from where people 'are', it is a better place to start, in order to identify in any given group where the oppressive forces lie, so the group can adapt and modify depending on those forces, rather than to create an oppressive structure from the offset.

²⁶⁰ Peters, *Philosophy of Improvisation*, 56-57.

Again, as I hope to have shown, Lewis' dual concepts of the Eurological and Afrological are not intended to be rigid binaries that cover every possible manifestation completely comprehensively, but they do offer us a useful lens to see how certain historical approaches to improvisation have manifested in crucially different ways. For instance, it's useful to keep these differences in mind as we progress: Eurological improvisation typically insists upon a musical approach with diminished performance style, habit, history or personality, where a super-rule typically exists that dictates that no rules will be followed, and by doing so ensures that the system or mediating musical concept guides what will happen through performers who consciously dedicate themselves to that concept. Afrological improvisation on the other hand typically insists upon a musical approach with emphasised performance style, habit, history and personality, where loose rules and guidelines exist which allow for the breaking down or resurrecting of any and all rules or habits, and therefore are meant to contribute to a musical approach in which performers guide what will happen through their individual agency, impulse and collective decision-making.

The core of such a positive freedom improvisation can be extended to even better reflect the principles of an un-Musical activism, as I intend to draw out later. To do so, it needs to work towards being free to play in the core Afrological perspective, but with even less pre-defined guidelines, meaning that whatever is decided internally is how things proceed. Now, of course most of the time this will be free-form improvisation, but, importantly, the opportunity emerges for it to become whatever the group want it to be. Since the individuals in each group decide completely for themselves how to proceed, the sound can be in principle, as chaotic and intense or as coherent and calm as the players decide. The reputation improvisation has for being predictable in its unpredictability is, I would argue, a fundamental Eurological conception (something Cage was criticised for before), but in the Afrological conception, the possibility emerges for even the most repetitive structures to emerge. Why not improvise repetitive pop or techno for instance? This is what many newcomers to improvisation cannot understand and will say things like 'but having no rules is still a rule, I wouldn't be allowed to play a tune etc'. But why not, why would you not be able to? It's only a particular idea of Eurological improvisation that has created this impression. In short, what can be

produced is the whole gamut of sonic expression, guided by an anarchical mode of socio-musical organisation.

What I have been articulating here is an attempt to extract potentialities from already existing historical approaches to improvisation. I accept that a lot of the time the practical realities may not match these potentials, but it is important to acknowledge that in the 1960's, an approach to socio-musical organisation was crafted by African-American musicians which continues to be the most revolutionary and progressive model I believe we have. It wasn't perfect, but I think we can extend this model and revive its revolutionary potential, and I intend to draw out this potential later.

Coding the 'free' out of Jazz: what's so difficult about difficult music?

If free jazz offers us the potential of a model of music-making which is revolutionary in its approach to socio-musical organisation, then, why is it so often referred to as 'difficult' or 'inaccessible'? This is the area of discussion we'll now look into, as there are misleading assumptions at work here that I need to dispel, before I can make the arguments I want to make in later chapters.

'What's so difficult about difficult music?' The title of a paper given by Dr. Marie Thompson in Newcastle upon Tyne at a local art festival; in the paper, she discusses how the term 'difficult' has been implanted upon musics of a certain experimental kind throughout history and some of the problems associated with interpreting these musics in this way. 'Free jazz' has suffered the fate of being labelled 'difficult', 'inaccessible' by some, while being labelled as 'violent' and 'ugly' by others. Some of the critics of jazz, who would label it 'violent' or 'ugly' are also the same critics who would diminish its influence and significance, placing it alongside other popular musics in an already well-trodden divide between 'serious' music and 'popular' music. As William Parker has said of this situation: 'our music is not considered "serious". This is a form of racism, classism, and cultural arrogance'.²⁶¹ In response to this 'cultural arrogance', those who tend to label it 'difficult' and 'inaccessible' tend to do so I would suggest in an attempt to try and salvage jazz's significance by presenting it as a 'classical' music' and placing it into the

²⁶¹ William Parker, *Who Owns Music*, 85.

‘serious’ camp of that same divide, thus further embedding that same binary hierarchy. Both have got it wrong, and I’ll aim to elaborate on this as we continue.

The terminology used against jazz as ‘violent’ or ‘ugly’ was repeatedly used about black music, most of the time to condemn, but even at times as an attempt to reclaim and articulate the abhorrent social and political conditions black musicians faced during this time and their artistic response to these conditions. However, I want to argue that although we must never forget the historical and social conditions in which this music emerges, as George Lewis insists upon, by essentialising the music in this way and attributing these qualities to it, we reduce it to a dependence upon the dominant culture; a repetition of the emotions that the oppressive culture imposes upon it. When we do this, we completely miss the revolutionary potential of this music. I’ll explain this further, but to do so I’ll need to repeat some of the more ‘ugly’ uses of this terminology by people such as Phillip Larkin, a poet and music critic who said this about John Coltrane’s emergence into free jazz:

It was with Coltrane, too, that jazz started to be *ugly on purpose*: his nasty tone would become more and more exacerbated until he was fairly screeching at you like a pair of demoniacally-possessed bagpipes²⁶²

Larkin’s close friend Kingsley Amis then said that Coltrane’s music ‘will suggest to you, in the strongest terms, that life is exactly what you are at present taking it to be: cheap, futile and meaningless.’²⁶³

Clive James said that Coltrane is ‘subjecting some helpless standard to ritual murder’ and the ‘full, face-freezing, gut-churning hideosity’ of his playing represents a model in which ‘shapelessness and incoherence are treated as ideals.’²⁶⁴ James goes on to say the political part of John Coltrane’s music ‘had to do with black dignity, a cause well worth making sacrifices for. Unfortunately, the joy of the music was one of the sacrifices.’²⁶⁵ Conservative jazz critic Stanley Crouch continues this critique when he says Coltrane’s

²⁶² ‘Ugly on Purpose: Such Deliberate Disguises, the Art of Phillip Larkin’, *Open Letters Monthly*, <http://www.openlettersmonthly.com/january-2009-larkin-coltrane/> (28th January, 2014).

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

music declined when he placed his music within what would be deemed a 'misguided Black Nationalism'.²⁶⁶

These comments are absurd for many reasons, but before I deal with those reasons, I want to illustrate how even some positive interpretations of free jazz see it as useful and meaningful to describe the music in this terminology. Sean Bonney is a poet who writes politically on a range of subjects associated with class struggle and revolutionary politics and he draws on the work of Amiri Baraka and subsequently the practices of free jazz. Referring to, and quoting from, Amiri Baraka's account of John Tchicai's alto saxophone solos within a New York Art Quartet performance in the 1960's, he says this: 'Baraka heard the solos as a system of thought pushing away from and through its imposed limits. It refuses the constraints of a conventional harmonic or social system, and instead moves us to a place from which we can offer counterproposals'.²⁶⁷ Now, quoting directly from Baraka himself:

The repeated rhythmic figure, a screamed riff, pushed its insistence *past music*. It was hatred and frustration, secrecy and despair. There was no compromise, no dreary sophistication, only the elegance of something that is too ugly to be described. That stance spread like fire thru the cabarets and the joints of the black cities, so that the sound itself became a basis for thought, and the innovators searched for uglier modes.²⁶⁸

Baraka's writing however does have its contradictions, not least because some of it (as in the quote above) constitutes short stories and fictions, and so it is sometimes hard to tell whether adjectives are in Baraka's voice, or in the voice of the oppressive cultural appropriation. At other times for instance he was scathing about this terminology, like here:

The attacks on John Coltrane were infamous. His transcendently beautiful sound was called "ugly". A remarkably gentle person, Trane's music was constantly reviewed simply as "angry". I remember one reviewer calling Coltrane's playing

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Sean Bonney – 'Non Cognitive Aspects of the City', *Pores: A Journal of Poetics Research*, http://www.pores.bbk.ac.uk/issues/issue5/poetry-and-music/SeanBonney_NonCognitiveAspectsoftheCity (1st February, 2014).

²⁶⁸ Amiri Baraka in Sascha Feinstein, David Rife, *The Jazz Fiction Anthology* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009) 81.

“Barbaric yawps”... yet Coltrane...literally expanded the perceived range and articulation of the instrument, while reflecting in exact emotional analogy the turbulent period in which he lived.²⁶⁹

This quote probably reflects Baraka’s position more accurately than what Bonney quoted him saying earlier and leads us back into the reasons for what I see to be the absurdity of the comments from Larkin et al earlier; and in Bonney’s case, the more misguided and counterproductive attachment of this terminology to this music. At the base of this thinking is that same trap earlier described as ‘structural listening’, illustrated with Lucy Green’s theories on inherent musical meaning. ‘Structural listening’ in this sense encourages listeners to form fixed narrow assumptions about musical meaning and then to ascribe anything outside of that rigidity as ‘noise’. In other words, if music is meant to be understood according to predictable and decipherable syntax, then if it does not adhere to this, it is automatically committing violence against this syntax and sounds ugly because of it. For adherents to a ‘structural listening’ model, there is no room outside of structural syntax and they have cornered themselves into a codec claustrophobia, whereby, for a ‘structural listener’, it seems impossible to see past the naïve association between a ‘screech’ of a Pharaoh Sanders saxophone solo as anything other than the representation of a human ‘scream’ or ‘cry’. This, in my view is way too naïve to simply project a one dimensional, linear meaning that stretches from someone’s personal experience and their musical expression. Part of this is inevitably due to the discourse from free jazz artists themselves talking of the music as a way of expressing human emotion or as Charlie Parker says: ‘if you don’t live it, it won’t come out of your horn’.²⁷⁰ However, what you live isn’t one-dimensional; it’s complex and subtle, and if the music simply represented it as one-dimensional, it wouldn’t hold much of the interest we get from it. It is in fact, music’s ability (art’s ability in general) to transform experience and meaning, to take the language of experience to a different, more complicated and obscure communicatory level, which gives it one of its key characteristics.

What makes the comments about Coltrane yet more absurd, in particular, to say that Coltrane sacrificed the joy of the music, is that, as Baraka alludes to, they couldn’t have

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 81-82.

²⁷⁰ Charlie Parker, in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 158.

picked a less accurate example. For Coltrane, through his spiritual pursuits and his learning of many non-Western religions and practices, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, his intention with music was specifically to bring positivity, light, happiness:

I would like to bring to people something like happiness. I would like to discover a method so that if I want it to rain, it will start right away to rain. If one of my friends is ill, I'd like to play a certain song and he will be cured; when he'd be broke, I'd bring out a different song and immediately he'd receive all the money he needed.²⁷¹

Coltrane is not alone in rejecting the assumption that this music privileges political expression at the expense of joy, many free jazz artists thought in the same way as Coltrane about their music. Here is William Parker who reflects on why he got involved in this music and traces this positivity throughout free jazz's history:

[I got] involved in the idea of civil rights, of revolution, of poetry, of purpose...I didn't really want to be a black panther, though I did hang out extensively with the Black Panthers, but I would bring in music, the music of Archie Shepp and John Coltrane, but they weren't interested in music. I was interested in music.²⁷²

The greatest revolutionary is a flower. A smile of a baby might stop a murderer from killing somebody, for a minute. Music has the same quality. It gets you into your deeper, deeper self. That's the purpose of the music, whether you play it slow, fast or loud or soft, rhythmic or arrhythmic, repetitious rhythms or broken rhythms, syrupy melody or long continuous blocked out melody, all of these things are the same manifestations of the same idea.

The reason I wanted to get into music... After putting together the messages of records called *Love Cry* and *Spirits Rejoice* [Albert Ayler], *A Love Supreme* [John Coltrane], *Karma* [Pharoah Sanders], Mingus' *Fables of Faubus*, *Things Got To Change* [Archie Shepp], Alan Silva, Sun Ra, so you got basically four things—spirituality, politics, the special ideas of space and time, and the tradition of folk and world music, Don Cherry, and all laced with the spiritual idea that you play

²⁷¹ Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and His Music* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1998) 211.

²⁷² 'Inside out in the open clip', You Tube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Tw-Jdl-EVY> (18th January, 2014).

music for music to uplift, to enlighten, to change people lives. Not necessarily to get people to pray or get people to believe in something. Just the idea that love, basically, will change the world.²⁷³

Parker's comments here are again exemplary and crucial in their ability to see beyond orthodox understandings of musical meaning. For many free jazz artists, this expression of freedom through sonic elements that are deemed 'difficult'; 'inaccessible'; 'violent'; or 'ugly' is actually an attempt to express positivity towards a future away from constraint and oppressive structures, musical or otherwise. An attempt to tell a different story, where musical meaning is defined by the artists themselves, on their own terms, not by the history of Western musical conventions. This is not to say that the social, economic and political struggle was not high on the agenda because it was, as Parker alludes to, but a lot of free jazz artists, far from ascribing violence into their music, saw it as a way out of that violence, a way of communicating something more positive, carrying with it the legacy of the past, while also positing an alternate future. The inability for conservative and radical critics alike to recognise and appreciate this, shows a tendency for most music critics in general to practice the same fundamental assumptions about musical meaning and representation that continue to plague music's revolutionary potential. To insist upon the inherent 'difficulty' or 'inaccessibility' for instance completely misses the point through a glaringly unrecognised potential of these sonic areas of experimentation. Free jazz was for the most part, an idiomatic improvised music with a firm jazz base, made using the vernacular lexicon of the jazz tradition. As such, it was an interesting and exciting musical movement. However, at this same time, a certain potential was opened up by this movement, a new direction which was picked up on by only a small element of practitioners. In the early days, Ornette Coleman and the Free-Form Improvisation Ensemble were instrumental in picking up on the most radical potential of this music. Later, William Parker, Hamid Drake, Susie Ibarra (amongst others) have continued this potential. These players have recognised its ability to go that one step further, to be an improvised music that has its roots in jazz, and other idiomatic styles, but feels no pressure to play jazz, or to play any other particular idiom, while at the same time always being open to any idiom that may emerge. In other words, a totally open music, what

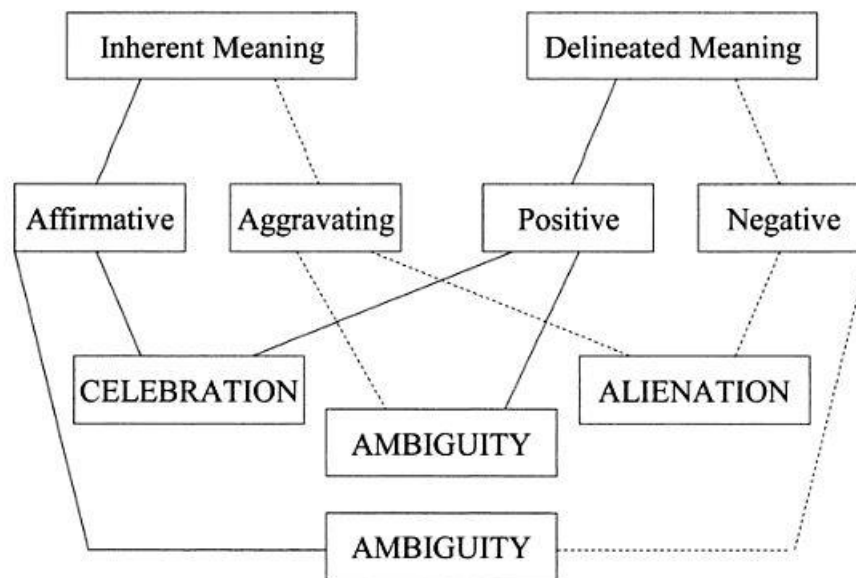
²⁷³ William Parker: 'Everything is Valid', All About Jazz, 2005, <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/william-parker-everything-is-valid-william-parker-by-eyal-hareuveni.php?&pg=2#.VCAagvldWSo> (21st April 2012).

Parker, in accordance with a North American tendency, now typically terms *creative music*. This particular approach is well-articulated in the documentary *Inside Out in the Open*.²⁷⁴ What makes this particular approach to music so revolutionary, is in its ability to exist both outside of the orthodox domain of musical understandings, while still communicating musically in socially meaningful ways. This ability to ‘communicate’ through its very ‘outness’ is what I want to suggest actually contradicts its interpretation as ‘difficult’ and ‘inaccessible’. Free jazz has the ability to produce dynamic, affective and enjoyable sonic experiences while on the outside of orthodox musical syntax. While it is generally played by highly trained musicians, the core ‘action’ of what it does projects outwards towards the possibilities of new sonic worlds that do not have any basis in exclusive orthodoxy. Again, the reason this potential is generally unacknowledged is because this music still exists largely in a music-for-musicians culture, in which there remains the assumption that most non-musicians can only listen to the simple stuff they hear in the charts. I believe this is both offensive and wrong and the focus must be on the musicians and critics who contribute to these assumptions. There must be a change in the way this music is interpreted and disseminated in order to avoid missing completely the revolutionary social potential it has.

To interpret this music using just the formalist relationships (as in ‘structural listening’) is to miss the most exciting and important aspects of that music. However, since the analysis of improvised music is still usually done solely through the lens of ‘structural listening’ by critics who are typically trained musicians, those elements that depart from structural orthodoxy are immediately considered ‘difficult’ and ‘inaccessible’. This again, is a symptom of the dominant musical ideology as it is used by musical analysis, criticism and interpretation. It is reminiscent again of Lucy Green’s systematic understanding of musical meaning, as outlined earlier (and repeated below for convenience)

²⁷⁴ Alan Roth, *Inside Out in the Open: An Expressionist Journey into the music known as Free Jazz* (ESP DISK 4042, 2008).

Fig.2 ²⁷⁵



Source: Adapted from Green 1988, p. 138 and 1997, pp. 134 and 251.

As I discussed earlier with the terminology of ‘violent’ and ‘ugly’ being used also by supporters of the music, so too is the terminology of ‘difficult’ and ‘inaccessible’ used by free jazz fans and scholars. Ajay Heble tries to locate ‘inaccessibility’ as the defining element and ‘productive force’ of free jazz in his book *Landing on the Wrong Note*. This is a continuation of the idea that we need ‘difficulty’, ‘inaccessibility’ and ‘outness’ to provoke a change for the better, to bring in new modes of musical and social organisation. However, my argument here is that such thinking continues to play by the same fundamental rules of orthodox musical meaning, and by doing so will always stop short of the full revolt, re-vision and revolution of musical meaning I believe we need. We need a fundamental re-questioning of what we mean by ‘difficulty’, ‘inaccessibility’

²⁷⁵ Lucy Green, ‘Research in the Sociology of Music Education: Some Introductory Concepts’ in Ruth Wright, *Sociology and Music Education* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2010) 27.

and 'outness' and the validity of the 'inherent musical meaning' which creates these micro-meanings, before we can think they have usage as revolutionary methods.

Let's question then. While it is the case that in traditional, mainstream jazz, as in most other musics, the codes that define 'inherent meaning' can frustrate and antagonise listeners if undecipherable; but to interpret 'the new thing' by 'the old thing's tools' is clearly inappropriate. For instance, while I may be bludgeoned and suffocated by traditional jazz's undecipherable codes, which don't offer anything outside, and don't allow me in as an untrained listener to their encoded meanings, I feel the trajectory of 'free jazz' for instance lets me out of that coded claustrophobia by creating the space outside, or at least enough distance from that encoding to enjoy other affective productions of the sonic experience. It seems to me that the sonic experience de-emphasises the importance of the symbolic coding and begins communicating on a more sensual, physical level with its rhythmic intensity, its dynamic frequency extremities, its unorthodox sonic relationships and its powerful human agency. Contrary to dominant assumptions, then, that 'accessibility' in music depends upon a simplification of musical codes, an easy-to-decipher dilution of sonic complexity, it may be actually these features, which usually are referred to as 'difficult' and 'inaccessible', which can if cultivated actually open up access for listeners towards an alternative, open-source musical environment. As an untrained listener, I'm not alienated, I'm excited, and I want to join in. More than that, I feel like I could join in. Of course these features don't occur with all free jazz, and for some it will be aggravating still, but the point is that it becomes possible with free jazz in a way that other musics cannot communicate by virtue of either their coded claustrophobias or ahistorical conceptions of musical freedom ('free-improv' for instance). So, when Heble asks the question 'to what extent does the political force of jazz reside in its "out" forms, its "wrong" notes, its very inaccessibility?'.²⁷⁶ I would say that the political force substantially resides in these "out" forms, but I would add not because of an inaccessibility, but in the potential for a radical and irresistibly potent accessibility.

²⁷⁶ Ajay Heble: *Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance and Cultural Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 171.

In other words, I am in total agreement with Heble about the pursuit, but feel that there needs to be a more rigorous and deeper critique of the underlying assumptions regarding 'inaccessibility' before we can utilise this music for its *irresistible accessibility*. I'm obviously aware that such a concept would sound alien to most people, but I intend to show in later chapters how we need to move in this positive direction, this positing of improvisation as something enjoyable and accessible, rather than always positing it as an inaccessible version of 'proper music' from the start. There's no reason why improvisation cannot be as enjoyable, as meaningful and as accessible as any other musical approach, if not more so. Unfortunately, music has sadly become perhaps the most deeply entrenched essentialist art form we have; so of course, in those circumstances, improvised music will be seen to deviate from something fundamental, so for improvisation to be effective as socio-musical activism which can bring out an irresistible accessibility, it clearly needs re-framing and re-cultivating in social contexts. For instance, on a broad level, artists and critics need to begin replacing their 'musical responsibility' towards the accessing of orthodox musical knowledge with a social responsibility towards accessing self-defined musical knowledge(s). To put to bed the absurd 'learn the rules before you break them' dictate, which pre-defines for everyone what they should have access to.

I want to close this discussion by drawing on an idea inherited from Roland Barthes in his essay 'From Work to Text'. He talks of how the traditional 'work' produces the concept of reading as 'consumption' and that it is the 'boredom' of this passive consumption that actually produces the idea of 'unreadability' in avant-garde, experimental creative practices. In other words, it is the idea that there has to be a single, clear and lucid meaning to be sought from a 'work', which the 'reader' (or listener in this case) must be able to understand in order to 'read' it, and therefore enjoy it. Pleasure comes from consumption in this case. This is the standard understanding of musical meaning, as described by Lucy Green and the 'structural listening' model. As I write this, I am in the process of such a consumption. I always work with music in my headphones, but I cannot listen to music that demands too much attention, music that is too, well, interesting, I suppose. I therefore deliberately choose music that I've heard (and enjoyed) many times before, so that it can distract me from other unintended distractions, but not command

too much attention that it distracts me from the focus of writing this page. Nothing about the music confuses my senses, but I feel detached enough from its production that it cannot engage me as an active participant. I can only enjoy it passively as chosen 'background music'. Barthes goes onto say that 'works' of this kind also suggest to him that 'if I can read these authors, I also know that I cannot re-write them (that it is impossible to 'write like that' – at least immediately) and this knowledge, depressing enough, suffices to cut me off from the production of these works, in the very moment their remoteness establishes my modernity (is not to be modern to know clearly what cannot be started over again'.²⁷⁷ I'm very interested in this idea of Barthes', that certain works close us off from a certain kind of sensual pleasure of active engagement or re-writing, and instead, suggest a detached, closed relationship in which our only enjoyment can come from the passive understanding of the 'inherent meaning'. The association that being cut off from the production of these works is also an establishment of modernity, is also exemplary in its recognition of how experimentation, the avant-garde and so-called 'modern' art as part of the Eurological tradition at least, contributed to a severing of social relevance, a greater detachment from the 'pure specialists' and a mass faceless audience. Forms of music that reflect this kind of 'work' cut us off from the production of them, closing us off from feeling like we could do it ourselves, while at the same time heightening our desire for their consumption through a kind of detached voyeuristic pleasure.

In contrast to this is the text which tries to reach a place where reading, writing, playing and listening are undifferentiated activities - where the reading of a text is not consumption but active, a playing, re-writing. We feel engaged by the material, and we feel connected rather than cut off from its production, enabling us to write or make music like whoever the example would be. While Barthes steers clear of a clear division between the 'work' as classic, and the 'text' as avant-garde, I want to suggest that in this case this particular conception of 'text' and 'work' does lend itself well to different types of music effectively. As I said earlier, traditional jazz, commercial popular music and standard European 'classical' music does close itself off to my untrained ears, creating a coded claustrophobia in which it seems the only enjoyment can come from either

²⁷⁷ Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (London: Harper Collins, 1977) 163-164.

background consumption, or a clear and lucid appreciation of the musical codes. However, with free jazz the possibility emerges for a new way of musical listening: complex, sensual enjoyment with a music that is not based upon previously deciphered codes. To repeat: I might not ‘understand’ the codes but it doesn’t seem to matter anymore - I feel like I want to join in, and feel like I could. Free jazz offers us a kind of ‘writerly text’, which invites us to ‘write’ it ourselves, in our own way. Obviously it is improvised, so I cannot reproduce the same thing, but I am not cut off from the means of production, so I can reproduce the mode of operation itself.

Free for whom? Maintaining the male dominant stasis in ‘free’ music

We’ve talked at length so far in this chapter about musical freedom and the kinds of accessibility to which certain concepts of musical freedom lend themselves, but now I want to discuss how certain conceptions of musical freedom affect participation, in order to ask an important question regarding ‘free music’ – ‘free for whom?’. Music communities who centre their practices around conceptions of freedom can often fail to see the kinds of dominant power relations that act upon their communities. In particular, music has always had a huge problem when it comes to gender, whether it is the historical marginalisation of female composers and performers across all genres, or the ideological pressure on women to only play certain instruments, or the objectification of female bodies in music marketing. The rape apologism featured in the recent Robin Thicke track *Blurred Lines*, the pornification of black women in Nelly’s *Tip Drill* video, the ignorance and denial of Miles Davis’ blatant admissions to physical violence against women²⁷⁸; or the casual nature of a composition teacher telling a young female student she couldn’t play the Baritone saxophone because she’s female; misogyny is never far away from music.²⁷⁹ Let’s talk about misogyny for a while then. The following paragraph is from a blog piece I wrote for the online forum The ICMUS Hub. I want to repeat it here to introduce important concepts to follow:

It took a while to see it properly, but it was always there, lying not dormant, but actively enacting its ugly violence in pervasive and subtle ways; the ‘boys will be boys’ indoctrination of boisterous toddlers everywhere, the vile lad culture of

²⁷⁸ Pearl Cleage, *Mad at Miles: A Black Woman’s Guide to Truth* (Michigan: Cleage Group, 1990).

²⁷⁹ Personal Confidential Correspondence.

early teens, the depiction of sex and sexual pleasure as a man's right and a woman's facilitation, the rigid and oppressive marriage institutions idealised as 'the future' and the cycle begins again with reproduction. Rape culture everywhere, violent sexual aggression in porn and addiction to 'this' porn as expected, while displays of alternative sexual erotica and sex positive representation masked and hidden from view; film and media portrayal of young girls and women as objects for male consumption. 'bitch'; 'whore'; 'slag'; 'slut'; 'cunt'; and many more gendered abusive terms all part of the linguistic fabric. Surrounded by men everywhere, in the immediate environment, at home, at school, at work, at venues, at gigs, the social network created to exclude young men from seeing the benefit of any genuine emotional bond with a woman, or any kind of gender equality. I'm talking here explicitly about heteronormative misogyny by men towards women and how absolutely normal and accepted that culture is. More than that, how, in order to 'become a man', this is what we are trained to become: to exploit, abuse, be aggressive towards women – this is a part of what masculinity means.²⁸⁰

This environment, this misogyny is part of the fabric of many of our societies. We've long been accustomed to Western classical music and its lineage being predominantly a representation of dead white men, and reflecting deeply traditional and sexist values regarding women's involvement in music, what instruments they were allowed/not allowed to play in order to maintain femininity etc. However, when we start to look at 'free' or 'avant-garde' musics we sometimes conveniently forget that enacting one freedom does not mean you get away with oppressing another. For instance, emerging from the Western art tradition, it should come as little surprise, that the Eurological avant-garde which insists on 'blowing up the past' would not be at all concerned with human issues such as gender.²⁸¹ In Alex Ross's huge 591-page *The Rest is Noise* book which chronicles Twentieth-Century Western art music (including of course the avant-garde) extremely little attention is given to female composers. In fact, once Ross gets to the end of the century, he proclaims proudly that 'composition has also ceased to be

²⁸⁰ Charlie Bramley, 'Fuck Misogyny', *The ICMUS Hub*, <http://icmus.ath.cx> 2013.

²⁸¹ Attinello, *Passion/Mirrors*, 156.

predominantly male; the preceding six composers are all women'.²⁸² It seems six composers represents progress in this world. Again there is the problem of power and hierarchy. Because of the canonisation process and existing pervasive gender inequality, the female composers who were active during these times have been marginalised and effectively written out of history. It seems shocking and frightening actually that this book gives no mention whatsoever to Annie Gosfield, who is one of the most pioneering and interesting composers of the late Twentieth-Century, very late in fact, emerging most notably in the early 1990's, meaning that she would have been prime material for the chapter 'Sunken Cathedrals: Music at Century's End', alongside the work of John Adams perhaps. Gosfield's work is innovative and experimental, but it's hardly buried. She's always performed internationally on a regular basis, has been releasing works on the popular New York label Tzadik, and even Max Reinhardt from BBC radio referred to Gosfield in these terms: 'A one woman Hadron collider, the queen of the detuned industrial noise'.²⁸³ Her omission from Ross' book speaks volumes about the problem here.

There is a more significant hypocrisy at work here though regarding 'free' musics. When it comes to 'free' music we have the suggestion that there is a musical struggle for freedom embedded in the social and political struggle for non-oppressive community relations. More often than not though, in practice these musics have reinforced gender inequality through and through. The Euro-American avant-garde, absolutely; the European free-improvisation movement, definitely; the Free and Avant-jazz movement, certainly. Most celebrated performers in these areas are male, and frequent critical discussion is given to virtuosic males whose performances are often characterised by competitive macho-esque soloing. In the Derek Bailey book *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*, and the subsequent 4-part documentary series, there is (to my knowledge) no reference to any female musicians whatsoever. Composer and researcher Dana Reason has done some excellent work in this area, and her PhD thesis entitled 'The Myth of Absence: Representation, Reception And The Music Of Experimental Women Improvisors' is an attempt to prove that it is completely wrong to

²⁸² Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (London: Harper Collins, 2009) 563.

²⁸³ 'Annie Gosfield: Press', <http://www.anniegosfield.com/press.html> (23rd February, 2014).

assume that women were not there, or were not interested in being there, because of the lack of documentation or representation. In her own words:

The insufficient documentation and dissemination of the work of experimental women inevitably leads to the perception that women are simply not part of the field of experimental improvisation. To begin to rebut what I have termed this myth of absence, and to examine its consequences for women improvisors and for the field of experimental improvisation, I have interviewed a diverse group of women improvisors active since 1950 in North America, Asia and Europe. They include: bassist Joelle Leandre; pianist Amina Claudine Myers; vocalist Maggie Nicols; bassoonist and composer Lindsay Cooper; drummer Susie Ibarra; accordionist Pauline Oliveros; kotoist, performance artist and electronic musician Miya Masaoka; pianist Marilyn Crispell; pianist Irene Schweizer, cellist and anthropologist Georgina Born; violinist India Cooke; drummer and electronic musician Ikue Mori; actress and singer Maia Axe; percussionist Gayle Young; harpist Susie Allen; harpist and composer Anne LeBaron; composer and singer Maria DeAlvear; and flautist Jane Rigler.²⁸⁴

That this absence would happen in the area of experimental, 'free music' scenes reveals the kind of hypocrisy I want to expose throughout this thesis, that on so many levels it becomes too easy and convenient to refer to something as 'free', 'experimental', 'revolutionary' etc, while being completely ignorant of how the very modes of operation continue to make this 'freedom' available to some while further restricting it for others. Unfortunately, despite all of the liberating qualities I previously discussed with regards to free jazz and its commitment to progressive movement beyond inequality, it suffers significantly from a lack of commitment to gender inequality. Frequent references to jazz as a 'black man's music' are made, and some key discussions have been raised by the likes of George Lewis, Ajay Heble and Eric Porter regarding the gendered exclusion in jazz. Even an organisation such as the AACM which was specifically about providing a safe space for black musicians to make music without the oppressive and exploitative structures inherent in the white dominated marketplace, have failed to properly deal

²⁸⁴ Dana Reason, *The Myth of Absence: Representation, Reception and the music of Experimental Women Improvisors*, PhD thesis (University of California, San Diego, 2002)
http://www.danareason.com/Writings/Reason_Myth_of_Absence.pdf

with gender dynamics. George Lewis again has been keen to probe whether the AACM included any genuine attempts to break down the gender inequality present in the jazz scene on a wider level. His findings suggest that while women were not necessarily explicitly excluded, there was still an implicit bias of a 'boys club' culture in which jam sessions and performance opportunities went exclusively to band leader's male friends etc. The saxophonist Joseph Jarman states that:

All of the women who became members were somehow connected with already active male members... It wasn't perceived that the women had the strength and energy to be full-time up front...because of the male egotistical bullshit in identity, the females were just not permitted the same opportunities as the males who made application to join.²⁸⁵

By 1977 there were estimated to be only 3 female members of the AACM and in 1986 this had dropped to just 1.²⁸⁶ As Julie Dawn Smith has said in her essay *Playing Like a Girl* regarding the absence of gender in the social and political struggles of improvised music:

Neither free improvisation nor free jazz...extended their critiques to include the aesthetic, economic or political liberation of women. For the most part, a practice of freedom that resisted gender oppression and oppression on the basis of sexual difference was excluded from the liberatory impulses of male-dominated improvising communities...thus, it is difficult to describe accurately just how integral women's contributions to the development of free improvisation and free jazz were in the early days, as women's participation was limited and remains underdocumented. Chronicles of free improvisation and free jazz from a variety of sources – including Derek Bailey's *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*; John Litweiler's classic book on free jazz, *The Freedom Principle: Jazz after 1958*; the more recent work of Kevin Whitehead in *New Dutch Swing*...pay little or no attention to the music's female constituents.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ Joseph Jarman in Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself*, 459-460.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 461.

²⁸⁷ Heble, *The Other Side of Nowhere*, 229.

Smith goes on to reference how pianist Irene Schweizer acknowledges that during the 1960's and 1970's European scene, she was a prominent, yet isolated figure as a female instrumentalist and recognition of her involvement almost always went unnoticed:

I had been taking part in the FMP festival during its development in the '60's and '70's, being the only woman on every festival...There was a photo exhibition about all the jazz musicians from FMP festivals from 1968 to 1978, and not one single photo of me even though I took part every second year.²⁸⁸

This last example highlights brilliantly how there is a kind of culture of ignorance and assumption in which even when women are active and prominent, they are still routinely ignored because of a deeply engrained assumption that the key players are automatically male. It's this dual process that is sometimes explicit and other times implicit, which continues the culture of marginalisation and exclusion of women, and the maintenance of gender inequality in free music, despite that culture also making inroads towards equality in other areas. Double-bassist Joelle Leandre has described her own situation to fellow double-bassist William Parker in his interview book 'Conversations':

I had to learn almost everything by myself - no podium, no women figures - I had to find, not my style, but just me. In Europe, when you are a bass player freelance, no [women] who play this instrument - I tell you, it's not easy. Everything in this society is built by men with roles and rules, and you suffer in a way if you don't follow nicely, and of course you have to shut up! ...You are an Afro-American bass player [William] and you can understand this kind of segregation for women in jazz, and in general! I had to find my sounds, my way, my freedom. This is political.²⁸⁹

To just elaborate a little on the precise effect that Leandre articulates, I want to firstly draw upon a paper given by Helen Papaioannou and Marie Thompson at a small jazz symposium at Newcastle University regarding the absence of women from discussions around jazz, as I think the following comments reveal some very important aspects. I'll

²⁸⁸ Irene Schweizer in Heble, *Other Side of Nowhere*, 230.

²⁸⁹ Joelle Leandre in William Parker: *Conversations* (Paris: Rogue Art, 2011) 438-439.

then draw upon work by an undergraduate student who has written an excellent auto-ethnography essay regarding her experience with this music. In other words, we will have two accounts from female saxophonists about how their gender impacts upon their relationship with the music they are deeply engaged by. If it seems odd that I am paying more attention to the gender inequality in jazz, more than in the Eurological scenes, this is precisely because I believe more in the activist potential of free jazz and what it offers, and so we need to deal with the problems and inadequacies of what is left out of this community, before we can propose how it can be extended as a useful model for wider community practice.

How do you reconcile your love of a field of music with the misogyny which litters its history? A core part of building my improvisational skills as young sax player involved learning about the 'greats' of jazz, the men who have come to epitomise what it is to be a jazz musician. With age, and becoming more present on jazz scenes, the question of 'what's my relationship with this music?' became more prominent. This education in jazz told me that women's relationship with jazz is either non-existent or limited to the role of a singer or dancer. And when enthusiasm urges you to dig a little deeper about the creators of the music you love, the blatant yet reluctantly-discussed misogyny of some of those 'geniuses' assures a thoroughly uncomfortable relationship with this canon. Jazz contains many elements that can and should make it attractive to me: it is noisy, rhythmic, affective, energetic, intensive. It comes with rhetoric of resistance and rebellion. It is thought of as distinct from the list of dead white male composers who dominated and continue to dominate my musical education. But I always had the nagging suspicion that jazz, like so many other musics, was thought of as music by men for men. The times I have been to self-proclaimed jazz nights have been at best, part of a very small minority of women. The innumerable names that get batted around in conversations about jazz are almost always men. The music I learnt about was almost always by men. The key figures within the history of jazz that I was taught were almost always men.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ Helen Papaioannou, Marie Thompson, 'Women and Jazz', *Music, Violence, Truth: Jazz Criticism and Social Expression* (Symposium: Newcastle University, 2013).

These comments reveal the difficulty of being excited by a type of music whose entire background and context is situated in opposition to your inclusion in it, and therefore makes your entrance into its future a daunting one. What makes this situation even more difficult is that after articulating this in a seminar about jazz, Ben Watson who wrote the book *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free-Improvisation*, responded by saying it was 'just moaning'. It's this context in which the considerable difficulty of simply reaching something that looks like equality becomes glaringly obvious. This background feeds directly into the experience of a young undergraduate student whose essay for a jazz criticism module struck my attention as exemplary in its articulation of the real practical experience of a young woman coming to improvised jazz music, playing the saxophone and the difficulties of this cultural process. Emily King's essay resonates with the above account and makes it clear throughout her early development as a jazz saxophonist that she struggled to come to terms with the male-dominated world she encountered, and not until university and the wider social study around jazz did she begin to come to terms with why she felt so uncomfortable with it. As such, she has utilised the critical theories of feminism and the practical implications of the improvisation scene in Newcastle to develop significant increases in her confidence as a player. The essay is fascinating in its insight into the 'outstanding gender gap' and how this has a multiplying and damaging effect on any change in the situation. When young girls are looking at options for creative outlets, they don't see an outlet in jazz, and certainly not the saxophone - a male dominated instrument in a male dominated arena of practice. Except, that is, in the Simpsons, with Lisa Simpson, the 8-year old Baritone sax player; a storyline initially created assumedly as a 'joke' by the creators; how funny it would be for an 8-year old girl to play the sax! This being of course the same prejudice that I referenced earlier, when a female colleague was told she couldn't play the Baritone saxophone because she was a woman. Little did The Simpsons producers know that such flippant, casual attitudes towards gender would actually contribute to a swathe of young girls wanting to take up the instrument. King's essay makes it clear that her decision to take up the saxophone was as a direct result of the character Lisa Simpson. What does it say about the gender dynamics involved here that a cartoon character is the only noticeable representation of female involvement in this area? :

For years, this would make me feel embarrassed and lacking in knowledge about my instrument. However as I learnt more and more about jazz, and I was introduced to the important players' of the scene and the famous records, there was an outstanding gender gap. Where were the female instrumentalists? Besides my teachers, I could not name any other female saxophonists to aspire to emulate, and it is only upon research for this essay, that I can now name a handful of players.²⁹¹

She goes onto say that it has been necessary to craft 'safe spaces' where her confidence could develop without the oppressive conditions of the male-dominated environment in which she grew up. When in further discussion about this, she told me that playing in school music bands was the first revelation of the gender gap, as it showed how all the young boys would happily get up in front of everyone at the demand of the male bandleader who would insist upon forced solos, and they would improvise expressively and confidently regardless of their technical accuracy, yet she and other girls found it difficult to do so with the same confidence. This is the kind of systemic and cultivated 'macho' intimidation, which intimidates and excludes girls from participating in that environment, contributing to another generation of gender imbalance. At university, she found that her involvement in the collective improvisation scene in Newcastle helped her develop this 'safe space' in which to develop her confidence. She found that it offered her previously unparalleled access to female agency through her musical expression. What she was moving away from musically, was the suffocation of a history that seemed to restrict the ability of self-definition. She describes her experience of jazz musical training, and says it is:

more constricting upon the player because it requires mastering the techniques of changing chords, which were created by the male players of history, and the expressions made through this form of improvisation are naturally tainted with masculinity, and merely mimic the 'voices' of the original creators learning their 'licks'. I have closely studied the transcriptions of Charlie Parker's solos in the

²⁹¹ Emily King, *Playing a Black Man's Music: The Creation of My 'Safe Space' as a White Female Saxophonist, Through My Herstory*, Undergraduate Essay (Newcastle University, 2013).²⁹¹

'Omnibook' and whilst they teach one how to play exactly like Charlie Parker, the solos are made by a voice so far removed from myself as a female player, they teach the player to become a tribute act to the artist, rather than to empower and self-define through unique solos. With only the instrument in common, they are not an expression of my own voice.²⁹²

In contrast to this, she has said that free forms of collective improvisation have alleviated the 'gender inequalities placed upon me'.²⁹³ Furthermore, because there is a 'complete creative control' and any judgement is based upon the 'ability to create a unique sound and piece every time I play', she concludes that 'it is my voice, through the saxophone, which is heard when I play freely'.²⁹⁴ What I find most revealing about these comments, is that while offering a critique of jazz improvisation, they ultimately result in a celebration of one of free jazz's most prominent pursuits, namely the ability to find your own distinct and unique sound amidst a creative environment in which the entire breadth of sound palletes are possible. In other words, what King has experienced here is a dominant but misleading education on jazz improvisation, which at its core should be about nurturing 'your voice'. To repeat a quote from earlier, from William Parker, perhaps himself a marginalised voice, but in my view resonating with the true affective potential of free jazz, the idea of imitating Charlie Parker is an absurd deviation from the core pursuit of this music:

Is Charlie Parker one of a kind, or can we produce another Charlie Parker at will?
...yes, Charlie parker is one of a kind...no, we cannot produce another Charlie Parker. We also cannot produce another you...we fail musically when we try to be something other than ourselves. The problem is that we go to music school, and music school was never interested in developing the music inside.²⁹⁵

In my view then, King's critique is successful in its target, which is the betrayal of this core aspect of free-jazz in the misguided and damaging ways in which it can be taught, disseminated and practiced. What she has found is that by reclaiming this core radicality

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Parker, *Who Owns Music*, 66.

of free jazz, applied to her own 'safe space' through free forms of collective improvisation, she can develop the ability to self-define her own creative expression and female agency through her chosen instrument distanced from the dominant histories and narratives that instrument and its legacy imposes, especially on young females. This suggests there is something more than just musically liberating about this approach to improvisation; there's something profoundly political and social in its potential, something activist. An activist potential however that is routinely ignored, misunderstood, underestimated, or sometimes, hijacked. Free jazz at its core should be as liberating to women as it has been for men and it is this core potential of this music, which I will now attempt to extract, adapt and extend in my own case studies as demonstrated in the following chapter. Through various small-scale case studies and auto-ethnography, I hope I can demonstrate how this potential may be realized through what I have come to call 'un-Musical activism'.

Summary

The intention of this chapter was to draw out key aspects of certain historical approaches to 'free music'. I said that I would focus on those aspects relating to concepts of musical freedom, and what these approaches gave us in terms of social relevance and in particular, potential models of socio-musical organisation. I drew on George Lewis's concepts 'Afrological' and 'Eurological' in order to identify crucial differences between two contrasting approaches to improvisation, modernism and the avant-garde. Within this, I outlined a further binary between positive and negative freedom, from which I argued could open up a third space beyond both, which although being influenced primarily from the Afrological positive-freedom, also would need to adapt and extend this approach in order to move beyond some of the dangers of these approaches to musical freedom and socio-musical organisation. I then explored and critiqued the assumption that improvised approaches to music-making are automatically considered 'difficult' and 'inaccessible', arguing instead that under the right circumstances, improvised approaches to music-making could become the most 'irresistibly potent accessibility' we have, in terms of developing a particular model of music that can allow participants to pursue what feels good to them by self-defining their own musical engagement and musical knowledge(s). I used the work of Roland Barthes to help

support this point by lending his argument that a more productive 'writerly text' model is sought after, in which the reading (or listening) of a 'text' is not a passive consumption but an active playing - a re-writing. I closed this chapter with an analysis on some of the contradictions involved socially with 'free musics' and in particular, their persistent ignorance of gender dynamics. I referenced Julie Dawn Smith who critiqued both free-improvisation and free-jazz's inability to include the liberation of women. I then quoted from a young female saxophonist, who in describing her relationship with traditional jazz education and contrasting it with her experience of the Newcastle improvised scene, helped illuminate an approach to improvisation that promises an activist potential that could have huge social impact, not least by bridging the 'outstanding gender gap' and breaking with the static power hold of an orthodoxy dripping in the grease of canonical male figures.

Discrepant Anachronism 2 - Interview between Dr. Senate Cogg and Slack Nutella

All characters appearing in this section are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Meet Dr. Senate Cogg, a retired former-musicologist and professional improvising musician, trained in the orthodox musicianship of the past, and devoted the best part of his adult life to devising new means of making 'new', improvised music within the domain of professional musicianship. At this moment of reinvented time, he is 65. He experiments with a largely Eurological approach to 'non-idiomatic improvisation' and utilises advancements in technology and instrument craft to devise highly mechanical and intentionally difficult approaches to his practice. He is currently working on a project entitled 'Mines, Lakes, Violins and Laptops: Electro-Acoustics Post-Digital Psuedo-Anthropomorphic Gesture Practice' or MLVLEAPDPAGP for short.

We have already met Slack Nutella of course from our previous Discrepant Anachronism of the previous chapter. Here, he is faced with a gruelling interview for the position of visiting artist at an academic music department from Dr. Cogg who has reservations about his legitimacy for such a role.

January 11th, 2016, after a draft submission of an essay to an avant-garde journal, regarding improvisation, community and freedom, Slack Nutella faces having to prove legitimacy for a number of the arguments made in this essay to Dr. Cogg before Cogg will sign off on a visiting artist role which Slack has applied for.

Dr. Cogg: Thanks for meeting with me today Slack - I hope you don't mind me referring to you in first-name terms. The first question I'd like to ask you about is your emphasis on the Afrological/Eurological binary - can I ask why you are focussing only on these two geographical domains, especially when you are making such a critique of exclusionary politics?

Slack Nutella: Well, the binary of Afrological/Eurological is focussed on in this particular work, because these two strands comment upon the topic of discussion here in extremely pertinent ways. For instance, while there are important developments that may be considered to lie outside of these two domains, what my critique and exploration focusses on is the way in which global ideological dissemination of the avant-garde tends to imply that both the lineage and value in these areas are drawn from Eurological history. While it is often stated that the work of avant-garde canon figures such as John Cage draws upon (or appropriates) Eastern philosophies and modes of practice, it is the explicit disavowal and denial of influence attributed to Afrological modes of practice that is of concern here, especially

when there are certain conceptions of freedom disseminated at the expense of others.

Dr. Cogg: But isn't there a danger here, that in attempting to redress this perceived unfair balance, you romanticise and over-hype the influence and significance of the Afrological influence on avant-garde approaches?

Slack Nutella: No, not really. I could just as easily argue that such perception of over-hyping comes from a predilection for European superiority and an unwillingness to accept that digging deeper for camouflaged cultural practices that have been suppressed is not an over-hyping, but the very reason why there is an unfair balance in the first place. A particular conception of the avant-garde has been crafted because of the hyping of a Eurological approach, and my argument is that this should have never been the case in the first place, because the Afrological approach offers lots of other interesting avenues to explore, and it is my pursuit to uncover and reveal these avenues, which will inevitably lead to a challenging and dismantling of the assumed hierarchy of the Eurological.

Dr. Cogg: Ok, we'll move on. When you define Eurological 'free-from' improvisation as an attempt to create a no structure, no idiom, no style, is it not possible that practitioners may choose to utilise this approach for different ends than this?

Slack Nutella: Yes, and there are examples of Eurological 'free-improvisors' who have enacted a more idiomatic, rhythmic, or jazz-based approach. The opportunity to do this does exist, but there is also something inherent to the conceptions of 'free-improvisation', which overwhelmingly produces a severe freedom-from recognisable styles and structures.

Dr. Cogg: But isn't this which provides its uniqueness. It offers players the space to explore a sonic space that is generally not

available anywhere else. Wouldn't it be banal to allow for a rigid set rhythm for instance to dominate proceedings?

Slack Nutella: While it does offer a unique sonic space, and it is good that it exists, it is the way that it has assumed dominance in the improvisation world and commandeered the term 'freedom' that I have a problem with. The idea that it can be considered 'freedom' to insist upon so many restrictions, and that you suggest it could be considered 'banal' to have a set rhythm. I would suggest it is 'banal' to have the same predictable unpredictability ruling over every 'free-improvisation' performance. It is so, very, well, formulaic.

(At this point, there are more back and forth debates over this particular point, which amount to a differing of opinion over this conception of 'banal', which becomes quite banal itself. We'll not labour here over it, and move to the next question).

Dr. Cogg: You say that William Parker's positive conception of free music as being able to explore any structure allows us to relate to each other and our past, but surely this is still only allowing relations between trained musicians? How can untrained musicians relate to each other through learned musical structures?

Slack Nutella: While it is true that most 'free music' in the free jazz tradition is played solely by trained musicians, there is something contrary in the inherent conceptions of this music, especially in Parker's conception which explicitly allows for anyone to get involved. Parker also repeatedly states this explicitly. There is also the inevitable fact that there are so few untrained musicians willing to actually give music-making a go, without first acquiring that training. My own case studies that I have carried out elsewhere demonstrate, that this particular approach is much more accessible to untrained musicians, who most of the time want something to relate to,

something that connects them to their current experience of music. And most of the time they want to play music because they enjoy the music they hear, and so to remove the idiom from the very start is to alienate lots of newcomers, and also, to imply that just because you are untrained you therefore cannot play in an idiomatic manner this is a myth I would argue that forgets the constant informal training everyone has had since the womb- this is why the term 'untrained idiomatic' is a useful one that I want to explore in the future, to refer to that particular hybrid position of extracting the radical potentiality of free jazz from an untrained perspective.

Dr. Cogg: But isn't it always going to be the case that you are closing off options by not learning everything. Why would someone not want to have more options available to them for instance? What is the negative in doing so?

Slack Nutella: The negative is to be seen in the many musicians we've probably both encountered who find it almost impossible to improvise, because their training is so deeply embedded that it feels either wrong to them, or they cannot get to grip with there not being a right or wrong. Also, there is the theoretical argument that once you've learnt your musical training, you make musical decisions in an improvisation setting based upon that training, so your strategy becomes mechanical or calculated. You may play dissonance because it works as a musical strategy in contrast to consonance for instance, rather than as an impulsive decision to make a particular sound at a particular time. From my own experience also, I can say that the experience of improvising without having any of that strict musical training, but having the life-long informal training is an incredibly enriching and enjoyable experience that seems infinitely fulfilling. Then, ultimately, it is about what individual people want. In an anarchist sense, it is about opening up conceptions of musical

meaning so people have the choice of which route to take. At the moment, there is just one route being made available.

Dr. Cogg: Moving onto the issue of anarchism then. Your argument that anarchy doesn't extend the possibility for murder - just because someone can kill someone doesn't mean they will, but surely, creating a model for socio-musical organisation which does nothing concrete to prevent oppression and abuse cannot reach the types of communal freedom you hope for? Surely you don't believe in something as naïve as a subjective interpersonal ethics?

Slack Nutella: This is a difficult issue, perhaps the most difficult issue we have for global societies, regarding how best to organise ourselves, distribute resources, etc. I'm not therefore naïve enough to suggest that I could give a model for that here; instead what I'm trying to suggest is that broadly speaking, anarchist models of socio-organisation are what I believe we should be working towards, knowing that they won't be perfect, knowing that we'll need to adapt, re-adjust, over and over, until we get it right, making the most anarchist system we can that preserves as much of the free expression of everyone with as little authority as possible. On a macro level, this seems a long-way off, but on a micro level, I believe we can cultivate small models, which although they carry the same problems and conflicts, and still require adaptation and adjustment, can reach positive forms of social organisation that are anarchist in principle. In terms of what we can do concretely to prevent oppression and abuse, there are certain instances when someone will enter this space without respecting those same values, and intimidate or abuse others in the group; at this stage, it is not a contradiction to say they have broken the values of anarchist organisation and so, therefore cannot be treated with the previous anarchist ideals of no authority. The space is open-access to anyone but only so long as they keep it that way. If they impose

authority or domination then ideally a discussion first and if nothing changes, then they would need to be asked to leave the group, but reminded it's always open according to certain principles. It goes without saying that this is an inevitably complex situation based on changing circumstances and ongoing interpersonal conflict.

Dr. Cogg: I hear what you are saying about the inherent assumptions regarding 'difficulty' and 'inaccessibility', but due to the ubiquity of standard musical understandings, isn't it obvious that free jazz and improvised musics are difficult to listen to and therefore inevitably inaccessible? Isn't 'potent accessibilities' a bit ungrounded and fictional?

Slack Nutella: There are two sides to it. On the one side you have the current musical expectations of a listener who has not experienced this music before, and is looking for something that they understand and can relate to. On the other side you have the curiosity of wanting to hear something new or different (a desire that seems to be typically satisfied by an entertainment industry that manages to exaggerate small differences and re-present them as radically new). These two different facets are for most people I would argue intertwined, meaning that people are typically only willing to go on a journey into new sonic worlds, if they have something to latch on to take them there, a bridge that has enough stability to take them across. This is why free jazz offers the starting point for discussions on potent accessibilities of improvised music, because it retains an emphasis on building stuff together, even if it is the looseness of an occasional and sporadic rhythm, or a high-energy saxophone screech, or an escalating and noisy intensity, there is usually just enough combination of materials to build a bridge to get new ears across to the other side. So, while there may be some necessary fiction,

there's always enough ground to create potent accessibility in this musical approach.

Dr. Cogg: If you say so, I suppose. You make a big argument against what you identify as the Eurological tendency for everything to be conceptual, for the essential aesthetic object not to be about spontaneity, but about the concept or concept-composer, but isn't this a bit of a red herring, because the Afrological tendency to emphasise collective improvisation, style and personality would also be a concept would it not?

Slack Nutella: The important difference here is that while everything can technically be said to be a concept, even not having a concept for instance, what Afrological improvisation in the kinds of free jazz I have articulated tends to emphasise is that the essential aesthetic object, or the key characteristics are decided on during performance, not prior to performance. This means, that whatever idea people may have regarding free jazz, or more specifically Parker's interpretation of it, it can always (and often is) unexpected during performance. One performance may be incredibly idiomatic and traditional sounding, the next can be incredibly chaotic or abstract, whereas in Eurological models, there's an overwhelming tendency for a generalistic attitude to 'free-improvisation', or 'non-idiomatic improvisation', which can be perhaps best summed up by Gary Peters' statement about Cage's approach, an all-too-predictable unpredictability.

(this segment provided another lengthy discussion about the definition of 'predictable' and 'unpredictable' and didn't really provide anything tangible to report)

Dr. Cogg: Isn't there a contradiction in your argument in support of Gary Peter's 'nondialogical listening' and the bypassing of the collective as a dialogical relationship, because wouldn't this

be more in line with the Eurological model, than the Afrological one, which you yourself say emphasizes personality.

Slack Nutella: This positing of a 'nondialogical listening' is my attempt to think-through the option for a third space beyond both the Eurological and Afrological, which while drawing primary influence from the Afrological perspective, does recognise some indirect benefits of a Eurological element. What this means in practice, is a collective that is free to pursue idiom, style, history and anything else sonically desirable, but de-emphasises overt personality in favour of a collective listening and pursuit of 'what feels good' - a listening to each other as existential agents yes, but not as William the trained bass-player, but William as a bass mind-body. This means that as a group, we focus on listening to the sound in the room, and figure out how we can contribute to it collectively, working on stuff together with all of the boldness, expressiveness and individuality of an Afrological perspective, but individualities that are not as rooted within set musical traditions that can ward off un-Musical newcomers. In other words, getting back to what I believe the core of an Afrological 'free music' can be, and what people like William Parker are continuously trying to make. This means that we can literally improvise techno, pop, metal, or whatever else.

Dr. Cogg: While I may agree with you that Eddie Prevost's comments about free jazz as a redundant technique seem off the mark when it comes to the social relevance, as a musical strategy, isn't it reasonable to suggest that such a strategy has its flaws, in terms of musical subtlety or dynamics?

Slack Nutella: Of course it has its flaws, and its vulnerabilities. It is vulnerable for instance to a singular voice dominating everything, volume wars, or lack of dynamics, but the important point is that it has the flexibility and ability to change embedded in its conception. I would argue then that such

musical strategies are just that, strategies, which are really distortions of what free jazz is at its core, which is about abandoning strategy completely and allowing spontaneous collective improvisation to guide everything, whereas in free-improvisation or non-idiomatic improvisation, there's very little flexibility at the other end - to be free-from something means having to enact something specific, as does being non-idiomatic - they are all strategies from the outset, embedded into the very concepts of the practice at a fundamental level. I suppose the point I'm trying to make, is that the reason I can say the Afrological vulnerability is a distortion, while the Eurological vulnerability is a fundamental component of its practice, is that, by definition, the Eurological essentializes itself into systems that frame its output, while the Afrological existentializes itself into people who determine its output, meaning that it is always adaptable and changeable determined by the individuals involved.

Dr. Cogg: OK, what I want to go onto now is your argument that referring to jazz as 'violent' or 'ugly' is problematic, because it essentializes it and too simplistically reflects the dominant culture and hinders self-definition - aren't you not paying enough attention here to the fact that maybe some of these musicians wanted it to be 'violent' and 'ugly' as a way of directly reflecting back the historical and social circumstances that it was born from? Aren't you preventing the kinds of artist self-definition that you require from your position?

Slack Nutella: Maybe they did, and there's an argument for that, but what my point is that there's nothing essential or inherent about the equation between social circumstances and musical traits - what makes musical expression distinct is its ability to situate itself at a distance from linguistic semantic meaning, to communicate on a more abstract level. So even if a performer themselves identified with the terms 'violent' and 'ugly' with

reference to their music (which to repeat, John Coltrane definitely did not, for who this was often said about), that wouldn't automatically mean it would sound 'violent' and 'ugly' to its recipients. One person could hear it as violent rage, another could hear it as transcendent beauty, that's what makes the music so special, but all of this doesn't mean that there aren't important social and historical circumstances that are tied up with the production of the work. However, I would repeat that part of what makes these social histories so important is in their resistance to essentialising structures that continue to contain and oppress minorities. What makes this music so incredibly distinctive and revolutionary is in its dual ability to communicate its social and historical situation in ways that not only are meaningful to people inside and outside of that situation, but also to transform beyond it, or as Ornette Coleman said, to communicate a 'striving beyond what we inherited'. We can't ignore the importance of these musician's social and historical circumstances, but at the same time we can't tie them to a particular interpretation of it and interpret the music accordingly in a simplistic manner. It's far more transformative, powerful and revolutionary than that.

Dr. Cogg: OK, I understand what you're getting at there. I want to ask you about your gender analysis. Isn't there a danger with the way you approach this, especially with the young undergraduate student's essay, that you implicitly imply that women are somehow less able to keep up with the challenges of a competitive musical culture of high-standards?

Slack Nutella: No, not at all, what Emily King's essay articulated was the experience of a particular culture of music education in which the entire value was placed on a hyper-competitive attitude in which competing with the male 'greats' of the music was how you gained acceptance and status. Furthermore, it was exposing how

boys from a young age are cultivated into this type of competitiveness, meaning that on the contrary, even when they weren't technically accurate they would have the confidence to go up on stage anyway, while girls who were more technically accurate may not have had the confidence due to the deeply embedded and nuanced intimidation of the macho environment. What it is about then is a critique of the ways in which the culture of this type of jazz music education lends itself to and nurtures a particularly macho perspective and subsequently diminishes or hinders participation by those who don't subscribe to the macho personality type. If we compare this to the so-called professional music teacher who told a young woman she couldn't play Baritone saxophone, we are seeing those same processes at work, and they cannot be underestimated. In other words, there's obviously no difference between girls and boys ability to meet technical performative standards, but there is a culture of discrimination at work pervasively in various forms, which can go a long way to affect girls confidence in performing in general. And of course, this is part of the wider deeply embedded modes of sexism girls encounter in most aspects of society.

Dr. Cogg: Why have you not mentioned the Punk Rock movement, especially considering its 'just get up and play' attitude?

Slack Nutella: Well, as much as I do see congruencies with certain aspects of Anarcho-Punk, in particular Crass, I think that Punk Rock is significantly different from what I am proposing here. Although at first glance, yes, the whole 'just get up and play' regardless of musical ability does seem to ally itself to un-Musical activism, but throughout Punk the apparent lack of musical ability was explicitly tied to the sound of Punk as being 'noisy', 'nasty' and 'wrong'. In other words, lack of 'proper' musical ability is used to create a harsh opposition to proper musical sound, therefore further entrenching the original distinctions

between musical/unmusical. This is opposed to for instance, how Hip-Hop producer Hank Shocklee has conceived of his so-called lack of musical ability and how that apparent 'lack' actually allowed him 'to see beyond what has been understood as correct and proper sound construction, giving him greater range of creative motion'.²⁹⁶ In this case, as in so much Hip-Hop practices, an apparent 'lack' is transformed into a positive.

Dr. Cogg: OK, that is all for now then Slack. I'll be back in touch shortly with a decision and some feedback.

²⁹⁶ Tricia Rose, *Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) 120.

Chapter 3 – Building un-Musical activism: Auto-Ethnography and Ethnographical Case-Studies from 2011-2014

Auto-Ethnographic Descriptive Research: An unmusical journey

The first two chapters have been my attempt to build a critical argument about the problems that dominant musical ideology creates, in particular how deeply embedded and pervasive notions of professionalism and specialism are. I have wanted this argument to expose the extent of the problem, and to articulate why an un-Musical activism is crucial to any fundamental rethinking of this dominant musical ideology. This chapter will serve as a combination of auto-ethnographical and ethnographical case study accounts that outline what an un-Musical activism looks like. The auto-ethnography will be based upon my journey as someone who has had no established musical training, yet found through improvisation a route to music-making. I will then present various case studies in which I have sought to use this experience to craft social outlets for other so-called 'non-musicians' to have the opportunity for similar opportunities of their own.

Institutional Obstacles

Newcastle University – Undergraduate Degree in Music, performance assessment within ICMUS- 'Centre for Inclusivity'.

I sit on the stage petrified, glaring at a computer screen, I'm aware I must press the buttons at the exact correct time so I'm 'in time' with the others in the band, knowing full well I will inevitably press them at the wrong time, and fail. I do this several times, I also become so afraid that sometimes my contributions are barely audible. I'm scared to contribute. I fail the assessment. This is hardly a surprise. In the official report, I am told

my contributions were not only 'severely out of time', but 'unmusical'.²⁹⁷ This should have come as no surprise, since in an official music theory test months earlier, I also failed, and in that report I was told my 33% mark was 'unconzonable'.²⁹⁸

To expand on this a little then, this is a descriptive account of my own performance assessment. Before elaborating on this particular situation, it's necessary to go back in time first, to explain how I got here. As a teenager I began wanting to play music, so I got a guitar and started playing. Only later did I think it might be useful to start 'learning', so for a year or so I would just thrash out at full volume either alone, or alongside Nirvana, Nine Inch Nails or Queen Adreena albums. Once I made the decision to start learning, I had a friend who agreed to give me a few lessons, alongside some chord books that I bought. During this time, I learnt the position of the major chords on a guitar, where to put my fingers to make a major chord and what the names of these chords were. After a few lessons, I gave it up, but continued to play the guitar. From that time I remember the finger positions of one of those chords. This is the extent of my musical training. I have no idea how to play in key, I don't know what keys even are really, or scales, or even the meaning of chords. I have no concern about this anymore, but for a long time this was a debilitating situation as I was constantly surrounded by musicians and music, but cut off from the production of this stuff (as Barthes alluded to earlier). I had no idea of course there was even such a thing as improvisation, and upon first encounter of it at University it was actually a very alienating thing. Looking back, this was primarily because it was being played almost exclusively by postgraduate students and staff, so I had perceived it to be some complex code I was unaware of, and my involvement in it would reveal me as a fraud. As it happens, it wasn't like this at all, but it took me a while to figure that out.

But, that was for later. For now, I had entered university fortuitously as it happens, as a result of a then Head of Music who initiated a widening participation agenda that included creating a new degree, BMus in Popular Music that allowed an entry route from BTech courses in Music Production (which I came from) in which students didn't necessarily have to have musical training (though all except me did!). However, the awkward element of this was that upon entry, all students were made to undertake

²⁹⁷ 'Performance Studies: Assessment Report', Newcastle University, 2008.

²⁹⁸ 'Music Theory: Assessment Report', Newcastle University, 2008.

compulsory performance studies assessment, which in my case inevitably meant performing in conventional music groups whose output would be reliant on those very musical 'skills' I didn't have. Inevitably I failed. I was told I was 'totally unable to deal with musical responsibility', that I appeared 'completely frozen to the stage' and that, as I said earlier my contributions were 'unmusical'.²⁹⁹ In a report later I was told that the term 'unmusical' was justified because it was used by 'a panel of experienced, professional musicians with great standing'.³⁰⁰ Inevitably bruised by this experience, an already insecure relationship with music-making exacerbated further by the assumption that there is such a thing as 'unmusical' and that such a term can be justified by the legitimating hierarchy of professional musicianship, a hierarchy itself governed by a musical 'responsibility' to uphold the structural orthodoxies of aggressively orthodox musical traditions that have marginalised so many. There was an unmistakable truth to the fact I was frozen to the stage, petrified, my heart thumping out of my chest with severe palpitations, adrenaline through the roof, terrified I was actually about to have a heart attack, moments away from having to walk off the stage. In other words, the point has not to do with the quality of the performance necessarily, but instead that institutions and the people within them can help preserve, foster and maintain a musical discourse that allow this extreme fear of music performance in the first place. For instance, in an earlier music theory test, my 33% mark was described in the assessment as 'unconscionable' (anonymous assessment report). That this was the official assessment terminology for a fail speaks volumes of the traditions in which music is placed institutionally, as well as culturally that no-one resists this. This plays into a long-standing historical tradition in which music has been contained in this way. Archaic binaries between 'professional'/'amateur'; 'musician'/'non-musician'; 'musical'/'unmusical' are retained, and reflect Kodwo Eshun's description of old 'fossil fuel' notions which return us to that stubborn power structure – musicality:

Returning to the values of musicality always rests on the dependable virtues of harmony and difficulty, which are raised to moral principles.

³⁰¹The connoisseur rallies to the gerontocracy of musicianship, swears an

²⁹⁹ 'Performance Studies: Assessment Report', Newcastle University, 2008.

³⁰⁰ 'School Feedback': Performance Studies Assessment, Newcastle University, 2008.

³⁰¹ Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun*, 02[022]].

oath to quality, makes a brave stand for originality...when music is praised as real, pure, proper and true, then it's too late: decay has set in and the maggots aren't far off'.³⁰²

It might seem obvious that university music departments would hold somewhat orthodox perspectives on musical understanding as a result of their deeply orthodox traditions; however, what is interesting about this example is the very unusual situation of having a student with no musical performance 'skills' being allowed into an institution of this kind and expected to somehow perform these skills as according to the assessment criteria. I think it says some important things about the theoretical model of inclusivity applied here and the inherent contradictions of it in practice. In other words, one is 'included' into an enclosed space whose inclusion is dependent upon meeting the internal criteria and rules of that space, rather than changing the meaning of that internal space to reflect newcomers. This correlates somewhat to the contrast between Gilles Deleuze's concept of the 'minoritarian' and the 'majoritarian' and a 'molecular politics', which I will be looking at in Chapter 4. Returning to the issue at hand though, a few things shouldn't go unnoticed before moving on. The ideological nature of implying that performance (of a certain kind) was compulsory to the study of music should not go unnoticed, nor should the assumption that 'musical responsibility' means responsibility to maintain the stable sonic relationships of orthodox musical structure, nor should the irony of how a music department which is one of the best (if not the best) in the country for its experimental, interrogative and progressive attitude (and breadth of options) could find itself subjugated by language that seems to sit more comfortably in the dark ages of an aggressively elitist tradition. I'm talking specifically about the description of a musical performance as *unmusical* and the description of a failed music theory test as *uncondonable*. This language reveals important things about the dominant musical ideology still present within most institutional, social and cultural music spaces that produces intense fear of music performance. It thinks of music as a concrete and autonomous entity, a form of private property, owned by 'experienced professional musicians with great standing' who determine *what counts as music* (as in Lucy Green's proposition earlier). It pushed me further into a corner as if to say, *you learn the rules before you break them or you break your chances of ever playing music*.

³⁰² Ibid.

Fortunately, within the same department a burgeoning improvisation scene of a particular kind was developing that was to offer a genuine alternative to this damaging ideology. At the time, this consisted of some formal practical modules within the university and some external performance events. I began going to these events, and started opening my mind up to these approaches, and eventually began exploring them practically. I could begin to see the theoretical reasons why improvisation could be thought of as liberating for people, but at this point it hadn't yet done this for me practically. It wasn't really until after my undergraduate degree had ended that I started regularly attending the practical module 'Improvisation for Creative Practice', that I was allowed to audit. I had some anxieties beforehand and I asked my supervisor Dr. Will Edmondson (who was running the module), would I fit into it? What if there are exercises where I cannot participate because of my lack of knowledge, etc? He said 'you don't need to worry about that, trust me'. So, I did. And he was right. This was total collective improvisation. There were some exercises, but mostly theatrical or abstract enough to not demand any pre-requisite musical knowledge. Mostly everyone would walk in the room and pick up instruments, start playing. It was mostly chaotic, loud and intense, with mostly everyone playing at the same time at the same volume. In many ways, it represented what can sometimes be the edge of an extreme polarity of 'positive-freedom' improvisation where everyone expresses their freedom at the expense of everyone else. However, this gave me everything I needed at the time. I've also heard others say the same thing, including Emily King whose essay was quoted earlier. Admittedly, I'm sure this approach could also be off-putting for some. For me though, it allowed the initial space to really express myself in ways I hadn't ever been able to in the past, in a social situation with others. This felt incredibly liberating, in a similar way as using your voice solo may be daunting, but in a collective situation with others it can be much easier. This approach to collective improvisation was a really great introduction for me to this alternative route into music-making. From this point on, I was hooked.

Scruffweed

Initially, my participation was limited to these sessions. It was a while before I began playing outside of this, in smaller groups. Eventually, I built enough confidence to start something up. I asked a couple of friends who I trusted to start this with me. This was

very important to me. I knew I needed people who I could trust to not judge my involvement. I had to be comfortable laying myself open, revealing my expression as untrained and hoping that they could respond to that in an improvised way. It started with just two of us, me on guitar and Daniel Dixon on drums, in a tiny room, just playing. Then a bass guitarist Gary Burdon was added. For weeks we got together for sessions and it was amazing, a revolution in my mind; I was playing in a group that was stimulating, engaging and enjoyable for all involved and I was contributing in ways that were meaningful to the group. I was being complimented for my distinctive contributions. This felt incredibly liberating. Eventually, we added vocals, saxophone with Claire-Murphy Morgan and Robbie-Lee Hurst and from then ,the idea was that anyone could join in when they liked, so we had multiple members at various times. The band was to be called Scruffweed. The first performance was perhaps the most exciting and simultaneously terrifying experience I've had. In contrast to the other institutional performance, it was an antidote, an inversion. My nerves shot to hell, yes. But they vibrated like hairs on the neck do when you get that special reminder that you're alive, the way adrenaline shoots through the veins when you need to be *present*. I *existed* this moment because I wanted to be alive in this. Literally the opposite of the university performance where I wanted to be *anywhere* but the stage. I had read about 'the zone' in improvisation, or what William Parker calls the 'juju', the time in the music where you've created such a productive relation with the sonic materials that it seems everything you do 'just works', and you could close your eyes and be alone, or with the whole world, you could be completely present and engaged and connected to playing the music or completely removed from it and it *plays* you. I felt a power and energy through that live performance that I've been immersed in ever since. The music taught me that night that no one owns it, and that I could play it and be played by it as much as anyone else. All the misleading lies and myths about music withered away like the paper-thin illusions they really are.

One of the other crucial things I wanted to do with Scruffweed was to play challenging gigs, in venues and with audiences that weren't used to improvised music. This was important to me, as I feel it is crucial that if we are to talk about this approach to music as being revolutionary or socially relevant, it cannot exist in a dark, lonely corner with

only the aficionado's and regulars. The results we had from doing those gigs were definitely mixed; from performance poetry gigs where the audience sits in a circle facing the performers and are absolutely and completely silent, to open mic nights that are usually reserved for orthodox singer-songwriters, we placed ourselves in awkward and uncomfortable situations deliberately. In hindsight, we probably received as much praise and positive feedback as we did negative. At times, people were very welcoming and supportive, telling us that they had never heard such an approach to music and expressed interest at finding out more about it. At other times, people sniggered, scoffed and huffed at the unfamiliar and sometimes chaotic output. What all of these performances gave for me personally however, was a solid confidence in myself and a kind of self-confidence that would not be negatively diminished by external influences the way it could have been at the time of the performance assessment. After a year or so of playing in Scruffweed, the band stopped meeting and playing together. This slightly premature ending happened for various reasons, but primarily my own reason for not wanting to continue with it, was that the initial reason I started Scruffweed was to enable me the opportunity to really focus on the exploration of my musical potential through weekly sessions and performances in a trusted environment. After a year, I felt so comfortable with this (perhaps too comfortable) that I wanted to have more time to explore playing with different people and open myself up to new challenges. However, a few band members had saw Scruffweed as a 'band' in the sense that only us 5 would get together each week, and it would remain somewhat fixed. At the same time as this, a new platform had emerged in Newcastle which was blowing my mind open to the possibilities of an infinite exploration of collective improvisation.

Felt Beak

Felt Beak, developed by improviser Will Edmondson forms a crucial element of Newcastle's improvised activity, and as a site for communal improvised music-making, serves as an invaluable platform. Described by Edmondson in similar terminology to Attali's, as 'a composition which uses the discipline of spontaneous performance [to make] new musical content any minute, what our bad habit has reduced to the sterile

equivalence called 'improvisation'.³⁰³ I'll elaborate through Edmond's own words on this, before talking through my involvement:

Making a distinction between composition and improvisation is a bad, but deeply engrained, institutional habit that helps no one in the act of music-making...I don't like the idea of 'improv' or 'improvisation' or 'free improvisation' as such. It reminds me of Sainsbury's Taste the Difference - what are you revealing when you have to draw attention to the superior value in something (or simply delineating it) while still actively promoting what by default is then peddled as a significantly inferior and less worthwhile product? Music should never not be improvised anyway, so why isolate its spontaneity as an eccentricity?³⁰⁴

What Edmond's seems to be getting at here is a similar pursuit of Attali's, that the term and concept of composition has been hijacked over the years, to the extent whereby something that was originally a simple putting together of materials became defined solely by a strict pre-defined structure. The idea is to reach towards a conception of music that can be improvised without having to constantly be either apologetic or superior by delineating the distinctiveness of such an approach. 'Improvising Musician' – a term we hear so routinely, it slips by completely unnoticed and unquestioned. But, it signifies upon something I believe is crucial to the social relevance of this practice of improvised music. That is, it denotes a signal difference from what a 'musician' would normally do, but at the same time reinforcing the underlying unity of what is expected from a 'Musician', that they will be well-skilled, suitably trained and therefore legitimated to enact this difference. Furthermore, Edmond's goes on to insist that Felt Beak attempts to revise the very definition of musical 'practice' and training itself:

Felt Beak seeks through example to emphasise that the only way to make 'good' (meaningful, relevant,) art is to do, do, do, do, do, even to the extent that consciously reflecting on and prescribing what you do becomes an impediment to the doing. The old adage 'practice makes perfect' has, in our twisted culture, come to be understood as 'rigorously repeating technical drills makes perfect,' moreover 'perfect' has come to mean 'flawless,' 'pristine,' 'antiseptic,' 'sterile'...

³⁰³ Will Edmond's, 'Felt Beak Outline' personal e-mail communication, 2013.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

What the saying really means is that constant *application* (constant, critically reflexive *doing*) engenders a capacity to create and express with a facility whose continuity with the 'world' (with the rest of one's experience and encounters of your setting and the people around you) is seamless and effortless.³⁰⁵

What this idea of 'practice' has produced in practice is a musical culture that surrounds and feeds from and upon this verb-like 'doing' to the extent that 'playing' has expanded to a degree where the word 'improv' isn't even used, it is just 'to play'. So, improvisation isn't isolated from a larger musical essentialism, isn't fixed into essentialism itself, but instead provides an alternative conception of music in its entirety, one in which individuals and collectives define for themselves through spontaneous creative practice how to proceed. Music isn't treated as an exceptional event in which you need years of training to participate. This is the ideal situation in my view of a revolutionary approach to music-making, as it embeds the idea socially that music can be something immediate, fun, and social, without a wealth of repertoire or pre-determined skill-sets.

My involvement in Felt Beak was absolutely crucial, perhaps the most crucial development to how this thesis has emerged in its principal arguments. Once I started playing in Felt Beak sessions, I was able to see how my musical development in Scruffweed could be deployed in these sessions without having to tell anyone about my musical background and skill-sets. What makes this so crucial, is that this isn't a typical non-idiomatic improvisation, whereby there are almost no stylistic references or conventional musical structures; Felt Beak's style is characterised more by a kind of free jazz aesthetic blurred with the absence of any particular idiomatic unity, so what you get is a kind of pan-idiomatic mash-up of people from different musical backgrounds coming together and mixing upon the collective space engendered by the spontaneous sessions. There can be strong rhythmic focusses, as well as more free-form sessions. The crucial point is that the way this form of music-making acts as a model for collective relations is exemplary, in terms of anarcho-existentialism, as it actually creates its internal structures every time anew, depending on the individuals in each group. Each group then acts as a kind of micro-structure, and each individual's particular desires and abilities contribute directly to the meaning of the group as a whole. No-one is turned away, or denied access

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

by virtue of their individual identity. A great example of this actually comes from one of the Felt Beak off-shoot groups Yeah You, whose practice is defined by an intensely dedicated commitment to daily improvised sessions as part of the daily routine of life; in the car on the way to work, after attending a gig, on the street, on the roadside, etc, etc. This is all facilitated by portable battery-powered electronic equipment. Yeah You are a duo of vocals and electronics, practicing a kind of improvised beat-based pop aesthetic that is intensely repetitive, catchy and exciting, especially during a live setting. During one particular live gig, a few people were dancing at the front, clearly a bit intoxicated by alcohol and drugs; one woman in particular starts to talk to them during the set, saying how great it is, and how she'd really love to do something like this – so they hand her the microphone and she joins in. All is well, and everyone has a great time. The gig finishes, she walks downstairs where there is a 'communal' folk session happening in the lounge, to which she tries to join in, and gets told to leave. Nothing makes the point I'm trying to make here better than this. On the one hand, there is pseudo-communal 'folk music' activities, and on the other, a genuinely alternative mode of socio-musical organization through better community relations and co-participatory practices.

Getting back to some of the nitty gritty regarding the interpersonal relations involved with collective improvisation of this type though, there is a potential problem opened up here, because no doubt someone will say, 'well, what if person no.1's identity conflicts with person no.2's identity' or in sonic terms 'what if person no.1. wants to play full volume, amplified, and person no.2. wants to play quiet acoustic guitar?' These are some of the most well-known problems of collective improvisation, and communities of improvised music-making have found many different techniques to try and deal with them, usually consisting of some kind of mediating device that constrains the amplified expression. However, this tends more often than not to standardise expression, leaving a dull, flat-line content that does no-one any favors, besides the fascistic and conservative. What Felt Beak does extraordinarily well is find ways of avoiding any of these mediating devices without leaving wolves to eat kittens. The vast majority of Felt Beak sessions go without these kinds of conflicts overwhelming or dominating proceedings. Of course, they are always present, there is always a kind of power-game, or intersubjective (for want of a better word) relationship between whose expression is exerted when and to

what intensity/amplification/complexity, etc. There are always some dominant personalities that need to pay more attention to how their expression relates to others, and other quieter personalities that perhaps pay too much attention to others at the expense of their own expressive potential. However, due to the wider scene of improvisation in Newcastle, including both the various formal modules and the informal sessions and performance events, there is a seriousness with which it is approached that contributes to the vitality of the sessions; a seriousness not at all related to the kind of detached seriousness of Eurological Western art music, but the kind of seriousness that William Parker talks about, a kind of devotion to the music, a deep and committed engagement with it. For me, this has come about through a focus on the kinds of collective improvisation engendered by the free jazz aesthetic, as opposed to the European free-improvisation movement (the two primary historical antecedents of improvisation people encounter here in Newcastle). On a more micro level however, the thing I always keep in mind, and other people have shared in sessions, is a dedicated focus, not on the individual relationships between different identities in the group, but on the music in the room, and the feeling that we are all contributing to that music, rather than having some kind of standard linguistic or dialogical model of conversation - in other words, what I began to articulate in chapter 2, that of a non-dialogical listening. It is an attitude of going beyond improvisation as a 'taste the difference' shock-factor alternative to 'music itself', but instead, a recognition that 'music itself', 'the real thing', whatever you want to call it, can always be improvised anyway, so let's get on and make some great music that is available immediately and socially accessible. This to me seems the key element that allows us to deal best with the above-mentioned conflicts between different personalities, because no longer is it a strictly social thing where it feels more like a music counselling class with music mediating personal relationships, and no longer is it a strictly autonomous music thing, where there is no social interaction between people. Instead, it is a delicate interplay, but an affirmative one, in which everyone is geared towards making a fucking great album. There is also a huge diversity of performer base and backgrounds in Felt Beak that I feel strongly contributes to the kind of communal respect and mutual benefit here. Contrary to many commentators on improvisation (including Gary Peters), I don't find any aspects of competition here, at least not in the conventional sense, which isn't to say that sessions aren't lively or

feature an intensity that comes with multiple dynamic subjectivities, but there isn't the kind of display of virtuosic showboating, or competitive individualism that pervades so many pseudo-revolutionary movements. For video footage of this environment, see the following links: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAa24tWBtFc>) (<http://vimeo.com/feltbeak>)

What I hope these videos demonstrate is that while this is all still very small-scale, there is a distinctive culture of improvisation being developed here that is helping promote access to self-defined music-making knowledges by its artists performing in ways that help dismantle specialist knowledges. Because of its location however, it is primarily music students with advanced musical training, which brings up some interesting consequences. Firstly, it allows for intriguing combinations of groups because of my encouragement of so-called 'non-musicians' to play in Felt Beak collaborations (which I'll elaborate on later). Also, it means that the stylistic elements that can be involved in Felt Beak can also be incredibly defined and there can be lots of conventional musical language in operation. Interestingly for me then is how comfortable I have become with this. I think the primary reason why is, again, through trust, because I know there is an absence of unity of any kind, conventions come and go, rhythmic bases are changeable, keys are meaningless, so my involvement can flirt with these factors, can contribute to them meaningfully and productively and can then depart. It's not the end of the world if I mess it up, which ironically ends up meaning I 'mess' up less, not least because that 'messaging' becomes a productive force for something else to emerge. This in itself is an alternative pedagogical model, because what is being lost by insisting on a sterile performance space?

Playing regularly in Felt Beak then, without any external judgement revealed some interesting things regarding education and development, for me personally. After a while I found that all of the conventional musical attributes that my performance assessment report from earlier implied were lacking had started to develop sharply: the ability to play steady rhythms; to respond quickly to changes in the direction of pieces; to hold together a shared idea; and to generate, maintain and expand my own ideas. The recognition of these established 'musical' developments within a fully improvised

context without actually 'knowing' anything (according to all established musical systems) was exciting from both a personal perspective that fulfilled a desire that I had always craved, as well as from a research perspective as it promised a potential alternative route into musical learning. It provided the embodied knowledge that this approach does not close off possibilities of idiomatic playing, but can, if practiced lead to a wider and more sensual engagement with a variety of styles of music-making. What we might begin to refer to as an un-trained, pan-idiomatic approach.

Most importantly, I've never had to tell anyone about my apparent lack of 'skill', and it's never been an issue of any kind. On the contrary, on the rare occasion that I've brought it up in a separate conversation, people have reacted in a shocked manner, saying they didn't know. Performances of totally improvised music have also been greeted with celebration from people who didn't know they were improvised. These revelations are the most key factor to emerge out of my involvement with this outlet as a form of auto-ethnographical research, as it tells me that this is also possible with others, and if this were to happen on a larger scale, it could provoke significant changes in the accessibility and participation in music. For me, this is a key argument in this thesis, which I will spend more time on. For now, though I need to finish this journey.

Ethnographical Case-Study Research

un-Musical

The un-Musical research project was (and still is) the culmination of an un-Musical journey that has reached such a stage that I feel absolutely no different from other musicians and I am confident enough to perform accordingly. As such, I felt propelled to put something together so other people with that type of background could experience something similar, or at least were given the opportunity to. This project started as a singular project, but has gone on to spawn what I have called an un-Musical activism, born out of this initial desire to create many social outlets for the radical widening of access to a musical environment, provoking political changes in the dominant ideology of music in small-scale music communities in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Methods

I initiated the un-Musical research project then as a way to deliberately find participants who classified themselves as 'unmusical', or people who had minimal music-making experience, and to introduce them to improvised music-making through a series of workshops that build towards total collective improvisation through live performance and continued long-term engagement. I recruited participants through Facebook advertising and word-of-mouth recommendations. The reach of this advertising was inevitably closely related to my social network. The bias involved in this was clear from the start that the participants would probably be heavily into music (albeit in a passive form) or would be otherwise creatively inclined. I decided on 5 participants. Two of these participants were heavily into music, and had tried at some point in their life to play instruments, but had given up. Two were artists and the other participant was a performance-poet. My advertisement consisted of a short statement:

I am looking for participants to take part in a series of improvised music workshops. There's only one restriction. You need to have as little music-making experience as possible. If you consider yourself 'unmusical', then even better! You will be introduced into different approaches to improvised music-making on a range of exciting, cutting-edge electronic instruments as well as a range of more traditional instrumentation.

The 5 participants were taken through 4 initial workshops that consisted initially of some warm-up games, followed by various sonic exercises which aimed at encouraging the unselfconscious appetite to explore sound within the context of collective improvisation, leading to regular group playing both by themselves during practice and recording sessions and in performance spaces to public audiences. Data collection methods including the audio and video recording of every workshop, intermittent discussion and notes, observational diaries during and after the project.

Discussion

While undertaking this project, I remained aware of Paul Hegarty's critique in his book *Noise/Music: A History* of how improvisation has in the past used the concept of 'inept' as a kind of gimmick to bolster their own specialisms and preserve the very fundamental binaries of ept/inept:

Free-improvizing groups would also be open to the untrained or the seemingly unmusical, but it seems to me, in this case, that non-musicians are undergoing an initiation ritual where their innate musicality is to be brought out. If not, or if they seemed incapable of following the implied rules of a band's working, they would be shuffled back into the ranks of the non-musical³⁰⁶

As a potential example of this, think back to the previously referenced Gavin Bryars' *Portsmouth Sinfonia*, as what resulted from this project was the persistent suspicion that there was a parodic element to the output - gimmicky because it was 'funny' to watch 'non-musicians' representing 'professional' material. For me, the aim was not to 'develop' or 'bring out' an essentialist 'innate musicality', but to attempt to craft an 'existential musicality' by unraveling ideology that had restricted the participants' ability to access and define their own musical knowledges. Unfortunately, once a lifetime of dominant musical ideology has been both directly and indirectly imposed on one's consciousness, sometimes it takes a little time to develop the confidence to self-define one's musicality. For video footage of this project, see the following link (<http://cbramley.wordpress.com/original-un-musical-project/>). I will quote some comments from one participant who will explain her process through the project as part of her post-project observational diary. While other participants found the experience very rewarding and continue to be engaged in regular music-making, it is one participants experience in particular that is most pertinent. This is Nicola Bushell:

I have bad memories of school music tuition! It didn't work... At the age of 24, I spotted a notice in the shop window advertising 'Guitar Lessons'. My aunt and uncle were both musicians and they had given me a guitar a few years back. Shortly after, I gave up.

Nevertheless, I made many friends while I was 'learning' to play guitar. There was a weekly jam session in the local [pub]. My guitar always stayed firmly in its case, unless I'd drunk enough [alcohol] to get the zip undone. On these occasions, they'd un-appreciatively inform me I was out of key/tune/time.

By the age of 30, I'd lost all nerve and given up on playing music. Even just being

³⁰⁶ Hegarty, *Noise/Music*, 93.

near an instrument in the company of a 'musician' dried my mouth and scared the hell out of me. I'd tried so hard and failed!

The first [unmusical] workshop was terrifying! A room full of instruments. Once I learned how to relax [however], and realised there was no wrong way to do this, I began to completely enjoy the experience. Each week we became more relaxed and attuned to the sounds we were making... The music, the music WE were making! Our first performance was immense! We all sat chewing our nails as the night grew closer to our set. As soon as we started playing, all doubt drained from my body... We were doing it... And it sounded amazing!! For the 20 minutes we played, I was completely lost in the sound. We could have been the only people in the building - I was so absorbed! The applause was unbelievable, we were even applauding ourselves... and rightly so! I have never been so wired in my entire life as I was after that gig...

The unMusical project has been one of the most amazing experiences of my entire life. And for me, it's been a time of healing... I can now play music!³⁰⁷

This is an individual's perception of a revolution in her life, a revolution that overcame major constraints that had prevented her from engaging in music-making activity, and allowed her to resist the frequent policing of music-making she had encountered throughout her life. This is hugely important. It was my experience too. However, does that mean everyone can have that same revolution and share it in some kind of naïve pseudo-utopian global village – not likely; there are inevitably going to be people for whom an un-Musical activism has little relevance, or for whom it may not have the dramatic revolutionary potential it has had for Nicola, myself, and others. However, although it is all very small-scale, the experience of facilitating a similar experience in other people to what I have experienced has given me great hope and renewed affirmation of why this is such important work to do. Nicola's personal account for instance illuminates a key part of the un-Musical pursuit: the existential affirmation of the ability to self-define one's own meaning of sound and musical knowledges. It was obviously important for Nicola's confidence that she made the leap from 'the sounds we

³⁰⁷ Nicola Bushell, 'Project Feedback', Personal E-mail Correspondence

were making' to...'The music WE were making!'. It's also revealing that Nicola's account of this first performance is almost identical to my own first performance – nerves yes, fear yes, but excitement definitely, cathartic release absolutely. The way that doubt in your ability to make music is not heightened and confirmed, but withered away amidst the sheer joy of being alive in this experience. Of course, the ubiquity of dominant musical ideology will have played its part in obstructing Nicola's access to self-defined music knowledges, but actually, the most crucial obstruction was her own personal community, her musician friends, who confirmed to her that she was always 'out of tune/out of time', and unless she could learn her instrument 'properly' she was making a 'mockery' of its traditions and she couldn't join in with their so-called 'communal music-making' because she wasn't making music, but just 'pointless noise'. Nicola had encountered this policing of music-making throughout her life, by those armed with the power of legitimised knowledges to guard the gates - the 'artists' who were intent on preserving whatever arbitrary barriers are currently erected to maintain the dominant musical ideology that stratifies those who 'can' from those who 'cannot'. I cannot stress strongly enough how urgent I think it is to forge models of activist resistance to this kind of absurd 'policing' of music-making by those 'artists' claiming hegemonic knowledges. I want to suggest that because artists/musicians are considered 'legitimate' producers of musical knowledges, they hold a particular kind of social responsibility to be aware of that power and ideology – where it comes from, whether it is valid, and whether they want to re-produce or re-think it. As we saw before, there are artists such as William Parker who do an excellent job of doing just this, but others that contribute heavily to the problem.

Key Observations

- Dominant musical ideology actively produces fear of playing music in those considered 'unmusical' or 'non-musicians'.
- Fear can be overcome through improvised routes to music-making, but needs to be gradual as well as regular and committed.
- Long-term outlets need to be developed if participation is to be ongoing. These outlets should take the form of regular performance opportunities, so as a networked support structure can emerge in local music scenes.

- Different strategies may need to be developed for participants who are not as creatively inclined as these participants were.

Human Beings Improvising : Parks, Pubs, Restaurants and Everywhere.

Methods

I created an event page on Facebook and invited people from various music groups, and advertised this event around my social network. I described the ongoing event as an open-access weekly improvised session for anyone and everyone to join in with small and large-group playing, including children with parents. The method of these sessions would not consist of workshop exercises. Instead, it would simply be a case of pulling names out of a hat and randomly organising small trios or quartets to play a timed piece of 5 minutes each before moving around the group. There would then be time for discussion from the rest of the group intermittently. When we played in the park in summer, we often just started playing as a large group, and would invite passers-by to join in, which occasionally they did (see picture documentation below) Data collection consisted again of audio and video recording as well as observational diaries taken from informal conversations captured on recordings.

Discussion

Once the initial un-Musical project had ‘finished’ its original schedule, I asked the participants whether they wanted to continue on, and I continued to book practice rooms and borrowed instruments for them to play with on a weekly basis. They were very keen to keep going with it. It then became apparent, that it is only half the battle to do what I had done so far, I now needed more outlets because the wider musical environment is not readily inclusive of improvised and experimental music anyway, let alone from people who haven’t *learnt the rules before breaking them*. It was necessary then to craft as many performance outlets as possible. Human Beings Improvising provided a weekly open-access space (in pubs and restaurants in the winter and the park in summer)

Because of the 'open' nature to this session however, there is the possibility of it being open to problems, of people turning up to impose their own authority on how the group should be organised etc. This is where the problematic associations with collective social organisation through anarchist ideals become to emerge. Anarchist organisation is never assumed to be perfect from the start; it takes a dedicated working through by a collective in order to allow for the maximisation of individual expression, but *never* at the expense of anyone else. To give a specific example then: trying to make committed, engaged improvisation, which in that definition does not exclude 'fun' means there is no real reason why children and adults cannot improvise together. Not everybody saw it that way though. One week, a young man turned up who seemed on board with the general ethos and atmosphere of this open-ended organisation. However, after the session, he sent Nicola Bushell (Nicola, from the un-Musical project) a private message on Facebook to tell her how he felt her children needed to learn some 'etiquette' and keep a bit more quiet! Obviously, she was angry about this and an argument ensued. He hadn't included me in this private message, despite it being me who had organised this session and invited people to bring their kids. Once I got involved in the conversation, his nasty tone changed, and all of a sudden he started saying things like 'hey bro'. This made sense, when I started browsing his Facebook page, and found out he was a genuine Men's Rights Activist and was regularly posting extremely misogynistic content. I told him that the weekly sessions were designed so that children could participate in a safe space and that he shouldn't come along anymore in light of this. He then designed an 'adults only improv' group, which almost no-one turned up to and we never heard from him again.

Although it may seem a theoretical contradiction to talk about potentially excluding people like this within the context of an apparently anarchist open-access space, I don't think it is a contradiction in practice at all to say that anybody who acts in a way that directly damages that open-access space itself, or the ability for others to move without intimidation, then the space cannot be open to that kind of abuse.

Fortunately, this situation was kept at a distance from the children, because it all took place via social media and so it didn't have any noticeable effect on the sessions at all. I want to enclose some images of the sessions alongside some links to documented

footage as I think it says a lot about the flaws of the music education models previously discussed, about how we think about music generally, about how unnecessarily stratified music is, and as William Parker alluded to earlier, how excluded children are from perhaps the most interesting musical environments.

Fig.3.



- 'Trauma' Noise performer Jamie Stewart (Wrest) who normally performs by aggressively smashing mic'd up objects on stage, is here playing Ukulele with 6-year old Kasey

Fig3.1



- Summer bandstand sessions in the park. The family at the entrance of the bandstand were walking through the park and decided to join in

Fig 3.2



- Very hot afternoon in the park with instruments; sometimes there was music, other times there was talking. Sometimes the two were blurred.

Fig 3.3



- Playing music on a Sunday afternoon in Barloco's restaurant/bar with my partner and daughter.

Fig 3.4



- Barloco Art Gallery open-access 'name in hat' sessions.

Fig 3.5



- Dual piano section and acoustic guitar in University Recital Room

Fig 3.6



- Two engrossed young minds watching live performance. The world would be a much better place if this were a more common scene.

Fig 3.7



- Father and son wander in and play synthesizers for the first time.

The approach throughout all of these sessions was always to have the kids' involvement as seamless as possible, so it would never be mentioned as a 'thing', we wouldn't do deliberate exercises, etc. They joined in always, took part in the small group and large group playing, and everyone (apart from the men's rights activist) found their involvement to contribute meaningfully rather than to detract in any way. It's excellent and also somewhat surprising how engaged they have been. It's been incredibly rewarding to have been involved in creating these opportunities, both for the children themselves, but also for the adults who have been given a different perspective on what

it means to have children around music. There were a couple of particular moments that stand out. One was the family who were walking through the park, and the kids ran over to the bandstand, and wanted to join in, and so did. This made me particularly happy, as it was in sharp contrast to when my own daughter around the same age approached the Folk musicians in the Cumberland Arms and was discouraged from participation. The other was a session in the pub/restaurant, where a father and son joined in and converged over a synthesiser, excited at discovering something new together. The image above capturing the warmth of the moment. It's these moments of enabling spontaneity, social interaction and accessibility that music should be about, but it is really only through this kind of immediate accessibility as improvised musical approach that it can become a social reality. This project has offered a micro-glimpse of an attempt to re-energise music as a social form through and through that can be accessed by all. We have sought to dismantle the specialism and professionalism of people's expectations of music and invite them to re-define music as immediately accessible, fun and socially engaging.

Key Observations

- Children are not automatically alienated by this approach to music whatsoever, instead they typically embrace the excitement of exploration.
- Socially accessible spaces automatically dismantle certain notions of professionalism, specialism and elitism associated with music and instead posit a communitarian, democratic approach.
- When producing new and alternative ideas in the community, it is important to be present in social space without dominating it. Allowing people to just wander in and either watch or join in invites them to consider an alternative understanding of music-making without shoving it down their throats. People responded to this well and often stayed and participated.
- Anarchist open-access spaces need to have strategies in place to deal with abuse of that space. Open-access cannot mean open to abuse. To use a tired political phrase, we cannot tolerate intolerance.

Improvisation for Children's Creative Practice

Methods

I was given the opportunity to work alongside a music teacher colleague of mine, Daniel Dixon at Burnside Primary School in Cramlington. We proposed a 6-week term-time project for year 6 students (10-11 year olds). We collectively devised exercises strategically adapted for this age group. They included invisible ball games, animal vocal sound orchestras, and musical currency games. All of these exercises were designed to introduce a gradual process from opening up perceptions to what is musically possible all the way to regular collective improvisation. Data collection consisted of audio recording (but not video due to complications of parental consent) as well as intermittent group discussions and post-project observational diaries.

Discussion

We worked in a music room surrounded by standard musical terminology, huge posters describing orthodox structures of music: harmony, melody, rhythm, etc. The children had already developed a basic understanding of these concepts and were able to perform the practical 'skills' associated with this knowledge. They were, however, extremely excited about having the space to explore and create without the restrictions they had been used to. When the project first started, this excitement overwhelmed them a little, and one of the first sonic exercises we did consisted of the entire group playing together (a group of 30 children!), but only being able to play 3 different 'ideas' each through the piece. Even with this restriction, the children found it hard to become really immersed in the activity, and instead people were talking to each other while it was happening, everyone was playing all at the same time, at the same volume. Although obviously this can become part of the process, even the children themselves during a discussion afterwards found it to not be very rewarding. However, after splitting the group in 2 and allowing more discussion, the sessions became more rewarding for the children, in the sense of them being visibly and audibly more 'connected' to the activity, immersed and enjoying it.

By the time of the final session, the children were taking part in full, total collective improvisation without any restrictions and were interacting with each other sonically in ways a lot of adult improvisors find difficult. They were listening to each other with intent and sensitivity, while still being bold and confident to express themselves individually, which for many improvisors is an ideal situation for spontaneous collective playing. It wasn't all rosy however, and there were ongoing issues – someone playing really dominant all of the time, someone being a little timid and anxious about getting audibly involved, etc. To grapple with this, we simply allowed for 10-15 minutes discussion with the children after each exercise, where we asked them questions about how they thought it went, allowed them to talk this through themselves, and occasionally offered subtle interventions where necessary. The music teacher who was in the class commented on the usefulness of this, and how it gave new pedagogical tools that she wouldn't otherwise have had access to in the normal music setting, especially in terms of using music as a means to negotiate interpersonal conflicts. For instance, she noted to us how when we asked the children to organise themselves into two groups, they would inevitably separate themselves alongside their friends, which also led to two very gendered groups, and this gave her the opportunity to identify key differences in the musical interaction. She had noted that the group with mostly boys was typically loud, brash and competitive, usually in terms of who could make the loudest and most noise, while the group with mostly girls was typically quiet, sensitive and interactive, with the children being very tentative about encroaching onto others spaces etc. This is a symptom that other workshop leaders in various conferences I have attended have also pointed to, and it is a useful and I would argue a unique opportunity to begin to identify these kinds of social issues, which in other kinds of pre-composed musical approaches would go unnoticed, or camouflaged.

Overall, I considered the project a success because we had a lively class of engaged, committed students determined, happy and immersed in the activities. We had managed to utilise approaches that brought the quieter, less confident children into the activities, while tweaking approaches which brought the louder, more dominant types into a more cooperative level, without necessarily squashing their expressiveness. The children as a whole seemed to reach their own conclusions as to how it was a delicate, balancing act

to contribute in enjoyable and engaged ways for yourself, but also in ways that were meaningful and enjoyable to the group as a whole. And they wanted to continue to do it after the project was finished. As I alluded to in Chapter 1 however, we have to keep the outcome of this project in perspective with what it contrasts from, which is an absurdly restrictive and rigid music education amidst significantly ill-equipped and under-resourced schools for most children. What is important, though, is that, unlike the Musical Futures programme from earlier, we weren't just giving children a simplistic revision of their normal music curriculum i.e. teaching them the structures of popular songs, but instead we were trying to open their minds to an approach to music that they literally had not come across before, which would give them agency, expressiveness and collective responsibility. In both this project, and during an informal skill-share session at my daughter's school, none of the children said they had ever made music with each other in this way before.

We received extensive feedback from the children at Burnside afterwards via observational diaries. These are just some of those comments (with my emphasis on pertinent points in italics):

I enjoyed that we had the chance to play various instruments with *no particular pattern*. This was a good way to develop our musical knowledge and skills.

I enjoyed interacting *with other people – with music*.

I liked the idea that I could *play freely, or play with other people*.

I liked that you didn't have to do exactly *the right thing at the right time*...I also liked that each time you do this you keep getting better each time.

I learnt that it does not need to be perfect. I have *learnt to play and not to be scared*...my confidence has grown loads.

It was very nice to have a laid back teacher who doesn't get angry. It was also fun when *there was no right or wrong*. I enjoyed that we were able to express ourselves and we could learn *how to interact with each other* through a fun way. I now know *how to play with confidence and enjoyment*.

I learnt during the excellent experience to play with other people together – *Before [this project] I was scared to join in...* I liked it because they {the teachers} were laid back and there was not much pressure...I will remember this for the rest of my life.³⁰⁸

Again, we have here someone talking about improvisation having life-changing effects. Now, obviously, this may prove not to be the case, but it says something about how important music can be in people's lives and how drastically cut off from its production most people also feel.

Key Observations

- Children placed significant emphasis on interaction with each other and how 'playing with other people' was a novel idea they had 'just' been introduced to after 5 or 6 years of music education. The fact this is an unusual idea for children speaks volumes of what we as societies have allowed to happen to music and children's involvement with it.
- This interaction with each other was directly linked to the 'freeing' of the activity – the improvisation.
- Because the activity didn't need to be 'perfect' or the right thing at the right time, they were not 'scared to join in' but felt encouraged to. The pressure had been lifted.
- 'Free-playing' did not lead to a lack of care, or lack of meaning attributed to the activity. The same child who said she enjoyed not having to do the right thing at

³⁰⁸ Anonymous Children's Feedback, Burnside Primary School, Cramlington, 2013.

the right time, in the next breath said she also enjoyed how she would get better at it each time.

- At no point did we make any suggestion of a better or a worse. The children seemed to come to their own conclusions on this based on how much focus was given to each activity.
- The groups gradually began to listen more to each other and developed a sense that they were making 'progress' and as a result gained more enjoyment from their interactions. They felt this approach could explicitly develop their musical knowledge.
- It seemed to be the very pluralism of musical knowledge(s) that the children found so rewarding and captivating.
- A consistent theme throughout the children's comments was also a positive recognition of the 'laid back' approach of the teachers. This implied that they had made a previous association between music lessons and angered discipline. While it is perhaps necessary to have a certain amount of discipline the classroom, and for music lessons to an extent, it is perhaps the specific mode and amount of discipline enacted to the extent that the fun of the activity of music is hindered, which may have been the problem here.

Weekly Improvisation Sessions – 'How do I know if it is wrong?'

Method

This was an attempt to look at the absence of improvisation in music scenes from the perspective of trained musicians who might not be used to improvised music-making to have accessible routes. I used word of mouth advertising through the Newcastle University Music Department, as well as through Facebook where I made an event page and simply advertised these sessions as free-form improvisation. I would deploy the same strategy as Human Beings Improvising, i.e. names out of hats and small groups playing in timed pieces.

Discussion

It might seem strange at first to use terms like ‘accessible’ routes for trained musicians, but for a lot of these people, it is a very difficult trajectory to start thinking of music-making in this way. As well as the informal and ubiquitous musical ideology imposed on them as with everyone else, they also have their specific and sometimes advanced formal training that has supplemented this ideology. Many times, these musicians are genuinely afraid to improvise and they find it the most difficult thing to do. They can have highly advanced and extended techniques, be incredibly proficient on their instrument, yet you say ‘improvise’ and they become completely stiff, rigid and static. The ideology of musical fixity rears its head and embeds itself. A couple examples of this are useful to further illustrate the problems at work here.

A young white man turns up with a guitar and after we introduce each other, he tells me he is a Folk musician and I ask him if he has had experience of playing improvisation. We’ll call him Jean-Paul for the purposes of this description. He says yes, lots. So, OK, we go straight into playing, in small groups of 4, picked at random for 10 minutes each. The first group plays a particularly noisy piece, that doesn’t offer much in the way of regular rhythm or standard musical relations. Then, the next group is to feature Jean-Paul. He looks frightened, he speaks out and says ‘Look, I don’t know what to do here, I’m a folk musician, I thought when it said improvisation it was like blues and folk and jazz’. His experience of improvisation then was obviously limited to a strict idiomatic model in which the moments for improvisation are limited and also tend to happen within clear idiomatic structures, keys, etc. I explained to him if he wanted to, he could ‘play folk’, if that’s what he wanted to do and people would respond to that. The whole point of this type of improvisation is that nothing is off limits, and that it is decided completely by the individuals involved. But, he said ‘How do I know if it is wrong?’

This question has stayed with me for the months and months since it was said, resonating its residue in a deeply profound way. It took me by surprise as much as it confirmed what I had feared regarding the level of fear invoked by professional musicianship, and the fixity that goes with ‘training’. What took me most by surprise was

how he didn't seem concerned with doing it 'right', but only with avoiding doing it 'wrong'. What did 'right' and 'wrong' mean for him here, and did it even matter? Was it completely arbitrary, and he just wanted to be told what the parameters for competence and failure were? When I responded by saying there isn't any 'right' or 'wrong' he looked disappointed, as if by pleading with me that I could give him one. I expanded a little by saying, as long as people are listening to each other and to the overall sound, you'll start to find ways of interacting and expressing in your own way and you'll feel how to respond and that feeling of being into it, or it feeling good, is really where the meaningful engagement in this music comes from. A violinist friend of mine sitting next to him tried to explain that it might be useful to think about it more like 'textures' than keys, or other standard musical terminology. He seemed OK enough to start playing, and it turned out to be a quartet featuring this violinist, a guitarist and a synthesizer. These particular players helped a lot, because two of them (the violinist and the guitarist) are from folk-based traditions, and so they were able to respond to musical configurations in a way that was probably useful in this situation. With that said, they did also push the boat in terms of variety and exploration of sound. After this experience, he seemed a little more comfortable. We did some more small group playing, and then some large group exercises in order to help him get used to what was happening. One such exercise was as follows: one person starts to play something simple, a really short phrase or sound, the next person responds to it in whatever way they wish, while the first continues to play. This goes on and on round the circle, until everyone is playing. It produces a build-up of a somewhat coherent entry point for collective improvisation. Once everyone is up and playing, the idea is to build on this and start improvising and responding to all the sounds. I think this produced a surprisingly enjoyable experience for Jean-Paul, as it gave him something to engage with and latch onto that he could relate to and enjoy. In this case, this was a somewhat regular rhythmic structure. As it developed, it showed him how the musical relationships can be more fluid, complex and expansive than just that, and this development was better received because of the introduction than it would have been going 'straight into it cold' as it were. He expressed afterwards how he had enjoyed this piece more, because of these features, but overall spoke of his confusion about the whole thing. He said he would consider trying to come regularly. This didn't materialise however, and he has since never returned to the sessions.

I want to draw attention briefly to one more example of this kind, before discussing the impacts of these examples. Recently, a friend had brought someone along to one of these sessions, again a trained musician, again, a young male guitarist, who was 'curious' about 'free-improv' and wanted to come along and see what was happening. There were only 6 or 7 people in the group, so instead of small groups we decided to all play together at first, see how it goes and then maybe split into smaller groups. This person, who we will call David for the purposes here was intently tuning his guitar before we started, insisting that he got it right. While obviously, tuning to standard tuning is fine in this context, it did slightly alert me to in hindsight to what was about to happen. We all played together for probably about 15 minutes. It was slightly chaotic, but nothing extreme, there was enough dynamic control and awareness that people could be heard, perhaps not all the time, but there was enough rhythmic emphasis to ensure it wasn't completely alienating to new ears. However, as soon as the 15 minute piece had finished, he got up and said 'Hey guys, I'm really sorry, but I'm just really not into this, I'm really sorry, but I'm going to go'. Before we had a chance to really talk about anything, he'd already gathered his bag and was wanting to head out. We didn't get a chance really to talk about it, but the level of his desire to leave probably meant any persuasion would have seemed too invasive for him too. In hindsight, approaches that try to give people something to relate to in their current 'situation' that allows them to see their own personal route is, I think a helpful one that has more meaningful longevity.

Key Observations

- This case study highlights the extent to which dominant musical ideology exerts its influence on trained musicians, creating a distinct fear of improvising particular to their musical identities.
- Also highlights the gap between the musical approaches taken-for-granted by trained musicians and those taken by improvising musicians.
- Significant difficulty associated with bridging this gap. It is clear that a gradual approach, as with the un-Musical project is also beneficial here.
- Important to remember the inclusive/exclusive group dynamics that can emerge when any group meets regularly, even in open-access organisations. Existing

group members can become desensitized to just how radical and perhaps unnerving these approaches can be to newcomers who may have never come across them before. These newcomers need a more sensitive approach to introducing them to these approaches.

Blue Rinse

Method

Blue Rinse is a monthly performance event I have hosted from 2011-2014. The format is typically 5 or 6 performances starting at 8pm, with short sets of 20 minutes each and fast turnarounds, but most importantly, the content would be varied and in sharp contrast, as much as possible. So, we would often have a singer-songwriter playing conventional musical structures right after a drone noise performance; a free-improv Dictaphone collage next to a standard rock band; a performance poetry set next to a folk duo; a pole dance routine after a solo double bass set. A few key findings emerged from this approach that I will now discuss. Data collection methods included audio and video recording (which was made clear to audiences and performers) as well as personal diaries and informal conversations.

Discussion

The motivation for Blue Rinse events was because I wanted to open improvised music up to wider audiences and avoid the usual situation of improvised and experimental music being played only alongside itself and to audiences who come expecting that music. What ends up happening mostly in those situations is rhetoric of how liberating or experimental this music is, all the while it is presented in spaces that render its wider social relevance, well, largely redundant (Tusk, A Better Noise, Café Oto, etc.) I wanted therefore to maximise the social relevance of this music. I feel that the Blue Rinse platform has allowed performers to gain a genuine appreciation of each other's practice, which provided a proper alternative from the 'alternative' marketing methods of the entertainment industry, in which 'alternative' is nothing more than another label for the same thing again; pseudo-difference nothing more than subtle variation. The entire

entertainment industry, from major label productions to pub and house gigs market their products in this way, packaging everything into genres and so-called oppositions and variations, all the while we always keep them apart and make each label, each genre, each event, unified into sameness. Who can we book that compliments the headline act, etc. In contrast, Blue Rinse challenges these tendencies in practice. For instance, one performer said to me: 'it was really funny, because we were on after [name removed for anonymity purposes] and our band would usually be his enemy, but it felt much better just talking about stuff'.

An additional consequence of the Blue Rinse framework is the inversion of power differentials impacting upon the performers, who have gotten used to the comfort blanket of this model of sameness and audience expectation being predictable. Two examples of this are useful: firstly, a singer-songwriter who I had known some years ago who came to play. Because I knew him, I also knew that he wasn't used to hearing improvised and experimental music. As such, he had a few problems coming to terms with it all. What he said to me before the gig though has always stuck with me: 'Charlie, I've never been so nervous in my whole life before a gig'. This shocked me, because I hadn't known him to feel nerves in this way. I felt bad at first because I thought maybe I had gone too far and invited someone to this scene which perhaps still had too strong an emphasis towards the improvised. But, then after some thought I realised the primary cause of this anxiety is what I referred to earlier. It's the comfort of knowing an audience will enjoy my stuff because they came to enjoy that 'type' of music. The fear of playing to audiences that may not like us is an inevitable product of an entertainment industry that creates pseudo-differentiation based on 'types', themselves based on yet more types. A typology that eventually unifies. The fear then is interesting because it reminded me of the fear I'd felt in advance of my performance assessment at university, that feeling like I didn't belong in that place, but also that I was not equipped with the skills to carry out the job. In this case though, the skills weren't the problem and the fear was able to be channelled productively. As I watched him play, I was again shocked because it was the best I'd seen him play. He played as if his life depended on it, he was incredibly focussed on it that what came through was a really engaging performance. That said, he didn't return to the event!

The second example I want to cite is of a pop/rock band who played on a night in which there was a slight bias towards the experimental. Most of the performers were doing performances that would have made this band feel uncomfortable if they wanted to play alongside similar 'types'. And they did, as it happens. The band were made up of music students, albeit first year students, so they may not have been completely aware of the type of event Blue Rinse is, but the event promotion should have made it clear to them what the content would be like. However, either the message didn't get through, or the extent of the contrast shocked them, but they were very shell-shocked after watching a particular raucous performance by an improvised band Radioactive Sparrow, whose performance style can often be about mimicking the style and aesthetics of a non-improvised band as much as possible. This perhaps threw them completely out of their comfort blanket, as they were insistent that they didn't want to go on and play: 'how can we go on after that?' After some discussion, they did go on, but a few minutes into the set, the lead vocalist decided to say : 'So, no-one informed us about the experimental music'. In this sentence, they revealed quite a lot of things about the power differentials and politics of what Blue Rinse created. Here was a group of young white men, playing male-dominated instruments in a conventional way (guitars, bass guitar, and drums) and really upset, disgruntled, even afraid, of playing alongside music that differed in some way. Maybe it was more than that though. Maybe the conflict goes deeper, because perhaps there is something about the experimental and improvised music that actually critiques the conventional in ways that make conventional performances and performers unnerved? Perhaps a group like this never really question themselves or their practice, because the validity and value of it is always confirmed by playing alongside similar groups, and audiences who only want to hear that kind of material. It would seem preposterous or unheard of however for an experimental or improvised performer to get up on stage and say 'no one informed us of the conventional stuff'. Their practice is constantly being questioned over its validity and legitimacy, and heightened by the fact most audience sizes for this music are generally tiny. So, there is the obvious issue of the sheer numbers of conventional performances versus improvised in the wider scheme of things and even though this particular night has an emphasis on experimental/improvised, the power relations of music more generally remain in place clearly. After the performance, I talked to some of the group, and tried to get an

impression of how they felt afterwards. At one point I tried to get them to see the positivity of the situation by saying 'well, the whole point of Blue Rinse, is that it has this dramatic contrasts between performances etc', to which the singer replied in an inversion of that positivity 'well, yeah you can say that again!'

The way that these power differentials play out upon the politics of performance spaces is not just limited to these aspects. Gender dynamics in performance spaces are something that is routinely excluded from most programming, leading to situations where implicit bias is allowed to perpetuate male-dominated scenes. Implicit bias, is a mode of operation that is at once unintentional and at the same time perhaps the most effective exclusionary device, specifically because of the apparent unintended nature of it. Say, for example you have a young white male promoter or organizer of an event; say his social network consists mostly of other young white men. It would seem inevitable that when he looks around for artists to book, he sees young white men. And this is what happens – over and over again.

When I was making the decisions then for programming Blue Rinse, there were occasions where people would get in touch and ask if they could play, and I had to be careful to ensure that the event as a whole had the right balance, in terms of the sonic contrasts I needed, but also the gender dynamics. This was incredibly important to me, as it makes no sense talking of an event being in any way liberatory or progressive, if it completely ignores oppressive structures that act upon it, especially if I, as a productive agent of that situation, can act upon that situation to change it. A few people had made comments to me about tokenism, so it's important to address this issue momentarily. In this sense, tokenism would be the attempt (whether well-intentioned or not) to include a member of an oppressed or minority group because of that minority identity, in order to present the appearance of fair representation, sometimes regardless of that person's suitability for the role (whether it is a job or a performance). At no point did I, at any stage in Blue Rinse's history deploy the method of tokenism. Why would I need to? When you have an array of fantastic female musicians at your doorstep (through the various university music programs as well as from the wider local music scene), why would I not ask them? They are clearly suitable for the performance. It's not a case of asking people because of their gender, but at the same time not being gender-blind or colour-blind enough to

pretend that these dynamics do not exist, or that we are in any way in a post-gender or post-racial situation. We're not, and the power relations that relate to factors of this kind are very much in play, and therefore need to be addressed in ways that provide meaningful change in performance spaces.

When it comes to race, we do have a problem with our geographical location and the social demographics. Newcastle is a very white city. That isn't to say that there aren't a significant amount of non-white musicians in the city, because there are, but numbers are such that there is always going to be a likely majority/minority relation here, which can only be moderately tackled by programming choice, but my argument is that when it comes to gender it is a definite misrepresentation to see it that way, and we can and should be doing much more to avoid implicit bias in this area.

One important example to draw upon before closing this section is a particular performance by 3 female saxophonists and a male drummer that I organised for Blue Rinse. The 3 saxophonists were Rebecca Jennings, Faye MacCalman and Emily King. Emily King wrote the auto-ethnography earlier that I referenced; Rebecca, Faye and Emily all went to the same Girls school in Wakefield and all chose to play the saxophone, and then go to Newcastle University where they are currently undergraduate students; and then all began playing improvisation around the same time and found in it modes of resistance to various oppressive structures elsewhere in music. They had all been attending a weekly improvisation session I had been running, and they had been playing a little in Felt Beak sessions. I had never heard them all play together in an improvised context, so I suggested to them playing in a group with drums, as I thought this would be an exciting combination. And it was. This was one of the most talked about performances at Blue Rinse and for the performers it was a powerful moment. Politically, to have 3 young women playing saxophone (the prototypical example of the male dominance of that instrument in jazz) in a free jazz/free-improv aesthetic of noisy, rapturous, rhythmic and rebellious music sent a strong message that we can do a lot better as a community than the 'boys on guitars' model that is allowed to suffice as 'that'll do' in most performance spaces. For the performers however, even I had not anticipated how important it was for them. Looking back now, their responses to my asking them to perform were revealing in themselves: 'Thankyou for the opportunity'; 'Thanks for asking'. The level of

appreciation for just being asked was surprising, as well as identifying it as an 'opportunity' spoke volumes. After further conversations, it became apparent that these performers weren't typically being asked to perform very often at all, in both conventional performance spaces and experimental improvised events. This seemed to change after this particular performance. All of a sudden, they remarked how people began to start asking them to play, either in practice sessions, recording for albums, and in performances. The problem of implicit bias and an absence of awareness of gender dynamics has a multiplying impact, as the lack of women on the scene through implicit bias creates the perception they don't exist and/or they lack the quality needed to be there. This myth then means existing female musicians don't get asked to perform. Usually, all that is needed (as in this case) is for female musicians to have 'the opportunity' to play, and then all of a sudden, people realise the mythical construct behind implicit bias.

Key Observations:

- The Blue Rinse approach to live improvised music means that more people experience improvised live music by 'accident'; either by coming to see someone else and then staying and being surprised by what comes next, by stumbling into the room, or being sat down having a meal not realising a gig was happening (6:30 sound checks for no-wave noise acts while people eat pizza and drink wine is not everyone's idea of fun though).
- It encourages a wider appreciation of music by being presented in short bursts of 20 minutes each, so that audiences and performers have unexpected music experiences and usually stay for the duration. This meant that most events were very busy.
- Performers begin to appreciate each other's differences more profoundly. They are presented with an inversion of how performance spaces are normally structured. Instead of being paired with complimentary or similar sounding acts that 'go with them', they are paired with contrasting or different sounding performers that sometimes 'go against them'.
- Performers also experience conflicts between their differences that need to be overcome to immerse in the Blue Rinse experience.

- Improvisation is not isolated into some culturally alienating location and segregated into a spectacle of its own difference. Instead it is fore-fronted alongside every other kind of 'conventional' approach to music. This normalising invites performers and audiences to challenge their own tacit assumptions around dominant musical ideology and widen their understandings of music itself.

For video footage of Blue Rinse, see: <http://cbramley.wordpress.com/blue-rinse/>

Key conclusions of an un-Musical activism

To close this chapter then, I want to draw together some key objectives and pursuits to have emerged from the previous examples and give a short outline of what I think they offer, in what I am calling an un-Musical activism:

Be present in social space without dominating it: An un-Musical activism requires multiple outlets of accessible improvised music-making happening at the same time reflecting the co-operative interrelation between cultivation and expansionism models.

un-Musical activism, then, reflects a multi-layered approach whereby there are two parts. The first involves groups of indeterminate numbers playing in various socially accessible spaces: on the street, in pubs, parks restaurants and cafés etc. – these activities form a kind of projection outwards, a form of direct action in which the cultural activity is visible, audible, and in clear sight for anyone who wishes to join in or find out more. This is the expansionist half of the project. The other half is in so-called 'internal' cultivation projects, in which participants are recruited to take part in ongoing workshops, school projects, recording sessions, performances, etc. This is the process by which we just get on and do stuff and hope to recruit as many people to join in as possible, without making it purposefully visible or audible in people's unsuspecting faces. However, I feel strongly that in the type of approach un-Musical activism practices, a two-part process of cultivation and expansionism is necessary. I feel it is necessary to have time for focussed dedication to alternative socio-musical organisation, but at the same time, I believe there is social space to display this visibly in a non-confrontational, non-aggressive way - to repeat: *to be present in social space without dominating it*. Make

ourselves present in various socially accessible spaces, hoping to display alternative modes of socio-musical organisation, without making ourselves so loud or aggressive so as to dominate that space and intimidate or exploit that space's potential usages for other means. The aim at the core of all of this, is that by having fun improvising in small community settings, this very fluidity and immediacy of music-making presented in a sincere way which doesn't force it down people's throats, will be greeted with, at worst, a passive acceptance of its presence in social space, and at best, an irresistible social energy that appeals to people on a fundamental level of curiosity– 'what's that happening over there, I wonder what they're up to'. The small-scale case studies presented in this chapter showed that this has happened on many occasions.

'If you don't put yourself in the way of people, they don't put themselves in the way of you': various points of entry, open-access, but not open to abuse.

'If you don't put yourself in the way of people, they don't put themselves in the way of you'.³⁰⁹ Penny Rimbaud, co-founder of Anarchist Punk band Crass is a firm believer in socio-musical anarchist organisation as a form of direct activist action. I like what Rimbaud is getting at here. This is a crucial part of any approach that involves itself with an activist agenda. How do you create alternative modes of socio-musical organisation while not alienating people completely, as we have seen with other approaches? Rimbaud's position that you have to put yourself in the way of people meant that he deployed a particularly open agenda about where Crass would play and deployed a particular welcoming attitude to newcomers. This meant ultimately refusing to play any commercial venues, playing instead in all kinds of unusual venues: chapels, social clubs, children's playgrounds, sport centres, etc. They often brought food and tried to create an environment in which community relations could be formed. This also meant trying to keep everything open-access, even to the point where other bands would deliberately try and kick people out who they thought might have reflected Fascist tendencies, Crass would try and bridge connections with people like this, because for Rimbaud: 'they've still got a heart, they were just desperate people coming from desperate situations and we proved time and time again that if you treated people with respect they'll treat you

³⁰⁹Crass – Penny Rimbaud Talks', You Tube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mADo_8D8nmc (14th March, 2014).

with respect'.³¹⁰ This level of effort involved with trying to bridge community relations is extraordinary. I'm not so sure that I could extend this far, because as I've discussed, I would worry about placing other people in danger, as I've experienced smaller-scale incidents of this kind of thing happening. The specifics can be argued over, but the general approach is dead-on. Come to people with sincerity, with respect and give everyone a chance to have access to these spaces. Open-access but not open to abuse.

Open spaces, not inclusive spaces

We must move away from traditional understandings of inclusivity. The entire binary of inclusivity/exclusivity presupposes a fundamental enclosed structure and/or space that people can be included into, or shut out from. This notion of enclosed structures/spaces that someone has been shut out from inevitably leads to the conclusion that the problem is not to do with the structure/space, but simply that people do not have enough access to it. un-Musical activism fundamentally challenges the foundations of such structures/spaces, and instead attempts to create open anarchist spaces for community music-making that widen participation, but do not resort to orthodox understandings of inclusivity that only create further enclosed spaces that others are shut out from.

Practicing 8 hours a day without a goal

un-Musical activism is dedicated to the Felt Beak definition of 'practice', as quoted earlier by Will Edmondson, in which you constantly practice, without ever aiming towards an objective goal of learning specific skills that will turn you into a professional. What I believe makes this notion of practice exemplary is its recognition that there are alternative routes to the standard, deeply embedded principle behind both 'formal' and 'informal' methods for musical training. What if someone took the route of practicing for 8 hours a day from a very young age, but unlike the burgeoning child virtuosic violinist who was made to rehearse technical drills on a daily basis, instead simply played with the instrument (or instruments), and played with other people, developing socio-musical organisational interaction as well as solo playing, without any specific goal or outcome in mind. What would that kind of practice lead to? Try to imagine such a thing without the automatic assumption that because it deviates from what is 'standard' and 'majoritarian'

³¹⁰ 'Crass – Penny Rimbaud Talks', *You Tube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mADo_8D8nmc (14th March, 2014).

that it *lacks* something crucial. There is just as good an argument that suggests such deviation from the standard way gives greater range through a pursuit of all that would otherwise would be lost in the rigid and sterile world of ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’. As Tricia Rose says of Hip-Hop producer Hank Shocklee in her book *Black Noise*: ‘Shocklee believes that his ignorance of formal musical training allows him to see beyond what has been understood as correct and proper sound construction, giving him greater range of creative motion’.³¹¹ Many noise-based practices such as Hip-Hop, Punk and others have made their most valuable and potent contributions towards revolutionary popular culture when they were at their most ‘lacking’ in conventional musical language, when they seemed to be in complete disregard for musical syntax and guidance, of the ‘proper construction of music’.

What is so incredibly powerful and potent about Edmond’s Felt Beak concept as applied to un-Musical activism, is that it puts this sporadic aspect of popular culture to the test, in a focussed, dedicated manner in which improvisation mobilises itself according to an anarchist community of practitioners who are unlimited in their particular approaches, meaning that such a ‘lack’ is transformed into the richest possible source of music-making. Sure, some will obviously say that you are limiting yourself through not exploring the options available to you via advanced formal training, but countless examples to the contrary would suggest that this particular method of ‘advanced’ training actively restricts people from entering the limitless frame of mind to feel comfortable in free-form improvisation. It’s just that formal musical approaches are seen as inherently valuable, while free-form improvisation is seen as an extravagant and unnecessary luxury! I’d obviously argue that nothing could be further from the truth. This is what is most interesting about a Felt Beak/un-Musical model of practice, that it creates a hybrid new ground, between both sides. It recognises the importance of regular activity and engagement with the materials and interactions necessary to create meaningful long-term practice, yet at the same time doesn’t impose any specific parameters, goals, or rights and wrongs which can then impact too heavily on the kinds of existential agency important for aspects of improvised practice. This results in a situation where sonically, the field is limitless, as well as socially, groups can be made up of people from every

³¹¹ Tricia Rose, *Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) 120.

possible music or social background. This concept of 'practice' has the best of all worlds, meaning that you can define for yourself the world of music, play in structured key-driven groups, play and formulate your own multiplicity of free jazz, noise-rock, improvised techno and free-form bands (as I've done), play completely unstructured free-improv, or play by yourself. Either way, doing this practice requires a kind of commitment that all 'musicians' will recognise, yet the difference is, it no longer subscribes to the ideological contamination and hegemonic structures it has done, and it is at the same time completely open to so-called 'non-musicians' who want to make music. It is both immediately accessible and of long-term, sustainable meaning and interest to the widest possible reach.

Unity is the sonic glue in a pre-assembled solid oak dining table that we must stain and disassemble with our collective pleasures and spillages.

Unity binds things together in advance, so that the real-time human relationships involved in shaping the content of production can be denied. For music, this has been assumed for a long time to be inevitable. Improvised practice, in the form of un-Musical activism is based on the premise that all musical content is organised in real-time, completely improvised and decided upon by each small-group. As such, groups can get the glue back out and put together a solid oak table from scratch if they like, or they can build ply-wood or MDF structures that disintegrate with a light touch. The only requirement is that no-thing or no-one is left out of the potential possibilities of music-making. What this produces (and in my mind has to produce) is a flexibility which imposes no sonic restrictions in advance. As such un-Musical activism deliberately avoids the pre-defined restrictive conceptions of a 'non-idiomatic' improvisation, or indeed, adherence to any rigid idiomatic style. un-Musical activism practices a kind of pan-idiomatic approach, where groups are free to use or not use whatever styles they wish, which is founded on anarchist principles that the groups themselves decide how to proceed with no external authority on what is possible.

Be open to the heresy of the untrained idiomatic

The untrained idiomatic is a concept that relies upon breaking down the belief structures that come about when there is a power grab by musicians and artists who have 'learnt

the rules' of idiomatic styles of music at the expense of so-called 'non-musicians' whose involvement in these styles necessarily involves breaking said rules without learning them first. It is important to encourage and actively promote this *heresy* as much as possible. It is necessary then to create opportunities for so-called non-musicians to play in idiomatic styled groups and alongside formally trained musicians in order to challenge the boundaries and myths associated with the requirements for idiomatic music-making. un-Musical activism deliberately pursues 'unmusicals' engaging in highly idiomatic, repetitive styles of music-making in recording sessions and performance events.³¹²

Music is too important to be left to the Musicians

Is Charlie Parker one of a kind, or can we produce another Charlie Parker at will. Yes, Charlie Parker is one of a kind, no we cannot produce another Charlie Parker. We also cannot produce another you – we fail musically when we try to be something other than ourselves. The problem is we go to music school and music school was never interested in developing the music inside.³¹³

OK, I've repeated the above quote again, but it's important to continue to repeat this throughout, because it's probably the most important principle of an un-Musical activism, that we aren't trying to cultivate 'Musicians', or any pre-defined standard associated with musical meaning, but instead, allowing immediate access to self-defined music-making. Artists, musicians and other 'creative professionals' can be very precious about preserving their specialist status, and accuse those who want more anarchic relations of 'mocking' the cultural traditions of their creative heritage and so on. This is a power-grab by people who have no interest whatsoever in musical or social revolution of any meaningful kind. They will be first against the kick drum when the revolution comes.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate the various practical case studies and auto-ethnography I have undertaken throughout this research, and to identify its potential in crafting an un-Musical activism. I first explored an auto-ethnography of my

³¹² 'unmusicals' is a humorous ironic term that the participants of the un-Musical project began referring to themselves as.

³¹³ Parker, *Who Owns Music*, 66.

own journey as someone who identified completely as a ‘non-musician’, all the way towards being a regular performing musician. Perhaps most important among this journey was the regular involvement with a culture of improvisation in Newcastle that has centred around Felt Beak, an improvised music label initiated by Will Edmondson, which aims to record at least 3 albums a week. This constant ‘playing’ as *normal* musical activity, rather than a spectacle, led to the emergence of a culture in which the word ‘improv’ is almost never used, but rather it is just ‘to play’. This was crucial in developing the confidence to identify as a musician.

I focussed on articulating an ‘un-Musical activism’, to denote both the reclamation of the originally pejorative term ‘unmusical’ as a productive energy that can be used to undo the conception of music with a capital M. The primary aim of this then was to specifically encourage participants who had either minimal music-making experience and/or identified as ‘non-musicians’ or ‘unmusical’. This took the form of various ethnographical case-study projects, including: specific workshops, state-school projects, informal park/pub sessions, and performance events, in which so-called ‘non-musicians’ were playing alongside highly trained musicians in order to try and break down the assumptions that this would somehow cause irreparable conflict. The projects I initiated which involved children were important, as it allowed me to give contrasting examples with the research from chapter 1 on formal, state-school music education. I closed the chapter by bringing together key objectives and pursuits of an un-Musical activism, to articulate that: un-Musical activism practices an anarchist organisation of open-access music-making, which attempts to dismantle the power relations involved with who ‘can’ and who ‘cannot’ participate, encouraging all those so-called ‘non-musicians’ and ‘unmusicals’ to practice heresy against musicians employed by the music police.

Discrepant Anachronism 3 –Interview between Carl Kegparty and Slack Nutella

All characters appearing in this section are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Meet Carl Kegparty, a writer, artist, musician and performer whose work is based around the multi-faceted field of sounds. His research is interested in the ways in which sounds can be excessive, absent, unwanted, weak, strong, negative, positive, alive, and dead. He writes about groups with names like Doctor with Cut with album titles such as 'Organised Meeting on a Board Room Table of an Overlocker and a Parasol'. He has been producing sounds on a significant level sometime around the last century, but he can't be quite sure as of the specific time of emergence. He's collaborated with lots of other humans who also make significant levels of sound, and in doing so, has amassed a portfolio of sound work that can be documented on websites. His sound work is based upon a combined method of collecting sounds that have already been sounded, and producing sounds from sound-making devices at the time of performance. This strategy has served him well.

This is the third time of meeting Slack Nutella, who this time faces a job interview for an artist residency position at the local council, where Carl Kegparty sits as the reviewer for an Arts-Council residency project.

February 2nd 2016, Carl Kegparty asks Slack Nutella into a meeting room for a job interview to discuss his job application, principally his C.V. which lists various other artist residency positions and creative projects, as well as his proposal outline, which consisted of a short essay outlining the ideas and perspectives of his creative practice.

Carl Kegparty: Bonjour Slack, thanks for coming in today, we really liked your proposal, and we just have a few questions for you today, based on the work you submitted.

Slack Nutella: OK, that's great, thanks.

Carl Kegparty: We'll go straight to it then. Amongst the great things in this work, what you don't seem to address here, is just how relevant this whole pursuit of un-Musical activism is. You tend to assume that there are just thousands of non-musicians out there who are waiting to be 'freed' from their oppressed situation, but have you not considered this might not be the case, that most of these people are quite happy being listeners, or if they want to play music, they might want to just learn in the standard way?

Slack Nutella: Well, I mean what we do know for certain is that music carries the ironic and distinctive quality of being both incredibly social, popular and engaging to almost everyone, yet very few people take up music-making as a long-term practice, whether it is children not opting to take GCSE music, or the many people who give up music-making shortly after commencing. I have argued that this situation can be explained in some measure by what Karl Maton and Alexandra Lamont have identified as this 'elite knowledge code' in which people genuinely think of music-making as requiring both highly advanced specific skill-sets, and a natural ability which you were magically born with - such a combination of requirements makes it unbearably out of reach. This is the context with which people's choices are made, so I think there is a meaningful argument to be made, that if the context and circumstances were different, we may see different choices made by so-called 'non-musicians'. This is the reason for an un-Musical activism, to demonstrate and show people an alternative route to music-making, and be present in social space without dominating it, so that people can witness and join in if they want.

Carl Kegparty: OK, that's understandable. My next question is whether it would be fair to suggest that there is a fundamental conception of musicality still retained in un-Musical activism?

Slack Nutella: This is a good question. I say this, because one of the participants in some of the weekly sessions I held would consistently play in such a way that made me question this very idea. For instance, he would often play the drums and would use this as an opportunity to play as loud and intense as possible for the entire session, while everyone else with amplification would have to turn up as high as they could, while those without amplification were left completely uninvolved in the session. His response to this problem was 'well they need to plug in'. Further to this, there was a performance once where everyone else had finished playing and he continued to play for a few minutes solo, seemingly missing completely that everyone else had decided to finish. While this can sometimes work as a tactic, it was clearly obvious at the time that this was more to do with a disregard for the collective relations necessary for collective improvisation. As well as the obvious social ignorance with which this displays, there's a musical problem too, in that it is questionable whether he can even really hear what the amplified players are playing due to the extreme loudness of the drums themselves and furthermore, playing at this volume constantly precludes the possibility for swift changes, hyperaware responses and the general dynamics and contrasts which is usually needed for continued interest in collective improvisation by performers and audiences. While this approach can be fun if everyone agrees to it, it can get very boring quickly for those who don't, since they cannot say no, or contribute meaningfully to any change in the dynamic. It is a dominating and oppressive approach. But is it unmusical, and is there such a thing?

The short answer is no, and no again. The long answer is, there's no such thing as unmusical, because all of the terrible approaches to music that you can think of, are basically, on a fundamental level, social. That doesn't mean to say they are entirely about dialogical relationships between people, but that the ideal that

is hoped for in collective improvisation, that ability to steer clear of both extremes of the positive and negative models, to be sensitive enough to other sonic bodies, while being bold enough to express oneself with confidence and distinctiveness; all of this, is social and can be negotiated through the dedication to Felt Beak's 'practice'. The reason people play well or badly is not because of some inherent mystical quality called 'musicality', but bad habits on auto-tune, a flawed or wrongly intentioned way of using music for other ulterior motives, or a deep laziness that has been set in by only playing with similar-minded musicians. In other words, a complex combination of factors as much to do with intention as to do with learned social habits through an already-existent engagement with music. It is completely possible, and happens all the time, that a highly trained musician can improvise terribly, while a completely untrained musician can produce incredibly engaging performances. Of course, I am talking about extreme examples here. For the most part, any judgement over the quality of a music performance can be left to the incredible variation of subjective preferences over different styles and techniques. And in this, improvisation offers unparalleled open-endedness to the judgement of a piece of music. However, it is important that we confront those instances of musical approaches which seem to damage the liberating elements of collective improvisation in general - those approaches of individual expression, which in their instrumental individualism compete with and dominate over others.

That was a long answer sorry, but I hope it answered the question.

Carl Kegparty: Yes, that was wonderful, thank you. You probably won't like this next question, but I need to ask it. I'm a little concerned about your deployment of the performance studies assessment. I think ultimately, it reads like a personal rant about something without the full and proper context and evidence

etc. It therefore seems to detract from the effectiveness and objectivity of your argument, and your ability to remain objective in the kind of role we are looking for here?

Slack Nutella: Unsurprisingly, this is a common question/criticism when I bring this stuff up. I was once marked down in a Masters essay for this very concern. What I have tried to retain in bringing this issue up, is a recognition that I am not 'ranting' about failing a module, but rather exposing the reasons why somebody like me was always going to fail such a module, and how the language and terminology surrounding it demonstrated the underlying ideological assumptions of a music education and how even in progressive and experimental music departments, these same assumptions form the way music is taught and critiqued. In terms of detracting from the argument, it is the argument, it is where the argument for unmusical activism stems from. If it can be considered 'unconscionable' to fail a music theory test, then such thinking should be provoking outrage, yet it is accepted as normal by almost everyone. Sometimes I feel you need to have a bit of emotion and personality involved in your motives, as it allows people to relate to what you're working towards. I make no apologies for being unashamedly political in my work and my work with others.

Carl Kegparty: Fair enough. Moving swiftly on then to issues of moving on in improvised groups. Isn't there a problem with what you highlight in Scruffweed, as needing to constantly move on and play with different people - isn't this an inherent flaw of improvisation that you need to address - if you have to continuously change line-ups just to keep things fresh?

Slack Nutella: It is a common issue that people identify with, but I don't necessarily buy into it, because it's usually a problem to do with Eurological free-improvisation, whereby people need to constantly move on because they worry about forming habits

and things getting predictable from a sonic perspective. On the Afrological free jazz scene, there are groups who have been playing together for 20-30 years and they don't see this as a problem, but more like a rich, deep connection that can have multiple facets. The particular problem with Scruffweed was more to do with the personalities in the band, in terms of some people wanting to frame it in a way that felt like a prized commodity and felt like this approach was constraining the actual music possibilities. The thing with the free jazz groups is that while you may have William Parker and Hamid Drake playing in groups together for 20-30 years, they also play in multiple other groups as well, while never stopping playing together. This kind of flexibility didn't seem possible with the way things were going with Scruffweed.

(there's a small segment here where the two people discuss the inner workings of these situations in their experiences of playing in different groups, and it gets a bit nauseously sweet, so we'll move straight onto the next question)

Carl Kegparty: I want to clarify a potential conflict with your articulation of micro-communities in which each small group completely decides its output - if the basis for the wider model of activism is based upon this micro-communal organisation, won't this inevitably produce a kind of brick wall, whereby no matter how revolutionary the stuff is inside, no-one will hear or see it, because it's communicated on such a small-scale by small groups?

Slack Nutella: What I've tried to communicate in this chapter is how the approach of unmusical activism is to have multiple different outputs happening at the same time, so you need to have small-groups playing together, cultivating relationships and stuff they are working on, their practice etc, but at the same time, having public performance spaces and other community project work that all intertwines.

Carl Kegparty: Isn't there a certain bias shown in the interpretation of the children's comments, because of course, if the school is trying to teach them structured musical training, there is a certain requirement for disciplined engagement, so of course they will respond positively when they can just basically do what they want for a while?

Slack Nutella: Yeah of course, and we were expecting that to a certain degree. What was surprising about the comments though was how many really specific comments were given about the productivity of the musical approach, about just how excited they were to be given this opportunity, and not only how enjoyable they found it, but also how productive it was by being useful to how they perceived their own musical development. This is somewhat in contrast to what you might expect regarding improvised approaches and musical learning. The comments reflected a genuine engagement and connection with the approach and the perceived quality of the musical interactions.

Carl Kegparty: You talk up the positivity of the Blue Rinse format of including both experimental and so-called conventional performances in the same space, but isn't your whole point that performance shouldn't be scary, it shouldn't make people afraid and to have to play 'as if their life depended on it'?

Slack Nutella: Not necessarily, it matters where the anxiety is coming from, and whether there is fear and why that fear is there. If it is imposed from elsewhere then this is a problem, but if it is coming from your own perspective, then it can be useful to challenge and explore why that is. In this particular case, the musicians have the skills in place to perform the material, but they are uncomfortable about playing it in front of an audience who might not be 'into' that music. This requires a certain flexibility from the audience and the performers, but in the Blue Rinse audience, they are used to this mixing of styles, so they

are generally friendly and welcoming, and this unexpected attitude can transform people's expectations about what a night of music has to be, and dismantle some of the mono-thematic assumptions from both performers and audience. With that said, it is a fine balancing act, and with this particular example, I was concerned that I had thrown someone into something they weren't prepared for.

Carl Kegparty: OK, that's all the questions I had for you Slack. It's been really enjoyable discussing this with you, and I will be back in touch after we've talked to the other people on the shortlist.

Slack Nutella: Thanks for the discussion. I look forward to hearing from you.

Chapter 4 – Anarchism, Existentialism and a Molecular un-Musical Activism

The primary aim of this chapter is to articulate the social and theoretical basis for the cultural practice I previously outlined in chapter 3. In other words, to describe the way in which collective relations are formed as a result of this practice and what that says more broadly about the philosophical underpinnings of social forms of organisation. More specifically, I will be attempting to argue that this model of collective improvisation and un-Musical activism create models of social organisation that reflect core principles of anarchist forms of organisation and existentialist thought, as well as the concept of a molecular politics put forward by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In other words, there are philosophical movements that can be applied to un-Musical activism in a meaningful way. I say meaningful, because this isn't done for the sake of it, as an empty academic exercise, what we are sometimes expected to do in a PhD thesis, but instead because I want to expose a glaring omission from philosophy and cultural theory, which is that cultural theorists and philosophers have rarely been able to probe music deep enough to uncover music-making models that reflect the theoretical frameworks they argue for. In other words, while literature, painting and film can be easily seen to reflect existential, poststructuralist and postmodern theories, music is assumed to be inherently structuralist and therefore the examples chosen by cultural theory simply don't add up. For this reason, I want to show how an un-Musical practice reflects key aspects of certain movements in cultural theory and political philosophy.

Anarchism and existentialism are often treated as if they are in fatal conflict with each other. However, typically this can be explained by a key misunderstanding of one, or both of these forms of praxis. In debunking these misunderstandings, my principal argument will rest upon a reclamation of an existential individualism in which the individual is placed as situated and socially engaged, instead of the absurd instrumental individual – a competitive social Darwinist produced by a rampant neo-liberalism. Music, as the consumption paradise of the entertainment industry, offers us a key glimpse of how these conceptions of individualism affect our social organisation. Improvised practice in this sense is not only implicated in these problematic associations, it's

sometimes at the core of liberalist forms of individualism. No better can rampant competitive individualism be seen than in those forms of improvisation where individual soloists take turns to compete in theatrical and often virtuosic show-off's for the audience. This happens frequently, but very surprisingly, it happened at the 2013 Guelph Jazz Festival, organised at the time by the Improvisation, Community and Social Practice (ICASP) organisation. This organisation is the most established research project worldwide devoted to the research and practice of improvisation connected to social organisation. It promotes improvisation as a potential model for social relations through the way in which its collectives interact with each other. Despite this, at the launch of the festival, 4 'world-renowned' improvising percussionists were invited to the stage with elaborate introductions giving glowing recommendations. While ICASP broadly believe in a type of improvisation that can bring people together for the first time and play together with little or no previous introductions (as was the case here), on display here was also the performance of virtuosity. The improvisors proceeded to play separate 5-10 minute solos, one after the other, with audience applause in between. What resulted from this was a strange display of competitive individualism with each performer competing with the next to get the most applause from the audience, with one performer saying (after a particularly rapturous applause) 'how do I follow that?'. This theatrical display of competitive individualism in an improvised musical context is, sadly, the result of a damaging conception of individualism which, in my view correlates to L. Susan Brown's distinction between an 'instrumental individualism' and an 'existential individualism', which I will elaborate on shortly. I hope to show that improvised practice can reflect much better, more anarchist models of social organisation that retain a more existentialist conception of individualism. For now though, I'll need to spend a little time articulating how I think Existentialism and Anarchism can relate more broadly to these discussions.

Existentialism: No Ivory Tower Philosophy

This section starts cautiously. I wrote my entire MLitt around Existentialism and spent the bulk of that year reading and re-reading Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, excavating it for every scrap of meaning that could be salvaged and deciphered, ultimately reaching a fairly comprehensive understanding of the book and its wider implications, with some

minor mental scars as a result. While I consider myself an existentialist and I believe in existentialism, Sartre's method of articulation is overwhelming, extraordinary and horrific, and ultimately I'd say, counterproductive to his very genuine socially engaged and activist agendas, due to its almost complete incomprehensibility to more than an extremely narrow academic elite. This problem of saying one thing and doing another is a problem most academics find, asking for change, yet contributing directly towards the resistance to that change via their own modes of practical operations. This is also counterproductive to the point of existentialism, which according to Christine Daigle (and I agree) 'is no ivory-tower philosophy; it is a philosophy for actual individuals in the real world'.³¹⁴ During this year, I spoke to almost no-one about this work, since I found it so difficult to re-translate the complex dense themes into readily accessible conversation.

Sartre's somewhat macho dogmatism when it came to *absolute freedom* also caused problems ethically, problems that Simone de Beauvoir was to identify and modify, creating for me the most exemplary form of existentialism we have. For me, it's disappointing that existentialism has fallen out of fashion in many humanities departments, as not only is it an extremely valuable and important philosophical position in itself, it was very important in the development of recent philosophical trends, as Daigle discusses (here about Sartrean existentialism): 'His philosophy of consciousness, which is no longer a philosophy of the rational subject, opens the door to philosophical and literary movements like deconstructionism, structuralism and poststructuralism that followed him. It is safe to say that, without Sartre's key work *Being and Nothingness*, these movements would not exist as we know them'.³¹⁵ Anyway, all of this is to say that I won't be articulating my understanding of existentialism here in any comprehensive or long-winded manner. Instead, I'll describe the aspects of existentialism that are key to the thinking around this cultural practice and about conceptions of the individual and freedom that are important. I'll try and do this in a way that feels more fluid and relative than the usual isolated and deep archaeological digging that is typically deployed. In other words, when I'm explaining a concept, I won't spend the time making an argument for its legitimacy as such, since this isn't a philosophy thesis and so for the space I have,

³¹⁴ Christine Daigle, *Routledge Critical Thinkers: Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Routledge, 2010) 1.

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

I'll require a certain flexibility to allow for the concepts to be briefly described and then applied.

Existence Precedes Essence

Like so many of existentialism's key tenets, they seem at once the most glaring obvious statements, while when fully acknowledged they can be incredibly radical. Historically, philosophy has tended to assume the human subject as having an essence, such as Descartes 'I think, therefore I am'. Philosophical interrogations of the subject then can be made to interpret the 'I am', or the 'that is', while existentialism claims that whatever essence one may find in a human subject, subjectivity is always beyond it. Identity can therefore never be contained or objectified. I am always *beyond* what I am. If we were to look for essence in the human being it would come in the form of historical content: 'essence is everything in the human being which we can indicate by the words: that is. But the act is always beyond that essence'.³¹⁶ In fact, it is our existence that gives rise to the very notion of essence: 'since there is no pre-established pattern for human nature, each man makes his essence as he lives.'³¹⁷ I am therefore always beyond what can be said of me: 'I am always temporal and whatever I am doing, whatever I am saying – at the moment I wish to be it, already I was doing it, I was saying it.'³¹⁸ If we take Sartre's account of subjectivity literally (as he wants us to) then the present 'is nothing other than an infinitesimal instant',³¹⁹ and we are always beyond whatever moment we are in - at once a point of view and a point of departure.³²⁰ It is in this sense that Sartre can transform the famous Cartesian cogito 'I think, therefore I am',³²¹ into 'I think, therefore I was'.³²²

This statement then of *existence precedes essence* has huge implications for the individual, because rather than being a product of the marketplace, a passive consumer of marketing categories and the objectification of labour, as the entertainment industry wants, the existential individual can always be beyond such constraints. Sartre's brilliant

³¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London: Routledge, 1943) 35.

³¹⁷ Hazel. E. Barnes, 'Key to Special Terminology' in *Sartre, Being and Nothingness*, 631.

³¹⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 107.

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, 120.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 326.

³²¹ Tom Sorell, *Descartes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 1.

³²² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 119.

narrative description of the waiter in the café, who plays his role as the waiter perfectly, down to every gesture, every utterance who tries to become a waiter through and through, tries to objectify himself into a waiter-object. He does this in 'bad faith', because he is lying to himself about his existence, that he is always more than this waiter, his individuality can never be contained within it, and at any point he could wake up and not be a waiter, or could do something else entirely. This is one of the controversial aspects of existentialism, because early Sartrean existentialism insisted upon an absolute freedom of consciousness regardless of material conditions, but as de Beauvoir insisted upon, there is a weight of the *situation* which impacts upon individuals ability to act and change their situation. Each individual carries a different situationist weight. Ultimately, existentialism (preceding Deleuzian poststructuralism) transcends the phrase *you are what you are*, into *you become what you are*. And even then what you are is always *becoming*, so in a sense we *become the becoming*. 'Existence precedes and conditions essence'.³²³ Individual musicians precede and condition the essence of music that they restrain themselves to, not the other way around.

Being-for-itself and Being-for-Others

An uncomfortable realisation perhaps, but an important one to grasp: we were not put here for a *reason*, we don't have a *purpose*. Maybe others have reasons and purposes for us, but we, as individuals were all thrown into this world, thrown 'in situation'. When Sartre refers to 'the being-for-itself' he simply means consciousness itself, or the human subject. We are consciousness through and through, there is no external or outside space from consciousness. It is total. This means everything is directed through and for consciousness. In other words, through our perspective. It is our perspective that shapes the world in front of us, meaning that we cannot avoid choosing how to define the world for us and for others. It is in bad faith to presume other people make choices for us, or that any external situation should be allowed to dictate our actions or define who and what we are. We have the ironic situation of being situated as a particular consciousness (or perspective) that literally creates the whole world. And this is where misunderstandings begin to develop. Such a formulation sounds like a liberal individualism straight away. However, remember the circumstances of a post-war

³²³ Ibid, 439.

philosophy that desperately needed to formulate a defence of individual rights and individual liberties, not just in terms of legal frameworks, but ontologically. An argument needed to be made which showed how individuals exist for and through themselves first. Once that argument was made, it followed of course, that exploitation, abuse, violence towards and by individuals for external ends was anti-human, ethically counterproductive and terminally stupid, since humanity is itself freedom. At the same time as individuals act against another at the expense of their freedom, they simultaneously act towards the destruction of freedom for all. I'll elaborate.

It's necessary to make the argument for an ontological freedom that is prior to anything else, because the way that individuals are socialized happens in ways that reflect the mode Sartre refers to as 'being-for-others', which he describes as a 'fall through absolute emptiness toward objectivity [...] this fall is an alienation'³²⁴ This is a particular mode of consciousness which seeks to objectify subjects (including myself), and it happens as a reaction to being confronted with other subjects, and the possibility that each subject can view the Other as an object, and subjectivity itself can become objectified (and therefore alienated). Sartre describes this as a stage in the development of consciousness that needs to be surpassed in order to have healthy interpersonal relationships. However, as a mode, it seems more accurate to suggest that it exists as a constant risk that requires regular agility to prevent relations with the Other from descending into Hegelian Slave/Master dialectics. No better can such an example be seen than improvised groups, where as we have discussed, certain groups can play out dominant/dominated relations. The situation in un-Musical practice is the same pursuit of Sartre's, in that interpersonal relations are such that each individual can express themselves boldly and confidently in ways that allow for the same manner of expression to be possible through each other individual. Clearly, this is difficult and an ongoing process, but maybe this is all it needs to be – an attempt to maintain awareness of each other while recognising that the pursuit is never to compromise our expressive potential but to maximise it in each other.

From a broad perspective, being-for-others can subtly permeate the most sensitive cracks of the self and is a difficult mode of being to surpass. For example, widespread

³²⁴ Ibid, 274-275.

feelings of shame or embarrassment of one's body is never actually of one's body, as it is for- itself (radically subjective), it is always shame, embarrassment and shyness for the Other (my subjectivity objectified).³²⁵ If I wake up and my hair is a little *messy*, but I am alone, I am unlikely to 'fix it' simply for myself, and if I do, it would be because I am looking in the mirror in the mode of being-for-others, objectified and alienated from my radical subjectivity. When I do this, I am not always thinking of a particular other, but otherness in general, what Sartre calls the *Third*. The *Third* is distinct from humanity and sees humanity as wholly object (as a kind of God's eye view of reality); in this regard God is the Third, as is the capitalist, the feudal lord, the conductor or even the audience. In a sense, the Third is an expectation imagined, and real, of myself in the face of others.³²⁶ It is the image of how others may perceive (and use) me as an object (or category). It is those professional fucking musicians at my performance assessment. Within this mode, some of Sartre's most controversial comments emerge. When people criticise existentialism for being negative, especially in terms of its take on interpersonal relations, they usually cite quotes such as 'Hell is other people'³²⁷ (from the novel *No Exit*) and 'the Other is the hidden death of my possibilities'.³²⁸ However, these quotes refer to a specific mode of consciousness, and a stage that needs to be surpassed. In order to apprehend the consciousness of its freedom: first, I experience the world as if it is flowing all to me and I am the only subject; second, I experience the Other's look which forces me to realise that it is also flowing to them; thirdly, I realise that the Other can see me as an object and I become obsessed both with the objectification of myself and the attempted ownership of the Other's subjectivity; finally, I realise that we are both free subjects and I surpass this damaging condition. Joseph S. Catalano's commentary on this has re-iterated the point that 'On the basis of the other's intruding freedom for which I am not responsible, I then become explicitly aware of my freedom',³²⁹ and according to Catalano, 'the ultimate purpose of the study of the look (*le regard*) is to reveal the existence of other persons (the "other") precisely as free subjects [...] our knowledge of

³²⁵ Ibid, 353.

³²⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 421.

³²⁷ Jean-Paul-Sartre in David Drake, *Sartre* (London: Haus Publishing, 2005) 60.

³²⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 264.

³²⁹ Joseph. S. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul-Sartre's Being and Nothingness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985) 165.

man as an object prepare[s] us for our realization of him as a subject'.³³⁰ Hell may well be other people, but only within the mode of being-for-others. On this point, Sartre was keen to comment on misunderstandings when he said:

People thought that I meant by that, that our relations with the Other were always poisonous, [...] But I meant something quite different. I meant that if the relations with the Other were twisted, then the Other can only be hell [...] The Other is, fundamentally, what is most important in ourselves, in our understanding of ourselves.³³¹

Assumedly, meaning in a Hegelian manner that we understand most about ourselves by understanding what we are not, and that the social connection between self-consciousnesses, is crucial to the development of those self-consciousnesses.³³² Learning how to live with each other's radical subjectivity and difference as it is for them is vital not only to the development of individuals, but to society in general. Being-for-others is therefore a mode of being that we urgently need to surpass. Also, to briefly relate this back to chapter 2, when Anthony Braxton voiced his concerns regarding positive freedom (or anarchy) and how it could be interpreted to mean killing someone etc. In this sense, an existentialist argument would say that this perception of 'hell is other people', or some kind of inherently violent state between individuals only makes sense when relations are twisted. I would argue that when relations become twisted, it is usually because of a pre-occupation with an instrumental individualism, which is a kind of distorted neo-liberalist hijacking, rather than with the more interpersonal existential individualism (both of these concepts will be elaborated upon shortly). So long as there is a care and dedication to keeping the interpersonal relations healthy, and a commitment to an existentialist individualism, then there's no inherent reason why a positive existentialist freedom cannot produce a more ethical position on interpersonal relations than other negative freedom models.

Freedom, Anguish and Choice

I am condemned to exist forever beyond my essence, beyond the causes and motives of my act. I am condemned to be free. This means that no limits to my

³³⁰ Ibid, 159.

³³¹ Sartre in Drake, *Sartre*, 60.

³³² Peter Singer, *Hegel: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 77.

freedom can be found except freedom itself, or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free.³³³

Freedom is a problematic concept because it is generally thought of in the same way as *free will*, which is that we are free to do anything, or that we could be free from anything. For Sartre however, freedom exists in a resistant world. It can only exist in a resistant world and is meaningless without restrictions. Existential freedom is the projection beyond the inevitable restrictions of our situation (facticity) through choice and action, which thrusts the agent into the realisation that the restrictions cannot define what I am as an individual. This is crucial, because for Sartre freedom is not about success, but about projection, and action: 'to be free does not mean to obtain what one has wished, but by oneself to determine oneself to wish'.³³⁴ Too often, people can remain immersed in their social or historical facticity, and do not project towards what could be, but instead remain enslaved in thinking things *are the way they are*, and cannot be projected beyond.

When the individual apprehends their freedom through *anguish*, they realise that 'nothing external to consciousness can motivate it' and they realise themselves as radical possibility in the midst of the world.³³⁵ 'It is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom'.³³⁶ *Anguish*, then, is the 'awareness of one's freedom as radical possibility'.³³⁷ To use Sartre's example, anguish is distinguished from fear in that if I am standing on the edge of a precipice, fear is the feeling I get at falling off, whereas anguish is the realisation that I could throw myself off. It is in this sense that the word's orthodox meanings: 'distress'³³⁸ and 'tormented'³³⁹ make some sense, as it is a difficult and often distressing process to face up to the responsibility of individual agency and possibility. It is far easier to do as one is told (even if the order is not explicit, and sometimes it is the subject who does the telling). Anguish is in many ways the opposite of bad faith, as it is the recognition of my existence as radical possibility, change and choice. It is important

³³³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 439.

³³⁴ *Ibid*, 483.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, 453.

³³⁶ *Ibid*, 29.

³³⁷ Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*, 133.

³³⁸ 'Anguish', *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 2010*, [http://east.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anguish_\(4th June, 2010\)](http://east.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anguish_(4th%20June,2010)).

³³⁹ 'Anguished', *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 2010*, [http://east.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anguished_\(4th June, 2010\)](http://east.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anguished_(4th%20June,2010)).

to remember that anguish is not freedom, but it illuminates it to consciousness by removing the camouflages of bad faith that had *clogged* consciousness before (in bad faith's attempt to flee anguish). It is the recognition of my responsibility for choice and action. The word responsibility is important here, because what anguish also reminds the individual, is that they cannot avoid making choices. I constantly have to choose how to proceed, which path to choose, which side to take, etc. It foregrounds the unavoidable importance of ethical choice. Anguish is: 'the realisation that a nothingness slips in between my Self and my past and future so that nothing relieves me from the necessity of continually choosing myself and nothing guarantees the validity of the values which I choose'.³⁴⁰ In short, while I am alive, choice is inextricable from my existence - even 'not to choose is, in fact, to choose not to choose'.³⁴¹ Choice and consciousness are inseparable.

To put this philosophical position briefly into a pragmatic ethics. Consider for a second the amount of times you hear someone defend a horrible action by saying 'I didn't have a choice'. Right now as I am writing this, people are defending Israel's absurd 'right to defend itself' by bombing and killing children in their sleep, because 'they didn't have a choice' since Hamas have allegedly hidden weapons in these places. This shows in the most horrific manner what happens when we lose the emphasis on existential choice and the fundamental, ontological reality of our freedom that we cannot avoid making a choice, and the ethical responsibility this places on each individual agent - Israel chose to kill those children. Deliberately chose to bomb those facilities knowing they would kill children.

I would now like to use the work of Simone de Beauvoir to expand on an extended ethics of interpersonal relations that I believe can be articulated through existentialist thought.

A Situated, Engaged and Ambiguous Existentialism: The de Beauvoir turn

Simone de Beauvoir's conception of self-Other relations took a marked shift from those of Sartre's, and importantly so, in ways that would influence Sartre to change his own position on *absolute freedom*. De Beauvoir was critical of the overly pessimistic

³⁴⁰ Hazel. E. Barnes, 'Key to Special Terminology' in *Sartre, Being and Nothingness*, 629.

³⁴¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 481.

interpretation of self-Other relations, derived from the Hegelian slave/master dialectic and perhaps not completely overcome by Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. She argues that the relationship of hatred and domination that is so often put forward is naive. As Ursula Tidd has summarised, regarding De Beauvoir's position on this: 'this hatred can only be a naive, preliminary reaction to the Other, because the Other simultaneously takes and gives the world to me'.³⁴² She goes on to cite an 'interdependence' between others, but more than this, that our entire freedom is inextricably tied up with the freedom of others: 'only the freedom of others keeps each one of us from hardening in the absurdity of facticity'.³⁴³ 'To will oneself free is also to will others free'.³⁴⁴ De Beauvoir's very definition of an ethics of ambiguity insists upon this: 'an ethics of ambiguity will be one which will refuse to deny a priori that separate existences can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all'.³⁴⁵ She goes on to articulate the complexity of this. De Beauvoir makes a distinction regarding the freedom of individuals between what she calls an 'adventurer' and a genuine or *authentic* existential pursuit of freedom.

An adventurer 'remains indifferent to...the human meaning of his action, who thinks he can assert his own existence without taking into account that of others'.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, nothing prevents the adventurer from 'sacrificing [others] to his own will for power. He will treat them like instruments; he will destroy them if they get in his way'.³⁴⁷ We can now see then that it is precisely this 'adventurer' who Anthony Braxton was so concerned about with regards positive freedom and the potential danger of it. Again though this relates to the important distinction between an 'instrumental individualism' and an 'existential individualism' as proposed by L. Susan Brown and discussed shortly. However, one of the most important contributions of existentialism is to insist that we accept the inevitable conflict of interpersonal relations that come about through individualism, thus fighting for a recognition that there isn't a contradiction between the individual and community, but that this is the very definition of community, as a multiplicity of individual existents dependent on each other for survival and working

³⁴² Ursula Tidd, *Routledge Critical Thinkers: Simone de Beauvoir* (London: Routledge, 2004) 41.

³⁴³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, 1948) 71.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 73.

³⁴⁵ De Beauvoir in Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*, 79.

³⁴⁶ De Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 61.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

towards the freedom of each other. No external authority. Such a situation can of course be scary and therefore provoke 'bad faith': the fleeing from anguish, the fleeing from the weight of the responsibility of our freedom, from the ambiguity of our condition, from the overbearing and unavoidable choice that guides our lives, from the insistence that there is no fence to sit on but to imagine one anyway. We must choose how to proceed, to sometimes take sides, to situate ethics at the forefront of our consciousness. Existentialism isn't an abandonment of ethics, it is the philosophy that places ethical emphasis at the forefront of our consideration, by its absolute emphasis on existential choice and agency. As Thomas R. Flynn summarises: 'It has been suggested that what existentialists offer us in the long run is more an ethical style than a moral content. They may counsel us how to live, but as de Beauvoir insisted, they do not offer us moral recipes'.³⁴⁸ Flynn goes on to elaborate on this often underrepresented existential insistence on the freedom of others, referring to both de Beauvoir and Sartre on an authentic existence:

My freedom is enhanced, not diminished, when I work to expand the freedom of others....my concrete freedom requires that, in choosing, I choose the freedom of others. And 'freedom' in this concrete sense means the pursuit of the 'open future' of others, that is, the maximization of their possibilities as well as my own. On this account, it would be 'inauthentic' to leave others in slavery or a state of oppression... a freedom wills itself authentically only by willing itself as an indefinite movement through the freedom of others.³⁴⁹

The primary reason for bringing these ideas of existentialism together is because I want to make the argument for an existentialist ethical trajectory to my model of social organisation reflected in the improvised cultural practices previously discussed.

³⁴⁸ Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*, 78.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 79-80.

AMBIGUITY

AMBIGUITY

ALIENATION

Another of the key misunderstandings of existentialism is that is a deeply negative, nihilistic philosophy that tells us that there is no meaning and there is no necessity to exist. This is a major misunderstanding and at least half wrong. While it is true that atheist existentialists such as Sartre and de Beauvoir do believe there is no necessity to exist, what this actually means is that we weren't created by God, and weren't created for a purpose. Instead, we were thrown into an existence that we are responsible for, and what we are ultimately is choice, we must choose how to proceed, choose the meaning of our lives, choose to live or not to live, choose how we treat each other, etc. etc. Various institutions, family, career, marriage, etc. attempt to create essentialist structures that cement our choices in stone, preserved for all eternity. The fact something like marriage creates the impression that it is *the* exemplary reflection of monogamous love, and something all partners must subscribe to in order to legitimate their love, is from an existentialist perspective a heinous distortion. L. Susan Brown says it is 'anti-existential':

The marriage contract denies the free choice of the individual, choices that emerge from individual whim or predilection, and is therefore anti-existential...it implies self-interested property owners making the best "deal" possible...³⁵⁰The existential individual...requires no marriage certificate, no modern contract, to validate close intimate relationships. External control of relationships, like that manifested inherently in marriage, is simply at odds with the freedom of the individual.³⁵¹

An existentialist critique of the marriage institution would suggest that rather than creating a social structure that restricts the continuing choice of being together, that makes it difficult to leave the marriage, a more ethical situation would be to make it as easy as possible to leave the marriage at any point, meaning that the two individuals

³⁵⁰ L. Susan Brown, *The Politics of Individualism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2003) 47.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, 50.

continuously choose each other on a daily basis, reflecting a daily expression of their continuing love for each other.

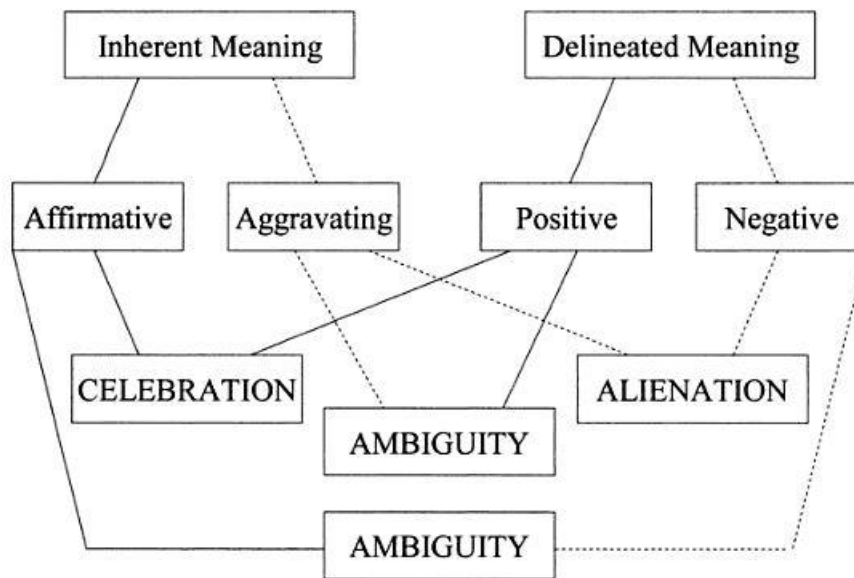
Furthermore, Existentialism doesn't say that there is no meaning, just that meaning isn't 'given', it is created and defined by us. This for me is a hugely positive interpretation of meaning. As De Beauvoir states here, while distancing her own conception of existentialism from that of Camus' conception of 'absurdity':

The notion of ambiguity must not be confused with that of absurdity. To declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won. Absurdity challenges every ethics; but also the finished rationalization of the real would leave no room for ethics; it is because man's condition is ambiguous that he seeks, through failure and outrageousness, to save his existence.³⁵²

This articulation of ambiguity as a productive force is important for the discussions here, as it refers back to the conception of inherent musical meaning delineated by Lucy Green earlier, and it questions our a priori negative understanding of ambiguity. I will re-display the image of Green's graphic system for convenience:

³⁵² De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 129.

Fig.4³⁵³



Source: Adapted from Green 1988, p. 138 and 1997, pp. 134 and 251.

As I argued earlier, to say there is such a thing as inherent musical meaning, as Lucy Green does here is to create an essential structure which refuses to acknowledge that this structure is ultimately created and defined by human individual existants. Furthermore, to then argue that anyone who doesn't grasp the inherent musical meaning will automatically have an alienating or ambiguous experience of the music with the inevitable conclusion that ambiguity would be a negative experience, is to suggest that essentialist structural musical meaning defines forever our listening experience. The way the word ambiguity is repeated twice and is in big bold capitals: **AMBIGUITY** **AMBIGUITY** warns us of a terrifying dangerous situation you would want to avoid at all costs. What it implies is not just that ambiguity in musical meaning is negative, and that people cannot handle that kind of confusion and uncertainty, but that, more generally, ambiguity is a problem that requires resolving before we can move forward in *harmony*, whether that be in so-called strict musical terms or social. However, what is so exciting about de Beauvoir's positing of ambiguity as not only a positive, productive force, but also an ethical one, is that it reverses that relation and gives us an opportunity to explore the idea that it is ambiguity of the human condition that allows us to self-define our own

³⁵³ Lucy Green, 'Research in the Sociology of Music Education: Some Introductory Concepts' in Ruth Wright, *Sociology and Music Education* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2010) 27.

meaning and value for things, thus radically opening up the potential for musical meaning to be self-defined, and socially for music-making to be encountered by new social relations. An ethics of ambiguity here would insist that ambiguity in musical listening and meaning provides us with the opportunity to not impose generalised standards upon people's interpretations; instead allowing a radical and pluralistic appreciation of difference in listening experience and difference in music-making approaches. What Green calls 'celebration' is really an affirmation of pre-defined expectations and musical values, a coherence between the 'inherent', essentialist musical codes and one's hermeneutic ability to decipher them, and the appreciation of those codes as enjoyable/pleasant etc. No ambiguity whatsoever and anything less than this, is aggravating and ultimately, alienating, according to Green. To 'celebrate' in musical listening, then, is really to shirk the truth of the matter, and the responsibility of existential freedom to define and condition the apparent essences that lie behind such understandings. It is clear to see how these perspectives on human consciousness actually impact upon understandings of music and music-making, because in this understanding of musical meaning, who would seriously consider making music without the necessary training and skill, knowing that you would be causing others distress and alienation through the ambiguous relation created with the music. To briefly return to the overarching point here, an un-Musical activism is about creating conditions socially whereby people create trusted relations with others and make music together in ways that alleviate these pressures by embracing the ambiguity of production and consumption and by focussing instead on the enjoyment of the social interaction of collective doing and making. An un-Musical activism, based on an existentialist ethics stresses the point that the intention is never to infringe upon the Other's ability to define the meaning of their life and the things and activities in it (music in this case). It is to work towards others freedom, by not putting them in bad faith, by not imposing essential structures and fixing a priori meanings of what music is or what musicians are, but embracing the ambiguity of 'music' and working through the anguish that comes with a freedom to define this for ourselves.

The Existential Individualism of Anarchism

Anarchism means, literally, without a ruler. While the popular understanding of anarchism is of a violent, anti-State movement, anarchism is a much more subtle and nuanced tradition than a simple opposition to government power. Anarchists oppose the idea that power and domination are necessary for society, and instead advocate more cooperative, anti-hierarchical forms of social, political and economic organization. Anarchist political philosophy is by no means a unified movement; in fact, anarchism's strong individualism encourages a multitude of views and perspectives.³⁵⁴

L. Susan Brown's book *The Politics of Individualism* goes to great lengths to try and make the argument for a reclamation of an individualism in Anarchist political philosophy. Or, to put it another way, she articulates how a certain kind of individualism has been at the core of anarchist political philosophy all along, but the hijacking of individualism into what she has called 'instrumental individualism' deriving from the Liberalist and neo-Liberalist traditions has scared away emphasis on individualism. However, she argues that by ignoring the very real requirement for a recognition of individualistic needs, anarchism as a political philosophy falls away from what it needs, which is the philosophical basis for an anti-hierarchical mode of social organisation that avoids totalitarian unity and conformity. She makes the very useful point that some anarchists have spent far too much time emphasising the abolition of the state and of private property, only to ignore the very real power relations that would inevitably continue to exist within and between people and their interpersonal relations. To deal with these issues, an emphasis on individualism is needed she argues, but clearly it is the very problematic forms of 'instrumental individualism' that exacerbate those interpersonal problems, and so she argues for an 'existential individualism' and draws upon the core of Sartrean and de Beauvoirian existentialist philosophy to articulate this. What is important I feel about this distinction is that it adds a crucial nuanced element into the normal positing of a binary between the *nasty* individualism on the one hand, and the *love-in of a global unified village* on the other.

³⁵⁴L. Susan Brown, *Politics of Individualism*, 106.

I would add to this, that there is perhaps no better cultural practice to reflect upon and work through these interpersonal problems than collective improvisation, especially in the case of an un-Musical improvisation that insists upon no pre-meditated restrictions and an absolute anarchic mode of organisation in which people from vastly different musical backgrounds can organise themselves and their music in situ, negotiating conflicts of interest, conflicts of personality, conflicts of power, volume, dynamics, etc.

To clarify then, Brown makes a distinction between 'instrumental individualism' and 'existential individualism':

Instrumental individualism is based on a belief in freedom as a means to achieve individual interests. Freedom is not valued as a desirable end in and of itself, but rather as a means by which to justify competitive self-interestedness. Existential individualism, on the other hand, is founded on the idea that freedom is an inherently valuable end in itself; self-determination and individual autonomy are desirable for themselves, and need no other justification. While instrumental individualism needs existential individualism, existential individualism is annihilated by instrumentalism. Seeing freedom merely as a means for individual self-promotion [instrumental individualism] destroys any possibility of ever achieving freedom as an end. Freedom, as an end in itself [existential individualism], depends on social respect and co-operation: all must be free if one is to be free. Competition between self-interested owners of real property and property in the person can never result in the freedom of all because it inevitably results in relations of domination and subordination. Existential and instrumental individualism are intrinsically incompatible.³⁵⁵

I want to focus here on the statement that existential individualism insists upon the maxim: all must be free if one is to be free. As dramatic, ambitious, and perhaps even naïve and unrealistic this is, it remains perhaps the most important aspect of an ethics of existentialism and anarchism as related to an un-Musical activism. To work towards this maxim is crucial, and to know that while working through it, this pursuit is as yet out of reach, but we believe in and fight for it as a constant pursuit. The reason I focus on this, is

³⁵⁵ Ibid, 32.

because in any collective improvisation, but especially in an un-Musical activism, the relationships between people (or at least sonic bodies) are the very stuff that makes things happen, and it's also the very stuff that reflects models of interpersonal relations which typically mirror either Brown's 'instrumental individualism' or 'existential individualism'. There are different stages to how these relations develop, but typically, individuals in an improvisation group will either resort to competitive instrumental individualism by virtue of jostling for power over others either through volume and dynamics, or competing musical structures. On the other hand, as discussed earlier with the university workshop examples earlier and the negative freedom-from, 'non-idiomatic' style, there can be an inversion of this - a fear of being associated with competitive individualism, resorting in an extreme form of timidity, where individuals are locked into a tightly knitted commune of shared space, a kind of misaligned distorted communism state, a deeply rooted arborescent and totalitarian unity, terrified of standing out or being bold enough to express any difference from this unity. What is hoped for in un-Musical activism is the existential individualism, whereby individuals are sensitive to each other, while being bold enough to express themselves, a balance of power constantly negotiated and being worked through.

Needless to say, there are dangers in these forms of organisation, and things aren't as positive all the time, despite the welcomed recognition here by Christopher Small of the relation between improvisation and anarchist political organisation:

Improvisation celebrates a set of informal, even loving relationships which can be experienced by everyone present, and brings into existence, at least for the duration of the performance, a society whose closest political analogy is with anarchism [with] each individual [contributing] to the wellbeing of the community.³⁵⁶

I would contest this idea of 'loving' relationships however, and tend to side with Gary Peters' critique of this commonly held view of a 'love-in dressed up as art' unity, which

³⁵⁶ Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue* (London: Calder Publications 1987) 307.

tends to not get close to the raw grittiness of what actually occurs in improvised practice.³⁵⁷

As Brown discusses, in terms of the potential pitfalls of an anarchist organisation that relies upon unity as a foundation:

Anarchism is a political philosophy based on an existential individualism that emphasizes the freedom of the individual. However, many anarchist theorists...buttress their anarchist politics by asserting that human individuals are naturally cooperative. The positing of a fixed, cooperative human nature presents problems for anarchism as it contradicts anarchism's commitment to... the existentially free individual... The political philosophy of existentialism, with its rejection of a fixed human nature and its affirmation of humanity as freedom itself, offers anarchism a fluid conceptualization of human nature more in keeping with its individualist imperative.³⁵⁸

This idea of human beings somehow being naturally cooperative is clearly one which Brown critiques strongly, and rightly so, because to ignore those conflictual aspects of interpersonal relations that Sartre calls 'being-for-others' is to also ignore the route beyond them, to ignore possibilities for the ultimate pursuits of existentialism and anarchism.

Anarchism has been historically linked to Marxist and Communist traditions, and there are certainly strong linkages between the two (despite there also being key differences). After all, Karl Marx said this about what full communism would enable for individuals, when all social needs are met: a full communist society 'will make it possible for me to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic'.³⁵⁹ I would add here playing music without ever being a musician. These words are not only synonymous with key aspects of Anarchist thought, but they also could easily have been written by Sartre or de Beauvoir themselves (Sartre's own book *Between Existentialism and Marxism* made

³⁵⁷ Peters, *Philosophy of Improvisation*, 3.

³⁵⁸ L. Susan Brown, *Politics of Individualism*, 153.

³⁵⁹ Karl Marx in Nicholas Churchich, *Marxism and Alienation* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990) 223.

direct efforts to discuss the relation between the two). Being able to engage in activities without becoming defined by them, objectified by them, as in the Café Waiter example from earlier, is a key part of all of these political philosophies. Furthermore, working towards the abolition of any external authority that attempts to impose laws, restrictions and external, objective mediating devices on individual agency and collective relations. The primary problem once these mediating devices are removed, even in small-scale organisations such as un-Musical, is how can we know that everyone will subscribe to the same existentialist agenda of opening up freedom for all? Brown discusses this very problem here.

For anarchism to work in practice, each individual must not only be responsible for creating his/her own values, but he/she must also defend the freedom of others in order to protect his/her own. The question remains, both for the existentialist and the anarchist: How does one know for certain whether one is acting in a manner that truly opens up freedom for all? Existentialism tells us that we never can know for certain. We choose to act in doubt, and with anguish, but we cannot help but choose.³⁶⁰

We act in doubt and anguish, but nevertheless, we act. Even inaction, in its consequences, is an act, and as such is fraught with doubt. This uncertainty taints our freedom with ambiguity. It demands that we act thoughtfully and responsibly, as our uncertain actions change not only our world but ourselves as well. Doubt can be assumed positively; the admission of our own uncertainty can allow us to be more receptive to other points of view. While existentialism requires freedom to be the ethics demanded by human existence, it is a freedom exercised in doubt and hence must not be assumed lightly.³⁶¹

This choosing in the face of ambiguity, in the face of not knowing, is in an existentialist sense, unavoidable – unavoidable that is, if we accept the responsibility of our freedom, which an existentialist critique would insist too many people don't. To assume doubt positively and to admit our own uncertainty in the face of spontaneous composition is to open up the possibilities for a dramatic recognition of other points of view, of difference

³⁶⁰ L. Susan Brown, *The Politics of Individualism*, 168-169.

³⁶¹ *Ibid*, 170.

itself. This form of social organisation provides the trajectory for a socio-musical organisation that is unparalleled in its potential for wide-reaching, accessible, productive un-Musical activism.

Molecular Politics and Colonial Inclusivity

For the remaining part of this chapter, I intend to bind together the philosophical ideas previously discussed with the specific socio-musical organisation of un-Musical activism, in order to build the substance both theoretically and practically in order to make the concluding arguments I intend to make later. To begin this, a hefty, but necessary quote from Deleuze and Guattari regarding majoritarian and minoritarian formations:

The opposition between minority and majority is not simply quantitative. Majority implies a constant, of expression or content, serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it. Let us suppose that the constant or standard is the average adult-white-heterosexual-European male speaking a standard language...It is obvious that "man" holds the majority, even if he less numerous than mosquitoes, children, women, blacks, peasants, homosexuals, etc. That is because he appears twice, once in the constant and again in the variable from which the constant is extracted. Majority assumes a state of power and domination, not the other way around. It assumes the standard measure, not the other way around. Even Marxism "has almost always translated hegemony from the point of view of the national worker, qualified, male and over thirty-five". A determination different from that of the constant will therefore be considered minoritarian, by nature and regardless of number, in other words, a subsystem or an outsystem. This is evident in all the operations, electoral or otherwise, where you are given a choice, but on the condition that your choice conforms to the limit of the constant ("you mustn't choose to change society...")....The majority, insofar as it is analytically included in the abstract standard, is never anybody, it is always Nobody, as opposed to the becoming-minoritarian of everybody...We must distinguish between: the majoritarian as a constant and homogenous system; minorities as subsystems; and the minoritarian as a potential, creative and created, becoming. The problem is never to acquire the majority, even in

order to install a new constant. There is no becoming-majoritarian; majority is never becoming. All becoming is minoritarian. Women, regardless of their numbers, are a minority, definable as a state or subset; but they create only by making possible a becoming over which they do not have ownership, into which they themselves must enter; this is a becoming-woman affecting all of humankind, men and women both.³⁶²

Before going into this in more detail, I just want to re-emphasise the importance of the statement about majoritarian democracy and relate it to music – dominant majoritarian musical ideology says: you can choose between all of these variations on music, but you mustn't choose to change music itself. I now want to expand upon the key components of this quote as it refers to the contrast between the majoritarian and minoritarian formations. The majoritarian dominant standard of 'man' as never anybody, but always nobody is contrasted with the minoritarian as sub or out systems of everybody. This serves as an excellent political analogy for how all kinds of social relations are organised; from political elections, to gender dynamics in workplaces, to Marxist analysis, to music education. As Claire Colebrook elaborates, this maps onto two types of politics, labelled by Deleuze and Guattari as 'molecular' and 'molar' respectively. A minoritarian (or molecular) politics 'does not have a pre-given (or transcendent) measure or norm for inclusion or identity. Each addition to the group changed what the group is'.³⁶³ 'Majoritarian (or molar) politics on the other hand forms itself according to a fixed, unchanging, essential identity, and each addition to the group changes nothing about what the group is: 'it is therefore possible [in a molar politics] for humanity to include...women or blacks as 'equal'...not by changing its notion of the human (as rational, individual and goal-oriented), but by arguing that women and blacks could also be rational, democratic, economically motivated and moral , 'just like us''.³⁶⁴ Majoritarian (or molar) politics sets the terms in advance and expects assimilation and integration in order to be included. A molecular politics on the other hand is defined by its identity being 'always provisional, in the process of creation'.³⁶⁵ Molecular politics also features an 'intensive multiplicity' in which 'you add more light to a colour and it becomes a

³⁶² Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004) 117.

³⁶³ Claire Colebrook, *Routledge Critical Thinkers: Gilles Deleuze* (London: Routledge, 2002) 117.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* ,118.

different colour', while a molar politics features an 'extensive multiplicity' in which 'you take one red thing out of a box of red things and you still have a box of red things'.³⁶⁶ What is important about these formulations is to remember that this is not about numbers - no matter how many additions to a minoritarian group there are, it will never be majoritarian, while there could be only one member of a majoritarian group yet it maintains itself as majoritarian.

Because of the systemic nature of this majoritarian standard, we can see it reflected in various micro level formations. This is why despite the benevolent sexism of holding doors open for women seeming inconsequential in comparison to widespread inequality, violence and rape against women, the micro level stuff seems to reflect and maintain the background supply for the macro-level. In music, it is why it seems blatantly obvious that a so-called 'non-musician' could not enter a music group without training to be a Musician - adapting and assimilating to the groups fundamental identity. This seems obvious and natural that it is this way. un-Musical activism is formed on the basis of a minoritarian (or molecular) politics in which each addition to the group fundamentally changes the meaning of the group and its modes of operation, without conforming to a new standard of identity. This is the crucial aspect. If someone joins the group for instance who wants to play in key and in time, then the group would need to adapt to this, but it couldn't conform to it completely, because this would transform its identity into a majoritarian formation. The very existence of a minoritarian group is its ability to *exist* conflict and process as its very identity. This is why 'music itself' is always majoritarian. Any music group that is based on a fixed identity with certain set goals and objectives is always majoritarian. No matter how many amazing 'distinctive' musicians you add to any non-improvised group, and no matter how diverse or open-ended the writing process is, these groups are always dependent on specific skill-sets and criteria for inclusion (that are unchangeable), and dependent on these particular skill-sets to enable pre-composed material. They are therefore on a fundamental level, majoritarian. A non-musician could not contribute to the vast majority of music groups because of a deeply embedded majoritarian musical identity that is constantly camouflaged as 'natural' and 'given'. This is why attempts in music education (as previously discussed) to

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

bring more people into the given order are ideological from the start, because they assume a majoritarian fundamental that is not inherent. This reflects what Caroline Pelletier (and others) have referred to as a kind of ‘colonial understanding of inclusion’³⁶⁷ in which, as Gert Biesta discusses:

Inclusion is nothing more than bringing more people into the existing democratic order. This is basically a colonial way to understand democratisation and it is precisely the logic behind what I see as the imperialistic expansion of (a certain definition of) democracy which is currently happening at the geo-political level. What Rancière provides us with is an understanding of the need for a different kind of inclusion: the inclusion of what cannot be known to be excluded in terms of the existing order; the inclusion of what I have elsewhere referred to as the ‘incalculable’.³⁶⁸

Returning to Deleuze for a moment and drawing on an analogy with racism, a reference to the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy is turned on its head. As Colebrook discusses: ‘Racism...is not a logic of exclusion; its violence and tyranny lies in inclusion. What explicit and insidious racisms share is the standard of man....We are all white and western. We are all the same; other cultures need only to be recognised as just like ‘us’.³⁶⁹ As alluded to back in Chapter 1, with some of the dominant political agendas that use terminology such as ‘inclusivity’, what this normally means is an attempt to integrate those on the margins into the centre. Despite ‘inclusivity’ becoming a buzz word for funding applications and community projects, and despite best intentions, the word itself has really always meant this. Etymologically ‘inclusive’ comes from the root ‘includere’, which can mean ‘to shut in, enclose, imprison, insert’.³⁷⁰ Predictably, the opposite ‘exclusive’ comes from the root ‘excludere’, which can mean to ‘keep out, shut out, hinder’.³⁷¹ Again, as with Corlett’s example earlier of how oppositions often camouflage the deeper unity beneath, both inclusive and exclusive reveal and refer to the same

³⁶⁷ Caroline Pelletier, ‘Emancipation, Equality and Education: Rancière’s Critique of Bourdieu and the Question Of Performativity’, *Discourse*, 2008,

http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/3196/1/Pelletier_2009_Education_Equality_and_Emancipation137.pdf

³⁶⁸ Gert Biesta, Democracy, Education and the Question of Inclusion, *Philosophy of Education*, 2007

<http://www.philosophy-of-education.org/conferences/pdfs/BIESTA%20PESGB%202007.pdf>

³⁶⁹ Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, 139.

³⁷⁰ ‘Include (v)’, *Online Etymology Dictionary*,

http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=include&allowed_in_frame=0 (14th April, 2014).

³⁷¹ ‘Exclude’ (v), *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=exclude> (14th April, 2014).

fundamental structure – an enclosed unified space that one can be shut out from, or enclosed within. Either way, once in, one is defined by that structure, and when one is in, there is always someone left out. Either way, the whole game of inclusivity and exclusivity breeds inequality, power and domination from the outset. It's useful that Jacques Rancière was mentioned in the above quote, because he offers an interesting perspective on this which is very useful for my purposes here. As Pelletier discusses, in her analysis of Rancière's critique of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological methodologies:

Bourdieu's analysis of the division of knowledge between social groups appears as an explanation of inequality: the poor do not succeed academically because they cannot formulate scholarly discourse, as a consequence of their habitus. Rancière's counter to this is that the poor do not succeed academically because their discourse is not treated or 'heard' as scholarly – and that this is precisely what Bourdieu's sociology also does.³⁷²

This is a fascinating argument, because it presents the very radical suggestion that there isn't actually a fixed conception of skill, scholarly discourse, excellence, etc. which everyone must attain to in order to be heard, but instead, we should be listening more attentively to the different voices that come through when such essentialist, unified conceptualizing are abandoned. William Corlett has made a similar point, again from his book *Community without Unity*:

Strategies to deepen the applicant pool, only to keep hiring the same kind of people on the grounds that their qualifications place them "head and shoulders above the rest" ...Being more extravagant when approaching excellence [involves] displacing those hierarchies that imagine the ideal professorial type and consider all lesser versions of it as deviations... overprivileged colleagues must ask whether their criteria measure excellence or merely reflect sameness...perhaps other criteria of excellence will emerge as colleagues who are not overprivileged

³⁷² Caroline Pelletier, 'Emancipation, Equality and Education: Rancière's Critique of Bourdieu and the Question Of Performativity', *Discourse*, 2008, http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/3196/1/Pelletier_2009_Education_Equality_and_Emancipation137.pdf

assume positions of power in the academy. Efforts to diversify are thwarted by a lack of different applicants who meet the going criteria of sameness.³⁷³

We could perhaps make a similar argument regarding musicality. Strategies to deepen and widen participation in music, only to keep hiring and listening to the same kind of people, with the same fundamental skill-sets, and the same goals and objectives will always lead to a maintenance of musical sameness and the preservation of dominant musical ideology – the so-called ‘non-musicians’ and unmusicals will either be kept in their place or elevated to the level of ‘amateurs’. Success for the conservative minded, but death for revolution.

Refusing to fix the unstable allure

There is a tremendous pressure from musicians and non-musicians alike, and from the broader societal structures to fix creative engagement into commoditized ‘transferable skills’ and I want no part of that. This is where my thesis finds its key political pursuit, the resistance to this pressure, and the ability to persuade others that real revolutionary creative practice comes most potently in this resistance, in the anarchic model of ‘practice’ described via the Felt Beak/un-Musical approach. Hélène Cixous would perhaps describe this quality I am referring to as the ‘unstable allure’, and as usual, her words are precisely precise regarding this aspect of creative practice:

I want the world of pulses, before destiny, I want the prenatal and anonymous night. I want (the arrival) to see arriving. Acts of birth, potency, and impotency mingled are what I'm passionate about. The to-be-in-the-process of writing or drawing. When we were little. Before the violent divorce between Good and Evil. All was mingled then, and no mistakes. Only desire, trial, and error. Trial, that is to say, error. Error: progression. As soon as we draw (as soon as, following the pen, we advance into the unknown, hearts beating, mad with desire) we are little, we do not know, we start out avidly, we're going to lose ourselves.³⁷⁴

³⁷³ Corlett, *Community Without Unity*, xviii-xix.

³⁷⁴ Helene Cixous, *Stigmata* (New York: Routledge, 1998) 26.

To think there are those who seek the finished. Those who seek to portray cleanly, the most properly! But some portray passing. The truth. The passing (of the) truth. This is what gives to their drawing and painting an unstable allure.³⁷⁵

What Cixous points up here is crucial, because again we have a beautifully articulated resistance to ‘the proper construction’, ‘the finished’, ‘the stable’. However, in Cixous’ argument, like Eshun’s, she actually begins to put this theory into practice through her writing style via ‘Écriture féminine’. It is also through her concept of the ‘unstable allure’ that she undermines such dominant understandings of art in which the ‘allure’ is normally created through an admiration for how the process was masked, camouflaged and hidden from view – ‘how did they do that?’. Whereas in the ‘unstable allure’, as in particular approaches to improvised practice, the allure comes from the instability of this process being completely on display, the fragility and fluidity of working things out transparently and uncleanly. To aspire to this for art is an inverted approach on the standard ‘majoritarian’ formation and weaves its way towards a trajectory of ‘minoritarian’ (or molecular) politics. However, like Deleuze and so many other writers who have written in the poststructuralist and postmodern movements they seem to fall into traps when it comes to music that they don’t fall into when they are dealing with literature or painting. Music has a deeply embedded structuralism and fixity to it, which other arts have moved beyond, far quicker. As an academic discipline, it is incredibly conservative and late to move beyond its structuralist and orthodox histories. As a popular cultural practice, it is susceptible to the market and industry that the other arts don’t suffer as comprehensively. Music is typically the art which gets left out of radical discussions specifically regarding poststructuralist movements. The ubiquity of music’s dependence on structure, coherence and formality combined with our dependence on music to support us in almost all of our activities (a process explored by Anahid Kassabian amongst others as rapidly increasing over the past 20 years) means that this conception of music as fixed, stable, pre-composed and representable is deeply engrained in not just our chosen music, but in our daily experience of sound and life, even when we sleep. Some mystical dream warriors may be required to awaken us from this malaise to move

³⁷⁵ Ibid, 28.

forward and change this situation, so that an 'unstable allure' becomes actually alluring in any socially relevant way regarding music production and consumption.

Sex, Improvisation and Resisting Compromise

To draw this chapter to a close, I want to extend this analogy of the 'unstable allure' to another framework, this time a sexual one. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, because such an analogy makes sense and helps articulate the unusual situation of an unstable collective relation in which pleasure, expression, awareness and mutual consent are both: not fixed, and at the same time, absolutely required for the activity. In other words, someone consenting to sex in advance of the act does not fix their place in this activity permanently. Consent is an ongoing process and requires a continual engagement of pleasure and engagement in the activity, as so with improvised practice (obviously not to the same literal level).

We'll start with some existentialism:

They are speaking to the best part of you, the toughest, the freest, to the part which wants neither melody nor refrain, but the deafening climax of the moment [...] they look mad, taut, as if they were searching for something. Something like sexual pleasure.³⁷⁶

Of course, what Sartre was experiencing in that jazz club might not even have been the type of un-Musical practice which I'm describing here, but it obviously expressed a similar enough reflection of collective relations in order to make the analogy with sex. We of course mentioned earlier of jazz's etymological relation with sexual energy. However, we need to stop Sartre in his tracks. Perhaps the jazz that he saw was actually a kind of competitive individualistic jazz which displayed virtuosity and showboating from the players involved (in other words, the kind of instrumental individualism explored earlier). This would make more sense and be more realistic to most mainstream jazz than to assume that he witnessed the kind of improvised practice here described. This may explain why his conception suggests the pursuit is 'the deafening climax of the moment', when in actuality this is not the whole story. Sartre's position is inflicted by a male-driven

³⁷⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre in Ralph de Toledano, *Frontiers of Jazz* (Gretna, L.A: Pelican Publishing, 1994) 66.

account of engorged sexual pleasure as reaching the highest point (orgasm), but such a position would imply closure, finish, end. What we have in un-Musical practice is a female-driven account of sexual pleasure in which pleasure is the full engagement in the activity itself, which may or may not result in multiple female orgasms, but does not pursue male orgasm – in fact, such a thing is continuously deferred as allowing such a process to be the definitive action of sexual intercourse misunderstands it as a closure, as the finished - as opposed to Cixous's unfinished, unstable allure. Doesn't it make more sense for everyone that sex continues for as long as it is highly pleasurable for both – individual pleasure being inextricably intertwined with the collective pleasure (thus reflecting the kinds of existential individualism explored earlier). Dominant conceptions of sexual relations, as in the Deleuzian majoritarian sense allows female bodies to be used by heterosexual males for their own self-interested pleasure (instrumental individualism).

Nestled into this articulation of the sexual intercourse analogy then, is a division between the two contrasting (but not mutually exclusive) terms: discourse and intercourse. For the purposes here, intercourse is understood as a 'flow' of energy exchanged 'among, between, betwixt, and in the midst of' each person engaged in that flow.³⁷⁷ It is dependent upon the practice of an existential individualism. In contrast, discourse is understood as a formal, detached exchange of energy engaged in from a distance, 'apart' from the flow. It is dependent upon the practice of an instrumental individualism. Both terms are used to refer to sexual and musical interpersonal relations and are interchangeable between them. Sometimes, discourse and intercourse blur, but for the most part, they offer distinctive approaches to engaging in energy exchange between people, whether that is conversation, sex, music, etc. The idea of 'flow' is a central part of this framework, and is not that dissimilar to the 'flow theory' as proposed in psychology, where 'flow' is described as an intense and immersive mental state in which the following 6 components seem to occur, according to Psychologists J. Nakamura and M. Csíkszentmihályi:

1. intense and focused concentration on the present moment

³⁷⁷ The meaning of intercourse here has been stitched together from various tracings of the different etymological roots of the words, but is not reducible to any single source.

2. merging of action and awareness
3. a loss of reflective self-consciousness
4. a sense of personal control or agency over the situation or activity
5. a distortion of temporal experience, one's subjective experience of time is altered
6. experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding, also referred to as autotelic experience³⁷⁸

While I will not be attempting to remain authentic to these 6 bullet-points, I think they give a useful trajectory towards the kind of model of collective experience I am discussing here. What is important to extract from this conception of 'flow' is that while engaging in activity of this sort, compromise of this energy would amount to its destruction. In order then, to have collective flow, as in sex, and improvisation, both individuals require maximisation (not reduction) of their pleasure in this flow.

This brings me to the other central argument which emerges from this conception of sexual relations: that 'compromise' is an unethical, damaging force in the drive for ethical collective relations which maximise collective pleasure. It is something which both this articulation of sexual relations and un-Musical practice avoid. This problematization of compromise is driven by a deep-seated suspicion of the idea of conservative, 'traditional' conceptions of sexual relations as something that happens 'behind closed doors' in the privacy of the bedroom, etc. There is a suspicion that keeping things like sex 'behind closed doors' allows those who abuse and damage others to maintain that abuse through 'compromise' and under the auspices of the *duties of marriage*, etc. Sex in which one participant only cares and acts upon their own freedom and pleasure is harmful, for that there is no doubt. When this is done through penetration of someone else's body, it is rape. One might jump to the conclusion that sex therefore relies on a kind of compromise of pleasure, a reduction in the pleasure impulse which is characterised as being somehow inherently oppressive, but such an understanding presumes again that 'positive freedom' – the 'freedom-to' will inevitably want or need to take pleasure away from someone else in order to gain more for themselves, that a full maximised pleasure for a heterosexual male for instance cannot be achieved without reducing or compromising the pleasure of a heterosexual female. Such a conception is

³⁷⁸ M. Csikszentmihalyi, J. Nakamura, 'Flow Theory and Research'. In C. R. Snyder Erik Wright, and Shane J. Lopez. *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 195–206.

deeply flawed and unethical. We need to expect much more from men. Also, compromise is not only an insufficient solution to collective pleasure - it is the problem to begin with. If we continue with the example of penetrative sex, it will serve as a good example to illustrate the point. If a woman compromises her own pleasure and arousal for the other person, her vagina will not be sufficiently aroused in order to have pleasurable penetrative sex. Likewise, if we are talking about anal sex, the same can be said, the anus must be sufficiently relaxed in order to experience pleasurable penetrative sex. For the other person to require a compromise in this, in order to maximise their pleasure is the criminality of this conception of sexual relations and begins to articulate how deeply unethical compromise can be when seen in this light. An ethical perspective on sexual relations has to in my mind require an uncompromising experience of pleasure and individual freedom. We seek the maximisation of collective pleasure as a minimum requirement, not a bonus. But, of course, this relies upon a particular conception of freedom, one in which an individual pursues freedom in a way that does not demand compromise of the other's ability to do the same. In other words, an existential individualist conception of freedom. Sex is the best analogy for this, as it distinctly allows a situation to emerge where two separate individuals can maximise their own individual pleasures, and in doing so can give that parallel pleasure to the other. Each individual's freedom and pleasure is inextricably tied to the other's through the practice of this existential individualism. During sex, while each person rides on the wave of energy being produced, any sustained interruption of this energy, interruption of this pleasure, shatters the collective experience – the 'flow'. In other words, yes, it is possible for one person (a man overwhelmingly) to have an enjoyable sexual experience without the other person also enjoying it, but in order for this to happen, he must compromise the other person's pleasure, and in so doing violates the experience as sexual intercourse itself. Sex of this sort does not come under the terminology of intercourse at all. He is detaching from the flow and is engaging in a instrumental individualistic discourse with himself, and objectifying the other's body in the most ruthless and violating way imaginable – a criminal, destructive act of aggression towards freedom itself.

If we push for a model of sex that requires a constant committed connection of separate people making a positive offer to each other in various different sensual ways, which

insists on maximisation of individual pleasure, then we move towards a mode of collective relations that is about connected, collaborative and collective singularities. If there is an ethics here, it is in moving from making negative offers that demand reductions in pleasure, to making positive offers that demand expansion in pleasure. Theoretically, the analogy between improvisation and sex should be relatively straightforward. With no external authority on how to proceed, each individual expression in improvisation can be uncompromising and can maximise itself, without compromising the other person's ability to do the same. The ideal situation then is a collective space that is as powerful for-itself as it is for-others. This, like sex will provide many contours, and many different ways of expressing one's self. There will be different positions performers will attach themselves to, and different roles played out, but what is important is that each person involved can commit to this experience constantly through the incessant necessity of re-choosing in each moment, as any sustained lack of pleasure will result in a return to multiple discourses rather than a true, collective intercourse.

Practically though, as with sex, interpersonal relations and the conflicts between different instrumental individualisms create the problems. Continual consent and maintenance of existential individualism is required in order to ensure that guy on the drums for instance doesn't just dominate everyone else. However, consent doesn't come explicitly as in saying 'yes, continue, yes, continue', but is expressed sensually through the sensual expression of sonic bodies, the continuation of an agenda, the continuation of a repetitive section, the continuation of space, etc. Once it becomes obvious that other people have decided to not continue this agenda, the drummer needs to be hyperaware and be able to respond quickly in order to change things. Likewise, there could be a moment of intense quietness, slow-paced movement. Someone decides to make a quick change, a deep increase in intensity, it becomes obvious quickly whether the other performers accept this offer or not. It should be clear also that there is a difference between giving consent and being agreeable. Often, dialogical models of improvisation tend to put forward views of agreeableness, where when someone in the group makes offers, others need to accept these offers, etc. We pursue nothing of the sort. An ethical un-Musical practice posits consent as the pivotal feature that reminds

people of their existential freedom to say no. It is this lack of agreeableness, this refusal to compromise or settle for anything that doesn't pursue maximisation of collective pleasure, which comes to characterise the ethics of this practice. It is possible of course, for one person to take pleasure for themselves at the expense of, or in ignorance of others' pleasure, but if this were to happen, the other individual(s) would be entitled to put a stop to the sonic domination in whichever way they could. Most of the time in Felt Beak and un-Musical sessions though, the intercourse is so pleasurable, that it would be terminally stupid to spoil this by premature ejaculation or self-interested masturbatory showboating!

Improvisation discussions have tended to focus on recognising the problems of engorged 'positive-freedom' improvisation (as discussed earlier) and responding to these problems by setting up a deeply entrenched dialogical pseudo-utopia, built on the basis of extremely naïve and liberal ideas of a 'global village', where everyone compromises in order to reach consensus. This produces the most treacherously dull, nauseatingly stale performances in which everyone is scared to make a move, out of fear of being present in the other person's universe. We don't want consent through compromise, we want consent through pleasure, consent to pleasure, more of it, maximised, but not finished. No male orgasm, yet.

Summary

The intent of this chapter was to articulate the ways in which certain political and philosophical frameworks could be meaningfully applied to the socio-cultural practices I had described in chapter 3. I focussed significantly on the ways in which a particular branch of existentialist philosophy through Jean-Paul Sartre and more importantly, Simone de Beauvoir, could create an ethics of interpersonal relations, or, in de Beauvoir's words, an *ethics of ambiguity* that best explained the kinds of collective relations at work in un-Musical activism. This allowed me to articulate the kinds of ideals this activism works towards, while recognising that it is never perfect and always in process, positing ambiguity positively and reflecting what Héléne Cixous has termed an 'unstable allure'. I articulated how L. Susan Brown's productive application of the political position of Anarchism with the philosophical position of Existentialism could be usefully deployed as

further grounding for this ethics, and how a certain division she makes between 'instrumental individualism' and 'existential individualism' can help explain the particular kind of 'freedom' wished for in un-Musical activism.

From here, I used the political division between a 'minoritarian' (or molecular) and 'majoritarian' (or molar) formation as articulated by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. I argued that un-Musical activism is formed on the basis of a minoritarian (or molecular) politics in which each addition to the group fundamentally changes the meaning of the group and its modes of operation, without conforming to a new standard of identity. I suggested this facet is crucial, because it resists the oppressive nature of pre-defined unity in which any one individual or majority can create a 'standard' or 'identity' of the group, through which everyone else must assimilate to. Instead, new members can contribute to the meaning of that group and the identity is always provisional. I argued that the 'majoritarian' formations with which un-Musical activism rallies against, reflect a kind of colonial understanding of inclusivity, in which integration and inclusion is only allowed on the basis of assimilation to a pre-defined group identity (Britishness, Conservative, Musical, etc.) This majoritarian formation forms a kind of meta-narrative of 'learn the rules before you break them', and in doing so, monopolises and colonises the very meaning of music itself, excluding the possibility of alternative routes to pluralistic musical knowledge(s). I closed the chapter by bringing together the previously outlined philosophical frameworks to bear on an analogical framework I developed between the interpersonal relations involved with a certain model of sexual relations and a certain model of collective improvisation. The framework for this analogical model depended upon first utilizing psychologists J. Nakamura and M. Csikszentmihályi's theory of 'flow' to illustrate how a constantly committed engagement between various individuals towards a mutually enjoyable act was dependent upon individual pleasures being inextricably intertwined with the collective 'flow'. One pleasure drops, the collective 'flow' crashes completely. From here, it was necessary to outline a theoretical division between two concepts: discourse, which reflects an instrumental individualism in which each individual can detach from the 'flow' by expressing their own freedom and pleasure either in ignorance, or at the expense of the other's; and intercourse, which reflects an existential individualism in which each individual commits to the flow by expressing their

freedoms and pleasures in ways that heighten and maximise the other's. The argument is then made that instead of requiring reductions in pleasure, an ethical perspective on collective relations of any kind has to require an uncompromising and maximisation of pleasure as a minimum requirement, not a bonus. I then concluded by commenting on the demand for an ongoing commitment to consent. However, not a consent reached through compromise of pleasure, but instead a consent to the maximisation of pleasure for everyone involved.

Discrepant Anachronism 4 - Interview between Professor Jerome Trotsky and Slack Nutella

All characters appearing in this section are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Meet Professor Jerome Trotsky, a retired scholar working in the fields of political philosophy, social activism and structuralist paradigms. He has been highly critical of the 'crazy ideas' of the French intellectuals, and post-structuralism, post-modernism and the ways in which these 'meaningless discourses' draw people away from real, pragmatic, popular struggles across the world. It's ironic then, that somehow, Trotsky has been asked to be the external examiner for the PhD thesis of Slack Nutella, whose work is involved substantially in what may be called post-structuralist ideas applied to pragmatic, social causes.

Slack Nutella culminates his journey in a 'viva voce' interrogation with Jerome Trotsky, who will attempt to pin him down and expose inconsistencies and problems with his theoretical arguments and how they apply concretely to the social activist practices he intends them to.

February 14th, 2016. No later than 4 months after submission of his PhD thesis, Slack Nutella is asked to defend by viva voce his

thesis to the experienced, stubborn and infamous Jerome Trotsky. Let's see how things proceed.

Professor Jerome Trotsky: Hello Mr. Nutella, I won't waste much time dressing this up. Let's just get straight to it if you don't mind.

Slack Nutella: That's fine by me.

Professor Jerome Trotsky: OK, while I understand the general principle of existentialism, that you are always beyond whatever essence has been constructed, isn't it important, and doesn't existentialism itself insist upon certain essential truths, for instance, that for any one of us to be free, we must all be free? Or that restricting someone else's freedom is inauthentic - Isn't this an essence? Isn't this a structuralist essence?

Slack Nutella: Existentialists would argue that this is the concrete reality of our existence, that to be true to the reality of our existence is to be forever beyond essence, to be forever beyond ourselves, but that this 'forever beyond' is not an essence, because an essence would restrict the movement of the 'beyond' itself and ossify into an 'I am', rather than a 'I was'. Essence implies 'I think, therefore I am', existence implies 'I think, therefore I was'.

Professor Jerome Trotsky: But what does such abstract theoretical posturing have to do with real people's struggles - real, activist concerns? And while it may be accurate to say that the existentialists offer more an ethical style, than any kind of moral content, isn't there something dangerous, especially in relation to the rest of your argument, to suggest that the ethics of communal relations can be guided by a vague 'style', without any fixed content. Doesn't this inevitably lead to confusion about what all of this means, the regular so-called misunderstandings of

Sartre's position on interpersonal relations for instance - isn't this inevitable with such a vague ethics?

Slack Nutella: Remember that existentialism was a response to the horrifying situation of World War 2 - *Being and Nothingness* was partially written while Sartre was a prisoner of war. There is a necessity to forming theoretical foundations for the fundamental freedom of all individuals, before we can make practical claims for their real, actual living freedoms in the material world.

Sartre's quote for instance that, which goes something like: 'Obviously, freedom as the definition of a man does not depend upon others, but as soon as there is a commitment, I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as my own'.³⁷⁹ Collective improvisation represents such a commitment on a micro-level, and the same can be said of anarchist organisation more generally. The ethical style guides proceedings but is never completely constituted as a fixed content, so there is always room for manoeuvre, but at the point of a violation of another's freedom, the existentialists such as De Beauvoir are in no doubt that this breaks the code, the existential freedom of human reality, and as such that person cannot be allowed to continue that violation: 'A freedom which is occupied in denying freedom is itself so outrageous that the outrageousness of the violence which one practices against it is almost cancelled out'.³⁸⁰

Professor Jerome Trotsky: You sound like Foucault at times there, but OK, I'm prepared to accept the intentions of the argument, even if I am not completely convinced that there are significant means here to do the things practically you need. We'll move forward. In musical terms then, this idea of doubt being assumed positively, and the uncertainty of how to proceed in spontaneous

³⁷⁹ 'Jean-Paul Sartre 1946: Existentialism is a Humanism', *Marxists.org*, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm> (24th April 2014).

³⁸⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 97.

improvisation giving us a better recognition of different perspectives - can't it also restrict this, because there's nothing concrete again preventing someone playing just for themselves, since there are no requirements to recognise others. While I understand the point about compromise, I also think that that sometimes in improvisation, what needs to happen is just that - that drummer for instance who takes pleasure from dominating over everything else - how can that be improved without for instance him compromising his own pleasure?

Slack Nutella: But the whole benefit of this approach to collective organisation is that there is still room and affordance of that, because the person who wants to play just for themselves can just form a group with others who also like to play that way. It becomes a problem when there is a conflict of ethos in a particular group, and most of the time through discussion, minor conflicts can be resolved or worked-through productively, but if someone takes an entirely different approach, then they just need a different group, rather than for everyone to compromise their own pleasure and enjoyment. This broad, macro-level perspective allows for multiple and radically different approaches to be practiced on a small, micro-level.

Professor Jerome Trotsky: If this model of practice literally gives people the opportunity to do absolutely anything, including key-driven composed stuff, then surely it no longer makes sense to actually call it improvised, or to delineate it as a specific mode of anything, since the field is so limitless that there is surely an argument that it might as well not exist at all? What is the point of delineating it then as anything?

Slack Nutella: And that's the whole point really. The fact is, a conception of music like this doesn't actually exist, really anywhere, at least noticeably or anywhere near the mainstream, so we need to make this argument. And also, in the Felt Beak

definition, although all of the stuff is completely improvised, the spectrum is really broad in terms of the styles and sounds played, and the word 'improv' isn't used, it is just 'to play' , so this breaking down of specialism and converting the very idea of what music is, this is what we're pursuing.

Professor Jerome Trotsky: Point taken. Doesn't the idea of having a female-driven account of practice contradict your point that there shouldn't be a driver at all of any kind, no hierarchy?

Slack Nutella: The female-driven is important, especially in heterosexual relations because in sexual terms, such a conception would ensure that both parties are fully aroused, that the sex is prolonged beyond just the male orgasm, and that sexual relations are enjoyed for the process of sex itself, not as a means to an end - male orgasm, which sadly it often can be. In this sense, female-driven is not about just one partner getting what they want, but opening up a better mode of sexual relations for all concerned. Even when women aren't involved, the same point remains, that full arousal of both parties and prolonged enjoyment of the sex itself, rather than just as a means to orgasm is a better mode of sexual relations.

Professor Jerome Trotsky: The critique of 'competitive/instrumental individualism' in the form of competing solo's I think needs elaboration, because there are instances where healthy competition can be good for musical communities, and I don't think you've spent enough time on that - how would this for instance be different from the competition involved with Hip-Hop cipher battles etc?

Slack Nutella: I think probably the most crucial difference between the kinds of competition involved with Hip-Hop ciphers and battles, is that this mode of skill has been self-developed and self-defined by a small, micro-community, and cultivated in such a

way that it becomes a communal practice and anyone in the community can practice this skill and compete within these practices. On the other hand, competitive solos have become a site for something completely different - the detachment of a particular small group from its much larger and passive audience who are meant to appreciate and revere the skill on show by a specialist performer trained in a musical tradition that is generally perceived to be way out of reach, or at least only attainable in a long-distant future after many years of training, meaning that if you haven't started when you were young, you're probably not going to make it that far, etc. Again, I would come back to the existential individualism and instrumental individualism. While the Hip-Hop cipher's flirt with instrumental individualism, and while some forms of these battles (especially the Dozens) can practice a damaging form of instrumental individualism and competition, more often than not, historically, they have served as a means towards the end of an existential individualism for the community, while the more traditional emphasis on competitive solo is solely concerned with an instrumental individualism that seeks to elevate individuals above the rest.

Professor Jerome Trotsky: Ok, I understand that, thanks for explaining that point.

That is all of the questions for now Slack. If you'd like to go out of the room for now, and we will discuss things, and call you back in when we are ready to give you a decision on this.

Slack Nutella: OK, thank you.

Conclusion: The Revolution will not happen in a PhD Thesis (probably)

While Slack awaits his fate, we will proceed with the current conclusion to this work, which is occurring in the various infinitesimal instants we may call 'the present'. Since I have already listed the summaries for each chapter already, I won't spend a lot of time simply repeating those here. I will however give a brief general overview of what I've attempted to do in this work. I don't want to be overly prescriptive here, or naïve about pretending I have all the answers about how we're going to use this music to enact global revolution, or global change. If I do tread into that territory, be sure to tell me OK? What I can, and should do though is speak on a micro-level about what has worked for me, the community around me, how we might progress and what rocks need to be shifted (or eroded) to enable micro-revolutions to happen that may have something to offer outside of their own environment.

Key arguments, principles and pursuits of an un-Musical activism: no-thing or no-one is left out of the potential possibilities of music-making.

What I have tried to do in this work is firstly expose a deeply problematic assumption at the core of dominant musical ideology, which insists music must be organised in such a way as to enable its future representation; that the organisation of sounds are structured into a coded system that has enough internal unity for the form to be performed again later. The initial corollary assumption to this being that a musician must have the necessary pre-requisite skills to compose or perform this material again and again – we are told that music is something which has to enable future performance, and therefore cannot be made immediately without these skills. Such an immediate, improvised process is determined as 'jamming', something that is a mere 'process' on its way to a more finished product (Music). The further corollary assumption is that music critics, musicologists, music educators, etc., are also required to have these skills in order to comment legitimately or educate others about the practice of music. These assumptions combine and congeal, leading to a general professionalization and specialism of music, which leaks pervasively into almost every corner of musical culture, meaning that even when the rules are 'broken' as such, there is a stubborn retention even in the most

'experimental' spaces of a 'learn the rules before you break them' mentality that retains damaging notions of professionalism and specialism.

Once this initial exposition is made clear, the primary argument I wanted to bring the fore was that notions of 'experimentalism', 'avant-garde' and 'free music' in the form of improvised practice have failed monumentally to deal with the damaging effects of professionalism and specialism, and in many ways have contributed further to their cementing in the musical landscape, ensuring that even the extreme margins of musical practice retains professionalism, hierarchy, specialism and the acceptance of a 'learn the rules before you break them' mentality. There is a greater weight given to the criticism of these forms, because being on the margins, they tend to define what is possible in the musical environment as a whole. Simultaneously, because of the greater responsibility given to these forms, there was greater weight given to the positives to come out of these scenes too, such as aspects of free jazz in the 1960's which were drawn upon significantly as they illuminated a potential which could be usefully extended in today's un-Musical activism.

I identified that potential as a kind of pan-idiomatic improvisation in which I deployed William Parker's conception of free music as not being 'no-structure' as such, but the choice to pursue any and all possible sonic configurations you wanted. I explored this in community projects, pursuing the dual project of cultivating experience for so-called non-musicians in workshops, practice and recording sessions to play with each other in practice rooms and studios, while at the same time exploring an expansionist model of having groups play this approach to music in various socially accessible spaces, such as parks, pubs and restaurants. The motive for this agenda remains to create an insurgency of 'non-musicians' and 'unmusicals' who can undermine for themselves and others, the dominant assumptions of music by demonstrating in various outlets the ability to play music that can be completely improvised while being meaningful on a wider level. For instance, the ability to communicate to wider audiences, the ability to play alongside highly trained musicians, the ability to dismantle any meaningful difference between 'non-musicians' and 'trained musicians', and the ability to fundamentally re-define music itself on a small-scale as something anarchic and open-ended.

To close the argument, I argued for an existentialist-anarchist basis for collective interpersonal relations and social organisation, in which groups are organised without any external authority or pre-determined modes of operation, except for the ongoing principles that: the groups themselves decide how to proceed on the basis of a total collective improvisation; that in principle no-thing or no-one is left out of the potential possibilities of music-making; that the group's identity is always flexible, minoritarian, open to change based on new incoming people; and, that the space is open-access but not open to abuse. There is an ethics of ambiguity in existentialist-anarchist social relations, in which people can self-define their own meaning and value of music through the ongoing application of the productive ambiguity involved with improvised music-making. An un-Musical activism insists that it's not enough to be able to improvise in a corner with your aficionado friends and high-cultural connoisseurs, isolated and socially redundant; it's also not enough to just have a political sing-along while representing standard musical organisation. Musical revolution demands that we do better, and as far as I'm concerned, the only way we have left to create meaningful revolution, is to utilise the activist potential of improvised music-making to make rewarding, enjoyable, radical, accessible and socially meaningful music that creates revolution through the relentless principle of giving everyone access and obliterating the distinction between those who *can* and *cannot*.

End times

un-Musical activism as a musical practice attempts to obliterate all pre-defined understandings of what music is, what musicians are, and who can and who cannot make music. Through a dedication to total, collective improvisation, facilitated through existentialist-anarchist organisation, it demonstrates that music can be whatever you want it to be. Following the sensual direction of what feels good, desire can be engaged productively and collectively as we go crate-digging into the past, present and future at will, hijacking government planes and re-routing them to raves, mosh-pits and loft parties. *Music itself* becomes an obsolete concept, as we mine its resources and its histories in order to reinvent its futures, destroying its dominant image as consumer product of neo-liberal capitalism and re-imagining it as anarchist activism. Pushing aside both the approach of Trad improvisation to insist upon specific parameters for advanced

virtuosic performance, and the approach of commercial popular music to reduce, package and commodify sonic pleasure; what we end up with is a micro-anarchist practice, with no absolute restrictions on who can participate or what can be made. Fertile ground for the future, mythical figure of the *untrained pan-idiomatic* to thrive one.

Un-Musical practice tries to create an Eshun-like sonic fiction, in which music can be imagined however you want it. At times, the acoustic guitar will be drowned out, while at other times it will assume priority. The drums will flirt between the roles of antagonist and protagonist; they may murder the piano and forge a convincing alibi to get away with it at one stage, while the ribbon synthesizer and the saxophone are distracted by an intensely stimulating love-affair. During confession, the sampler hijacks the priest's voice and lights a hopeless candle for us all. The self becomes a puppet for the greater infinity of the 'fabulated' imagination.³⁸¹ I'm going to quote Eshun again here, and although what he's talking about in this quote is actually the mode of writing articulated in his book, I want to borrow the principles and apply them to this mode of improvised practice and this thesis:

A lot of the moves I've described will provoke real annoyance, the lack of the literary, the lack of the modernist, the lack of the postmodern. All of these things should provoke a real irritation, and simultaneously a real relief, a relief that somebody has left all stuff behind, and started from the pleasure principle, started from the materials, started from what really gives people pleasure.³⁸²

And so that is where we will start, from the materials, from what gives pleasure. We do this not because we think pleasure is free from ideology, but precisely because it *exists* ideology comprehensively as part of its vibrant membrane. By engaging it in its fullest, we render its grip on us more apparent and more visible. To try and do this collectively at the time of performance, is probably one of the most challenging creative approaches to take, yet at the same time the shackles of both tradition and consumerism alike have been alleviated. This will, like Eshun's project, provide both an irritation and a relief - that

³⁸¹ Ronald Bogue, *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

³⁸² Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun*, A [193].

in an existentialist sense, there is nothing inherent to guide you one way or another, and no 'clever' music ideology to alleviate you of the choice; but that, finally, music is there to shape how you want it, no instruction on what is *right* or *wrong*.

What I'm trying to suggest with all of this then, is not just that there are significant activist, revolutionary potentials to improvised practice and that music can be accessed immediately by people from various different backgrounds in open-public settings, but that any such potential is being kept out of view by either the strict parameters applied to the musical approaches themselves under the guise of 'freedom', or the way these musics are operated socially to preserve the hierarchy, privilege and exclusion of high-art musical culture. What are we pursuing here then ultimately? Jacques Attali says it, probably most directly:

A resurgence of music for immediate enjoyment, for daily communication, rather than for a confined spectacle. No study is required to play this kind of music...It is thus accessible to everyone, breaking the barrier raised by an apprenticeship in the code and the instrument³⁸³. It heralds the arrival of new social relations.³⁸⁴

Such new social relations though would need to expose the hypocrisy of using terms such as 'freedom', 'experimental' or 'revolution' in improvisation discourses that flagrantly disregard the power relations involved with who *can* and who *cannot* participate. Why? Why is this so important? Because, to put it simply and bluntly: 'music is too important to be left to the musicians'.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ Attali, *Noise*, 140.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 20.

³⁸⁵ Small, *Music, Society, Education*, 214.

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