



The Space Between:
exploring spontaneity, group interaction and social
context in improvised performances of motivic
compositions

PhD Thesis

Matthew Jacobson BA, MMus

Supervisors: Professor Frank Lyons & Dr Brian Bridges

School of Arts and Humanities

Ulster University

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I confirm that the word count of this thesis is less than 100,000 words

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Abstract

This practice-based thesis explores non-structured improvisational performances of motivic compositions. The research is undertaken in the thematic framework of historical development, group interaction, freedom versus constraints and social context, all of which have been investigated through a multi-disciplinary literature review. The performance approach explored is connected to improvised music innovations in the 20th century that have developed into the current practice of creative music particularly associated with the downtown New York music scene. This investigation has driven formulation of research questions focussed on the balance between composition and improvisation, performance context, the medium of compositional motifs and instrumental functionality. Motivic compositions have been created, performed and documented with various ensembles and in multiple performance contexts around the world. This documentation is divided into four categories: the same composition performed by different ensembles; the same composition performed by the same ensemble in different contexts; non-musical motifs (image and text-based) as vehicles for improvised performances; and the non-standard performance of jazz standards. Performances within each of these categories have been analysed using hybridised mixed-method methodologies including descriptive and transcriptive analysis, fully adapted Schenkerian analysis, graphs representing comparative levels of elaboration and a semi-structured qualitative interview series with participants involved in the documented performances. A full portfolio of audio and video documented performances is included in the output of this research, featuring tracks from three commercially released albums that present performances of these compositions. The analysis of this output has produced findings connecting degrees of structure and complexity, bandleader intention, instrumental functionality and social context to levels of elaboration. These findings are discussed in conjunction with the research questions, the literature review and the interview summaries.

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Glossary of Terms

Affordances: “opportunities for action that emerge from the interaction between organisms and their environment” (Hannaford, 2019)

Background Section

(adapted Schenkerian analysis): the musical elements or attributes that make up the core of a motivic composition

Elaboration: the improvisational development of material presented in a motivic composition

Foreground section

(adapted Schenkerian analysis): the performance of material unrelated to the ‘background’ of a motivic composition in an improvised performance

Flow: a pleasurable state involving a loss of self-consciousness that occurs when an individual is fully engaged with a demanding task – developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990)

Middleground Section

(adapted Schenkerian analysis): the performance of material elaborated from the ‘background’ of a motivic composition in an improvised performance

Motivic chain-association: a stream of consciousness style of musical improvisation, where each idea grows organically into the next one – taken from experimental psychology by Jost (1994)

Motivic composition: a short piece of material with little or no compositional development and no specified structure for

improvisation, to be used as a stimulus for an improvised performance

Non-structured improvisation: musical improvisations that take place without any pre-determined structure, form, length or duration

Points of Departure (PoD): the materials upon which one's improvisation are based (Nettl, 2002)

Structured improvisation: musical improvisations that take place over a pre-determined structure, form, length or duration

Practical Output

Same motivic composition by different ensembles							
Composition	Ensemble	Context	Output	Address	Date	Link	Duration
Tricky	FarJam	Private Rehearsal	Audio	Crooke Ave, Brooklyn, New York, US	08/01/2017	Click for link	00:05:22
Tricky	Whyte Jacobson	Public Performance	Audio	dlr Lexicon, Dublin, Ireland	30/01/2016	Click for link	00:04:32
I'm Benter	Naked Allies	Studio Recording	Audio	Figure 8 Recording, New York, US	06/06/2018	Click for link	00:04:54
I'm Benter	ReDiviDeR	Studio Recording	Audio	Meadow Studio, Wicklow, Ireland	13/01/2020	Click for link	00:04:05
BK	Berri	Public Performance	Video	Workman's Club, Dublin, Ireland	16/09/2018	Click for link	00:04:33
BK	Insufficient Funs	Public Performance	Video	Bello Bar, Dublin, Ireland	06/02/2019	Click for link	00:06:01
BK	Fireplace Dragon	Public Performance	Video	Billy Byrnes, Kilkenny, Ireland	06/07/2017	Click for link	00:10:47
Grove Park	ReDiviDeR	Public Performance	Audio	Workman's Club, Dublin, Ireland	12/01/2020	Click for link	00:07:44
Grove Park	Roamer	Public Performance	Audio	Tivoli Backstage, Dublin, Ireland	20/12/2020	Click for link	00:04:51
Grove Park	Pursglove Mapp Gardener-Trejo Jacobson	Public Performance	Audio	Vortex Jazz Club, London, UK	11/03/2020	Click for link	00:07:36
Opener	Fireplace Dragon	Public Performance	Video	Billy Byrnes, Kilkenny, Ireland	06/07/2017	Click for link	00:08:15
Opener	ReDiviDeR	Public Performance	Audio	Workman's Club, Dublin, Ireland	12/01/2020	Click for link	00:09:17
Opener	Insufficient Funs	Public Performance	Video	Black Gate, Galway, Ireland	08/02/2019	Click for link	00:04:14
Same motivic composition by same ensemble in different performance contexts							
Suite for Eirik	Blowout Fracture	Public Performance	Audio	Théâtre de l'Oriental, Vevey, Switzerland	20/01/2017	Click for link	00:04:26
Suite for Eirik	Blowout Fracture	Public Performance	Audio	Théâtre de l'Oriental, Vevey, Switzerland	21/01/2017	Click for link	00:03:39
Cicaplast	ReDiviDeR	Private Rehearsal	Audio	Sandymount, Dublin, Ireland	11/01/2020	Click for link	00:10:03
Cicaplast	ReDiviDeR	Public Performance	Audio	Workman's Club, Dublin, Ireland	12/01/2020	Click for link	00:08:25
Cicaplast	ReDiviDeR	Studio Recording	Audio	Meadow Studio, Wicklow, Ireland	13/01/2020	Click for link	00:06:25
BK	Naked Allies	Private Rehearsal	Audio	192 2nd Ave, Brooklyn, New York, US	04/06/2018	Click for link	00:07:43
BK	Naked Allies	Private Rehearsal	Audio	192 2nd Ave, Brooklyn, New York, US	05/06/2018	Click for link	00:05:50
BK	Naked Allies	Studio Recording	Audio	Figure 8 Recording, New York, US	06/06/2018	Click for link	00:04:23
Performances of image-based vehicles for improvisation							
Fingerpainting 1	Fingerpainting	Private Rehearsal	Audio	DCU, Dublin, Ireland	21/09/2018	Click for link	00:07:12
Three Pastels	Fingerpainting	Private Rehearsal	Audio	DCU, Dublin, Ireland	27/09/2018	Click for link	00:03:07
Fingerpainting 3	Fingerpainting	Public Performance	Audio	Workman's Club, Dublin, Ireland	30/09/2018	Click for link	00:04:02

Performances of text-based vehicles for improvisation								
Portal	Clang Sayne	Private Rehearsal	Audio	Cullenstown, Wexford, Ireland	19/06/2018	Click for link	00:09:42	
Portal	Clang Sayne	Private Rehearsal	Audio	Cullenstown, Wexford, Ireland	19/06/2018	Click for link	00:04:47	
Portal	Clang Sayne	Public Performance	Audio	Ergodos HQ, Dublin, Ireland	13/08/2018	Click for link	00:06:37	
Lost Bees	Roamer	Public Performance	Audio	MVP, Dublin, Ireland	19/12/2019	Click for link	00:05:22	
Non-Standard Standards								
All or Nothing at All	Fireplace Dragon	Public Performance	Audio	Billy Byrnes, Kilkenny, Ireland	06/07/2017	Click for link	00:11:19	
Tea For Two	Insufficient Funs	Public Performance	Video	Black Gate, Galway, Ireland	08/02/2019	Click for link	00:05:41	
Booboo's Birthday	Sanders Jacobson	Private Rehearsal	Audio	Ocean Ave, New York, US	09/01/2017	Click for link	00:05:03	
Alice in Wonderland	BigSpoon	Public Performance	Audio	Arthur's Jazz Club, Dublin, Ireland	06/02/2020	Click for link	00:07:55	
Miscellaneous performances of motivic compositions								
Coming or Going	ReDiviDeR	Public Performance	Video	Workman's Club, Dublin, Ireland	29/04/2018	Click for link	00:05:13	
Opener	ReDiviDeR	Studio Recording	Audio	Meadow Studio, Wicklow, Ireland	13/01/2020	Click for link	00:07:29	
Tricky	ReDiviDeR	Studio Recording	Audio	Meadow Studio, Wicklow, Ireland	13/01/2020	Click for link	00:08:17	
Grove Park	ReDiviDeR	Studio Recording	Audio	Meadow Studio, Wicklow, Ireland	13/01/2020	Click for link	00:07:51	
evilOlive	Insufficient Funs	Public Performance	Video	Billy Byrnes, Kilkenny, Ireland	07/02/2019	Click for link	00:12:00	
Insufficient Funs	Insufficient Funs	Public Performance	Audio	The Hut, Dublin, Ireland	09/02/2019	Click for link	00:06:54	
Macon St	Origin Story	Studio Recording	Audio	Meadow Studio, Wicklow, Ireland	18/09/2018	Click for link	00:07:26	
I'm Benter	ReDiviDeR	Public Performance	Audio	Workman's Club, Dublin, Ireland	29/04/2018	Click for link	00:07:06	
BK	Engel Fiske Jacobson	Public Performance	Audio	Arthur's Jazz Club, Dublin, Ireland	30/03/2017	Click for link	00:07:49	
<p>All motivic compositions written by Matthew Jacobson Text for Portal written by Laura Hyland Text for Lost Bees written by Cherry Smyth Paintings by Izumi Kimura Standards composed as follows: All or Nothing at All (Altman) Tea for Two (Youmans) Booboo's Birthday (Monk) Alice in Wonderland (Fain)</p>								
								TOTAL DURATION
								04:33:57
								Click here for Scores

Table 1. Practical Output. Source: Author

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the past 18 years that I have spent as an improvising musician, I have played in countless different scenarios and contexts, from duo with drum kit and computer in a dark empty basement to jazz orchestras with 30 musicians in a sold-out concert hall. At times, this music has been fully pre-defined, with every note that I was to perform written, while in other situations not one note was written and absolutely no instructions were given. However, since my first experiences listening to artists such as Tim Berne¹, Jim Black², Chris Speed³ and Tom Rainey⁴ I have felt a particularly emotive musical relationship with music that somehow falls between these extremes. These artists have all been heavily involved in a downtown New York music scene that has developed over the last 30 years, relying neither solely on compositional skills nor free improvisation but rather spontaneously developing written material in improvisatory passages.

In comparison to early forms of improvisation in a jazz context from the 1940s on, where musicians would play a melody and then solo over the harmonic structure of that melody, and to early free jazz such as the Evan Parker and Derek Bailey-led scene in the UK in the 1960s, this downtown New York scene has provided innovative and creative musicians the platform to be spontaneous without the confines of specific form and structure, while retaining the shared context of a specific musical idea or motif. In many live performances of this music, I have heard audience members make comments such as, “how do you know when they are improvising and when they are playing written material?” This very question is at the heart of the research undertaken in this thesis, which will explore the balance between improvisation and composition necessary in order for artists to improvise in a manner that suggests that they could be performing written material.

¹ Tim Berne is an American avante garde jazz saxophonist, bandleader and composer.

² Jim Black is a Berlin-based, American improvising drummer, composer and bandleader of post-rock influenced creative music group AlasNoAxis.

³ Chris Speed is an American jazz and improvised music tenor saxophonist, clarinetist and composer.

⁴ Tom Rainey is an American jazz drummer and bandleader.

My own path to being immersed in this style of music is a result of a combination of social context, certain cognitive predispositions and conjuncture. Perhaps most influentially, initial musical experiences in my case came through my older brother, who studied jazz performance, and from when I was 10 years old would teach me to clap syncopated rhythms and then develop polyrhythms with split voices that we could perform. Around this time, I took one year of piano lessons and from very early on began applying these polyrhythmic and contrapuntal ideas on that instrument by creating short riffs or motifs with two interlocking parts. Later, following the departure of my piano teacher, I ceased receiving lessons but continued to improvise at the piano and two years later began playing the drums. Due to these earlier experiences, however, my immediate inclination was to interact with the musical elements happening around me. This is as opposed to the more common approach from a drummer of creating a specific drum part that is then rigidly stuck to, with occasional fills inserted. This approach allowed me to more freely communicate with other musicians and develop my own voice on the instrument. Those inceptive rhythmic experiences and formative years spent at the piano also allowed me to develop a compositional style that is expanded on in the practical output of this research.

Throughout this thesis, this style will be described as ‘motivic composition’. For the purpose of this research, a motivic composition is a short piece of material – generally featuring only one or two sections and containing little or no compositional development – with the intent of being used as a catalyst for open improvisation. The aim is for the development to occur spontaneously, through the actions of the performers, as opposed to the style of compositional development that is commonly studied through standard western music programmes and is completely notated. Both the motivic compositions themselves and various improvisational performances of these compositions will be presented and analysed in this study, with the aim of refining this artistic process and producing new knowledge in this field.

Key to this research have been my experiences developing this compositional and improvisational style in collaboration with peers connected to several scenes and communities around the world. The New York creative music scene has been seen as a mecca for such forms of artistic expression for much of the last 100 years. However, being part of a European – and further still Irish – creative music scene has allowed me to interact with this music on social, analytical and emotional levels on a daily basis for the majority of my adult life. While my artistic development has benefitted from the inspiration of New York musicians, travelling to

perform with them and inviting them to collaborate in Europe, a more geographically convenient network of artists has also been crucial to this development.

Such intense interaction and a desire for further development have resulted in the formation of several questions that warrant dedicated time and energy to investigating. These are based around qualitative methods of practice and analysis, and form the research themes of this thesis. These methods primarily include documenting performances in various contexts and descriptively, and via transcriptions, analysing them before discussing the findings in relation to these themes. As a busy touring musician and educator, particularly in the field of improvisation, it can become easy to feel like one is on a conveyor belt, going from one project to the next, with no form of qualitative inquiry. On occasions, there may be reviews of performances or albums, but often these will lack the full insight of the process leading up to that output, which only the performers can truly understand. And certainly, most artists will advocate for constant practice and improvement of their work; most improvising musicians I know, regardless of age or experience, attempt to keep up some level of regular practice on their instruments. However, this ‘conveyor belt feeling’, rather than being about a level of technical proficiency on one’s instrument, is more about deeper questions about the ‘how’ and ‘what’ of the entire process. For example, ‘how’ much material should be presented to performers that are adept improvisers, ‘what’ is the impact of the structural elements and complexity of the material presented and ‘how’ do performance and social contexts affect the output of improvised presentations of motivic compositions? These inquiries reveal gaps in this field of knowledge that form the basis of the research questions presented in this thesis. These gaps will be filled with insights led by topics such as stylistic and performance constraints, sociocultural theories, instrumental functionality and embodiment.

Such questions also provide a framework around which the practical element of this research is conducted, as well as the exploration of literature discussing these topics through the lens of several disciplines, including musicology (Jost, 1994; Nettl, 2009; Berliner, 2009; Monson, 2009; Gioia, 2011; Rose, 2017), psychology (Sutton, 2001; Berkowitz, 2010; Sawyer, 2011; Van der Schyff, 2019; Schiavio et al, 2019) and philosophy (Nachmanovitch, 1990; Peters, 2009). The aim of this investigation – as an improviser, composer and bandleader – is to evaluate the methods and processes by which improvised performances of motivic compositions are produced, reacting to discoveries and developing them throughout the research period and thus creating new knowledge in the field. This original insight will then

enhance the potential for the music to facilitate creative, spontaneous and honest communication for collaborators and listeners alike.

1.2 Thesis Structure

While the improvisations scrutinised in this research are non-structured by nature, it was deemed necessary to adopt more conventional structures in the presentation of this thesis. The organisation of this structure, following this introduction, continues with Chapter 2, which is a literature review of research related to the topics presented above. The combination of factors that have shaped my own artistic development up until now have resulted in the literature review being influenced, to varying degrees, by a variety of disciplines. These include musicology, psychology, philosophy and organisational sciences.

Chapter 3 presents research questions formulated in response to the gaps in the knowledge found in the previous chapter and explores methodologies by which the practice-led investigations and analysis of practical output have been carried out. These explain the development of hybridised mixed-method analytical processes, the development of visual representations of the improvised performances, ethnographic surveys and compositional, performance and documentation strategies.

Chapter 4, which contains practice-led investigations, is broken down into four categories: the same composition performed by different ensembles; the same composition performed by the same ensemble in different contexts; non-musical motifs (image and text-based) as vehicles for improvised performances; and the non-standard performance of jazz standards. These categories are divided as such to address the gaps identified in the literature and resulting research questions formed. These relate to the balance between structure and constraints, social contexts and the impact of instrumental functions.

Each of the above four categories features analyses of a selection of documented performances from the practical output – a body of work that I have produced as a bandleader and improvising percussionist over the four-year period of this research. The initial two categories also exclusively feature my own motivic compositions. The remaining categories feature text and image-based work from peers and collaborators, as well as works from the jazz canon. These

investigations feature scores as presented to the performers and audio links, followed by analysis using the methodologies presented in the previous chapter. Each of these categories of investigation also includes initial findings, which are then considered in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 contains a comparison of the key findings. In this chapter, the results from the practice-led investigations are discussed in relation to key literature and research questions. The impact of these results, how they will determine future research and how they have affected my own artistic development are then discussed in the conclusions in Chapter 6.

Due to the practice-led nature of this research, its practical output is presented at the outset of this research (page vii – viii), with links to audio and video documentation and contextual recording information. Readers are encouraged to explore this output first, to ensure that the following work is received in its intended context. Audio examples specific to the categories of investigation are presented in the thesis as necessary, to allow a linear movement throughout. Sections in the table of contents (page ii) are also linked to corresponding chapters and sub-headings for ease of navigation. References to interviews with collaborators, undertaken as part of this research, are linked to full transcripts of those interviews in the appendices, which also feature some illuminating perspectives that did not make it into the main body of the final thesis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

While the specific area constituting improvisational development of motivic compositions is not a heavily researched topic, there is a growing interest in the origins and development of improvisation in a broader context. This is reflected in the increasing number of journals, societies, conferences and handbooks on the topic that have been established in recent years. These include but are in no way limited to the journal, *Critical Studies in Improvisation*, the *International Society for Improvised Music*, the *Documenting Jazz Conference* and the two-volume *Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*.

As this research has not found any explicit focus on improvisational approaches to motivic compositions in the published literature, a framework has been created showing this topic in the context of similar themes that are more present in the literature (figure 1). Two recent PhD dissertations, however, follow some similar lines of thought. Hannaford (2019) examines the creative practice of composer, improviser and pianist Muhal Richard Abrams, including theories on “the relationship that emerges when free improvisation is preceded and/or followed by composed material.” He comes to the conclusion that when improvising in passages with no structure, performers use key aspects of preceding written material to structure their improvisation and that the relationship between these can be analysed in terms of affordances⁵. Kingston (2018) investigates a number of works by guitarist, improviser, composer and author Derek Bailey in order to detect key concepts and develop organisational approaches when combining free improvisation and repertoire interpretation. His practice-led research finds that by utilising “multiuse materials” such as register or timbre and “textural differentiation” – where a prolonged use of a limited set of materials establishes textural unity – as well as “considering all instrumental sound as possible material”, enables free improvisation to be used in the context of repertoire interpretation.

⁵ Hannaford (2019) draws on the work of Gibson (1982, 1986), Ingold (1992, 2016) and Heft (1989, 2003) and describes affordances in their simplest form as “opportunities for action that emerge from the interaction between organisms and their environment”.

Throughout this thesis, in order to clarify the distinguishing factors of the improvisational approaches taken by performers, they are broken down into three categories. These categories feature either ‘structured’ or ‘non-structured’ improvisations. While there can be said to be latent structures involved in any improvisation, in this context, non-structured refers to the absence of a pre-determined structure or form over which the improvisation will take place. Examples of structured improvisation could be musicians improvising over the harmonic progressions of jazz standards, or over a vamp or ostinato that repeats a pre-determined number of times. In this sense, performances can be broken down into three categories: performances that use pre-composed material and have a pre-determined form for any improvised section(s), performances that use pre-composed material but without any pre-determined form for improvisation (motivic compositions) or they can have neither pre-composed material or pre-determined forms (Figure 1).

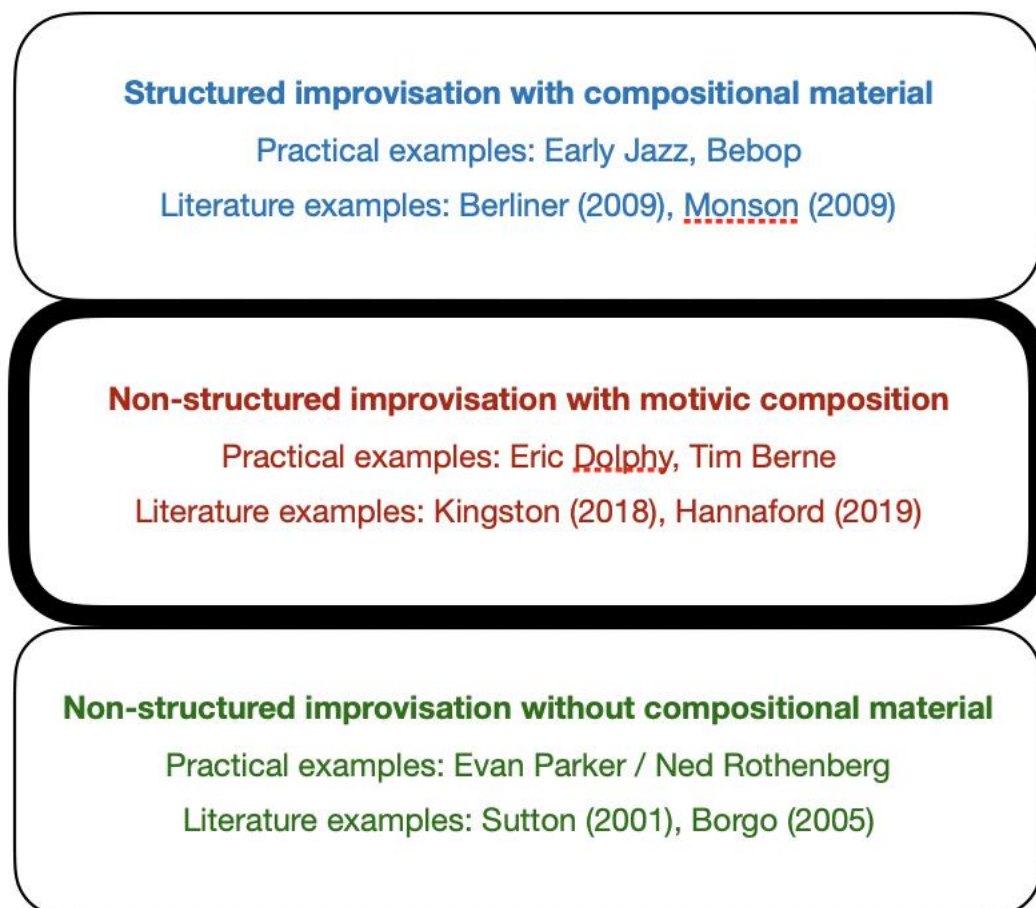


Figure 1. Framework for improvisation. Source: Author

The above findings from the literature also correspond to the practice of non-structured improvisation of motivic compositions, with a cohort of proponents generally confined to a

smaller subset of a scene within a larger jazz or improvised music community. An example of this would be within the New York jazz scene. The practical equivalent of research in the broader contexts of improvisation lies in the city's numerous long-standing jazz clubs such as the *Blue Note*, the *Jazz Standard*, *Smalls* and *Birdland*. There are occasions when musicians who adopt non-structured approaches to motivic compositions perform in these venues, but in general, one would be far more likely to see acts on the traditional end of the improvising spectrum. This generally includes musicians who either play over standard jazz repertoire or compose music where the improvisation is to take place over specific predetermined harmonic progressions or structures. The 'less traditional' musicians are far more likely to be heard performing in smaller, niche venues that have been created for, and often by, artists with an interest in these musical concepts. Current examples of these clubs, often referred to as the New York 'downtown scene' (Barzel, 2003) – referring to the southern geographical location of most of these clubs in New York – are Brooklyn-based *iBeam*, *Seeds*, *Shapeshifter Lab* and *Barbes* and Manhattan-based the *Stone*, curated by John Zorn, the *Jazz Gallery* and loft-space *Spectrum*. Artists that often perform in such spaces include Tim Berne, Ingrid Laubrock, Mary Halvorson and Jim Black.

This scene can be viewed as a development of New York's 1970s "loft-scene", in which musicians opened up their own homes as public performance spaces (Heller, 2017). This allowed them to combine the informality of a jam session performance with the self-empowerment of programming whatever music they wished to perform and resulted in New York lofts acquiring an "international reputation as a center for avante garde music" (Heller, 2017). Musicians Matthew Garrison and Ohad Talmor's respective directorships of *Shapeshifter Lab* and *Seeds*, the collective artist-collective style running of *iBeam* and John Zorn's curatorship of the *Stone* can all be seen as examples of that same desire to perform in an intimate setting with innovative, risk-taking music. Such spaces have also been explored by Scherbenske (2017), who establishes that "musician-cum-venue proprietors harness collective and individual labor for reasons beyond personal economic expediency" and that they "do so to make places commensurate with a web of ideology, belonging, and aesthetics based on distinction". The presence of non-structured improvisation with motivic compositions in this web is shown by the frequent programming of artists such as Berne and Laubrock, who are important proponents of this stylistic approach.

This literature review will cover four main themes: historical development; group interaction; freedom versus constraints; and social context. Each of these will investigate the research under the corresponding headings in connection with current practice. This will allow me to identify the gaps in the knowledge that will then be targeted through my research questions, methodologies and practice-led case studies. As research into improvisation has occurred in a wide variety of disciplines including philosophy (Peters, 2009; Benson, 2003), behavioural psychology (Sawyer, 2011), organisational sciences (Barrett, 1998) and musicology (Nettl et al, 2001; Bailey, 1992), the examination of these four themes will be shaped by diverse branches of knowledge.

2.2 Historical Development

The origins of the word ‘improvisation’ come from the Latin *visus*, to see. The *pro* before it translates as ‘in advance’, while the *im-* prefix at the beginning of the word suggests the negative and together these suggest: ‘not being able to see in advance’ (Alterhaug, 2004). The description of the word ‘improvise’ in the Collins English Dictionary is either to “do or make quickly from whatever is available, without previous planning” in the sense of devising something, or else “to make up (a piece of music, speech, etc.) as one goes along” in the sense of ad-libbing. For the purposes of this research, it will be the latter definition that is the focus. While the former definition is undeniably an important part of human existence and evolution (Gur-Ze’Ev, 2010), it would be both out of the realms of the researcher’s academic background to fully examine this theme and would also result in a dilution of the specific devised area of this thesis.

The suggestions from the above definitions, that there is no planning involved whatsoever in the act of improvising, is certainly at odds with the vast quantity of hours spent honing their craft by artists that have made improvisation a key part of their expression. These artists exist, and have existed for thousands of years, in a variety of artforms including but not limited to music, theatre, comedy, dance, literature and visual arts. Some of the earliest forms of improvisation in the arts, that have been discussed in the literature, are from medieval times.

One obvious reason for a greater prevalence of artistic improvisation in the Early Middle Ages, was artists’ reliance on oral communication (Alterhaug, 2004). While descriptions of improvisation in this period are varied, there still appears to be an unwillingness to fully accept its importance. Or, at least, most analyses on medieval improvisation focus on its contextualisation, rather than on the acts of improvisation themselves. This need to qualify the term is understandable for several reasons. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, the difficulties in accessing examples of that period make their analysis far less common than modern day output. Secondly, the previously quoted differing definitions of the word itself from the Collins Dictionary show that general perception of improvisation as an act is both nebulous and conflicting. Lastly, the general academic debate around improvisation as a generative process versus as an impromptu act, is a dichotomy that feeds into much research on the topic, not just in historical but also current contexts. It is widely accepted, however, that “the co-existence of

written and unwritten traditions is a premise for the understanding of medieval music cultures” (Treitler, 1991). This very co-existence, and the coalescence of the two, is also the premise for the form of music-making at the heart of the New York ‘downtown scene’ and its equivalents and scions around the world. However, there is a more specific focus in the current research on the interstices between these written and unwritten traditions, rather than their “co-existence”.

While a complete global history of improvisation is beyond the scope of this thesis – particularly when that has been achieved successfully already, most notably by Bailey (1992) – select historical overviews have been chosen that most influence my own approach to motivic compositions. These will outline some of the main developments within this field and expose knowledge gaps that this thesis will attempt to fill. These selective choices are jazz, Indian classical music, Persian music and Baroque. The selection of jazz is the most obvious, given its synonymy with improvisation. Indian classical music is relevant due to the malleability of its core material, similar to motivic compositions (Widdess, 2013). Persian music is chosen due to the fact that improvisation is at the core of its performance (Nettl, 2009) and the comparability of its “radif” or traditional repertoire with the motivic compositions used in the context of my practical output. And finally, Baroque music is included for the parallels between its use of “continuo” as a sketch with which performers are to improvise and the material provided for improvisers in the ‘downtown’ scenes mentioned throughout this thesis.

Notable historical absences from the following section include Turkish *maqam* and the significant contributions made by free-improvisation specialists in Japan, Russia and Australia among other countries. The *maqam*, closely related to the Persian *radif* mentioned above, warrants dedicated research of its own in relation to improvised performances of motivic compositions, particularly as it has “from a European point of view... sometimes been regarded as music improvised without form” (Touma, 1971). As Touma discusses, this misrepresentation of a supposed lack of form or musical organisation was accepted and repeated by musicologists throughout the 20th century. The need to clarify such nuances while providing historical context for the specific topic of this research (whose nuances often need similar clarification) was seen as having the potential to confuse matters, hence its absence in this study.

Meanwhile, the impossibility of giving adequate coverage to all historical performers related to improvisation, and the outlining of the main developments in this thesis' field of research by American and central European artists, has resulted in the omission of artists from important scenes such as the Russian underground free improvisation movement.

2.2.1 Baroque Music

Working backwards from the four styles above, and of all the various forms of Western classical music, Baroque is generally considered to have the greatest reliance on improvisation (Bailey, 1992). Around the 17th and 18th centuries, Baroque keyboard players would, by necessity, be comfortable providing improvised embellishments for simplified left-hand basslines. This occurred in the work of many important composers including Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel and these improvisations would generally take the form of harmonic elaboration, ornamentation (trills, turns, appoggiaturas, mordents etc.) or rhythmic variation (Moersch, 2009). This can be very easily aligned with instinctive approaches improvisers might take to performing over motivic compositions in a modern musical context. The key difference in more open improvised contexts, would be that these initial embellishments have the possibility of becoming launch pads to further elaboration of the material. This difference, similar to the traditional approach to improvising over jazz standards, requiring the improvisation to take place within a predefined structure or using a set formula, is precisely what my own music and that of many of my peers strives to be released from, representing a knowledge gap in such research.

Elements of Baroque have also been utilised in the current practice, with improviser, composer and bassist Barry Guy an important artist to note. In particular, his collaborations with violinist Maya Homburger have juxtaposed Baroque with aesthetics of modern classical composers such as Ligeti and Berio, as well as his own considerable improvisational skills, to create multi-disciplinary and multi-strategy works such as *Time Passing* (2012) and *The Blue Shroud* (2014) (Dwyer, 2016).

2.2.2 Persian Music

Persian music, although a noted absence – acknowledged by the author himself – from Bailey’s book (1992), has one of the oldest and most reliant relationships with improvisation of any musical traditions. Performers of this tradition are required to memorise repertoire known as *radif*, with reportedly 270 to 400 different pieces made up of varying modes or *dastgahs*, which are in turn formed of melodic variations known as *gushahs* (Nooshin, 1998). The *radif* is taught to musicians by a teacher and, as in most oral traditions, they later develop their own repertoire based on personal stylistic choices and changes to what was passed down to them. The performances of these pieces are largely improvised, leading to the necessity for them to be learned by heart. This is equatable to the benefits of knowing material by heart when improvising with motivic compositions. In order to elaborate or alter given material without getting lost in these deviations, having it memorised allows one to have it simultaneously running in the background and come back to it seamlessly. This approach is what Nettle (2009) refers to as “points of departure (PoD)” and, unlike the stricter structures found in Baroque music, allows performances of *radif* to end up considerably longer than the original compositions and with a much greater degree of freedom in relation to the root characteristics (Nooshin, 1998). Although Persian musicians are rarely taught how to carry out the improvised performances, the fact that they have studied the *radif* so closely and exclusively results in their PoD of course still coming directly from that language. Examples include the specific timbres of instruments such as the *ney* (wind instrument), *daf* (frame drum) or *oud* (stringed-instrument), commonly used time signatures such as 2/4, 4/4, 5/8, 6/8, 7/8 and the melodic use of quarter-tones and fixed fourths (Talai, 2014). This creates a narrow focus and would be a different situation to most ‘downtown’ musicians who have studied a much broader palette of music, resulting in a more eclectic range of PoD.

2.2.3 Indian Classical Music

Another often-cited musical traditional with inherent dependence on improvisation is Indian classical music. This refers to both the North Indian (Hindustani) and South Indian (Carnatic) traditions, although for the scope of this research, these specificities will not be highlighted. Like Persian music, Indian classical music has been passed on by oral tradition. Unlike Persian music, however, discussion about the improvisatory process and the provision of the musical

tools required to succeed in that process are explicitly dealt with in the learning process of Indian classical music (Atre, 2007). These tools or schemas, as described by Widdess (2013), take various forms in Indian classical music including *tāla* (metric structure), *rāga* (melodic structure) and text. Looking specifically at each one of these structures and learning many ways in which they can be altered, gives musicians the ability to improvise performances of pieces each time they play them. This allows them to adapt to their accompanists, the context of the performance or their own mood at any juncture. An example of an improvisatory technique within the *tāla* structure is a three-time rhythmic motif called a *tihai*. These motifs can be any length, can include rests between the three iterations and are generally used as a concluding statement to an episode, providing a feeling of resolution. For a performer who has improvised a *tihai*, they will then also likely need to adjust their melodic and text structures to fit. This could involve adding or subtracting notes from a melodic phrase, altering pitches to ensure stronger pitches feature on resolving beats and adjusting text by repeating words or groups of words to fit the rhythm of the *tihai*.

Such advanced Carnatic rhythmic concepts have been used by several downtown musicians, notably pianist Vijay Iyer (2009) and saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa (2004). The ability to improvise fluidly with these rhythmic devices has added new elements of vocabulary to many improvising musicians, and proof of its recognition is shown by its inclusion on the curriculum of many third-level jazz performance courses around the world. In order to integrate this vocabulary into my own improvisational language, I spent one month in Chennai, South India in 2010, researching *konnekol*. This is the vocal rhythmic language and syllabic system learnt by all Carnatic musicians, often before they perform such rhythms or melodies on their instruments. This method of focusing on individual musical characteristics is similar to what improvising musicians do in other idioms, but in this case the instrumental choices, specific melodic structures and timbres of the music keep it instantly recognisable as Indian classical music. This is in contrast to motivic compositions, which have the capability of being unrecognisable at any given moment.

2.2.4 Jazz

The inclusion of jazz as a musical idiom that includes improvisation, has the potential to overbear this overview of historical developments. Due to the great importance of jazz in

improvisation studies in the 20th and 21st centuries, it would be easy for this section to turn into another ‘jazz history’ lesson. However, this is not the intention of this thesis, nor of its presence in this section, which aims to give an overview not of improvisation as a whole, but rather the specific approach featured in the practice-led portion of this research; that is the spontaneous development of given materials. For example, this author would argue that in relation to the improvisational development of a motivic composition, a Persian *radif* or an Indian *rāga* is at least as relevant as, if not more so than much music in jazz’s history. For that reason, only the most pertinent parts of the jazz story will be looked at in this overview.

2.2.5 Early Jazz

The initial developments in jazz in America occurred in New Orleans in the late 19th century, directly from the cultural mix of African and Caribbean slaves and French, Spanish and British colonial powers (Gioia, 2011). The musical style that came out of these developments, generally considered ‘New Orleans Jazz’ and led by musicians including Buddy Bolden, Jelly Roll Morton, Kid Ory and Louis Armstrong, contained a strong component of motivic theme and variation. Although no recordings of Bolden’s music ever survived, other composers certainly appreciated his importance with Morton performing and recording ‘Buddy Bolden’s Blues’ and Sidney Bechet composing and performing ‘Buddy Bolden Stomp’. These tracks and much of the music of that time feature repeated melodic riffs, the use of ‘blue notes’ (the flattening of the 3rd, 5th and 7th degrees of a major scale) and syncopation. These characteristics are then used in improvisational passages in a similar fashion to Nettle’s PoD. Unlike the improvisational setting for Indian classical music, which is linear and builds in intensity until reaching a climax at the end, the general structure of these performances in New Orleans Jazz was that the musicians would perform the written material or theme, improvise using the same structure as the theme and these PoD, before returning to the theme to finish. This general form for jazz improvisation – colloquially referred to as ‘head, solos, head’ – continued throughout the next hundred years of the idiom’s development and is still the most commonly used today. It is, although not exclusively, one of the key differences in the ‘downtown’ music studied in this thesis. To expand, most music in jazz that does not use the ‘head, solos, head’ form, is probably going to be considered experimental or avant-garde in some way.

2.2.6 Structural Developments

One famous example of this approach is pianist Lennie Tristano's recording of 'Line Up', from the album *Lennie Tristano* (1954). The song uses the chord progression of jazz standard 'All of Me', but instead of performing the written melody, the track consists of seven choruses of Tristano soloing, with eight bars of bassist Peter Ind and drummer Jeff Morton as an intro and a fade out of Ind and Morton to finish (Shim, 2007). Despite the fact that this recording is over 60 years old and is illustrious among jazz musicians and aficionados, it cannot be said to have had any great impact on most musicians' structural approach to performing their repertoire. While improvised performances of motivic compositions have a focus on improvising *with* the material as opposed to *over* it – as in 'Line Up' – they do contain the same departure from the overarching form. In these performances, motivic compositions might feature in their entirety to start, to finish, in the middle, coming and going on multiple occasions, a combination of these or sometimes, as in 'Line Up', never at all.

Incidentally, the structure of Tristano's infamous recording is not its only experimental feature. In the years following on from the recording, it was also discovered that he had overdubbed his piano solo over a pre-recorded take of the rhythm section (Jago, 2013). While an interesting historical development in jazz, this is more relevant to group interaction and will be discussed later in this thesis. There is also debate around whether or not Tristano recorded his part at half speed and in a lower octave before being manipulated to reach the tempo on the record.

Another comparable departure from the structural norms in the development of jazz in the 20th century is found in the works of Ornette Coleman. While Tristano's approach kept the harmonic structure of a piece but let go of common practice performance of 'head, solos, head', Coleman let go of the harmonic progressions but generally continued to perform the theme before and after improvisations. Rather than continue writing in a similar vein to those that had gone before him, Coleman dedicated much of his time to studying music theory and composition (Jost, 1994). While his pieces often had strong elements of the blues in them, they also used rhythmic displacement and changing time signatures to fit irregularly phrased melodies. These compositions were then truly used as vehicles for improvisation, as opposed to improvisational frameworks, and the openness of these improvisations was enhanced by the chordless rhythm section, particularly in 1959, when Charlie Haden joined Coleman on bass

and Billy Higgins on drums. The quartet was completed by trumpeter Don Cherry, who would himself go on to be one of the most important figures in free jazz.

The examples of Tristano and Coleman show that performers began moving away from standard improvisational forms over 60 years ago, and the relatively small amount of research discussing the organisation of such improvisations will be used to guide the filling of gaps in the knowledge with regard to improvised approaches to motivic compositions.

2.2.7 Free Jazz

The fact that there was no piano player or guitarist in that group meant Coleman was much freer harmonically and his improvisations often adopted what Ekkehard Jost (1994) refers to as “motivic chain-association”. Taken from experimental psychology, this term indicates a stream of consciousness style of playing, where each idea would grow organically onto the next one. This was different from much of the jazz improvisation at the time, and since, in which soloists are encouraged to create long lines that outline the chord changes of a piece using chord tones and passing tones. This new approach meant that often Coleman would stay in one tonal centre for a long period, occasionally leading himself into a secondary centre by his “motivic chain-association”. The improvisation technique here – where the drums and bass would provide accompaniment for the horns’ improvisations with a constant pulse and swing feel but abandon any harmonic progression or formal structure from the theme – would later be referred to as “time, no changes”. This was expounded by Miles Davis a few years later with his second famous quintet on albums such as *Miles Smiles* (1968) and *Nefertiti* (1967) (Waters, 2011). It also resulted in Coleman’s ability to invoke a raw energy that had rarely been heard in jazz before that time, most likely due to his ability to focus on the emotional intent of his solos, without having to worry about “making the changes”.

While all these developments undeniably made Coleman a great influence on exponents of ‘downtown’ music all over the world, one of the most discerning factors of his approach came later with his release of *Free Jazz* (Atlantic, 1961). Until that point, all of his performances maintained a constant pulse and tempo, but with this release tempo was abandoned altogether for extended periods of rubato playing. The documentation of such an approach was revolutionary and would prove influential for many important artists in the succeeding years

including John Coltrane, Albert Ayler, Pharaoh Sanders and Cecil Taylor (Cooke, 1998). Even the title of the album would go on to be used as a general term for a movement within jazz that did not fit the regular structures of jazz (DeVeaux, 1991). Another defining aspect of this recording was the addition of a second chordless quartet to the existing one, featuring drummer Ed Blackwell, bassist Scott La Faro, saxophonist Eric Dolphy and trumpeter Freddie Hubbard. This doubling of each instrument in the band, as well as the rubato playing and the absence of structured solos will also be discussed later with regard to group interaction.

2.2.8 Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM)

In 1965, four years after Coleman's *Free Jazz* release, a Chicago-based organisation was established that would have a huge reach not just on jazz musicians, and not just performers, but musicians and composers from all genres all around the world. The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) was founded by a group of artists that included Muhal Richard Abrams, Anthony Braxton and Roscoe Mitchell, with the aim of helping support the development of innovative musicians who did not feel that they belonged in the mainstream (Lewis, 2008). If artists like Coleman took some of the general concepts of jazz and reimagined them to fit his own terms of expression, then the AACM zoomed in on countless facets of improvised music: from the media it is presented through, its pedagogy, its sense of community, its compositional frameworks and in particular with the output of Braxton, the inclusivity of all genres and African-American and European cultural developments (Gioia, 2011) and reinvented them in order to create their own postmodern terms of creation.

While not the sole purpose of the AACM, their effect on current practice among modern day 'downtown' musicians should not be ignored. The aforementioned examples in this historical overview all show developments of certain improvisatory elements of what are used in current practice of improvised performances of motivic compositions, but within each of those idioms there is a general framework and aesthetic combination of musical principles such as pitch, rhythm and form that are homogeneously adhered to. In contrast, the AACM break these principles down on so many levels that they could be said to be present to some degree in the current practice of almost all improvisers. One example of this is their artists' use of instrumentation, which can be as varied as solo saxophone, string quartet, four orchestras, tuba and percussion and Braxton's *Composition 96* for orchestra and four slide projectors (1989).

Other examples of AACM artists' multifaceted examination of musical attributes include modification of instrumental timbres through extended techniques and the use of electronic synthesis, innovative forms of notation including image and text-based material (Wilkins, 2004).

All these avant-garde elements, however, did not stop members from creating work that was also highly connected to gospel music, blues or traditional jazz. Braxton himself has released several albums playing jazz standards in the traditional 'head, solos, head' format, including *23 Standards* (2004) and *19 Standards* (2010). The AACM's all-encompassing microscopic approach, along with the individual stylistic concepts of the other idioms looked at here have all led to the current practice of key artists such as Tim Berne, Craig Taborn and Mary Halvorson, as well as the researcher's own artistic *modus operandi*. This apparent contradiction between searching for freedom in the avant-garde, while remaining connected to more traditional forms is worth reflecting upon. It perhaps suggests that, without the context of what has come before, the impact of new innovations becomes less meaningful. This is also emulated in this research's motivic compositions, which place a development and hybridised version of elements rooted in more traditional music – such as specific grooves or melodic devices – in a contemporary context.

2.3 Group Interaction

Although dedicating one's life to being a musician can result in a great amount of time spent alone – be that through solitary practice on an instrument, travelling or even listening to music – so many of the fundamental reasons for putting in this time are related to enhancing the ability to interact. Whether communicating with other artists on the bandstand, in the rehearsal room, or in the studio, the ability to interact with those around you with as great a sense of honesty, integrity and open-mindedness as possible is a vital goal for all improvising musicians. This literature review section will examine ways that researchers have dealt with the topic of interaction in improvised settings from a variety of disciplines including psychology, musicology, philosophy and organisational sciences and place this work in the context of the spontaneous development of motif-based compositions in group settings. Practical examples will also be used to illustrate the performance-based outcomes of these approaches.

2.3.1 Musicology: Ethnography and Musical Analysis

Two of the most in depth publications that look at interaction in jazz improvisation are *Thinking in Jazz: The infinite arts of improvisation* (Berliner, 2009) and *Saying Something: Jazz improvisation and interaction* (Monson, 2009). They have influenced and informed much of the current research on improvisation – proven by the thousands of academic citations amassed by each – and thus would be remiss to ignore in a review with a topic such as this. Given these publications' pre-eminence in the field, however, there are certainly gaps in their research, particularly in terms of improvisational approaches discussed.

The former is a thorough and wide-ranging examination of the improvisational process, using ethnographic and musicological approaches. The author's main aim appears to be to dispel the common misconception that improvisers are simply 'making it up as they go along'. He argues that improvisation is equally as advanced as any formal Western musical tradition by tracing the entire journey of an improviser's development from the rehearsal room to the stage, while also analysing the "collective aspects of improvisation" (the title of Part III of the book). Berliner conducted in-depth interviews with members of the jazz community in both Chicago and New York and uses data collected from these interviews to form his views. He also undertakes serious musical analysis with over 250 pages of musical examples, exploring

melodic, harmonic and rhythmic approaches to improvisation by groups led by innovators such as Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and Barry Harris. While a detailed and important publication, the focus of this work is almost exclusively on musicians who improvise over very similar structures. There is almost no mention of freer improvisation or more contemporary performers in the jazz community in the 20 years leading up to the book's release. If a key goal of an improviser is to express oneself spontaneously and through group interaction to develop a common sense of achievement or growth, then, even within the field of jazz, it is not possible to produce the truest sense of that with these relatively one-sided conversations. This traditional 'theme-variation-theme with consecutive solos' jazz performance template, developed in the early 20th century, which began to be broken down in the 1960s with artists like Ornette Coleman and members of the AACM as discussed earlier, so often retains a hierarchical structure. The soloist is leader and, while input from the rest of the band (the term 'sidemen' tells you a lot here) is encouraged, it is generally expected that they will keep out of certain territories, be they dynamic, timbral, harmonic, pulse-related or density-related (Berliner, 2009):

In the most general sense, the rhythm section's collective function is to "comp", a term that carries the dual connotation of accompanying and complementing. To Walter Bishop Jnr., this special skill means "to get under the soloist – not over him or on par with him – and to lay down a carpet".

Of course, by opening up these territories to all members of an ensemble, one runs the risk of creating chaos. This gap in Berliner's research is a central idea of a motivic composition: to prevent such chaos by providing the group with a frame of reference within and around which all musicians have equal control. Improvising with a more egalitarian approach within a group will also be the focus of the practical element of this research.

While *Saying Something* has several similarities to *Thinking in Jazz* in its approach, including its ethnographic survey and musical analysis of specific improvisational situations, its focus is pared down to the interaction between members of a jazz rhythm section. Through interviews with influential jazz rhythm section members such as drummer Billy Higgins, pianist Jaki Byard and bassist Richard Davis, Monson illuminates the depth of power they have on the development of improvisational performances. Again, despite the intention here of empowering the rhythm section members, the overall pecking order still exists. This is shown

in a discussion with Davis about departing from the traditional role of ‘walking’ and how if a bassist interjects too frequently, “the rest of the band might turn and stare” (Monson, 2009). Such literature confirms and further expounds the prevalence of such hierarchies within improvisation, something which the current research will aim to provide alternatives for both practically and analytically.

This hierarchy is also shown in the previously discussed example of pianist Lennie Tristano’s recording of ‘Line Up’. For Tristano to record his piano part as an overdub to the pre-recorded drum and bass accompaniment is an indictment of how unimportant some jazz musicians felt interaction with the rhythm section was to the overall performance. Granted, this is just one example, but Tristano was a hugely important figure at that time and is still widely considered one of the great pioneers of jazz (Shim, 2007).

Although the discussion in *Saying Something* is again limited to structured improvisations, the idea of exploring interaction in the rhythm section can certainly be extended to the interaction between all group members of a non-structured improvisation. In Monson’s work, it is understood that the members of the rhythm section are fulfilling specific roles, whereas in a non-structured improvisational context these functions can be largely removed, resulting in a more fluid and spontaneous interaction between all musicians. Of course, the idea of instrumental functions is historically important and various socio-cultural and socio-economic factors have influenced greatly the development of certain idioms. An example of this is the prevalence of percussion instruments in West African cultural traditions, such as the *Mandingue* – inspired by dance, rhythmic singing and clapping – and that tradition’s later direct influence on the importance of rhythm in many modern-day styles including blues, jazz, hip-hop, reggae and soul (Price, 2013). Such traditions and instrumental functions make sense when the goal of the music is to make people dance or when the music is part of a ceremonial or ritualistic process, but if these goals are not present, as in much of the practical element of this research, then it would follow that these functions can also be removed.

2.3.2 Instrumental Functionality

As previously mentioned, there were significant developments in the roles of instruments when improvising with thematic material in the 1960s, which have greatly informed current practice.

The importance of such instrumental functionality is vital to the egalitarian approach aimed for with a motivic composition. In order to successfully remove hierarchies from a musical setting, without removing all sense of cohesion, it is important to understand the development of such shifting instrumental roles in improvised music over the last 60 years. Some selective examples of these developments can be found in the burgeoning free jazz scene largely informed by Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* released in 1961, work by multi-instrumentalist Eric Dolphy, selected pieces from Miles Davis' second quintet and John Coltrane's classic quartet and compositional work of AACM members such as Anthony Braxton and Richard Muhal Abrams. The ways in which the instrumental roles deviate from tradition vary in all of these examples, but they have all had a substantial influence on current practice, as presented by downtown New York creative music artists such as Tim Berne and Craig Taborn.

Davis' second legendary quintet featured Tony Williams on drums, Ron Carter on bass, Herbie Hancock on piano and Wayne Shorter on saxophone together released six studio albums between 1965 and 1968. As stated earlier, the group had also picked up on Coleman's "time, no changes" approach on several releases (Waters, 2011), but another innovation in their means of interaction occurs on the title track of *Nefertiti* (Davis, 1967) and the alternate take of 'Pinocchio' from the same record. Both of these tracks feature no dedicated solos space for any specific members of the ensemble. Instead, the themes are repeated by the horns for the entirety of each of these performances. In these instances, the rhythm section is given much more freedom to interact with the written material and with each other. Williams' drumming, in particular on 'Nefertiti', creates an arc in tension and dynamics, filling in spaces in the horn melody with drum rolls around the kit and creating moments of release with crashes on rhythmic beats seemingly unrelated to the melody. The alternate take of 'Pinocchio' is more subdued overall but is noted for Hancock's frequent flurries and harmonic embellishments on the piano, sounding at times very much like a featured soloist, although constantly in interaction with the perpetually stated horn melody. As unique as these interactions and performance structures were at the time, it should also be noted that all band members adhere to basic musical elements like pulse and timbral choices. Williams, for example, even when creating tension and acting disruptively, continually comes back to the traditional instrumental choices of a swing feel or variations thereon on the ride cymbal with accompaniment on the snare and bass drum. However, a more holistic approach to band interaction involving the same drummer can be found on Dolphy's important album *Out to Lunch* (1964).

Recorded in August 1964, *Out to Lunch* features Dolphy on bass clarinet, flute and alto saxophone, Freddie Hubbard on trumpet, Bobby Hutcherson on vibraphone, Richard Davis on bass and Williams on drums. The music presented on this album includes a more spontaneous and equal approach to group interaction than most other recordings at that time (Simosko & Tepperman, 1996). In the title track, for example, the theme is stated and, following its last note, Davis and Williams catch the downbeat before pausing, as if listening to Dolphy, who enters with a long melodically angular dense sixteenth-note line on alto saxophone. Rather than coming in with a traditional walking bassline, Davis in a clear expression of support, comes in with a broken straight eighth-note line, and although Williams initially enters with a swing feel on the ride cymbal, he soon moves to a more open, straight double-time feel. Davis continues to develop his idea, adding notes and rhythms to his bassline in response to Dolphy, while Williams continues to shift between the original swing feel and the double-time feel, by means of interacting with Dolphy's changes from long, active lines with shorter, abrasive stabs. In a regular recording around that time, such constant seesawing between feels would have been completely inappropriate but here it is very clear that an open and spontaneous conversation is taking place.

Within one minute of this improvisation, any constant sense of pulse has been abandoned. Davis plays a repeated upper register note on the double-bass and Williams has also abandoned the ride cymbal, now playing linear sixteenth-note melodies on the drumkit between snare, toms and bass drum and punctuated by open hi-hats accents. Hutcherson is also getting involved in the interaction, not fulfilling a specific harmonic chordal role, but playing some short lines as well as some single note or dyad accents. At this point, it is as if all musicians are simultaneously interacting with the band members – responding to each other's ideas (and their own) – organically developing their own motifs. This is an advancement of Jost's 'motivic chain-association' as in this scenario it pertains not just to a soloist, but to all members of a group interaction. Using motivic compositions as the source for such concurrent interactions is essential to the concept put forth in this thesis. As bandleader, Dolphy's affordance to all members of the group to express themselves in these creative and innovative ways is most likely as a result of his interest in and study of many different styles of music. His textural conceptions, ideas of musical structure, harmony and rhythm often resemble contemporary classical chamber music, and this was probably a result of his interest in avant-garde composers such as Schoenberg and Satie (Simosko & Tepperman, 1996).

With specific regard to his own extended instrumental technique capabilities, Dolphy famously performed Varese's solo flute piece *Density 21.5* at the Ojai Music Festival in California in 1962. This piece marked an important development in flute writing, challenging the performing by utilising constantly changing dynamics, unusual structural elements and introducing the expressive possibilities of the instrument by striking the keys on the flute for percussive effect (Fabricciani, 2004). Dolphy's willingness to engage with this shows the importance of extended techniques when attempting to interact without the safety blanket of formal and pre-determined improvisational structures and instrumental functionality. This feeds directly into improvisational performances of motivic compositions, where such blankets are removed and musicians are free to function in any role they see fit at any given moment. The meaning of such attempts is articulated by Borgo (2005) in his discussion of saxophonist and improviser Evan Parker's use of extended techniques:

Many devotees of Western "classical" music (particularly those with nineteenth-century leanings) idolize a purity of sound, articulation, and pitch, whereas Parker's extended devices seemingly ignore or transcend the normal design and use of the instrument. By expanding the natural range, timbre, and traditional connection between tongue and fingers, Parker may also be able to convey metaphorically a heightened meaning or immediacy to listeners (just as distorting the human voice or overdriving electronic equipment often do).

A more contemporary example of such egalitarian group interaction and use of extended techniques is found in the work of New York-based alto saxophonist and composer Tim Berne. The musicians featured in Berne's recordings are all advanced exponents of extended techniques on their respective instruments. This allows them to create sub-layers within performances, at times supporting or deconstructing each other's improvisations and at other times collectively moving away from the material to more textural or soundscape-based sections. An exemplar of this occurs in the improvised passage six minutes into the track 'Sigh Fry' on the album *Science Friction* (2002). Following some melancholic, ballad-esque written material, guitarist Marc Ducret can be heard bending heavily distorted, high-pitched notes. Berne reacts to that with saxophone multi-phonics and drummer Tom Rainey creates the sound of drums rattling in a plastic bag on top of a snare drum. These extended techniques, and the precise control the musicians have in creating them spontaneously in response to what is happening around them, are a vital element to their group interaction.

Using the same album as an example, and as suggested by Dolphy's previously mentioned focus on new levels of instrumental techniques and dynamic innovation, timbral control is another key element to group interaction. Looking at Rainey, drummer with Tim Berne and one of the most influential and in-demand musicians in the downtown New York music scene over the last two decades, his ability to blend written and improvised passages with seamless transition is extremely important in terms of its impact on the overall sound of the music. Rarely playing a standard drum groove, Rainey's very open approach allows him simultaneously to interact with the musicians around him and the material itself as well as developing his own PoD. His use of very dry cymbals with little decay also allows him to play with a great deal of intensity, creating very dense linear patterns without a sense of overbearing or upper hierarchy. An illustration of this is Rainey's playing over the intro of 'Manatee Woman' on the same *Science Friction* album. While Taborn plays a three-bar pattern of hits on keyboards, the drums simultaneously accent the hits and play through them with dense activity along with the saxophone and guitar, all the time evoking a strong sense of groove. Despite never repeating himself, essentially improvising through the entire section, Rainey manages to create a wave of momentum, upon which the other musicians appear to ride.

This highly musical style of drumming results in an ability to interact with the band members on a much deeper level in improvised sections (Bakkum, 2009). For example, if a drummer was to play a more conventional drum groove over a composed section, then when it came to improvisational development and spontaneity, they would most likely only be using that drum groove as their main source material. With Rainey, due to his holistic style, the improvisational development is related to all of the musicians' parts as well as the written material, resulting in a deep and complex interaction that can delve into different aspects of the proposed themes at any time. As he mentions himself in Bakkum's (2009) PhD thesis *Don't Push, Don't Pull: Jazz Rhythm Section Interaction And Musical Change*, "I'm trying to improvise, and I'm trying to feel like I have a part as much as everybody else has a part, even though it's not written".

The process of breaking down pre-existing hierarchies within instrumental functionality and providing artists with an environment conducive to creativity and freedom of expression, is also discussed in the literature through an 'ecological' view of jazz improvisation and in particular the theory of 'affordances' (Hannaford, 2019). This theory allows us to explore the relationship between improvisers and their musical environment and how they respond to each

other and will be investigated in more detail later in this literature review within the theme of ‘Freedom versus Constraints’.

2.3.3 Linguistics

If the aim of a motivic composition is to provide a catalyst for deep and open-minded communication, then it follows that the field of linguistics might contain some research that is relevant to this study. While earlier work (Monson, 2009) has specifically referenced improvised interaction in terms of language, it was carried out in the context of predetermined musical structures. Detailed analysis on the connection between musical and linguistic interaction has also occurred with relation to non-structured improvisation without composition material, notably in the PhD thesis ‘*The invisible handshake*’: *an investigation of free musical improvisation as a form of conversation* (Sutton, 2001). Sutton is categorical in her analysis of a selection of improvisations by mostly UK artists such as Evan Parker, Keith Rowe and Eddie Prevost. This work shows the existence of conversational devices in improvised music and that interactions in improvisation are more intricate and sophisticated than had originally been perceived to be the case. She concludes that “meaning in music is contextualised through elements within the musical work itself”, whereas, in conversation, words can reference elements external to that conversational setting. In a motivic composition, this contextualisation is added to by its intrinsic musical elements, essentially providing a predetermined topic of conversation. While illuminating, none of the musical examples analysed in Sutton’s thesis use written material as a vehicle for the improvisation. Although the context of her research is different, it would also be constructive to use similar comparisons relative to improvised performances of motivic compositions. Using Sutton’s linguistic approach to analyse the levels of communication unfolding in such performances will be among the contributions to the literature of this thesis.

In earlier discussions on the general aesthetic of musical idioms it was mentioned that ‘downtown’ musicians have attempted to break down the barriers of these stylistic differences with the use of Nettle’s ‘PoD’ or Jost’s ‘motivic chain-association’. Within the context of language, these groupings of musical aesthetics – Persian music or Indian classical music for example – could be compared to different languages or dialects. Musical structures within an idiom are akin to the syntax of a language; the melodic modes used could be relatable to the

pitch-contours of a language; and rhythmic devices or note density could be compared to the stress- and syllable-timing of a language (Patel & Daniele, 2003). One could thus imagine that being able to interact in an improvised setting within one of these musical idioms is analogous to interacting with a group of people all using the same language. Furthermore, one could then suggest that attempting to zoom in on these musical structures and allowing interaction to happen not just in the context of a specific idiom, but in any context with any musician, would be like breaking down linguistics in order to interact with others, free from the restrictions of a specific language.

2.3.4 Cognitive and Organisational Sciences

Other notable analyses of interaction in non-structured improvisation without compositional material have been undertaken in *Sync or Swarm* (Borgo, 2005). Here, the author draws on developments in fields such as cognitive science, network theory, general systems theory and computer science to investigate both solo and group improvisations. There are musical examples from UK saxophonist Evan Parker and American saxophonist Sam Rivers, which are investigated with instrumental and phenomenological analysis. As with the other publications mentioned, this book attempts to portray the complexities of improvisation and to champion its importance in comparison to the higher esteem in which composition is generally held. Once more, there is a need for these complexities to be elucidated in the framework of motivic material as a creative trigger for improvisational interaction. While this level of scientific evaluation is beyond the parameters of the present research, the door is certainly left open for the undertaking of such work.

Similar to Borgo's offer of the "interconnections between the realm of musical performance and community activities", organisational science is another field in which the benefit of studying interactivity in a musical improvisation context has been emphasised. Frank Barrett, professor of management and organisation behaviour, and active jazz pianist states (1998, p.151):

Appreciating the interactive complexity involved in jazz improvisation suggests that we pay attention to intuitive and emotional connections between organizational members, the

experience of passionate connection that inspire deeper levels of involvement and committed participation.

These emotional connections are key to the success of non-structured improvised performances, although in Barrett's research the improvisational references are always structured. In the scenario of a firm or company, the existing structural framework of a composition is comparable to the organisation's own business framework. Within that comparison, elements of interaction such as spontaneity and creativity are suggested to be of benefit to the organisation, as opposed to a more pre-determined or predictable approach. That is to say, if employees were encouraged to always interact in the same way, asking the same questions and giving the same responses, then there would be no development of theoretical knowledge or inspiration for creative problem-solving. The benefits of such interaction are clear, although, once again, there may be benefit from also using non-structured improvisations as a model. In such a case, the motivic composition could represent the viewpoint of the business and the spontaneous and open-ended developments could represent more abstracted thinking and out-of-the-box style innovations. In correlation with much of the literature on musical improvisation, most behavioural studies in organisational science tend towards individuality and cognitive orientation, suggesting that further study of "spiritual intimacy, synergy, surrender, transcendence, and flow" is warranted (Barrett, 1998).

This focus on cognitive orientation in organisational sciences has been enhanced over the last thirty years, with highly developed cognitive studies of musical improvisation allowing a much better understanding of the neuroscientific processes occurring during such deep periods of interaction. While not the primary focus in my research, it would be remiss to abandon it altogether. In order to attempt qualitative assessments of improvised performances, having an awareness of the cognitive theory can only help.

Landmark cognitive studies (Pressing, 1988) suggested that the key to improvisational abilities lay in practice. That is to suggest that, in order for improvisers to perform successfully, they would be required to repeat something enough times that the act becomes an instant recall function during the act of improvising. Pressing also asserts that one of the necessary tools for efficient cognitive processing is the presence of a basic underlying formal scheme from which their improvisational actions could be generated and edited in real time. He defined these as the "referent", and they can also be seen as being similar to Nettl's PoD or a Persian *dastgah*

or Indian *raga* (Berkowitz, 2010). Lutton's recent PhD thesis *Contemporary Steel-String Fingerstyle Guitar: Developing New Vocabulary and Improvisational Approaches* (2020), also finds that "the knowledge base⁶ (along with a 'referent') allows the performer to divide cognitive load between working and long-term memory and attend to higher-order processes in performance such as emotional engagement". Although Lutton's research is undertaken in a solo performance context, for the current research the knowledge base can be seen as a combination of the various techniques and devices acquired individually by all members of an ensemble, in addition to their collective knowledge base of techniques and devices utilised in any past collaborative experiences as a group. Thus, an improvised performance of a motivic composition is the result of multiple knowledge bases and a referent and should also allow the ensemble to attend to higher-order processes.

The "10,000-hour rule" or the "10-year rule" – demonstrating that experts generally spend 10,000 hours over 10 years practising – came from research (Ericsson et al, 1993) suggesting that performance expertise was a result of deliberate and intensive training under the instruction of an expert tutor (Beaty, 2015). Although this rule was further popularised by Malcolm Gladwell's bestseller *Outlier* (2008), the original researcher has since stated his opposition to the idea, maintaining that the figures used were averages and that such arbitrary rules disregard the importance of genetic predisposition and cognitive abilities (Ericsson, 2013). To once again borrow from the linguistic analogy, it would follow that somebody might spend hours and hours learning all the possible phrases in a language, but when it comes to communicating with others, simply spewing out those phrases might not result in the deepest or most meaningful form of interaction. A combination of a strong grasp of a language, a predisposition to open-mindedness, empathy and a development of trust is more likely to contribute to a purposeful and worthwhile conversation.

One purpose in presenting improvisers with motivic material is also to stimulate them in a way that prevents them from relying solely on their "10,000" hours of practice. The material should encourage performers to interact with each other in a way that is unique to any given moment, thus avoiding the dangers that can come from either structured improvisation – relying exclusively on the ingrained vocabulary that fits with a specific musical template – or non-

⁶ The *knowledge base* (Pressing, 1998) is described in Lutton's (2020) PhD as "the useable techniques and devices that form the basis of skill or expertise."

structured improvisation without compositional material – playing habit patterns out of muscle-memory without being challenged into real engagement. Referring to a quote from Steve Lacy, discussing that same value of “freshness” in search for an “edge” when improvising, Sparti (2016) explains:

It is a myth that the value and creativity of a musician is connected to his knowledge of where he finds himself, musically, in a given performance, and is in full control of what he is doing. Rather, he puts himself into unfamiliar expressive areas and contexts because the circumstance of not knowing precisely what he is doing carries him to the very limits of his creative capacity, where he may find that “freshness” Lacy alluded to.

In concisely wrapping up these discussions of group interaction in the literature, psychologist Keith Sawyer has developed a concept that combines this “freshness”, the unpredictability of an improvised performance, Jost’s motivic chain-association style development of Nettle’s PoD, the oral nature of an improvised performance and its social context, all into one collective process that he calls “collaborative emergence” (Sawyer, 2000). Drawing on the previously discussed ethnographic studies by Monson and Berliner and his own ethnographic studies of improvisational theatre in Chicago in the early 1990s (Sawyer, 1997), as well as his background in conversation analysis, Sawyer describes how the determination of every moment in an improvised setting is *emergent* on the ongoing decisions being made by the participants. Similar to Borgo’s (2006) assertion that “group creativity is not simply reducible to individual psychological processes”, Sawyer aims to dispel the myth that culture emerges through any individual processes. This emergence is also occurring on several levels: the structural and aesthetic templates that emerge through historical development, as proposed in the first section of this literature review; the actual creative performance that emerges through a group’s interaction; and the elemental musical motifs that emerge as part of this creative performance. This concept is well-suited to feed into the current research as the aspiration of an improvised performance of a motivic composition is to combine the knowledge found in these collaborative emergences to deliver spontaneous, interactive and innovative performances, without restraining the chosen artists’ freedom.

2.4 Freedom versus Constraints

The first meaningful scholarly writing on improvisation was published in 1938 by Hungarian music educator and musicologist Ernst Ferand and was entitled ‘Die Improvisation in der Musik’ (Nettl, 1974). Before this publication – and in reality, also for a considerable period later – improvisation was thought of as a far less important musical element than composition. Perhaps the ideas of impulsiveness, risk and inconsistency that are inherent in the former resulted in scholarly dismissal, whereas the comparative compositional characteristics of control, safety and consistency encouraged its acceptance as the height of artistic capabilities. Given the vast degrees of reliance on each other, this inequality appears questionable at the least. It is simply impossible to have composition without improvisation and vice-versa. As described in the *Contemporary Music Review* article ‘On Spontaneous Music’ (Curran, 2006), “it is they, the improvisers, in whom the traditional roles of composer, performer, director and teacher are fused into one single role”.

For the purposes of this research, the themes of ‘freedom versus constraints’, ‘chaos versus control’, ‘expression versus technique’ and ‘spontaneity versus control’ are all relatable to the practical idea of ‘improvisation versus composition’. One of the ambitions of this research is to explore the balance between these opposing concepts, allowing performers to be creative without losing sense of the topic being discussed – to once again use a linguistic analogy. As with the previously explored theme of group interaction, such paradoxes have been explored in many disciplines, notably philosophy (Nachmanovitch, 1990), psychology (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Sawyer, 2012) and ethnography (Anderskov, 2015; Rose, 2017). A selection of this research will be highlighted in relation to current practice to attempt to define the boundaries between such dichotomies and better grasp the needs and requirements of both the musicians and the written material in the context of improvisational approaches to motivic compositions.

The issue of structured versus non-structured improvisation is an important element in the practice of musical improvisation. There is a common misconception that structured improvisation means that there is predefined material present and that non-structured improvisation does not contain any written material. In order to clarify this, it is necessary to define what is meant by structure in this context. For example, if a musician were to be given

a set of chord changes but no melody and asked to improvise over them with a given feel and tempo, there would already be a considerable amount of predefined material present. However, what if there were no chord changes and just a time-feel and pulse? Or, perhaps paring things back even more, what if there was no predefined time-feel and only a pulse? Is that enough to warrant being called structured? The argument for this research is that structure is related only to improvising over a given form. Thus, a non-structured improvisational performance may include many musical elements, but the one element that would deem it structured would be a set form over which the improvisation should take place. An example of this from the historical development explored previously is the improvisational elements of the Ornette Coleman-inspired free jazz movement. While a regular swing feel on the drums accompanies a walking bassline, solo passages are developed spontaneously and structured according to group interaction.

There are some scenarios where such definitions can be blurred, intentionally or otherwise. For example, a motivic composition may suggest a form by the presence of specific harmony, a written bassline, melody or a set drum pattern. However, the explicit instruction of the composer or bandleader as to whether or not such elements are strictly adhered to, is then vital in whether or not, or the extent to which, the performers are restricted by the form suggested by those elements. In the improvisational performance of a motivic composition, rather than being imprisoned by such a form, it should be seen as a catalyst for spontaneity. If it is clear that such a form can be departed from, then the improvisers are free to elongate or shorten material, increase or decrease tempo, harmonically or rhythmically modulate, completely abandon the material or create a mixture of as many of these as they see fit. This will occur based on the spontaneous interaction of their own decisions and those around them. This would mean that if abandoning the material altogether were referred to as ‘chaos’ and staying exactly with the motivic composition was referred to as ‘control’, then it would be up to the improvisers themselves to spontaneously navigate the line between these extremes. Such degrees of abandon from the motivic composition will be referred to as the ‘level of elaboration’ and will later be used in this thesis for the analysis and comparison of different improvisational performances of motivic compositions.

Two chapters from the *Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies* that are specifically related to this topic are Feisst’s ‘Negotiating Freedom and Control in Composition: Improvisation and Its Offshoots, 1950 to 1980’ and Sparti’s ‘On the Edge: A Frame of Analysis

for Improvisation’. With reference to 20th century composers such as John Cage, La Monte Young and Terry Riley, Feisst (2016) states:

Through improvisatory means composers challenged the musical work's object character, notational system, fixedness, author-performer-listener hierarchy, and historicity. They “decomposed” the musical work of art, instilling music with new types of openness through novel directive and graphic notation, which allowed performers a high degree of freedom.

This is similar to the intention of a motivic composition in a non-structured improvisational performance. However, compared to the context Feisst refers to, the roles of the composition and the improvisation are swapped. In the case of the practical element of this thesis, a work’s “object character” and “fixedness” are challenged by the improvisers rather than the composer. On many occasions the composer of a motivic composition is also one of the improvisers performing but, even in such a context, the aims of spontaneity and interaction are still present.

Whether writing for a group that includes oneself or not, the goal of creating a stimulus for innovative music must be present. According to Sparti (2016), the improviser “puts himself into unfamiliar expressive areas and contexts because the circumstance of not knowing precisely what he is doing carries him to the very limits of his creative capacity”. This is at the essence of the presentation of a motivic composition to performers – the attempt to place the performers in a stimulating musical environment that leads them away from muscle memory habits or routines in their improvising. Such research has shown the importance of these observations in relation to structured improvisation with compositional material and non-structured improvisation without compositional material and this research will go on to explore the gaps in this literature relating specifically to non-structured improvisation with motivic compositions.

2.4.1 Psychology and Philosophy

Other fields that can be helpful to this research are psychology and philosophy. Similar to linguistics, if one wants to take a more holistic view of improvisational processes – and not just examine the musical actions involved – then these fields can help to illuminate this inquiry, particularly through the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of any individual choices made. Two important

publications – interestingly originally published in the same year – that feed into the specific area exploring the balance between abandonment and control, although from less of a musicological background are Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* and Nachmanovitch's (1990) *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*. Csikszentmihalyi's context is psychology and his work is concerned with how optimal creativity is achieved. He explores the concept of ideas flowing out in a loss of self-consciousness and finding the balance between challenges and skills. Nachmanovitch's topic is similar but he approaches it from a spiritual, philosophical background. He talks about the creative process as a spiritual path and asks, "How do we balance structure and spontaneity, discipline and freedom"?

The former's exploration of a "flow" state is highly applicable to the improvisational development of a motivic composition. While it has been used in studies in various fields including sports psychology, education and neuroscience (Payne et al, 2011), it has never been applied directly to improvised performance of motivic compositions. Often referred to as being "in the zone", it is a pleasurable state that occurs when an individual is fully engaged with a demanding task (Dillon & Tait, 2000). Anecdotally, this is something that many musicians and in particular improvisers talk about trying to achieve – to perform with such high levels of spontaneity and with such natural interaction that the split-second decisions being made occur purely instinctively. As previously discussed, these are very similar to the aims of a motivic composition, so it could be said that an improviser achieving a flow state would be the result of a successful motivic composition and its performance.

Relating the basic theory of flow to the current practice examined in this research, several factors become important. Firstly, if as the research suggests, the participants need to be fully engaged in a task (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), then the creation of a fully interactive and open-minded scenario is vital for success. This level of engagement could depend on the social context of a performance: whether it is public or private; formal or informal; recorded or not recorded. These aspects will be explored further in the following section of this literature review. The second factor, that the task is demanding, can be directly related to the contents of the motivic material. It would be presumed that if the material included in the composition is too complex, then the performer will find it too demanding and will not result in a pleasurable state. Equally, if the material is too simple, or perhaps more importantly not distinct enough, then it could also fall flat of engaging the artist. This could be related to both the piece's musical

characteristics, such as rhythm, melody and harmony, as well as its structural elements. For example, if a composition had an unusual amount of repeat marks on a section, the improviser might not be able to feel them passing naturally and having to overtly count them would not achieve a sense of flow.

These two factors – social context and structural constraints – can also be looked at as a group process, as opposed to individually. This would follow Sawyer (2012) and Borgo's (2006) findings that affirm that we must look at both individual and group processes to understand the creative outcomes. For example, certain contexts might create more optimal creative experiences with more or less restricted structures than others, so looking at any creative interaction with regard to social context or structural elements alone will not paint a full picture.

More recent psychological studies that have been heavily influenced by Csikszentmihalyi include Biasutti and Frezza's (2009) research on the cognitive processes involved in musical improvisation, and in particular the impact of performers' instrumental abilities on those processes. As opposed to a number of qualitative studies with a small number of participants on this topic (Kenny & Gellrich, 2002; Johnson-Laird, 2002), the researchers here use quantitative methods and a larger number of participants. The study is carried out through two questionnaires; one based on instrumental abilities and another on instrumental processes. The findings of the research show that there are several concepts involved in musical improvisation, namely "technical, expressive and social elements". They also confirm that flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) provides motivation for musicians and allows them to express their instrumental abilities in a more extensive manner (Biasutti & Frezza, 2009). This confirms that by aiming to provide performers with an optimal creative experience via a motivic composition, we can also maximise the benefit of each musician's technical capabilities.

Drawing on the work of Pressing (1988), Berkowitz (2010) also explores the cognitive constraints provided by certain elements of musical improvisation. He explains that focussing on a specific genre within which an improvisation is taking place, allows a performer to draw on their experience within that genre, performing with a higher degree of automaticity and thus allowing them to concentrate on the "higher-level musical processes" such as the form or feel of a piece. Describing the former as a stylistic process and the latter as part of a performative process, Berkowitz declares "stylistic constraints thus alleviate performance constraints."

This is addressed on two levels by a motivic composition. On one level, the need for a specific genre is eradicated by the already pared down, elemental level of the written material. The composition itself is here the “referent” (Pressing, 1988) and therefore the performers need only be familiar with the material itself as opposed to an entire genre. Secondly, the lack of form or any definitive higher-level musical processes helps further remove the associated performance constraints.

In placing the aforementioned sense of structural development in a more philosophical context, Nachmanovitch (1990, p. 106) states:

Creation is not the replacing of nothing with something or chaos with pattern. There is no chaos; there is a vast, living world in which the rules for specifying the pattern are so complicated that after you look at a few of them you become tired. The creative act pulls out some more inclusive shape or progression that gathers an immense amount of complexity into a simple, satisfying notion.

Although a more outward-looking description of the improvisatory process than Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) inward-looking neuroscientific elucidation, the above paragraph displays the same search for the boundaries between ‘chaos’ and ‘pattern’. Connecting the two researchers’ work even further, Nachmanovitch (1990) goes on to say that, in developing an artwork, “We create new rules of progression, fresh channels in which the play can flow”. In finding that balance, he also continues to point out the difference between ‘simplicity’ and ‘insipidity’ in an artwork. This is a further clarification on the earlier question of how complex the written elements of a motivic composition can be to demand enough of an improviser to achieve a sense of flow. The material itself can consist of musical elements that are simple, but they should cultivate characteristics that give it an individual flavour, colour or texture. For an example of this in the current practice, we can use the same albums presented earlier by Tim Berne for consistency.

2.4.2 Exemplar practitioner: Tim Berne

In particular, the tracks ‘Manatee Woman’ from *Science Friction* (Screwgun Records, 2002) and ‘Hard Cell’ from *The Shell Game* (Thirsty Ear Records, 2001) are both demonstrations of

improvisational development of motivic material at the highest level. Berne's music has not been analysed in any of the previously mentioned literature, largely because it falls in the space between the structured and non-structured improvisational forms that the literature exists in. This space, and the literature void it exists in, is the central theme to this thesis and the knowledge gaps it will aim to fill. Despite its absence in the literature, Berne's music is influential in demonstrating the connection between written material and improvisation.

Given the extended use of his music as a reference in current practice, it is worth pointing out the history of this researcher's interest in Berne's music. After spending much time in formative years as a musician listening avidly to his music, this interest gathered momentum in 2005, when joining forces with some fellow musicians and also Berne-followers, to develop a deeper understanding of his music. The aim was to do this by studying and performing his music both privately in rehearsal sessions and at public performances. This afforded an opportunity to experience Berne's compositional techniques first-hand, giving a vastly different perspective of a player, compared to that of a listener. Coming from inside the music, it was found that many of the compositions that were originally difficult to grasp became clearer, with defining musical characteristics running through them, holding them all together like a string of DNA. A chance to understand his music on an even deeper level was presented at the School for Improvised Music (SIM) in Brooklyn in the summer of 2007, as part of an ensemble class that Berne was teaching while I was studying there. This created an opportunity to perform his compositions alongside him and under his guidance, providing yet more insight into his compositional and improvisational processes.

Interestingly, Berne was a very late beginner to jazz, only picking up saxophone at the age of 20. Under the tutelage of fellow saxophonist and composer Julius Hemphill he began to formulate a unique vision for his own music, perhaps in part due to his unorthodox musical training and Hemphill's encouragement (Iverson, 2009). Discussing the music performed on *The Shell Game*, Berne (Olson, 2006) says:

In terms of the written material, I'm just looking to supply enough contrast that it's not boring, basically—and then enough information that makes you want to improvise. These days I don't really want to direct any improvisation; the only directing I do is by nature of the written music. That should make you want to improvise, provoke something to happen. If it leaves you someplace and you don't feel like improvising, it's not working.

As mentioned earlier, his bandmates are all long-time collaborators and the mixture of their deep understanding and levels of interaction, along with Berne's sense of the boundaries between chaos and control, make both *The Shell Game* and *Science Friction* remarkable examples of this provocation and of fluidity between composition and improvisation. In both, the performers seem to be engaged in an open-minded but intense conversation on the provided topics – to borrow the metaphor again. The written material is presented with a fine balance between looseness and integrity and is developed in ad-lib improvisational passages with great focus and sense of exploration. Berne's compositional approach often uses systems such as tone rows, giving the material a specific but unique sound – Nachmanovitch's 'simplicity' but not 'insipidity' – unattached to conventional harmony, which the performers can then expand or abandon in their improvisational development.

The tone row technique comes from the serialist musical movement, established by composer Arnold Schoenberg and his students – including Anton Webern and Alban Berg – in the 1920s (Vander Weg & Stewart, 2001). A tone row is typically a consecutive sequence of each of the twelve notes in the chromatic scale, although larger and smaller sets are also found. In claiming pre-eminence for this new technique, Schoenberg's (1975) claim was that he "laid the foundation for a new procedure in musical construction which seemed fitted to replace those structural differentiations provided formerly by tonal harmonies". In finding the balance between freedom and constraints in an improvised performance of a motivic composition, it follows that such serialist techniques, which avoid the implied restrictions of tonal harmonies but create a particular melodic colour – could be beneficial. A tone row can use any combination of intervals and given that one premise of a motivic composition is to pare down written material to its rawest undeveloped form, a specific combination of intervals could be a clear example of that. This is opposed to the idea of a tonally harmonic approach, which immediately supplies the performer with generations worth of given rules and conventions that they would be dealing with. Even in choosing to avoid such conventions, as is an improviser's wont, it is an added set of information to deal with and to detract from a more immediate interaction with the material and those around them. This is not to say that it is impossible for an improviser to achieve a sense of flow with a tonally harmonic approach, but it is certainly a consideration in the exploration of the content of a motivic composition.

In the two figures below, from 'Manatee Woman' on *Science Friction* and 'Hard Cell' on *The Shell Game*, we see clear examples of this use of tone rows. In the first example, Berne uses

the exact same series of 14 consecutive notes in two different sections of the piece, altering the rhythmic structure of the notes and putting them down an octave the second time. In the second example, the 14 notes from the opening ten-beat pattern of ‘Hard Cell’ are rhythmically altered to create a new feeling. The 14 notes are arranged in exactly the same order, but in the second iteration, start from the final note of the row and end on the penultimate note. Also, on second hearing, the seventh note in the row, a B natural, is repeated rather than being tied.



Figure 2. 14-note row from two different sections of ‘Manatee Woman’. Source: Author

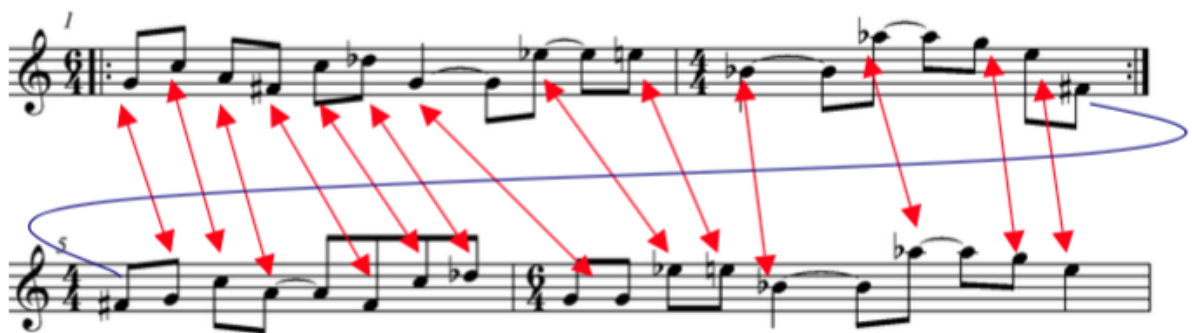


Figure 3. 14-note row from two different sections of ‘Hard Cell’. Source: Author

The researcher’s own creative practice is influenced by some of the key musical elements utilised here and developed by Berne, however it is also fused with a unique background and history of personal experiences. In particular, a composition using similar elements of serialism will be found in the practical component of this research in the composition ‘Cicaplast’.

2.4.3 Ethnographic Research⁷

There has also been recent ethnographic research that combines a number of this thesis' subthemes including instrumental technique, spontaneity and the question not just of improvisation versus composition but also of improvisation *as* composition. Similar approaches have been separately adopted by two improvising musicians, researchers and educators; Simon Rose (2017) and Jacob Anderskov (2015) conducted a number of interviews with improvisation practitioners and researchers and in analysing these interviews, they elucidate many of the subthemes examined in this literature review. The breadth of experience and levels of achievement by the interviewees – including musician and editor of the *Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies* George E. Lewis, co-founding member of the AACM Roscoe Mitchell, influential experimental art composer and improviser Pauline Oliveiros and MacArthur Fellowship recipient Mary Halvorson – in both practice and research-based contexts, provide valuable insight into these topics.

Anderskov's ongoing research, which he has given the title 'Habitable Exomusics', includes the aforementioned interviews as well as practice-based output and analysis and self-reflection on this output. The title, analogising the astronomy term 'exoplanets' meaning planets outside of this solar system, refers to musicians becoming comfortable and open to structures that are outside of standard and generally conceived conventions, as well as allowing listeners to "inhabit" the music. His intention is to develop his own artistic expression through exploration of what he calls 'post tonal material structuring principles', expanding from the use of familiar rhythmic devices and standard and definable tonalities and harmonies. Several of the artists interviewed by Anderskov talk about how they like to challenge themselves and their bandmates through their compositional material. This is connected to the idea of freedom versus constraints, although for Anderskov, the focus of the research is the language utilised to improvise, and in this thesis, the focus is on the motivic composition itself as the catalyst for improvisation. For example, Anderskov includes non-structured improvisations with no written material in his output and examines the use and development of his post tonal material structuring principles in these performances, whereas the practical submission in this PhD is

⁷ Two recent ethnographic publications in the field of music improvisation have been left out of this literature review as they were deemed less relevant to the current research. Aşkan (2019) looks more specifically at free improvisation with no materials and Schroeder (2019) explores improvisation in a pedagogical context within Brazilian higher education institutions.

more concerned with motivic compositions themselves being the ‘exomusic’ stimulant. While Anderskov is clear that his pursuits are directed towards his own personal development, it would appear that such an approach would optimally require all participants in a performance to be comfortable with those same systems. In the case of a motivic composition, the levels of comfort of the individual participants with any systems used in the material is of less value, once it is clearly presented and they are willing to develop it with respect and honesty.

In comparison, Rose’s research, while not practice-based, explores the social and ontological issues around improvisation through the lenses of his esteemed interviewees. In discussing the dichotomy that results from the expectations of ‘the composer’ and the improvisational process itself, Rose (2017, p. 66) declares:

The role of ‘the composer’ can become clarified by acknowledging the capability for improvisation. Improvisation and composition are part of the same process and the redundant binary of improvisation versus composition is a misrepresentation.

In the context of this research and much of the current practice, where the composer is also directly involved in the improvisational process as a performer, that misrepresentation is inherently avoided. Furthermore, even in a context where the composer is not also a performer, the aim of a motivic composition is the opposite of placing undue emphasis on the role of ‘the composer’, but rather giving as much control as possible to the improviser, with the composer merely providing the source material. It would be unlikely for the composer of such a motivic composition to claim a disproportionate amount of responsibility for the performance itself, particularly given the inherent trust that is needed for such control to be placed on the improvisers.

Another noteworthy section of Rose’s work here is his questioning of the importance of spontaneity in improvisation. While not refuting it outright, many of his interviewees claim that its importance is “overblown” (Lewis) or “overrated” (Honsinger). In discussing these opinions Rose deduces that “it is not that spontaneity should be negated but that the contribution of spontaneity become clarified”. He goes on to cite the *Echtzeitmusik* scene in Berlin as an example of such clarification of spontaneity. Directly translating as ‘real-time music’, the *Echtzeitmusik* scene is an international community of improvising and experimental musicians in Berlin that emerged in the 1990s and has developed a unique, reductive sound,

influenced by John Cage's compositional theory and free improvisation (Blažanović, 2012). This is similarly an aim of a motivic composition; to induce such spontaneity. That is, not spontaneity for the sake of effect or in the sense of spontaneously returning to old clichés as is suggested by some of his interviewees, but rather as an important tool and process in the deep interaction of artists. As such, it can perhaps also assist in clarifying Rose's question of where spontaneity is situated in improvisation.

Other notable literature on the topic of creating an atmosphere conducive to spontaneity and creativity as a composer, bandleader and performer is an article by Christopher Smith (1995) on Miles Davis and how he controlled but also freed musicians:

There were virtually no visual cues between players, and contrasting performances from one night to the next showed that the shifts, contrasts, and juxtapositions were not precomposed; yet they were accomplished with as much cohesion as if they had been carefully rehearsed.

Smith (1995) also writes about how Davis forced his band members to focus attention on him by doing the unexpected and thus pushed the musicians beyond their existing performance constraints. Similar to the aim of a motivic composition, Davis wanted “a quality of attentive musical flexibility that would lift the players to the level of co-composing interpreters; one that would encourage them to respond to the improvisational moment with the same alert freedom that he did” (Smith, 1995). Although this article focuses on semiotics – within a musical context of structured improvisation – the discussion of a performance ambition of spontaneity, creativity and collaborative group development is complementary to that of non-structured improvisational performances of motivic compositions.

2.4.4 Ecological Psychology and Philosophy

A third example of an active musician and researcher exploring the relationship between composition and improvisation is pianist Marc Hannaford's recent doctoral dissertation (2019). Hannaford examines the adaptation of improvisers to their musical environment, as well as the adaptation of their musical environments to them. He draws on Gibson's (1986) ecological psychology concept of affordances – posited through the nature of visual perception – and its development through Chemero's (2003) more dynamic sense of the theory with regard to

embodied cognition, and Ingold's (2013) anthropological relation of the theory to sociocultural context. What emerges for Hannaford from this is affordances as "opportunities for action" that are presented from the interaction of organisms with their environment. He develops an affordance-based analytical framework with which he discusses the work of improviser and composer Muhal Richard Abrams, using the concept to describe how the qualities of an improviser's "sonic gestures" – made up of various "sonic characteristics" including musical elements such as rhythm, pitch, texture and timbre – are related to their "sonic environment", that is the theoretical structure around which a musical performance is framed.

The issues and importance of feedback loops, temporality and embodied activity in improvisation are paralleled in the affordances concept and these parallels are used in his affordance-based framework. Hannaford's research is particularly relevant to the current practice discussed here as he uses his framework to study performances "where free improvisation is preceded and/or followed by composed material". The use of the affordance-based framework could also be aligned with the non-structured improvisation of a motivic composition. However, Hannaford's focus is on the sonic environment of free improvisation when it comes before or after written material, whereas the current research is concerned with the improvisational development of material composed for that specific purpose.

Hannaford's work also can also be related to the development of instrumental functionality in improvised music. As discussed earlier, the 1960s saw several artists, such as Eric Dolphy and Anthony Braxton focus on new ways of interacting through their instruments (Lewis, 2008). Such artists were particularly inspired by the contemporary classical music they were surrounding themselves in, and thus afforded their collaborators the freedom to express themselves with similar levels of unconventionality.

The connection of affordance to instrumental functionality in an improvisational environment is also presented by Toop (2016), in conversation with AACM founding member Roscoe Mitchell. Discussing the opening to his album *Sound* (1966), with the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Mitchell explains that the wash of mallets on cymbals creates a "sound environment" and that each musician then improvisationally responds to that environment with their own sounds, instead of "notes following notes to create a melody". Describing how the sound of each instrument comes out of silence and manifests as a "sound sculpture that fits the constraints of the sound environment created by the compositional framework", Mitchell

demonstrates the idea of a feedback loop between the improvisers, their musical environment and the space afforded to each instrument in the context of silence.

This has continued in the current practice and the practical output here also features such affordances, with the freedom created by the absence of prescribed improvisational structures in motivic compositions, suggesting a space in which artists can interact with each other and the composition without a standard instrumental hierarchy. This freedom can then be reacted to with the use of extended instrumental techniques, which in turn create a sound environment for the rest of the musicians to respond to. An example of this is the earlier discussed work of Tim Berne, and the affordances of drummer Tom Rainey and guitarist Marc Ducret. Berne's intentionally non-structured improvised sections provide him the space to perform with multiphonics on saxophone, which is responded to with the use of heavy distortion by Ducret and in turn by Rainey rattling sticks in a plastic bag on a snare drum.

Looking deeper into the philosophical sense of this discussion, Peters (2009) creates a further duality within the freedom versus constraints binary by portraying two aesthetically opposed versions of "positive" and "negative" freedom. This is argued in the context of examples from Anthony Braxton's problematisation of collective improvisation (Dean, 1992) and philosopher Isaiah Berlin's 'negative / positive liberties' distinction (Berlin, 1969). The traditional sense of an anarchist free improvisation is suggested to be positive freedom. It is an ideal of singularity, dangerously evoking an oppressive personal mastery that fundamentally threatens the sense of spontaneity, creativity and innovation essential for the ambitions of most improvisations. Negative freedom, on the other hand, is a collective ideal, allowing nonconformity and providing space for originality and impulsive action. In attempting to assert one's independence and freedom improvisationally, there is a danger of obsessing over a 'me against the world' mentality (positive freedom). Embracing a "collective language of care and enabling, of dialogue and participation, a pure, aesthetically cleansed language of communal love" (negative freedom) (Peters, 2009) will provide a result more closely aligned to the original purpose of the activity. This strikes at the philosophical essence of a motivic composition; an attempt at providing freedom for an improvisational performance, but the right kind of freedom. Not a 'free for all' chaos with no understanding and apathy, nor a conforming system that negates any impression of spontaneity. A successful motivic composition will allow for the "language of dialogue and participation" to flourish, and to react to all that is going on around it and inside it.

The above literary examinations of the dichotomies found in improvisational performances of motivic compositions, such as freedom versus constraints or chaos versus control, are aimed at furthering the understanding of the current practice. As searching for an appropriate balance between such antitheses requires a variety of perspectives, it was appropriate and has proven beneficial to be informed by various research disciplines. The later analysis of practical output, in which the improvisation versus composition paradox is an important concept, will draw on these examinations to illuminate the musical phenomena present.

2.5 Social Context

As discussed previously, spontaneity, commitment and dedication of performers during an improvisation are all important. However, if the same group of performers were to play the same motivic composition in different performance settings – such as a private rehearsal space, a concert hall or a recording studio – would one experience the same results? There is often a false truth built around the concept of improvisation as a once off act, and that each performance should reach the pinnacle of one’s ability. And while that is a worthy, if lofty, goal to set, the reality is that, as well as interacting with each other and the music, improvisers are also greatly impacted by their surroundings (Walton et al, 2018). Breaking down the context of a live public performance, one could create a further context for analysis; if the same musicians perform the same motivic composition in the same performance setting on different dates or over a series of dates, are there notable differences?

Social context has always been a vital part of musical improvisation, both in a direct form (the space, audience, performance context for a performance) and in an indirect form (an answer to social constructs or a means of expressing and communicating thoughts on the world around us). The indirect form is vitally important to a large quantity of the current practice, and indeed a basic *raison d’etre* for this researcher. There are many examples of research being carried out in that specific field including Siddall and Waterman’s (2016) exploration of identity and subjectivity through improvisation, Smilde’s (2016) examination of the relationship between improvisation and identity, Iyer’s (2016) work on embodied cognition in the context of improvisation and Sawyer’s (2012) analysis of group creativity through sociocultural theory. There are far fewer examples of research on the direct form of context, hence for the purpose of this research, such indirect examples will be used to illuminate the former.

First, it would be useful to set up a framework for the performance context for the practical output of this research. In general, the current practice of performances of motivic improvisations can be perceived in two contexts: a recording of a performance or physically attending a live performance. There are less frequent occasions when one has the opportunity to hear a third context, a rehearsal of a performance involving musical improvisation. This might occur in a situation such as part of an open workshop or a group masterclass. However, for this research, this context of a private rehearsal is added via the documentation of group

rehearsals of motivic compositions by this researcher over the course of several years. This framework is shown below (figure 4).

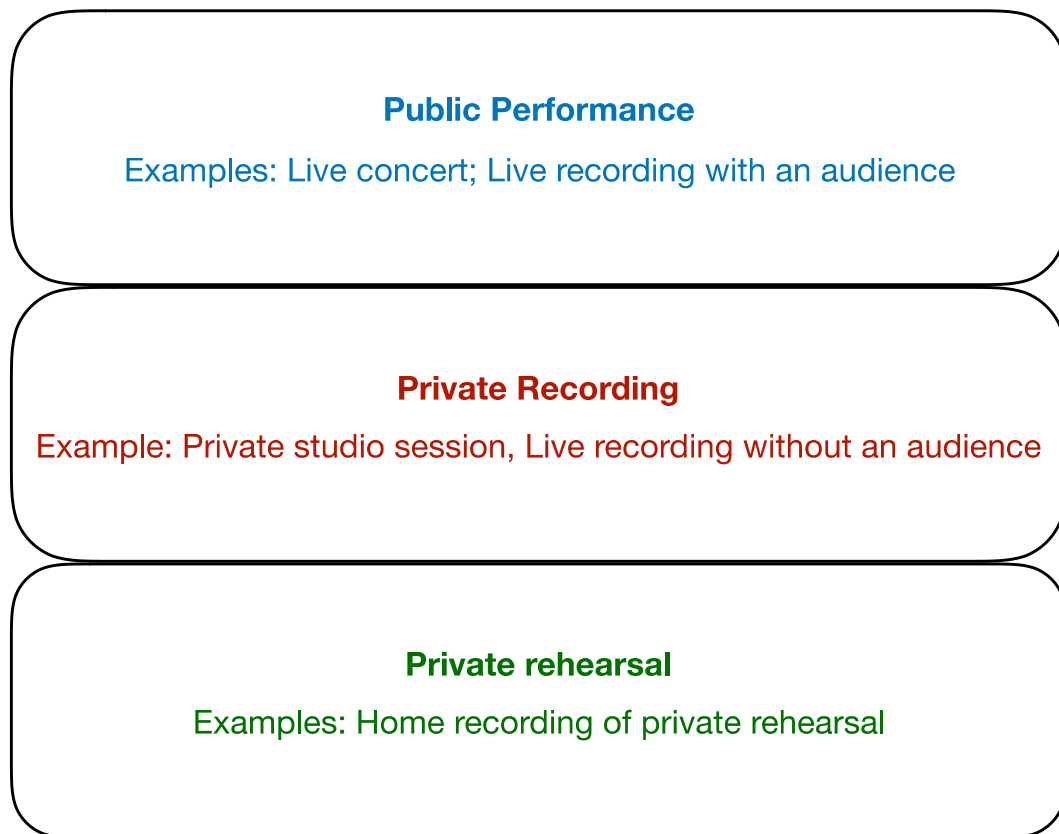


Figure 4. Framework of performance contexts. Source: Author

2.5.1 Sociocultural Theories

Sawyer’s (2000) theory of the “collaborative emergence” process has been previously discussed here in the context of group interaction. Later work by the same author discussed this same process as an extension of sociocultural theory. The performances of motivic compositions examined in this thesis are group processes and it has been established by Sawyer (2012) that it is difficult to reductively analyse such processes by the actions or thoughts of individual participants alone. The necessity to examine both group and individual actions together is described as being essential to the emergence of certain social practices, and that, over time, these become accepted parts of culture. Sawyer (2012) describes the work of sociocultural theorists, such as Hutchins (1995), in proving that culture is not a set of real or hypothetical objects, but rather a process by which such objects are ingrained in people’s way

of life. The development of such social practises is part of the indirect contexts that have profoundly affected much of the current practice of musical improvisation, as discussed by Monson (2009) among others. Musical contexts of such practices are the performance structures cited in the historical development section of this literature review: the developments of the ‘head, solo, head’ approach, the idea of consecutive solos being passed around the band or the conventions of accompanists performing very specific instrumental functions. That the disruption of such processes by innovators including Dolphy, Coleman or members of the AACM never became fully emergent, is shown by the fact that their own approaches are still very much in the minority in terms of practical output. That is not to say that their innovations are any less valuable, and their changes in the processes of performance structure and instrumental functionality are influential on the current practise of downtown scenes across the world.

The direct forms of performance context from the framework above could also be examined using such emergent processes. Anecdotally, and through the experience of this researcher, there are several noticeable sociocultural differences in how improvising groups rehearse material. Taking the downtown New York scene as an example, when a rehearsal is booked by a bandleader there is, on most occasions, an unspoken rule that that the duration of the session will be two hours. Furthermore, as soon as all musicians have arrived at the rehearsal venue, they will begin playing as soon as they have set up. This does not have to be communicated to the other bandmembers, but could be hypothesised to be a social practice that has developed over many years in response to the time constraints placed on members of that scene through the cost of living in that city and lack of earning potential from a non-commercial form of music-making. This example is adverse to the rehearsal process experienced with improvising groups in Ireland, where an end time will often need to be specified for a rehearsal. On arrival at such a rehearsal space, musicians will often begin not by setting up instruments, but by being offered beverages and conversing before beginning to play. Once again hypothesising, such social practice could be influenced by a more laid-back aspect to society in Ireland. Such aspects are supported in qualitative research on interacting sojourners: “life in general appeared to be more relaxed and at a slower pace in Irish culture than in the American culture” (Langley & Breese, 2005). Although no specific research has been done on these exact social practices in improvised music, we can use Sawyer’s work on sociocultural theory to elaborate that they are a result of ingrained social processes over many years within those communities.

In order to place the practice of improvising performers of motivic compositions in a sociocultural context, it would also be of benefit to explore their sense of social identity. Although published research on this specific topic is rare, MacDonald and Wilson (2006) have, in a somewhat broader context, examined the social and musical identities of professional UK jazz musicians. This was achieved through discursive analysis of ten semi-structured individual interviews. It was found that, in particular, two social constructions were identified as being part of a jazz musician's sense of belonging. These align with two ideas previously voiced in this thesis, of transcendental construction – the idea that improvisers are striving for a state of immersion in their actions and that they are no longer fully conscious of their choices – and conversational construction, which provides the ability to “verbalise a non-verbal interactive experience” (MacDonald & Wilson, 2006). They also found that within the communal setting of being a jazz musician, participants identified more specifically with sub genres such as a “West Coast style player” or in one case identifying as “an improviser rather than a jazz musician”. Such questions of social identity could potentially also be explored within the smaller subset of performers of non-structured improvisations with motivic compositions, although there is a similar difficulty that few musicians involved in such performances will identify only with that form of improvisation.

The questions raised by MacDonald and Wilson of an improviser's sense of belonging to a musical or geographical or cultural scene is an important consideration. Although it cannot be fully explored in this thesis, drawing on personal experience of growing up in Ireland but being heavily influenced by music emanating from Black American culture, it is easy to see how multiple identities can develop. Work on establishing an identity of a specific Irish jazz scene has been recently carried out in research for a PhD thesis at Technological University Dublin (Evans, 2016). Conducting an historical overview using primarily archival research and ethnographic studies, it posits that in order to gain a better understanding of jazz performance, the day-to-day activities of jazz musicians should be studied. Another aim of Evans' research is to address the inequality in much of the study of jazz and improvised music that focuses only on the top tier of musicians within a scene and gives less credence to other parts of communities such as audiences, journalists and amateur or part-time practitioners of the music. This is another important aspect of my research and is aligned with the direct form of social context to be explored. Rather than only examining the final product associated with top-level musicians, the exploration in this thesis and its accompanying practical portfolio of the process

leading up to and informing the final products – including rehearsals and multiple recordings within a series – addresses this imbalance.

2.5.2 Embodied Cognition

This sense of an improviser’s social identity through cultural and contextual factors has also been explored through embodied cognition (Iyer, 2016; Van Der Schyff, 2019; Schaivio, 2019). Embodied cognition is a topic developed as an opposition to standard cognitive science (Shapiro, 2019). Its key characteristic is that, contrary to commonly held beliefs from the 20th century, the body is not acting purely on command of what the brain tells it, but that our cognitive functions are also rooted in our sensory-motor or bodily interactions with the environment around us (Wilson, 2002). Work has been done using these mind-body connections in opposing previous music cognition work, which assumed that the “mind could be understood as the software and the brain and body as the hardware” (Iyer, 2016). An obvious example of such embodiment is the social practice of dancing in response to musical stimulation. However, such a reaction is also variable by culture, therefore there can be said to be an interdependence between the mind, the body and its sociocultural context in music perception.

Such research also makes apparent that embodied cognition can be applied to the sense of identity or belonging questioned previously. If our cognitive functions are connected to how our sensorimotor system interacts with the social and cultural environment around us, then it follows that we will identify with things that make us both feel and move in a certain way. Iyer (2016) asks whether our mutual embodiment and empathy for an action comes by means of an ability to replicate it, by an understanding of the action itself, or, by understanding the intention behind the action. He also cites previous cognition studies (Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2010), which found that participants had much more mirror neuron responses (suggesting empathy) stimulated by images of their own race (white North Americans) than of other races (non-white) as well as newer research that suggests our mirror neurons respond separately to audio and visual stimulation. This allows him to question whether our experience of sociocultural identity could be very different if experienced more through audio than visual cues. This could allow a much greater sense of empathy for another culture without *seeing* it as being different to one’s own.

Exploring these concepts with the example of my own engagement with a variety of music from around the world during my formative years, the 4E model of *enactivism* – in which cognition is described as being *embedded*, *embodied*, *enactive* and *extended* – is applicable. In discussion of 4E, Van der Schyff (2019) has provided an open-ended framework for collaborative exploration of improvisational experiences. This model suggests that living organisms cannot make sense of knowledge simply by its factual description as part of an external environment but that it must also be experienced and negotiated through engaged action. This would help explain how my own engagement with improvised and rhythmically complex music – via the earlier mentioned childhood exercises with my brother, active listening sessions he would involve me in and later performances – has resulted in the kind of output developed through the performances documented in this thesis.

Van Der Schyff's research also connects to the affordance-based framework from ecological psychology discussed earlier (Hannaford, 2019) in that it examines “embodied feedback loops” that are created between performers, their instruments and their acoustic and musical environments. The enactive perspective suggests that people's cognitive actions are not determined simply by their environments and sociocultural identities, but that they “actively shape the cognitive ecologies we inhabit; mind and world stand in a circular, co-emergent relationship to each other” (Van Der Schyff, 2019).

Similar to Sawyer's (2012) position that we cannot separate the skills and techniques of individuals from the collaborative processes involved in improvisation, Van Der Schyff proposes that the 4E model encourages a form of self-assessment that fosters “creative potential and collaborative environments”. Much like non-structured improvisations with motivic compositions, this process of assessment requires a “cooperative dialogical approach that involves shared processes of action and critical reflection”.

These social requirements of “cooperative” and “shared” approaches, as espoused by Sawyer (2012) and Van Der Schyff (2019) have also been investigated by Schiavio et al (2019). They have also used the enactive perspective to investigate the “feeling of being together” in collective musical and sporting interactions, as well as how people have the “capacity to skilfully adapt to the contextual demands arising from the social environment.” They find that when music teachers provide students with the freedom to learn through shared interactive experiences, they develop their skillset through the provision of feedback and the exchange of

musical ideas and personal experiences. Although much of this research is undertaken with regard to novice participation and pedagogical development, the same theories could be applied to the shared experiences of a high-level improvising ensemble over the course of many performances of motivic compositions. The familiarity with the other performers' reactions could alleviate further cognitive constraints, enhancing the prospect of an optimal creative experience.

The direct social aspect of the current research theme is also examined in the literature through the "temporality of performance" (Iyer, 2016). During an improvised performance, there is a sense of "mutual embodiment" and "shared time" taking place between the musicians and the audience. Everybody present will experience the same length of time passing for each piece. This is compared to the context of reading a book, which, despite eliciting certain physical and mental responses, is not bound to any temporal restrictions; there is no mutual experience of shared time between the writer and the reader. Taking the situated contexts of either a rehearsal or studio recording of a motivic composition, the sense of empathy created by such mutual embodiment of performer and listener is now removed and could perhaps help in explaining any differing approach or outcomes found in such performances. That is not to say that the listener does not continue to perceive both the sound and bodily movement implied through the music, even if it is not happening synchronously to the performance, but that this act is now unilateral, given that the performer cannot also perceive the listener's response.

This sense of empathy in the mutually embodied experience of listeners and audiences is reiterated by Smilde (2016):

The ability to make observations through the eyes of another, empathy, is thus very important. To put it in the words of Brian, the staff development practitioner who worked with the caregivers on dementia awareness, here, through improvisation, 'the music is generated by the musicians from the residents' (Smilde et al, 2014). These deeply insightful words can apply to any musical engagement in any social context, as these words are about belonging.

In a similar vein by which the ethnographic work of MacDonald and Wilson (2006) elicits connections between transcendental and conversational structures in improvisers' sense of self, Smilde (2016) distinguishes interviewees' sense of 'sound' as one of the determining factors in their social identity. If one's sound is related "to expressivity, musical communication and

conversation, to social learning and ownership”, then through the study and development of non-structured improvisations of motivic compositions, one can develop an identity both as a musician and more socially as a person. Moreover, by examining the varying direct and indirect social contexts documented through this research, one can gain first-hand insight into how that sound or identity develop through these contexts.

Such work can be particularly useful to the current research in the context of non-musical motifs as vehicles for improvisation. The images or texts provided in this category of investigation are aimed at providing a shared frame of reference for artists, without the constraints of any musical information. However, the above cognitive studies show us that each artist’s own sociocultural identities and experiences can result in a reflective embodied output. Therefore, the reactions of each improviser to each other’s output and resultant group motivic developments of material can thus become a manifestation of all of these identities.

2.6 Chapter Summary

The historical development of improvisation has been described through its importance to Baroque, Persian, Indian music and Jazz. Their respective elements of basso continuo, radif, ragas and melodic and harmonic themes are compared as equivalents to Nettle's (2009) "PoD", albeit in differing musical and social contexts. This places them as precursors to the basic premise of motivic compositions: to act as a catalyst for improvisation. Later, these PoD are further aligned with Jost's (1994) theory of "motivic chain-association", showing their potential for improvisational development. These will all be adopted throughout later chapters to directly elucidate musical occurrences in the practical output and address the deficiency of research on analysis of improvised performances of motivic compositions.

The development of performance structures in jazz throughout the 20th century, particularly through Miles Davis, the AACM and the Free Jazz movement involving Ornette Coleman and Eric Dolphy (Waters, 2011; Simosko & Tepperman, 1996, DeVeaux, 1991), is seen as a progression towards the current practice of non-structured improvisational performances of motivic compositions. The success of these groups is suggested to have come from their ability to simultaneously bring improvisation to brand new contexts, while remaining strongly rooted in the music's history.

Many of these historical innovations have then been explored in the theme of 'group interaction' and through disciplines including ethnography (Berliner, 2009; Monson, 2009), linguistics (Sutton, 2001; Patel & Daniele, 2003) and cognitive and organisation sciences (Borgo, 2005; Sawyer, 2011; Sparti, 2016; Barrett, 1998; Pressing, 1988). The breakdown of instrumental functionality and hierarchy in the current practice is discussed and connected through the examination of cognition-based concepts such as collaborative emergence and contextualised meanings found in conversational interactions. The aim of a motivic composition in providing a fresh challenge for improvisers is compared to the lack of spontaneity that can come from ingrained vocabulary (Sparti, 2016). The importance in exploring all of these actions both as individual and group processes, and the relationship between the two, is established through the literature as being vitally important (Sawyer, 2000). This will be utilised accordingly later in this thesis to create new knowledge on such processes in the performance of motivic compositions.

The theme of ‘freedom versus constraints’ is viewed through similar disciplines as above. There is a clear connection made between the affordance-based framework of improvisation (Hannaford, 2019) based in ecological psychology and the development of instrumental functionality. This alleviation of certain constraints is also explored through cognitive studies and in particular Csikszentmihalyi’s (2014) theory of the flow state. This provides specific characteristics in relation to engagement and complexity that a motivic composition can aim to achieve in order to create an optimal creative experience. Berkowitz’s (2010) work similarly compares “stylistic” and “performance” constraints, which provide us with a further background in cognitive processes to consider in presenting material for improvised performances, such as in the explored example in the current practice with the music of Tim Berne. Nachmanovitch’s (1990) philosophical work on freedom in creativity is also used as a foundational source to elucidate the search of balance between chaos and patterns and is furthered by Peters’ (2009) work on “positive and negative freedom”.

The specific roles and complexities created by the intention of both composers and improvisers is explored through the ethnographic work of both Anderskov (2015) and Rose (2017). Their similar roles as pianists, improvisers and composers and their respective series of interviews with leading researchers and performers presents important questions about where and how we can construct appropriate environments for improvisational performances.

Finally, ‘social context’ is investigated through direct and indirect forms. A framework of performance contexts is created to clarify the former and sociocultural theories (Sawyer, 2012; MacDonald & Wilson, 2006) are examined to review the latter. Research on embodied cognition in improvisational processes (Iyer, 2016; Van Der Schyff, 2019; Schiavio et al, 2019) is summarised, showing the value of self-assessment and the interdependence between the mind, body and social environment. These processes again reiterate the importance placed by Sawyer (2000) on a combined interrogation of individual and group processes and further help the researcher understand the necessary conditions for finding a balance between freedom and constraints that results in an optimal creative experience.

The above exploration of the historical and current practice processes in musical improvisation – relating to non-structured improvisation with motivic compositions – is selective and highly varied. Arguably, this exploration has established more questions than

answers. However, it is hoped that the following investigation and analysis of the practical element of this research will use the questions established to good effect, allowing a much broader sense of where this music has come from – cognitively, philosophically and historically. Some of the specialist literature referred to above goes to greater disciplinary depth than is possible for the more eclectic approach pursued in this thesis. However, their conclusions have contributed by helping to focus attention on remaining lacunae in the analysis of non-structured improvisation with motivic composition. It is clearly out of this researcher's remit to conduct cognitive neuroscientific research on the participants in the practical output attached to this thesis. It would similarly be impractical to attempt to interview each and every one of them on their phenomenological viewpoints of the performances. However, the descriptive and transcriptive analysis, as well as the adapted methodologies used, are exponentially strengthened by the awareness of such work in those fields.

It is hoped that the review has not only been successful in increasing this researcher's awareness, but perhaps also in helping to connect research examining similar practices and processes throughout varying disciplines. Arguably, the most common thread running through all of the literature discussed, is the foregrounding that improvisation is a greatly under-researched topic. Many of the researchers have called for increased attention to improvisation in education, academia and society as a means of understanding the psychological, philosophical and physiological nature of beings. As most practitioners and researchers will agree, this is a lifelong goal, and indeed a social identity, that we will continue to strive for.

3. Research Questions and Methodologies

3.1 Introduction

From the preceding review of the literature and current practice, it has been found that gaps in the knowledge exist in the space between improvisation and composition, particularly with regard to non-structured performances of motivic material. This space is the area within which the practical output of this research exists. Having established these lacunae, and in order to efficiently address this thesis' research questions, improvisational performances of motivic compositions were divided into four categories (figure 5).

The first category – the same motivic composition performed by different ensembles – addresses the research questions of how instrumental line-up shapes the development and group interaction involved in an improvised performance of a motivic composition and how developed the structural elements and complexity of a motivic composition itself can be before it restricts the musicians' freedom to improvise spontaneously. The second category – motivic compositions performed by the same ensemble in a different performance context – attends to the research question of how the social context of a performance affects the development of a motivic composition. The third category – the use of non-musical motifs as vehicles for improvisation, including text and images – addresses the research question of differences in the spontaneity or group interaction in improvised performances when the medium of the motifs are non-musical. The fourth category – non-standard performance of standards, which entails the use of standard jazz repertoire in a non-structured manner – also engages with research questions related to the effects of structural elements and complexity of compositions on improvised performances.

For the former two categories, the researcher used exclusively his own original material, including both simplified versions of existing original compositions and newly composed material. Given the researcher's lack of experience in the creation of text or image-based vehicles for improvisation, the decision was made for the third category to include performances by ensembles led by peers more specialised in these fields. For the fourth category, it was intrinsically necessary to use compositions from the jazz canon, but for each of these performances, the choice of an appropriate piece was made in conjunction with all

ensemble members. It was also agreed that, for the purposes of using jazz standards as vehicles for improvisation in a non-structured manner, it was necessary for all of the performers to know the chosen piece by heart, without needing to use a lead sheet.



Figure 5. Framework of motivic composition performance categories. Source: Author

Performances in some of these categories were easier to document than others. For example, a once-off performance or private rehearsal with a group provided an instant opportunity to document the same motivic composition performed by a different ensemble. However, in order to document the second category, the same ensemble needed to perform the same composition in different performance contexts, such as over series of rehearsals, concerts or recordings. The difficulty in documenting the performance of non-musical motifs as vehicles for improvisation was, as mentioned earlier, related to the fact that they were not created by this researcher. Therefore, there was a greater reliance on the creators of those text or image-based pieces to provide the opportunities to perform them. As the composer of the compositions in the first two categories, once I was present, it became possible to perform those pieces.

While some improvising musicians have spent time training in the idiom of jazz specifically – and have learnt some amount of jazz standards by heart – not all of the performances featured

in the practical submission of this research are familiar enough with such material to use it as catalyst for non-structured improvisation. Furthermore, due to the necessity of each member of an ensemble being able to perform the material without a lead sheet, it was necessary to find a consensus for pieces that all members were familiar with. Given that there are approximately 200-300 pieces that one is expected to know in the performance of standard jazz repertoire (Gioia, 2012), it is not always easy to have all performers find and agree on a piece that they all know.

The research was aided considerably by the researcher's involvement in several pre-existing ensembles dedicated to performing motivic compositions, including ReDiviDeR, Insufficient Funs, Clang Sayne and Blowout Fracture. However, new ensembles were also formed to further explore such approaches with varying instrumental possibilities, including Fireplace Dragon, Fingerpainting and Naked Allies. Rehearsals were scheduled, concerts were organised, and, for some projects, studio sessions were also booked. These performances took place both in Ireland and in various locations around the world including New York (as part of a research trip in 2017), France and Switzerland (as part of collaborative invitations). As often as was possible or appropriate, these performances were audio recorded and on a smaller proportion of occasions, performances were also video recorded. On completion of these performances, both audio and video documentation were edited using Reaper, as this was the digital audio workstation (DAW) that the researcher was most familiar with. Minimal adjustments to audio were made if necessary, mostly in relation to volume levels and EQ. Such adjustments were made solely to allow the listener to hear each instrument clearly and with no intention to make any inherent changes to the sound of the instruments or the room, as these are seen as potential points for analysis. This approach to the documentation ensures the listener has an honest perspective of the improvisational process. The resulting documentation has been uploaded to cloud storage platform Dropbox and now makes up the practice-based submission of this thesis. For efficiency, not all of the recorded material will be included in the analysis portion of the main investigation section of this thesis. The selection of certain recordings over others has taken place based on several factors including their audio quality and an attempt at having a balanced distribution of examples across the categories. The analytical work in the following chapters will attempt to connect the various research explored previously to the practice-based output.

3.2 Research Questions

To aid and focus my research, I have formulated the following research questions as integral parts of this project. They are borne out of the interstices between constraints and freedom in which this music exists and are explored both directly in the compositions written for this project and in the analysis and investigation of the performances of those compositions.

- How developed can the structural elements and complexity of a motivic composition be before it restricts the musicians' freedom to improvise spontaneously?
- How does the instrumental line-up shape the development and group interaction involved in an improvised performance of a motivic composition?
- How does the social context of a performance affect the development of a motivic composition? For example, private rehearsals, recording studios or live public performances.
- Are there differences in the spontaneity or group interaction in improvised performances when the medium of the motifs are non-musical? For example, image-based or text-based motifs.

3.3 Research Focus and Compositional Methodologies

Having been so drawn to this music at an early age, I have spent much of my musical career composing and performing in groups where finding a balanced approach to non-structured improvisational performances of motivic compositions was one of the main objectives. These compositions have worked to varying levels of success. From September 2013 to June 2014, I was a Fulbright Scholar in New York, 'exploring the area between composition and improvisation'. This research was conducted largely practically, as I composed new material and performed with many different musicians in both informal private rehearsals and public performances. One important lesson that I learned from this period was that over-complicating the structure of the material I was writing would lead to a lot of wasted time in rehearsal or performance settings. Even musicians who were at a very high level technically – with regard to their reading skills and as improvisers – would need more time to become familiar with the form of the material the more involved or complex it was. Examples of this could be how many times a certain section was to be repeated or how a subsequent section was to be cued. This

extra time spent explaining such a form would detract from the time spent developing the material in an improvisatory manner. This is reflective of the cognitive work explored previously that found that genre-specific improvising allows musicians to perform with higher levels of automaticity and thus concentrate on higher-level processes such as feel and communication (Berkowitz, 2010).

As a way of combatting this problem, and reworking Berkowitz's (2010) assertion that "stylistic constraints thus alleviate performance constraints", I began writing material with only one section – literally removing structural "performance constraints". This one section might have several parts that can occur simultaneously or be played independently. Also, key to the idea, is that each part can be played by any musician on their instrument. This allows full spontaneity in that any performer can introduce any part at any time. Also, with all the musicians being familiar with each part, they can react more quickly to a particular musician introducing or even paraphrasing the written material. This is representative of the downtown New York music scene discussed earlier and can be seen as a development of achievements by artists such as Miles Davis, Eric Dolphy and the AACM in breaking down traditionally accepted instrumental functionality in the 1960s (Waters, 2011; Simosko & Tepperman, 1996; DeVeaux, 1991).

There is always a large element of risk involved when improvising, and when it is in the context of a specific motif there is a possibility that performers will relate to the material differently. This can cause varying degrees of tension and conflict in the music, be that melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, sonic, dynamic or otherwise. The development and possible resolution of this tension, however, is one of the aspects of this music that makes it so unique.

Such musical situations are comparable to regular, everyday-life conversations. Imagine a situation where everybody involved in a conversation is in complete agreement. If everybody has the exact same point of view, stated in the same way, then the likely result is that this conversation will be unrewarding. Another possibility is that people have similar points of view but are approaching them from different angles. This could be represented musically by performers improvising with the same diatonic key centres and/or rhythmic pulses but with varying levels of note density or dynamics. A third possibility is that people have extreme, clashing views on the topic being discussed. This might occur in a performance setting with harmonic or melodic dissonance or with jarringly different tempos or rhythmic approaches.

While comparisons between improvisation and conversation have been made previously in the literature (Monson, 2009; Sutton, 2001), a number of the specific correlations drawn here have not been explored and are another aspect of the current practice-led research of improvised performances of motivic compositions.

For the purpose of this research, a motivic composition is one that features little or no compositional development, instead allowing the development to happen improvisationally through the actions of the performers. The intention is also to present musicians with material that will provide them with a stimulus to help them overcome familiar playing behaviours. This is similar to Braxton's 1960s exploration of multi-instrumentalism, where he and his fellow musicians used instruments that they had not mastered in order to distract them from their normal routines (Feisst, 2016).

The composition might have several parts or voices that can be performed simultaneously but will generally not have more than one or two sections. This is to allow the performers to improvise the form or structure of the piece, using the motivic composition to any degree they see fit. The composition is thus provided with the flexibility to adapt to any scenario, both with regard to the performance context itself (whether a private rehearsal, live performance in front of an audience or studio recording) and the instrumental line-up. As Swedish keyboardist, improviser and composer Sten Sendell states in Jacob Anderskov's (2015) series of interviews on *Habitable Exomusic*:

Free improvised music is the only form of music where I can completely change my way of playing depending on the character of the room or the space. The room becomes a co-player that I can either go along with or resist. In my project I investigate different ways to explore and clarify how changes of direction in free improvisation can be performed and how the spatial conditions and other conditions affect the way the music is played.

Although Sendell is referring specifically to “free improvised music” or non-structured improvisations without material, I am attempting to investigate very similar conditions with non-structured improvisations with motivic compositions.

3.4 Analytical Methodologies – Schenkerian Analysis in Jazz and Modern Music

Schenkerian analysis⁸ is one of the most widely used methods for analysing Western tonal music. Over the past 50 years, there has been a certain amount of debate around whether these methods are applicable to post-tonal music or indeed jazz, with varying conclusions. I will discuss some of the arguments here, placing them in the context of my own research and performance output, in which compositions vary between being modal, nebulous with regard to a tonal centre or completely atonal.

Key contributors to these arguments on the applicability of Schenker's theories to modern music include pioneer of jazz theory Steve Larson - whose own PhD dissertation *Analyzing Jazz: A Schenkerian Approach* was published in 2007 by Pendragon Press as a full volume - as well as music theorists James Marshall Baker and Mark McFarland. Their work, to differing degrees, has attempted to establish adaptations to Schenkerian analysis in a way that allows them to analyse music that contains harmonic progressions not found in the work that Schenker had analysed himself.

Although Schenker's method of analysis is stylistically very specific, and he himself essentially only used it to analyse works by German composers from the 18th and 19th centuries – JS Bach, Handel and Mendelssohn for example – he believed that as it was based on the basic harmonic series of I – V – I, it could be used universally. It thus follows that modern music that is similarly harmonically grounded can also be analysed with the same approach. This is undoubtedly the reason that some of the most widely-cited Schenkerian analyses of modern music have included The Beatles' *She Loves You* (Everett, 1992), Jimi Hendrix' *Little Wing* (Brown, 1997) and Gershwin's *I Loves You Porgy* (Gilbert, 1995) – all of which generally fit into a dominant-tonic harmonic structure. Gilbert (1984) himself stated: "Since Gershwin wrote basically tonal music, it is reasonable that we adopt a modified Schenkerian approach."

⁸ During the latter stages of conducting this research, major controversy has broken out about Heinrich Schenker, the 19th-century music theorist. A recent publication has directly connected his political associations with his influential analytical approach to music (Ewell, 2020). The following adaptation of his method of analysis had already been developed and utilised in this thesis before Ewell's publication and, furthermore, is aimed at hybridising Schenker's method in such a manner that would alleviate the "institutionalized racialized structure" at the core of these controversies. As a researcher, composer and improviser, I stand for equality, and hope that the following analytical methodology clearly connects that standpoint with the open and inclusive view of the music composed and performed in this thesis.

When discussing the use of Schenkerian analysis in the context of jazz or improvised music, Larson is a hugely important reference. Much of his academic work is dedicated to this field and his publications are thus an important resource for my own work. In particular, his transcriptions and analysis of several performances by pianist Bill Evans aim to illuminate a lot of the misconceptions that prevail around the general academic belittling of improvisation, in comparison to the heralding of comparable compositional methods. Furthermore, the fact that he uses the very same analytical method (Schenkerian) that was created specifically to study the latter makes his arguments all the stronger. In his thought-provoking 2005 article *Composition versus Improvisation?* Larson states: “I want to explore *why* our way of thinking about improvisation versus composition would lead us to embrace hidden repetitions as a significant artistic feature of composed music and yet be sceptical of the same features in jazz improvisations.”

This quote comes in the context of an analysis of Bill Evans’ solo on Thelonius Monk’s composition *Round Midnight*. Following transcriptions of several performances of this piece by Evans, and through deep analysis, Larson identifies numerous harmonic patterns or shapes that appear in slightly differing executions of ‘prolongations’ in the piece’s middleground. He uses the existence of these recurrences not to extenuate the fact that improvisers play ‘licks’ or use muscle memory habits, but rather to draw parallels between them and the equivalent repetitions seen time and again in composed music. The real-time development of such shapes and patterns through a pre-existing harmonic progression, as in *Round Midnight*, documented over several performances demonstrates the extremely high level that a master improviser such as Evans must have been working on. This should be, at the very least, comparable to a composer achieving similar results with the advantage of ‘pen and paper’, time and revision.

3.5 Basic Description of Analytical Method

While not wishing to go too deep here into the working of Schenker’s ground-breaking analysis method – due to its general distance stylistically from my own research – it is perhaps more pertinent to explain only the structural mechanisms within it that I believe can be translated to fit analyses of motivic compositions. These motivic compositions, at the centre of my research, are pieces that are based on a small amount of material – musical or otherwise (image or text-

based for example), tonal or atonal – with no predefined structure, which are intended to be developed improvisationally as opposed to compositionally.

As described by Preda Ulita (2011) in his article ‘Basic concepts and principles in modern musical analysis: A Schenkerian approach’, Schenker breaks down his analyses into several layers or levels (*Schicht*). The fundamental structure (*Ursatz*) is the most basic harmonic movement that an entire piece is based on – the movement of I-V-I for example. This fundamental structure is then broken down into three main levels – the background (*hintergrund*), middleground (*mittelgrund*) and the foreground (*vordergrund*). Again, the following explanations are not intended as exhaustive, but merely the starting point from which adaptations can be made in the very different musical context.

The background is essentially the fundamental harmonic structure at the core of the piece, the movement from the tonic to the dominant and back to the tonic. For Schenker, this is the basic concept of a piece that the rest of the material is developed from.

The middleground is where the basic harmonic principle is developed with the use of ‘prolongations’ or elaborations such as arpeggios or auxiliary and passing notes. This middleground can be split into several layers depending on the level of complexity the analysis reveals.

The foreground is the surface layer of the music. This is what is happening in any moment or bar of the piece, as it is heard in performance, or as it is written in the score. Schenker saw his analysis method as being a generative model, that is that one should think of a piece as developing from its most basic idea (background) and developed through various permutations (middleground) into its final form (foreground). However, in the act of applying this analytical method, one is most likely to treat it in reductive form, by starting with the final product, establishing how it is developed and breaking it down further to get to its most basic structure.

3.6 Adaptation of Schenkerian Analysis for Motivic Compositions

Schenker’s (2001/1935) motto, from the beginning of his best-known work *Free Composition*: ‘always the same but not in the same way’, is key to understanding the importance of his

analytical method. He is suggesting that although the same basic musical principles are at play in the greatest of works, it is how they are developed that differs, making them unique and at times brilliant in their own right. It is my design to use the crux of this motto in the analysis of the motivic compositions composed and performed as part of my research.

In order to analyse the documentation of these performances of my own motivic compositions, I have created a substantially adapted version of Schenker's approach. I have maintained his use of foreground, middleground and background but shifted their definitions to fit the musical paradigm that I am analysing. Given that the objective of Schenker's method was to analyse tonal music, and many of the motifs used as source material in my own research are either atonal or even conceptual, the first point that I need to establish is: what exactly am I trying to analyse?

The answer to this question leads me to the quintessence of why Schenker's fundamental breakdown of a piece is so applicable in the motivic composition context. His generative analytical model runs concurrently to the musical model used for my practice. My ambition, as explained in further detail elsewhere in this thesis, is to reduce the compositional element of a piece into its most basic form. Thereafter, rather than develop or elaborate on the piece compositionally, my hypothesis involves allowing those elaborations to be achieved spontaneously by the improvising performers. This allows the performer to adapt to different performance situations, for the composition itself to adapt to varying orchestration or instrumental line-ups, and also for the piece to develop over time through numerous iterations. These real-time, improvised elaborations are essentially Schenker's 'middleground', while the composition material itself is the 'background'. The 'foreground' is then, similar to Schenker's analysis, the surface level of the piece at any point.

To further define these analytical categorisations, the background of any motivic composition can be broken down into key musical elements. These might be a combination of rhythmic, melodic, harmonic or timbral attributes and any development, elongation or shortening of these can then be further analysed to provide insight into a middleground section. For example, if a group were to play material exactly as presented in a motivic compositions, they would remain in a background section. If a group were to never explicitly play the material as presented, but instead reacted to the material with related rhythmic, melodic or harmonic improvisations, then a performance could feature purely middleground material. The degree to which the

background material departs from its original design will be referred to as its level of elaboration, which will be expanded on later. If a group were to completely ignore the written material (as is generally suggested as an option by this researcher in such performance contexts) then the performance would feature no background or middleground material and could thus be analysed as explicitly foreground material.

Such use of Schenker's structures also aligns with the concepts of both Nettl's PoDs and Jost's motivic chain-association, discussed previously in the literature review, as well as the melodic variations or *gushehs* found in Persian music and the *tāla* and *rāga* found in Indian Classical music. Adapting the background, middleground and foreground could equally be applied to the analysis of any of these situations, regardless of social or cultural context.

It thus follows that, if Schenkerian analysis aspires to deconstruct an entire piece of music analytically to its most basic structure, then contemporaneously my motivic compositions aim to start at that deconstructed form and build the piece up from that point. Of course, just as there is a base level of theoretical understanding and knowledge needed to use Schenker's analytical methods, there is a similar presumption that the musicians performing these motivic compositions have the requisite skills to interpret the material provided to them, sometimes only minutes before, and develop them in an interactive and spontaneous way.

With this use of Schenker's background, middleground and foreground structure, one has the ability to make qualitative comparisons of documented performances of motivic compositions. These might be in relation to the degree of development of an improvised passage to the written material, the interactivity between the musicians in the context of the composition or the spontaneity at which the improvisation arrives or departs from written material. Utilising Schenker's basic structure for this purpose is an extremely helpful tool to add to the descriptive analyses I have undertaken of these performances.

Whereas each composition will have its own unique background, the middleground will differ to varying degrees and ultimately lead to different foregrounds. This highlights the core element intended by this method of composing / improvising: that each performance, even with the exact same fundamental source and at times performed by the exact same musicians can lead to extensively different results.

3.7 Example of adapted Schenkerian analysis of motivic composition

The following is an example of the use of my adaptation of Schenkerian theory to enhance the analysis of an improvised performance of a motivic composition. The composition itself, entitled ‘I’m Benter’ in an anagrammatic nod to saxophonist and composer Tim Berne, is a ten-bar motivic composition written in three interlocking parts. The documented performance – recorded in the Vintage Room at the Workman’s Club in Dublin on the 29th April 2018 – was performed by ReDiviDeR, a quartet featuring Nick Roth on alto saxophone, Colm O’Hara on trombone, Derek Whyte on fretless electric bass and myself on drumkit. The performers were each given a score with all parts and were encouraged to learn each part by heart – in order to give them full flexibility in choosing to play the material or not, to recognise when other musicians were playing parts of the material and so that that they can fully interact with and develop these parts without also having to worry about the notes on the page. The piece had also been rehearsed on two occasions previous to the documented concert. No specific form was suggested either during the rehearsals or before the concert. As this particular performance was the first piece of a set, there was a count in, insinuating that the performers would start with the material.

concert

i'm benter

Matthew Jacobson

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'i'm benter' by Matthew Jacobson. The score is written for three staves: Treble, Bass, and a lower Bass staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 1-4) features a melodic line in the Treble staff, a bass line in the middle Bass staff, and a rhythmic accompaniment in the lower Bass staff. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the melodic and bass lines, with a change in time signature to 2/4 at the end of measure 8. The third system (measures 9-12) concludes the piece with a final cadence in 2/4 time. The notation includes various note values, rests, and accidentals.

Figure 6. Motivic Composition 'I'm Benter'. Source: Author

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/w2dj3aguuxaac8/Im-Benter_ReDiviDeR_Workmans_290418.mp3?dl=0

The first four bars of the composition (figure 6) contain a call and response motif between the bottom and top voices. This is of both a rhythmic and melodic nature, with the bottom voice starting with two eighth-notes of Db and Eb and the top voice answering with two eighth-notes, reversed to Eb and Db. Meanwhile, the middle voice alternates between harmonising the lines above and below and also occasionally adding its own counterpart. From the '3 and' in bar 5, all three parts play in rhythmic unison with a subdivision of groups of three eighth-notes. The bottom voice plays a repeated tritone of Eb to A, the middle voice another tritone a major third up of G to Db, with the top voice up a ninth from the bottom voice with its own tritone of F to B. The collective texture of these repeated tritone intervals stacked in major thirds and ninths, the dotted-quarter-note subdivision and the written crescendo expression marking in the score invoke a strong sense of tension. This continues to build over the bar lines until, with the help of a bar of 2/4, the rhythmic figure resolves after one quarter-note in bar 8.

In the final two bars of the composition the bottom voice outlines an ascending augmented triad before descending to an F that maintains the colour of the major third as it resolves back to the first note of the piece, Db. The top voice also features the major third colour in these final two bars with an initial offbeat eighth-note run of Gb, Ab, Bb. The following note, E then descends a major third to the final bar of B, Bb, G, F. In the penultimate bar the middle voice harmonises the bottom voice with ninths before harmonising the top voice in the final bar of the piece with a ninth on the first beat followed by major thirds in the remaining three beats.

In order to relate this to Schenkerian analysis, I shall first establish the background, or the fundamental structure, of the piece. As the motivic composition does not follow functional harmony, I will look for other defining factors that create the core essence of the piece. As described above, there are a small number of ideas that have been established in the piece. Rhythmically, offbeat eighth-notes are prevalent, as well as the dotted quarter-note theme in bars 5 to 8. Melodically, the idea of the tritone interval is pervasive and harmonically the major third and ninth sound is also heard several times.

The other part of the background that I would like to expand on is the approach of the drums. This is often overlooked in such situations, but actually has a profound effect on the overall sound of the piece. This can be with regard to the nature of the orchestration around the drum kit, for example whether the drummer plays more on the cymbals or more around the shells of the kit. Cited examples of such investigations include Richard Savery's (2014) article on the

work of composer and improviser Henry Threadgill. He describes how Threadgill's 1980s group Sextett consisted of two drummers, each with a drum kit tuned to specific pitches. One was tuned in fourths with the same pitches as the double bass and the other was tuned in fifths with the same pitches as the cello. Savery (2014) asserts:

Threadgill's method of tuning for the drumkits creates a much larger musical palette, possibly due in part to the sympathetic vibrations. Sonically this system creates a larger drum sound as each kit has a self contained sound that works as part of the greater musical atmosphere. It also allows the drums to be used in different musical ways.

While agreeing that the tuning of drums creates a certain sonic world, I would also suggest that even without specific drum kit tuning, a drummer's approach to orchestration has a great impact on the musical atmosphere. Also, it is important to take into consideration that a lot of what the drummers in Threadgill's group were playing was notated, allowing him to decide exactly when those tuned drum pitches would be heard. In a setting where the drummer's role is far more improvised and spontaneous it can be a safer choice to have the drums tuned ambiguously. For example, in the case of key Brooklyn-based improvising drummer Tom Rainey, mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, the drums are tuned particularly low to allow him play in a very dense and active manner without taking up higher sonic frequencies that would clash with the other instruments.

In this ReDiviDeR performance of 'I'm Benter', I chose to take Rainey's low-tuned drum approach and utilise this to play very interactively with the material. As heard in the audio, the drums are very dynamic and take on a multi-functioned approach of emphasising the motivic composition rhythmically but also providing a strong sense of momentum with frequent rolls across the toms and snare drum. Over bars 5 to 8, the drums cease filling in between the notes and instead focus on the dotted quarter-notes in rhythmic unison with the rest of the ensemble. Therefore, in Schenkerian terms, the background layer must also feature this rolling, energetic approach from the drums.

An example of the middleground from this performance is heard at 02:26. The saxophone begins a phrase with the opening bottom voice eighth-notes Db and Eb and continues on to the written melody notes in bar 2 of the top voice, except altering the rhythm so that it mimics the

offbeat eighth-notes. It is also now prolonged and, following the A to F and the A to Eb from the original melody, the background idea of the tritone is added with a G to Db (figure 7).



Figure 7. 'I'm Benter' – saxophone solo middleground. Source: Author

Another example of this occurs at 03:37, when, in the midst of a long passage of more abstract soloing from the alto, the performer returns to the opening bassline phrase of Db to Eb. This is a clear indication of a return towards the composition and indeed less than ten seconds later, also returns to the tritone theme from the melody with a repeated G to Db over two octaves. The bass and drums are quick to pick up on this with the former echoing the G to Db phrase and the latter returning to tempo by setting up the opening rhythmic phrase of the bassline with an eighth-note fill on the snare drum. The drums continue to play through the entire nine bar form of the bassline and as if arranged, the alto and bass both hit bar one of the bassline together.

This is a fine exemplar of how in such an improvised context, the middleground can be used to bridge the gap between foreground and background. On first listening, it appears that the performers are playing with a high degree of freedom. There is no pulse and harmonically it is very abstract. However, after just two notes from the alto, and the use of one interval, the performers all come together for a huge release of tension. It can be suggested that this is due to the motivic nature of the material. For example, if the motivic composition itself was much more developed, then it is probable that the playing of one interval would not elicit such a response from the other band members. Due to the stripped back focus on that interval in the composition itself, and its presence in the background of the piece, its reoccurrence at any point is guaranteed to gain their attention.

3.8 Levels of Elaboration

Among the innovations in this thesis is the idea of developing different methods of analysis of improvisation. Various researchers on the topic have found methods that measure the requirements, characteristics and physicality of improvisation. However, these do not address

the needs of the central idea of this thesis, that the improvisation taking place is a spontaneous development or elaboration of the written material.

As discussed in the literature review, Biasutti and Frezza (2009), in their article on "Dimensions of Music Improvisation", take a quantitative approach in a cognitive study of musicians' ability to improvise based on instrumental ability and experience. Azzara and Snell (2016) in their work on "Assessment of Improvisation in Music" list a wide variety of characteristics of improvisation that can be used to determine the excellence or otherwise of the improvisation (to "rate" it, in other words), primarily for educational assessment purposes. This includes musicians' ability to improvise (for example, "demonstrates an understanding of tension and release through resolution of notes in the context of the harmonic progression"); rhythmic ability; expressive ability; harmonic progression ability; as well as ability within a group, for example to interact with other musicians. While there may be scales in relation to each of these, the musician who performs adequately in relation to each of these characteristics of improvisation would in some sense "pass" the test and qualify as an improviser. At a much more statistically sophisticated level there is the work of Walton et al (2015) who undertake the measurement of the "ability of musicians to improvise". Ultimately, their main focus is on the physical movement of musicians as they "spontaneously coordinate their actions with co-performers in order to produce novel musical expressions".

Rather than any of the above ways of assessing or measuring improvisation, what is undertaken in this thesis is a single measure of the improvisation actually performed by the musicians. The concept "elaboration" is defined and used to measure the extent of the improvisation in each performance analysed. Broadly speaking, elaboration refers to the improvised development of what has been provided in written form by the composer. In order to quantify elaboration as a unit of measurement, a motivic composition's background must first be analysed in terms of its key characteristics or attributes. It is the amount of development of these elements that is then reflected in the level of elaboration. For example, a melodic phrase could be seen as being slightly elaborated through a performance with the same intervallic structure but using a different starting note, moderately elaborated on with the use of some of the intervallic structure but some varied notes or highly elaborated on with the use of a similar contour but little or no intervallic similarities. This can be similarly applied to rhythmic devices that are altered to varying degrees and then reflected by levels of elaboration.

In addition to the described hybridisation of Schenkerian analysis, a method of graphic representation of such analysis has been developed. These graphs allow the researcher to plot the levels of elaboration of any given performance of a motivic composition through background, middleground and foreground sections.

For these charts, a subjective scale with notional numbers 0 – 10 is used, where 0 would suggest all the performers playing exactly what is written and 10 suggesting the performers all playing something unrecognisable from the written material. The duration of the performances is also divided into ten equal sections, with the average level of elaboration for each of those section marked on this subjective scale. Musical elements used to determine the level of elaboration at any moment include pulse, rhythmic devices, intervallic cells and timbral approach of each instrument. These elements are taken into consideration both from the band as a whole and the individual members. For example, if half of the performers were to explicitly state the motivic composition and at the same time the other half were to play fully elaborated from it, that section of the performance would be given the notional rating of 5.

In relation to the adapted version of Schenkerian analysis discussed earlier, a background section could result in a notional value of 0 – 2, a middleground section a value of 3 – 5 and a foreground section anywhere between 6 – 10 depending on how far from the composition all members of the group are performing in any section.

The notional values for these scales are input into an Excel spreadsheet, before being visualised on a 2-D line graph, with the level of elaboration on the vertical axis and the entire duration of the performance on the horizontal axis. The resulting graph provides a visual representation of the freedom and constraints presented to an improvising group by a particular motivic composition in a specific performance. For example, a low level of elaboration might suggest that there were too many constraints to allow any departure from the written material, while a very high level of elaboration might suggest that either there was not enough stimulation from the material to actively engage with it, or that the constraints were so high that the musicians abandoned it completely. These graphs can also be particularly illuminative in providing a graphic structure of a performance, given the inherently non-structured nature of these compositions and the intentional avoidance of a predetermined improvisational form.

Below is an example of a graph (figure 8) showing the correlation between the level of elaboration and the performance duration for the performance of 'I'm Benter' by ReDiviDeR, analysed above.

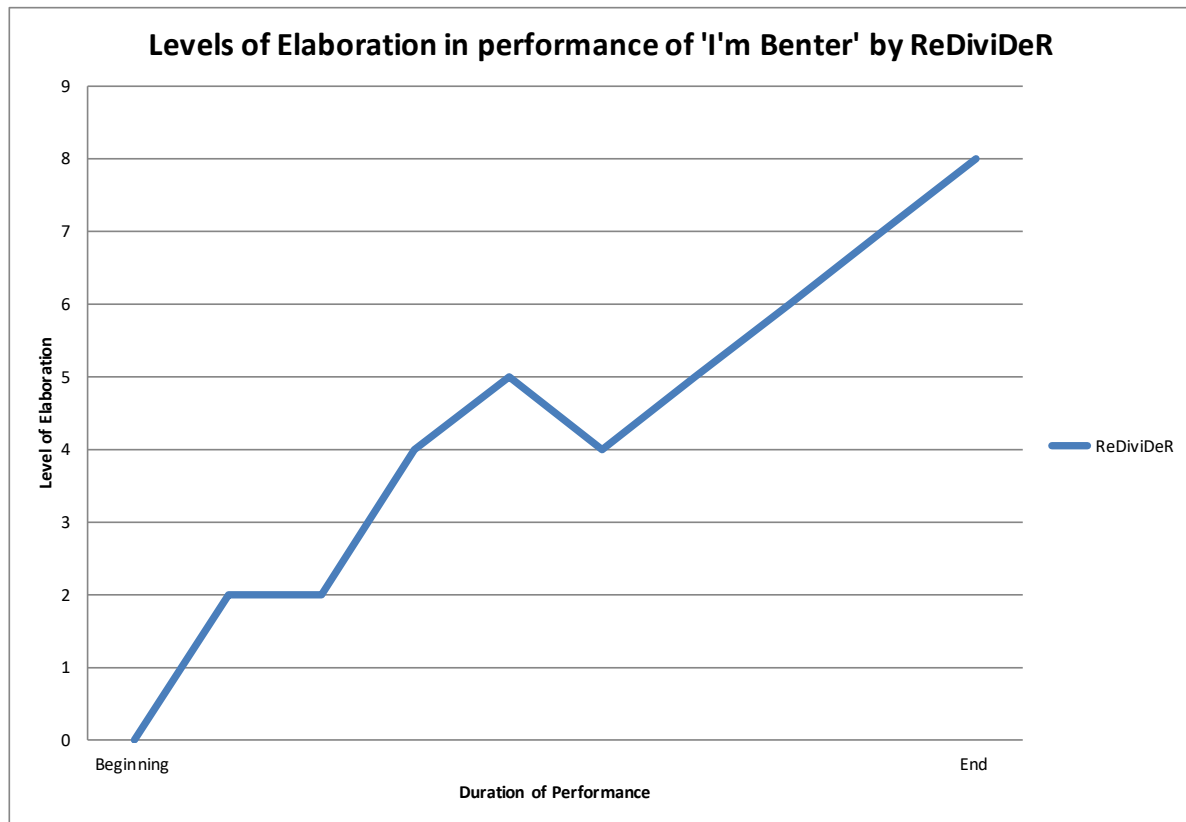


Figure 8. 'I'm Benter' – Level of Elaboration Graph. Source: Author

By using values from multiple performances of the same compositions, we can also display graphic comparisons of the improvised structures therein. This is useful to the analysis of documentation in the context of different performance conditions. In addition, by taking an average level of elaboration – by adding the notional values and dividing by 10 (the amount of durational sections it is divided by) – we can compare and contrast different categories, compositions and contexts for performances of motivic compositions based one figure. For example, based on graph above, the average level of elaboration in this performance of 'I'm Benter' by ReDiviDeR is 4.3.

3.9 Interview Methodology

Following the completion of the creation and documentation of the practical element of my research, I conducted interviews with participants who feature on recordings submitted as part

of my portfolio. The participants were recruited based on their expertise in the area between composition and improvisation and, more specifically, the improvisational development of motivic compositional material. The key objective in conducting these interviews was to provide a broader perspective and added subjectivity on the processes and actions involved, particularly important given the dearth of published knowledge related to non-structured performances of motivic compositions exposed in this thesis' literature review.

As discussed earlier, it is hypothesised that the successes of improvisational performances of motivic compositions lie in the artists' propensity for sincere communication, clear expression and open-mindedness. This is something that is acknowledged and mimicked within the design structure of the interviews. The pre-existing interpersonal connections are a factor for consideration whilst exploring the research questions, but they are not at the forefront of the investigation.

Perhaps some artists prefer to express themselves primarily through their chosen medium, in this case sound, but the proponents in this specific field of musical output also lean towards a partiality for lengthy verbal discussions on the how, why and when of their artistry. However, it is probable that the interpersonal relationships enriched the quality of interactions with the interview participants and as such, are acknowledged but not explored in depth. While there is some history of research on the topic of musicians as verbal communicators, particularly during performance (Seddon, 2005), there are few examples specific to improvisational development and clarity of expression. For example, Rockell and Ocampo (2014) conducted a survey on English as foreign language teachers in Japan and the incidental transference of musical skills into language teaching environment. While they unsurprisingly found corroboration of links between basic musical concepts such as rhythm, harmony, melody and structure, and linguistic constructs such as grammar, intonation and the accenting of certain syllables, there is still very much a suite of unanswered questions in relation to musical and linguistic expression comparisons. Whilst a noteworthy subject in itself, this is not the primary aim of the conducting of the semi-structured interviews.

My choice of participants was necessarily selective. I chose musicians that, from personal experience, I knew would be happy to discourse about the subject matter. Once again, this corresponds with my choice of artists to perform these compositions and aligns with the

emphasis placed on the collection of context-dependent knowledge for such case study research (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

In preparing interview questions, I used a semi-structured approach. The aim was to have a series of topics based around my research questions, guiding the participants but also giving them the freedom to expound their own viewpoints and if necessary, discuss other issues pertinent to them. The expectation was that each interview would inspire free flowing conversation, as is suggested best practice (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Choak, 2012). There are strong parallels here with the motivic compositions at the core of my research output. The interview topics could be seen as mirroring the musical motifs present in the compositions, both created with the aim of giving the participant or performer the liberty to react based on the subjective realities of their own experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Each interview was then transcribed and keywords such as ‘creativity’, ‘spontaneity’, ‘interaction’, ‘improvisation’ and ‘composition’ were searched to find the most relevant insights and explications of the research questions. The space between composition and improvisation has been scarcely explored in the literature. The semi-structured interviews with experts in the field enabled a deeper understanding of the area and guided the analytical framework.

As Bent Flyvbjerg asserts in his 2006 *Qualitative Inquiry* article ‘Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research’:

Context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity. Such knowledge and expertise also lie at the center of the case study as a research and teaching method or to put it more generally still, as a method of learning. Phenomenological studies of the learning process therefore emphasize the importance of this and similar methods.

His strong argument for case study research, coming from the Kuhnian insight established in the 1960s, are highly applicable to my interviews. Kuhn (1962) champions the approach of case study research in the sense that knowledge is not always built in an accumulating linear manner. A wider more holistic collection of data is often necessary for the inclusion of wider viewpoints on a subject matter in order to create knowledge. The qualitative methods used in analysing my interviews with expert peers in the field of improvisation and composition are

essential to understanding a topic so fluid and abstract. To attempt to use quantitative data only to describe and expound on these discussions would fight the grain of the amorphous states of the subject matter. Context dependant studies that are rooted in the idea of subjectivity acknowledge that anomalies exist and do not seek to eradicate them from results (Kuhn, 1962), further highlighting that using interviewees and their point of view is valid – even if contradictions arise.

Dr Daniel Rorke Interview – 20th September 2019

My interview with saxophonist and composer Daniel Rorke was insightful for several reasons. We had recently released an album together on Los Angeles-based Orenda Records, consisting of five compositions of Rorke's and two of my own, and also featuring Simon Jermyn on bass and Oscar Noriega on alto sax and bass clarinet. All of these tracks feature passages of non-structured improvisations, often as departures from motivic material, or occasionally as intros or outros to tracks, thus bearing considerable significance to my research. It also meant that we had a shared experience as a framework with which we could discuss Rorke's approaches to both the compositional and improvisational aspects of the music and added insight into the research question of the effect of social context on improvised performances of motivic compositions.

The presence of Noriega in this project is also illuminating. He is a highly regarded member of the downtown New York improvised music scene that has so keenly influenced both Rorke and me. Noriega has featured in several recent albums of Tim Berne's, including three albums with his group 'Snakeoil', released by renowned German record label ECM. He co-leads Endangered Blood, another local New York band that have left an indelible mark on the city's creative music scene and has also performed and recorded with MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant recipient Anthony Braxton.

Another key reason for interviewing Rorke was his own research into the space between composition and improvisation. He completed a PhD at the University of New England, Australia in 2012 with a thesis on Nordic Music that represents "the proclivity for jazz to intersect with musical material from many cultures and related identities" (Rorke, 2012). As Rorke's dissertation contains some crossover with my own research themes, it allowed me to discuss my research questions at length with an expert in a related field. However, his work is

targeted from a socio-cultural background, as opposed to the practice-led nature of the current research.

Dr Simon Jermyn Interview – 27th September 2019

My interview with electric bassist, guitarist and composer Dr Simon Jermyn was similarly instructive. I have a long-standing musical relationship with Jermyn, having performed in groups together since 2006. His move to New York in 2010 to immerse himself in the city's downtown creative music scene, a community at the heart of my research, has also benefitted my own artistic development. During my research period as a Fulbright scholar from 2013 to 2014 in New York with host institution the School for Improvisational Music (SIM), I had the opportunity to play with many of the artists that inspired me to go there in the first place, often due to the relationships Jermyn had already forged with them. The main output of this period of research, 'exploring the area between composition and improvisation', was a trio performance and recording with Jermyn and director/founder of SIM, trumpeter Ralph Alessi. Other collaborations featuring Jermyn that are included in the portfolio of this thesis are Irish quartet Roamer – with vocalist Lauren Kinsella and saxophonist Matthew Halpin – and Berlin-based trio Fireplace Dragon – with guitarist Keisuke Matsuno.

As with Rorke, another incentive to include Jermyn as an interview participant was his completion of a practice-led PhD in a related field to my own thesis – also at Ulster University and with a similar supervisory team – concentrating on the developing role of 6-string electric bass in an improvised context. His 2015 submission of 'The 6-string electric bass: approaches to the development of stylistic flexibility in a range of roles in improvisation environments' and the accompanying audio and video documentation include much music featuring improvisational, non-prescribed development of written material. However, Jermyn's focus in his thesis is specifically on the role of the instrument in such environments, rather than the role of motivic compositions as in my own research. Due to his own use of motivic compositions – both as a composer and performer – and his multi-instrumental career on both bass and guitar – Jermyn adds important observations connected to my research questions on the complexity of material used, as well as how instrumental line-ups shape the development of performances.

Patricia Brennan Interview – 9th October 2019

My third interview participant was Patricia Brennan, nee Franceschy. Brennan is a vibraphonist, marimbist and composer from Mexico but based in New York for many years. We initially met in Brooklyn in 2007, while taking part in Ralph Alessi's SIM Summer Intensive workshop. On my later Fulbright sabbatical in the city, we formed FarJam, a trio with German guitarist Keisuke Matsuno, whom I had earlier met studying for my Master of Music Performance Degree at Lucerne University. The combination of her training as a classical musician and experience working in orchestral settings, alongside her deep interest and skills in improvisational contexts, have seen Brennan carve a niche in the New York creative music scene, featuring in several award-winning large ensembles. These include Michael Formanek's Ensemble Kolossus, Vijay Iyer's Large Ensemble project Open City and Grammy-nominated John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble.

The inclusion of Brennan as a participant, apart from personal connections, was also to obtain the perspective of an artist not from a pure jazz background. Given the many conflicts in the improvisation versus composition debate, it would make sense to access the knowledge and expertise of someone with an initial music education concentrating on the latter, in order to give a well-rounded and global perspective. The relatively small number of classically-trained musicians as comfortable in an improvisatory environment meant that I was lucky to have the opportunity to gain Brennan's unique viewpoint.

Izumi Kimura Interview – 15th May 2020

In a similar vein to Brennan, Japanese-born Irish-resident pianist Izumi Kimura is a classically-trained improvising musician. While performing the works of leading composers including Gerald Barry, Greg Caffrey, Mamoru Fujieda and Takashi Yoshimatsu and appearing alongside orchestral and chamber groups such as the RTE Concert Orchestra and the Crash Ensemble, Kimura has also developed a strong reputation for her improvisational abilities. The first line of her own website biography states that "As a contemporary pianist, I am attracted to the things that live in the cracks between composed and improvised music." These cracks themselves are at the essence of my own explorations in this thesis, thus providing me with yet another perfectly placed participant with regard to context, experience and practise.

Kimura features on recordings in my audio submission with Fingerpainting, a trio with bassist Ronan Guilfoyle in which Kimura herself also provided fingerpainted artwork as vehicles for improvisation. This provides added insight and subjectivity into this thesis' research question of how spontaneity and group interaction are impacted when the medium of motivic compositions are non-musical.

Whilst acknowledged, no efforts were made to explore the roles of gender, age or socio-economic background in this study. The foundation for the recruitment of participants was pre-existing interpersonal relationships that facilitated the ease of conversation, allowing for deep and open communication and discussion of the research questions.

3.10 Interview Excerpts by Research Theme

The following excerpts from interviews with the four participants are divided by the research themes of group interaction, freedom versus constraints and social context. They are used here to provide subjective and qualitative views of the themes from experts in the field, to draw connections to the literature and will also be utilised later to inform analyses of performances.

Group Interaction

Under the theme of group interaction, the four interviewees shared their thoughts and experiences of group improvisation in an interactive setting. There are parallels in their use of broader communication skills and emotions as comparative analogies for musical interaction.

Daniel Rorke (DR) from [Appendix 1\(b\)](#):

There's a sort of shared language. It might be a little more divergent in the straight-ahead scene, but basically people know when the drummer plays 'this' you've heard something in that universe before and you know you can go 'there' or 'there'.

Certain aspects of language which I think are applicable to music. You might write some really small thing – say you are writing and you are going to playing with Oscar [Noriega] so you write some little thing, it might not be specifically something that you took from him, but you

have an aspect, your response to his music but then he is playing and he might reference that so there is this little loop that you can identify... And you might be able to trace that back to free music that he has done that you can go into. That's also like how group musical languages in communities develop too.

Patricia Brennan (PB) from [Appendix 1\(c\)](#):

But definitely I think there are certain instincts that if I notice a person is struggling maybe I will jump in and help them or maybe try to steer or go completely away from what's happening and just bringing in completely new material, almost like starting over and see what happens.

I think you know somebody was saying that when the situation gets really awkward just make a complete random noise, then there is something to that in music. Just really do something that is completely unexpected to kind of shift the attention from what's going in that moment.

Simon Jermyn (SJ) from [Appendix 1\(d\)](#):

In my experience, anything beyond four people gets challenging in a way that below four people is not. Generally, because I can only process so much, I start being more or less focussed on subsets of the group. Sometimes that is cool and sometimes less cool. Five can work. Getting into larger things I find it very challenging.

For me especially switching between guitar and bass affects that [improvising with a large ensemble]. In that situation I was paying bass. So me and the drummer could affect a lot of things, in a way that I couldn't have done as a guitar player. Just the role of the instrument. Or the fact that the instrument becomes so connected to another instrument. The drums and you are sort of a rhythm section. If you are moving as a unit you can dictate a lot there.

With three or four people there is a lot of connection. Everybody can hear and can depend on everyone else in a way that is less possible with a large group of people. That is in my experience.

Izumi Kimura (IK) from [Appendix 1\(e\)](#):

Yeah I think honesty is the most important thing in this music. There is no point otherwise. If you are playing this type of music [improvised] then there is no point otherwise. So that's for

sure. That's why it feels like there's always a constantly beginner... like I don't know anything, I'm a complete beginner from this moment!

The idea of instrumental functionality and its development through the work of the AACM and artists such as Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy and Miles Davis (Waters, 2011; Simosko & Tepperman, 1996) discussed earlier is somewhat contradicted here through Jermyn's suggestion that, for him, switching between bass or guitar affects how he improvises. While a motivic composition aims to remove those instrumental hierarchies, instrumental groupings such as drums and bass may allow one to "move as a unit" (Jermyn). The open-ended nature of the performances documented in this thesis does, however, mean that certain constraints around *how* such a unit interacts are removed. For example, traditionally the bass and drum unit would provide a time-keeping role, but Jermyn does proceed to say that "sometimes I want a drummer to play super clear time and I won't".

The importance of assessing creativity as part of both individual and group processes (Borgo, 2006; Sawyer, 2000) is mirrored in Rorke's description of being inspired by the work of an artist, writing for them and then playing and improvising with them using that material. This provides what Rorke refers to as a "loop". We are not simply writing and performing based on our own thoughts and experiences but also constantly being inspired by those around us. When a set of performers, individually and as a group, constantly create such "loops" then there can be a development of a "group musical language" (Rorke) within a community.

The analogy of improvisation as a form of conversation is most notable in the work of Monson (2009) and as discussed earlier has been analysed more specifically by Sutton (2001). While Sutton breaks down analysis and comparison of improvisations as conversation under the topics of beginnings, endings, turn-taking and silence, in the above excerpt Brennan makes the analogy in a description of problem-solving. She says that she might "make a completely random noise" if a musical situation gets "awkward" or that she might introduce completely new material if she recognises that another performer is struggling. This both reinforces and further develops such research, as well as placing it in the context of a motivic composition.

Freedom versus Constraints

With regard to freedom versus constraints, the participants all suggest that the purpose of specific limitations is ultimately to provide a sense of freedom. There is also a common thread in these excerpts that the clarity of composer or bandleader intention is particularly important in setting up an atmosphere conducive to creativity.

DR:

The best stuff, all the keepers on that recording [Naked Allies – Rorke, Noriega, Jermyn, Jacobson – Orenda Records 2019] are the moments when the musicians are intersecting with the compositional material in some way... even if you are violating it, that's a way of interacting with it. Bad improvised music doesn't do that... it doesn't have that dialogue basically. It's a dialectic between the composition and the improvisation.

It can be more restrictive but it can be funny – sometimes I think placing more limitations kind of oddly equals more freedom too... But the thing is too if you are a quartet you are listening with four sets of ears, and four minds so you've got the other musicians interpreting the written material in a way and you are hearing that in real time, it's not just you and the composition, it's you and the others negotiating what is that dialectic between composition and improvisation and that's kind of the role of the musicians I would say – to negotiate what are the questions that this composition is asking and how do we respond to those questions.

PB:

And I think the information I am given, if it's a melody or some kind of sub-harmonic content implied on the melodic content that is given, or even just the rhythm that is given or sometimes if it's just a drum beat, all of that is enough information to create some kind of improvisation. And so I actually prefer that kind of structure, where there is a little bit of freedom but a little bit of a suggestion of what you should be playing.

Most of the time you ended up limiting yourself because sometimes it is compatibility. Maybe you are not compatible with that musician no matter how good he is. And in order to make it work you might have to write what you really want to hear from that person

It really depends how you see written material too. I never see it as restriction, I just see it as more information to use for improvising... When I write music for people and if they start doing something with it actually that's kind of what I want, even though I did write something for them. Because that's the way I will treat it. It is more like a suggestion. It's more like that is the vibe I am thinking, and you can take it from there.

The other thing that I think is in a general sense of what I was saying that the more informed you are the more freedom you have when you improvise and the less you need to rely on sort of default tendencies...

SJ:

I think it is better if the composer or bandleader hasn't specified then I will assume that it is all open and generally in my experience that leads to better music-making. So I can really listen.

I think for me the thing is to step back and in general being aware of as many approaches and strategies and tactics as possible. And then if I am as aware as I can be of all those then I think that helps me be more present in the moment with the other musicians.

I have definitely seen improvisers in a group ignore some complex written material and leave that to other musicians and then just play their own beautiful stuff through it or on top of it and that's a way better musical result than hearing them grapple something they are not really that interested in.

IK:

So I think if it is written a lot or it is a really small amount of material, it all depends on what's expected by the person who wrote it. Like if it's expected to go a certain way or expected to have certain results, then it makes it different. Of course it's difficult. The whole thing is different. But if it is open-ended... we would decide to play cup of coffee or play this one page of very tightly knit rhythm, it doesn't make that much difference any more, if that makes sense? So I think it is all about the intention of if it is open-ended or if it is going a certain direction or has to go a certain direction. Where it is going, that's what matters, more than where it is coming from.

But, if you have this thing, which is a composition, whatever, which is really on its own, has its own universe then that is a good thing as a starting point for the improvisation. Because improvisation itself, we don't know what's going to happen. I think that ideally we all trust, and using those materials to create the space that we feel safe because we know what the other person's intention is and we also know that the other person is open to whatever comes out as well.

But ideally you know anything that comes from will get to the same place after all. Because if we start from the written material, I would start by using maybe, say it's a little bit more intellect – the little bit of intellect I have – and it's more logical part of my brain or being, and if I start from painting then it is more sensual or sensory part of my being. Start there but where it's going is all going into the same, like the river going into the sea, going into the same place I think.

Within the theme of freedom versus constraints, and addressing research questions about the complexity of structural elements of motivic compositions and the complexity of musical content itself, the interviewees largely viewed the intention of the composer to be more important than the specifics of the material. Brennan mentions that limitations are useful when there is less “compatibility” between improvisers, although for the research herein, all collaborators have been chosen based on such “compatibility”.

In order to spontaneously develop a motivic composition in the style of “PoDs” (Nettl, 2009), a “referent” (Pressing, 1988) or “motivic chain-association” (Jost, 1994), the participants here all suggest that it is most useful when the material is presented in a way that makes it clear that the performance is open-ended. This can be connected to the research done by Berkowitz (2010), which found that by restricting the genre of improvisation, musicians were able to concentrate on higher level musical processes such as interaction and feel. In an improvised performance of a non-structured motivic composition, the removal of a specific form and a clear intention from the composer that the material is to be treated as a PoD, allow the performers to interact as honestly and openly as possible.

The idea of a genre providing a specific set of musical possibilities that the artists can then freely engage with (Berkowitz, 2010) is echoed in Brennan and Jermyn's comments that “the more informed you are the more freedom you have when you improvise” (Brennan) and “being

aware of as many approaches and strategies and tactics as possible... if I am as aware as I can be of all those then I think that helps me be more present in the moment with the other musicians” (Jermyn).

Social Context

In the following excerpts, the interviewees describe their slightly differing opinions on improvisational approaches in various performance contexts, as well as the importance of shared experiences and developing a group rapport.

DR:

Like a rehearsal is not a performance, and you don't want to perform with that sort of cognitive landscape that you would have during the rehearsal... I think there's sort of a weird uncanny valley with those rehearsals where if you don't rehearse at all you can get a really high creative improvisation concert and if you begin to rehearse a lot you get like a slump where it's a bit like you've problematised some of the relationships between the composition and the improvisation. But then say you go on tour or start playing a lot, you get to a point where you have become familiar enough with everybody's language that there is a kind of fluidity where you are able to then dialogue between the musicians that really at a higher level.

When you have been playing awhile and playing this music awhile you are like 'I've got this' – we'll rehearse the written material and everybody sort of has a trust and confidence and you know each other. But when you are younger you tend to rehearse more. I thought it was more important when I was younger too.

PB:

I think for rehearsing even the improvisation, it's important. Just because I mean even if you know each other well, it is almost like you are practising reacting to those instincts. Even if it's all an improvised gig it's good to get together and play once. To sort of get an instinct, a sense of how people react. Especially when you don't know them. You don't know the musicians. You can kind of get a sense of the musical personality of the person just by playing with them once.

[In answer to what affect the context of a performance has on the result]

It's interesting. I mean I don't know, for me particularly, it doesn't really have an effect. You know like if it's on, it's on! No matter where I am, but I do know what people mean when the audience or that live performance gives you that certain kind of pump, just a little bit.

But again I can say the benefit of a live performance is you do feel a little bit of that excitement, that's true when you perform. And maybe that sort of helps for the improvisation to be even more focussed, but I guess what I am trying to say is the focus should always be there no matter what. Just because it is a rehearsal and you are in somebody's house doesn't mean that the music is less meaningful.

Basically the whole set was based on the photographs that he was presenting, and then every photograph had a little description and that's the book actually, so it's a photograph and has a little kind of text that goes underneath and then you move onto the next photograph. And so I remember the first gig that we had with that project, what we were given were the photographs and the text in advance to sort of get into the vibe of each photograph. And I mean just like in music there is emotional content, that you get from reading a book or from watching a movie or looking at a painting or whatever so that was already common ground to do something.

We all have our own personal perception of music, and our musical context is when you see an idea on the page you kind of approach it based on your own personal experience.

SJ:

If there's a gig happening soon and we have one hour to rehearse then I think that probably the best use of that rehearsal time is to get the written material as strong as possible and save the improvising for the gig. Maybe do some short improvisations to make sure everybody is comfortable if there are solo sections or not even solo sections but that people have a little bit of fluidity with the written material. But if you are going to do a rehearsal and soundcheck and play the gig, I think it is silly to have played the gig in the soundcheck already.

But if it's something that is more of an ongoing situation then I would love to work on everything. I think that the idea that rehearsing is going to kill something is not necessarily true. Even for a band that is going to play completely improvised music, just getting together

and doing that a lot, of course it might lead to ruts or repeating the same kind of stuff, but if you approach it consciously it can also be an opportunity to get into all kinds of terrains that you would never get into on a first meeting

To be honest the vast majority of rehearsing that I have done in the last ten years has been either in New York or with New York musicians somewhere else, so I am fairly used to a particular approach to rehearsal, which is people just tend to be very good readers and be good at digesting and internalising new material quite quickly. And so I want to not be the person slowing it down by having more difficulty with something than somebody else you know? And that's directly connected to capitalism, time and money. I have to go and teach or I have another gig before or I have two other rehearsals today or don't have time to spend four hours on this or take a coffee break and chat about it.

Also I think a lot of people play completely improvised gigs because that opens up all these terrains that composed music doesn't necessarily but it is also a way of getting straight to music-making and not having to worry about any written constraints.

Of course I just want to give 100% and be 100% present and go for it whether it is rehearsal, private performance, public performance, recording studio... but they definitely are all affected by the other people in the room. A full and enthusiastically engaged audience gives a huge amount of energy, there is just no way around it. And it has a positive effect usually on performance. The opposite end of that is a recording studio where the sound is dry and maybe you have headphones on, you don't have the physical proximity to the musicians as you would in other performance situations, and that can be very challenging. I have always liked the idea of inviting a small audience into a studio and playing with no headphones.

An unusual part of that that I have experienced in New York is that because the market is so saturated and there is so much happening all the time, you can play a gig with great musicians to a very small audience and sometimes the fact that it is a small audience in a bleak venue setting can... maybe not inhibit, but it doesn't imbue it with tons of energy and positivity. Playing with those same musicians in a rehearsal space, beautiful or shitty, can actually be more connected and fun and I think better music can come out of that. And I have certainly had the experience of playing sessions with people – improvising or playing written material – and it being extremely connected and engaged in a rehearsal setting and then doing a gig with not

much of a vibe and a small audience and having it not live up to what the previous experiences were.

What the public sees, whatever public there is, is a performance or a recording, but for the musicians that are living through those experiences or for most of them, for me certainly, all of the other stuff on that path is as important and meaningful – practising, rehearsing, listening, talking – it's not just a performance.

IK:

I don't get that so much, the opportunity to rehearse improvising, but if I do, with some people that rehearse, actually improvising part of it, it just creates much more comfort, feels more comfortable. I think the imagination is a memory. Imagination is based on memories. So you hear it and you feel what other person is about to do or you kind of create this thing.

And especially if you do a performance, each time you just, you know, get more... communication level gets better. I think it was a good idea to do that – go into Annaghmakerrig [the Tyrone Guthrie Centre – a residential facility for creative artists in Monaghan, Ireland] before the first concert, because I just felt like that was needed. Rather than just start playing and I'm not there, I wasn't there. So that was definitely good. And talk about things. It's not like we were playing ten hours a day, obviously. Just sharing the space and it was good to have that.

Music itself changes according to the energy in the place. So in a live situation of course it is great because this is it, we are going to die after this, you know this kind of mindset can be created. And it is hard to do in a rehearsal, but it's actually nice when you are rehearsing with the people and you feel like the other musicians are feeling like that. Even though it's a rehearsal. You know like really serious, taking it extremely serious. And that makes it much better experience of course. Why don't we just do that all the time?!

It's just if you are going to record in the studio, maybe we decide to do the recording as more like... treat them like compositions. So I was hoping to, when I was talking to Barry [Guy – bassist/composer], if we were recording in his studio then we probably will have more written or more agreed stuff, so each one will be a piece. And then when we go out and play that live, don't need to talk about it anyway, because that is a lot of practice, you gain so much practice

from recording anyway. So that's the good thing about recording. So almost treat studio session like a really intense rehearsal. And then go out and just play!

All four interview participants agree that, in the current musical landscape, it is uncommon to be able to spend considerable time rehearsing improvised music due “to capitalism, time and money” (Jermyn). However, their opinions on how to utilise the rehearsal time that is available to them is contrasting. Rorke states that “a rehearsal is not a performance, and you don’t want to perform with that sort of cognitive landscape that you would have during the rehearsal”, while for Brennan “just because it is a rehearsal and you are in somebody’s house doesn’t mean that the music is less meaningful”. Jermyn has had “the experience of playing sessions with people – improvising or playing written material – and it being extremely connected and engaged in a rehearsal setting and then doing a gig with not much of a vibe and a small audience and having it not live up to what the previous experiences were” and for Kimura it “creates much more comfort, feels more comfortable.”

The idea of becoming more comfortable over a series of performances is agreed by all interviewees and connects to the findings from the literature review that improvisation requires assessment with a “cooperative dialogical approach that involves shared processes of action and critical reflection” (Van der Schyff, 2019). This is reflected by Kimura’s comments that dedicated rehearsal time with her trio featuring bassist Barry Guy and drummer Gerry Hemingway was beneficial as it also provided time to “talk about things” and “share the space”. Such thinking can also be aligned to the work of Schiavio et al (2019), which in a pedagogical context found that students developed their skillsets through shared collaborative interactions, personal experiences and ideas.

The importance of “mutual embodiment” (Iyer, 2016), where audience and creator “share” the temporal experience of art, is confirmed by Jermyn in his statement that an “engaged audience gives a huge amount of energy” and that it “has a positive effect usually on performance”. Furthermore, he suggests that such an experience could be useful in an otherwise drier and less energetic recording studio context, by inviting a small audience to the recording studio. He also proposes that having the musicians perform without headphones would help, another decision that would result in the listener and performers sharing a closer sonic experience.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has set out the methodologies central to the practice-led research that takes place in this thesis. Firstly, a framework for categories of performances of motivic compositions has been established ([figure 5](#)) in connection with research questions addressing gaps found in the literature review. These categories are: the same motivic composition performed by different ensembles; the same motivic composition performed by the same ensemble in different contexts; non-musical motifs; and non-standard standards. Strategies and potential obstacles for successful documentation within each of these categories have been discussed in connection to relevant musicological research that investigates the development of ensemble-based improvisational interaction in music over the last 60 years (Waters, 2011; Gioia, 2012; Simosko & Tepperman, 1996).

Research questions have been formulated, connecting the themes of social context, freedom versus constraints and the use of various media as catalysts for improvisation to the practical output. These questions evolved from the improvisation-based research examined in cognitive studies around performance and stylistic constraints (Berkowitz, 2010; Sawyer, 2012; Van der Schyff, 2019), ethnographic research on performance contexts (Anderskov, 2015; Rose, 2017) and the philosophy of freedom in improvisation (Nachmanovitch, 1990; Peters, 2009). Specific comparisons between improvisation and conversation are drawn in the context of non-structured performances of motivic compositions, influenced by similar work done by Monson (2009) and Sutton (2001).

Methods for collecting and editing documentation of performances are explained, including the use of appropriate software and considerations in presenting as honest and reflective a version of performances as possible. This documentation includes live recordings, rehearsal recordings and commercially released studio recordings. The culmination of these performances is the release of *Mere Nation* by improvising ensemble ReDiviDeR (2020) exclusively featuring motivic compositions by this researcher.

Innovative adapted analytical methodologies have been developed and discussed, specifically an adapted version of Schenkerian analysis that utilises its background, middleground and foreground sections to explore improvised development of motivic compositions. For the

purposes of this research, such sections represent varying degrees of elaboration of motivic compositions and novel graphs representing these levels are also constructed. This form of measurement of improvisational output provides a more stylistically appropriate alternative to similar work done previously by Biasutti and Frezza (2009) using a quantitative approach, Azzara and Snell (2016) in an educational setting and Walton et al (2015) using a physical movement-based approach. The methodologies developed for this thesis allow for concise and graphic representations of the descriptive and transcriptive analysis undertaken in the following practice-led investigation chapter and are a key contribution to the knowledge added by this research. Analysis of a live public performance of 'I'm Benter' by ReDiviDeR from the practical output of this research is included as an example of such analytical methods.

A semi-structured interview series with four peers that also feature as performers in the practical output has been introduced. This attempts to widen the viewpoint of the analysis and is valuable given the context dependent nature of these qualitative studies. Selected excerpts from each interview participant are broken down into research themes of freedom versus constraints, social context and group interaction and are connected to previously identified important related literature. Full transcripts of these interviews are available in the [appendices](#) and will be later used to inform analyses of the practical output with subjective and qualitative views from experienced improvisers, researchers and collaborators in the output itself.

The development of the aforementioned methodologies will greatly assist the following practice-led investigations and subsequent discussion of findings and conclusions. They will help connect the practical output with key research from the literature, as well as providing a framework within which the output can be presented.

4. Practice-led Investigations

This chapter will feature musical analysis and investigation of the practice-based output of this PhD. As previously discussed, improvisational performances of motivic compositions have been separated into four categories. An overview of the compositions, performing ensembles, contexts, locations and durations that are analysed are presented below ([Table 2](#)), with links to streaming audio available by clicking on each composition.

Performances in each of these categories will be analysed both individually and comparatively. These investigations will use a mixed methods approach. This will include descriptive and transcriptive analysis, the adapted approach to Schenkerian analysis and visually representative graphs depicting comparative levels of elaboration. This analysis of the material will provide an overview that can then be placed in the more extensive context of improvisation studies, addressing the gaps in the knowledge found in the literature review of this thesis. The analysis will also utilise the accompanying series of interviews (appendices) to provide broader insights into the improvisational processes at play.

At this point, it is also important to address the potential conflict of simultaneously being the composer of the material, one of the performers and the analyst of the performances of those compositions. While any worries about such a conflict are understandable, the researcher's background as a performer and composer ensure that, while improvising, the primary focus is always the music being created in the moment. As mentioned throughout this thesis, one of the ambitions or testaments of a successful improvised performance, is the focus and presence of the artists. Although this may not have been fully achieved 100% of the time, the thought process was never on the possible research outcomes of the performance at a particular juncture, as that would have felt wholly unnatural as a committed performer.

Same motivic composition by different ensembles				
Composition	Ensemble	Context	Address	Duration
Tricky	FarJam	Private Rehearsal	New York, USA	05:22
Tricky	Whyte Jacobson	Public Performance	Dublin, Ireland	04:32
I'm Benter	Naked Allies	Studio Recording	New York, USA	04:54
I'm Benter	ReDiviDeR	Studio Recording	Wicklow, Ireland	04:05
Same motivic composition by same ensemble in different performance contexts				
Suite for Eirik	Blowout Fracture	Public Performance	Vevey, Switzerland	04:26
Suite for Eirik	Blowout Fracture	Public Performance	Vevey, Switzerland	03:39
Cicaplast	ReDiviDeR	Private Rehearsal	Dublin, Ireland	10:03
Cicaplast	ReDiviDeR	Public Performance	Dublin, Ireland	08:25
Cicaplast	ReDiviDeR	Studio Recording	Wicklow, Ireland	06:25
Performances of non-musical vehicles for improvisation				
Fingerpainting 1	Fingerpainting	Private Rehearsal	Dublin, Ireland	07:12
Three Pastels	Fingerpainting	Private Rehearsal	Dublin, Ireland	03:07
Fingerpainting 3	Fingerpainting	Public Performance	Dublin, Ireland	04:02
Portal	Clang Sayne	Private Rehearsal	Wexford, Ireland	09:42
Portal	Clang Sayne	Private Rehearsal	Wexford, Ireland	04:47
Portal	Clang Sayne	Public Performance	Dublin, Ireland	06:37
Non-Standard Standards				
All or Nothing at All	Fireplace Dragon	Public Performance	Kilkenny, Ireland	11:19
Booboo's Birthday	Sanders Jacobson	Private Rehearsal	New York, USA	05:03

Table 2. Practice-led Investigations – performances by category (click composition link for audio). Source: Author

4.1 Analysis of Performances of the Same Motivic Composition by Different Ensembles

The first category of performances under investigation in this thesis is performances of the same motivic compositions by different ensembles. These performances were documented over the research period from 2016 to 2020. For the practical submission of this PhD, this category features five different motivic compositions, nine different ensembles and performances in Ireland, the UK and the USA. For the purpose of the following written analysis, two of these compositions will be analysed and the performance of these compositions by different ensembles will be compared. These will include ‘Tricky’ and ‘I’m Benter’. The remaining compositions from the practical submission are ‘BK’, ‘Grove Park’ and ‘Opener’.

4.1.1 Tricky

The first analysis will feature performances of the motivic composition ‘Tricky’ (figure 9) by two ensembles; FarJam and Whyte | Jacobson duo. This is a six-bar composition, written in 2016, that loosely fits in an Eb Lydian Dominant tonality and features advanced polyrhythmic and subdivision concepts. It starts with a 7:3 polyrhythm-based riff in the first two bars and continues with a sudden drop and then subdivision increase from whole notes to quintuplets in bars three and four. Over the final two bars, the piece moves to a groove, based on the ‘7’ side of the polyrhythm – with an initial grouping of three plus four in bar five and the reversed grouping of four plus three in bar six. The level of detail and complexity in this short piece allow us to explore the research question: ‘how developed can the structural elements and complexity of a motivic composition be before it restricts the musicians’ freedom to improvise spontaneously?’ As discussed earlier, knowing beforehand that the musicians were interested in and capable of performing such rhythmic devices is vital to this approach to improvising, and all members of the two ensembles had previous experience with comparable concepts.

In the first example, with New York-based trio, FarJam, featuring Mexican vibraphonist Patricia Brennan, German guitarist Keisuke Matsuno and myself on drums, the other performers had not previously seen the material. This was due to time constraints and the late organisation of the session. However, for performance purposes, sections of the composition were looped briefly before this rendition in order for it to be playable. For the second example,

duo with Derek Whyte on bass and myself on drums, the piece had been rehearsed on two occasions prior to this live public performance. By exploring the output of these two different groups, it allows the investigation to address another research question: ‘how does the instrumental line-up shape the development and group interaction of a motif-based improvised piece of music?’ In neither example were the performers instructed specifically on the overall form of the piece and were given free rein to play as much of the material or otherwise as they felt appropriate in the moment.

tricky

Matthew Jacobson

♩ = 60

The musical score for 'tricky' is presented in three systems, each with three staves (treble, treble, and bass clefs). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 60. The first system is in 4/4 time and features a simple melody in the upper staves and a bass line with a repeating eighth-note pattern marked with a '7'. The second system begins with a triplet in the treble clef and changes the time signature to 3/4. The bass line continues with a similar pattern, now marked with a '3' and a '5'. The third system returns to 4/4 time and features a more complex melody with slurs and a bass line with a repeating eighth-note pattern marked with a '7'. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Figure 9. Motivic Composition 'Tricky'. Source: Author

4.1.2 Example 1a: FarJam – Tricky. Recorded in New York at private session. 8th January 2017

Line-up:

Patricia Brennan – Vibraphone

Keisuke Matsuno – Guitar

Matthew Jacobson – Drums / Composition

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/do3h13udlm9cy92/Tricky_FarJam_Edited_Jan2017.mp3?dl=0

This performance opens with vibraphone playing the top and bottom voices, the guitar doubling the top voice and the drums going between the two rhythmic ideas. The musicians repeat the first two bars of material, with the 7:3 polyrhythm prominent. At around 00:25 the guitar starts improvising, playing ambiguous long notes while floating over the rhythm provided by vibes and drums. The guitar improvisation develops with increasing note density and at 0:45 moves to the top voice of the material, creating considerable tension due to the juxtaposition with the bottom septuplet line being played by the vibes. At 01:00 the guitar goes back to the bottom written line, relieving tension and thus signalling to the other performers that the solo section is coming to an end. The musicians move to bar 3 at 01:13 and play through the rest of the composition.

At 01:26 they return to the first two bars and the vibes now begin soloing. The phrasing here is a contrasting approach to the beginning of the guitar solo. The vibes stay closer to the pulse, playing very clear phrases and then leaving space, as if to let that phrase sink in, then moving on to another.

The drums and guitar react by also following this approach, also leaving space in their disjointed accompaniment at 01:56. The drums very clearly signal a return to the top of the polyrhythm with a floor tom and snare fill at 02:20. The guitar reacts by adding distortion and playing random notes from the bottom voice, while the vibes also play a mix of the bottom voice and some solo fills.

02:37 sees a very defining moment as the vibes and drums 'hook up' very clearly with a triple-based pattern that again feels like a big release of tension. The vibes present a new polyrhythm on top of that to pull away from the drums, leading to a long descending line at 02:52 that causes a huge shift in the feel of the piece, with all three of the musicians breaking away from the pulse in the subsequent moments.

From 03:07, no longer attached to the polyrhythm, the musicians start exploring other textures. The drums and guitar play flurries of notes with dry sonic qualities, while the vibes echo the melodic characteristics of the written material. At 03:22 the guitar and vibes start suggesting the bottom voice again, although not in its entirety, until 03:38 when the vibes return to the polyrhythm, with the guitar and drums playing wildly and abstracted from the material. This is a strong example of how the motivic material allows the performers to stay connected when individually they appear to have strayed far away from the motif. Another descending line from the vibes at 03:49 signals the end of this improvised section.

The vibes present an upper register trill at 03:53, which the guitar quickly follows with a similar gesture, while the drums respond with dry rim clicks around the kit. These reactions put all of the musicians in a similar sonic space, with the metallic percussive sounds mimicking the high-pitched trill sounds of the other instruments. At 04:18 the vibes move back to the polyrhythm at a much quieter dynamic, while the guitar continues the trill idea but now moves it melodically to fit the written material. The drums also continue to mimic the trill and do not return to the pulse. This is another example of the spontaneous improvisational development of the compositional material that performers can display, given a motif and the freedom to improvise around it. The trio start to fade the piece out but at 04:55, in the final seconds, the drums reintroduce the septuplet pattern at tempo at a very low dynamic. This could be perceived as a compositional decision to recapitulate the opening statements, in essence bookending the performance.

This track shows how a six-bar composition, based mainly around one two-bar motif, can be a major catalyst for improvisational development. At no point do the musicians sound lost, as even when they find their way to a space unrelated to the written material, a member of the band introduces, paraphrases or references the motif. Although the piece goes to many different sections, at times dissonant and arrhythmic and abstracted from the material, it maintains the sense of a being a cohesive conversation, with the main topic of conversation regularly

referenced. Despite the presence of complex and little-rehearsed rhythmic material, the musicians have the freedom to play completely spontaneously, while retaining a strong sense of communication through their interaction with each other and the material.

With regard to the social context of this recording – a private session in the vibraphonist’s apartment – the lack of an audience does not appear to detract from the energy of the performance. This energy appears to be derived from the material itself and the musicians’ level of engagement with that material and each other, as demonstrated in the above analysis. In an interview with Patricia Brennan, as part of this research’s interview series ([Appendix 1\(c\)](#)), when asked about getting energy from an audience as opposed to performing privately, she asserts:

...something that I try to be really strict with myself – really be in the moment, really react to what the music is asking for in that particular moment. So I am already too involved in that particular thing that I really have time to think about the space or the situation and so on... Just because it is a rehearsal and you are in somebody’s house doesn’t mean that the music is less meaningful. Sometimes I have better rehearsals than performances. And I think a lot of people feel that way and then once the music starts you are just in it no matter where you are at.

While this illuminates the importance that Brennan herself places on being ‘in the moment’, this is also something that as a performer I would concur with and anecdotally have heard a similar sentiment from many other improvising musicians. Such feedback solidifies earlier statements, clarifying that simultaneous involvement as a composer, performer and, later, analyst is possible without a conflict of interest.

4.1.3 Example 1b: Whyte | Jacobson Duo – Tricky. Recorded at the Pavillion Theatre, Dun Laoghaire in front of live audience on the 30th January 2016

Line-up:

Derek Whyte – Double-bass

Matthew Jacobson – Drums / Composition

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/vu8b97hympc6m0h/Tricky_Jacobson-Whyte_Jan2016.mp3?dl=0

This performance of the same composition, 'Tricky', is performed by a duo of drums and double-bass. It begins with the double-bass freely improvising actively in a B blues-orientated tonality. Straight away, this provides an example of the freedom of the performers in relation to the written material. The loose tonality of the piece is Eb Lydian Dominant, however, this B blues tonality is only partially related, with the two tonalities sharing two notes – Eb and Db. This harmonic choice by the bassist does not present any problems, partly because there are no other performers playing harmonically, and also because such elaboration of material is encouraged in the non-structured performance of a motivic composition.

The drums juxtapose this active low end playing with the use of percussive bells, providing a high-pitched texture without any defined rhythm. The drums soon move to cymbals played lightly and sparsely with hot rods (light drumsticks made of numerous thin canes stuck together, developed from the rute stick). At 00:50, the drums also introduce a rim click and start outlining the 7:3 polyrhythm. The double-bass reacts to this by moving to a more percussive sound with some shorter punctuated notes, but restrains from fully connecting with the polyrhythm, prolonging the tension created. That is until 01:25 when he begins to rhythmically portray the top voice of the composition, that is the slower quarter-notes from the '3' side of the polyrhythm. The melodic phrase that he repeats with variations can be seen below (figure 10). The phrasing of both the drums and the double-bass allows them to suggest both sides of the polyrhythm simultaneously.



Figure 10. Bass variation of top voice of 'Tricky'. Source: Author

The duo continue on this theme, building tension until a clear release point at 02:21, when there is a jump in dynamic from both instruments. The double-bass begins emphasising downbeats with double-stops and the drums turn the snare wires on. This small percussive change has a big impact on the improvisation, the raspier snare sound leading towards a stronger sense of

groove. The double-bassist's reaction to that change is to play with more reference to the '7' side of the polyrhythm and can be heard playing a 'walking' bass line over that 7-beat rhythm from 02:35 (figure 11).



Figure 11. 'Tricky' – 'Walking' bassline variations. Source: Author

The double bass interacts with the composition by repeatedly referencing the Db from the middle voice as a root note for these improvised bass lines. In this instance, the drums do not fully commit to playing in '7' with the bass. They do accompany the 7-beat bass line on the ride cymbal and hi-hats but also continue to emphasise the '3' with hits on the snare drum, the bass drum and with crashes on partially open hi-hats and the crash cymbal. Perhaps, due to this lack of full commitment to the idea from the drums, the bassist leaves the 'walking' idea after just four bars and at 02:48 he moves back to a riff that again accents both sides of the polyrhythm (figure 12).



Figure 12. 'Tricky' – polyrhythmic bassline. Source: Author

This new riff sounds very much like a precursor to the written bassline, only in C instead of Eb, and indeed at 03:01, after four repeats, the bass moves up a minor third to the original key. However, instead of playing the bassline exactly as written, and perhaps due to the lack of another melodic instrument to play the '3' side, the bass syncopates the rhythm to accentuate both sides of the polyrhythm (figure 13).



Figure 13. 'Tricky' – syncopated bassline. Source: Author

This is repeated four times before the duo move to bar 3 of the composition, creating a major release of tension at 03:15. The motivic composition is performed three times. Due to general inaccuracies from both performers, the material is not always played the same amount of times. At 03:39 the double-bass plays bar 5 rhythmically incorrectly but the drums continue, moving on to a repeat of the composition at bar 1. The double-bass appears to ritardando before cueing bar 3 again with double-stops at 03:51. The drums follow before the performers return to bar 1 together for one last performance of the composition with a major decrescendo over bars 5 and 6 leading them to a final pianissimo fade out over bars 1 and 2. This last section is another demonstration of how a motivic composition can bring performers together in an otherwise uncomfortable situation; the reference point of the composition having the power to alleviate disparity in focus between the musicians.

4.1.4 Comparative Analysis:

This duo performance by Whyte | Jacobson is very different to the previously analysed trio performance by FarJam. The immediate and obvious difference is the inability of the duo to simultaneously play more than one of the written parts, due to only having one melodic instrument.

Another difference is the structural approach taken in each performance. With FarJam, the performance starts explicitly with the written material. The performers then take turns improvising over these motifs and the remaining two support the soloist while keeping reference to the motif. The trio then become highly elaborated from the material, before referencing it again to finish. FarJam also never consecutively repeat the full composition in its entirety, but instead use different parts of it to generate movement in the improvisation.

In contrast, the starting place for the Whyte | Jacobson performance is much further removed from the composition and they gradually move towards it throughout. Furthermore, once they introduce the written material, they stay with it, repeating it several times before fading out the piece. This is perhaps a result of the number of performers involved; in the trio the extra performer means the possibility of 50% more suggestions being made at any given time, thus giving the musicians a greater number of choices to make with regards to how they structure the piece. In the duo performance, with less choices to be made, the performers end up following a relatively straight-forward line from fully elaborated to explicit motivic composition (figure 14). It could also be posited, that the documentation of the FarJam performance was from a private session, the musicians felt freer in coming in and out of the material, whereas the publicly performed Whyte | Jacobson version perhaps felt obliged to stick to the material due to the constraints of a public performance.

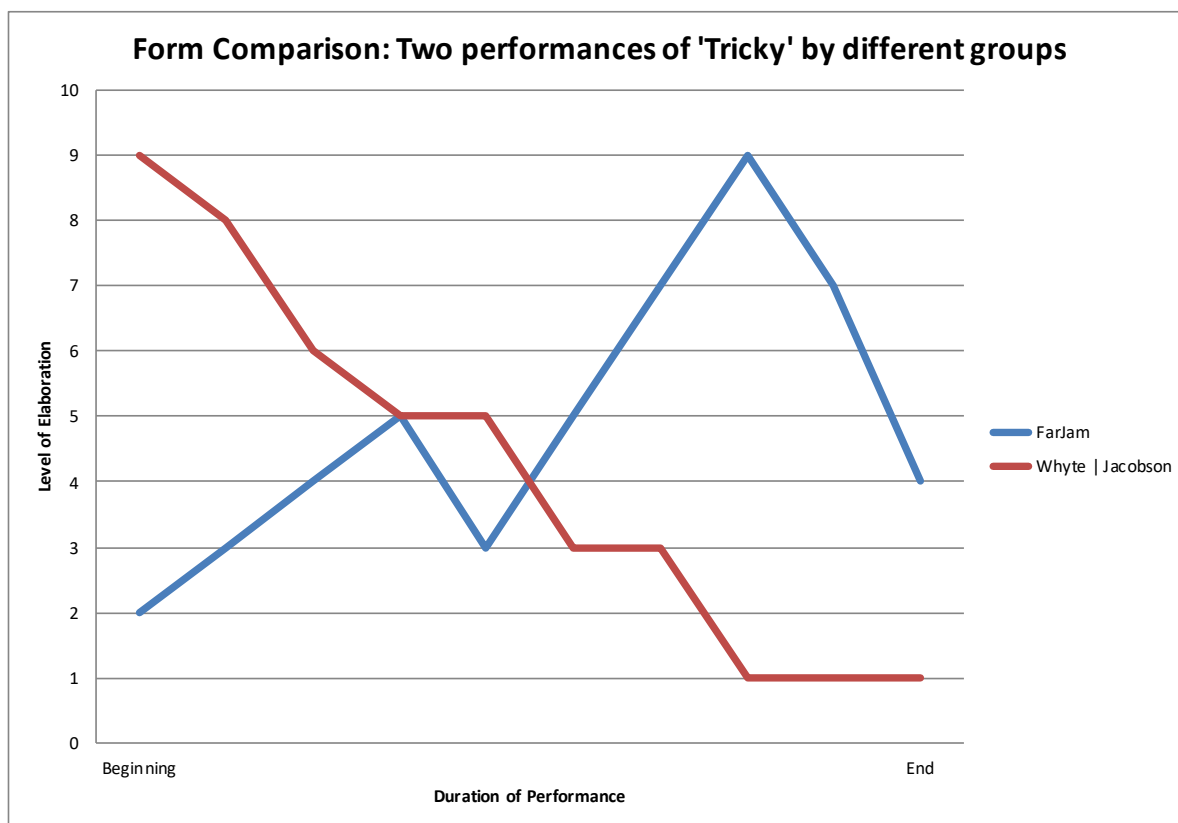


Figure 14. 'Tricky' – Level of Elaboration comparison graph. Source: Author

4.1.5 I'm Benter

This motivic composition, 'I'm Benter', written in 2018, has been introduced already in this thesis in the example of adapted Schenkerian analysis. The documented performance for that analysis was a live recording from ReDiviDeR. The two versions that will be looked at for this comparison of motivic compositions by different ensembles are both from recording studio album sessions and feature ReDiviDeR and Naked Allies.

4.1.6 Example 2a: Naked Allies – I'm Benter. Recorded at Figure 8 Recording Studio, Brooklyn, New York on the 6th June 2018

Line-up:

Oscar Noriega – Alto Saxophone

Daniel Rorke – Tenor Saxophone

Simon Jermyn – Electric Bass

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/q1t73s8ayp51q9m/I%27MBENTER_NakedAllies_July2018.mp3?dl=0

For this performance, the group had rehearsed over the two previous days. These rehearsals were the first time that the four band members had been in a room together, and an entire album worth of material needed to be looked at and organised. This resulted in short but very efficient rehearsal periods. As discussed in the social context element of this thesis' literature review, the rehearsal etiquette in New York is of focussed two-hour sessions, and in a project with a very refined timeframe such as this one, that is particularly advantageous. The recording session was booked by Australian saxophonist Daniel Rorke and also featured a stalwart of the downtown New York music scene Oscar Noriega and Irish bassist Simon Jermyn. It was agreed that Rorke would bring five compositions and that I would bring two. Such a project – with a short rehearsal time and a new group of like-minded performers – was an ideal opportunity to bring a motivic composition. Having recently written 'I'm Benter', which was inspired by the work of saxophonist Tim Berne, and given Noriega is a regular collaborator of his, this piece was an obvious choice.

No specific instructions were added to the chart for the rehearsals or recording. The composition's deliberately non-structured approach was explained, and the other performers were encouraged to use as much or as little of the material as they deemed fit in any given moment. The motivic composition itself was briefly rehearsed, to ensure that all musicians were comfortable and to check for any possible mistakes or misprints on the charts. This was done at varying tempos, as the artists were also told that the piece did not have a fixed tempo and could be introduced at wherever any of the artists felt was appropriate, or that it did not even have to stick at the same tempo once it was introduced. This documented performance was one of two takes recorded in the studio and was chosen as the final album version due to its sense of momentum and how it fit with the track listing.

As discussed earlier, in order to use an adapted version of Schenkerian analysis to assist us, the background of this piece includes: the rhythmic use of offbeat eighth-notes and dotted quarter-notes; the melodic use of the tritone interval; and the harmonic use of ninths and major thirds.

The performance opens with the four musicians each taking their own distinctive routes into the piece: the drums play sparsely and lightly with brushes on the skins and occasionally an extra dry crash cymbal; the bass plays short flurries of intervallic leaps between upper register harmonics and lower register muted notes; alto saxophone plays an upper register Eb-Db trill; and tenor saxophone takes a more melodic approach, playing a breathy eighth-note Ab Dorian line over the other instruments' activity. These disparate approaches display how the freedom awarded to the musicians allows them to 'disagree' on the starting point to the performance. As asserted in discussion with tenor saxophonist Daniel Rorke for the interview series accompanying this thesis ([Appendix 1\(b\)](#)), "that's kind of the role of the musicians I would say – to negotiate what are the questions that this composition is asking and how do we respond to those questions." Their open-minded communication around these questions and sense of interaction is then displayed by the way in which they arrive at the written material.

Also, the choice here of tonality by the saxophones, demonstrates the harmonic openness of a non-structured improvisational approach to a motivic composition. There is intentionally no harmony specified on the chart, and it was written with a focus more on intervallic structures than any tonality or fixed key. However, instantly, the alto saxophone has based his opening on the first two notes of the bassline, and the tenor saxophone imposes his own choice of harmony, in interactions with both the composition and the other musicians. In adapted Schenkerian terms, the alto is here using the middleground, taking the cell of a major second interval from the written bassline and embellishing it to create his own opening statement. The other three musicians have started with foreground, improvising material that is abstracted from the written material.

At 00:30, the alto comes in with a melodic phrase of his own; a descending Eb, C, Bb, G and E. The bass immediately picks up at the note that the alto ends on, replying with a descending chromatic line of E, Eb, D and the tenor then joins in with an ascending Eb, Bb, Eb and G passage. The drums then add an exclamation mark to finish the passage, departing from the brushes for the first time to strike a hand cymbal at 00:36. This results in a momentary pause from the horns, while the bass returns to his initial muted high-low theme.

The horns then resume a light dialogue on top of the bass activity, with drums also returning to brushes. This playing intensifies, with the horns in particular playing with increased note density. At 01:24 we also hear a middleground presentation from the bass (figure 15).



Figure 15. 'I'm Benter' – bass middleground. Source: Author

Although not played with an exact sense of pulse, the bass here plays a very clear elaboration of bars three and four of the composition. Rhythmically, it uses the same offbeat eighth-notes syncopations and, although the original starts a semi-tone higher on an F, the bass here also plays a rising minor third interval, and a descending perfect fourth interval. As well as transposing this section of written material, the bass also elongates it, playing two rising minor thirds – E to G and G to Bb – followed by three descending perfect fourths – Db to Ab, Eb to Bb and Gb (this note cracks) to Db. As if to emphasise this statement, the bass remains tacet for the subsequent four seconds.

Initially, the bass' middleground utterance here has no impact on the other musicians as the horns continue their active improvisation and the drums continue with some moderately sparse brush work. At 01:42, in the middle of a foreground section, we hear a strong example of group interaction and once more the drums providing punctuation to the conversation. Both the horns and the bass play rising chromatic patterns, which is concluded by the drums playing one crash cymbal on top of another with brushes, twice in succession. The introduction of this wetter sound at this particular juncture, causes a noticeable pause from all musicians.

Following on from this pause, the horns return to very busy upper register playing, while the bass also plays frantically in the upper register. This mood is first broken by the tenor saxophone, who breaks away into a slower more melodic approach at 01:59, landing on a repeated, descending Ab to G interval, which is continues from 2:04 to 02:11. This appears to signal a change to the rest of the group, with the alto saxophone also ceasing the dense upper register actions to perform his own repeated interval of an ascending D to F from 02:12 to 02:16. The reaction of the drums is to move to an extended technique of scraping a stick off the side of the snare drum rim. In this instance it is done in short bursts and creates a much a softer attack than when the scrape is carried out on a cymbal for example. The bassist's response is to move to a lower register, playing broken chromatic chords.

This passage leads to the tenor playing a long Db drone, the first note of the bassline, at 02:29. This use of just one note of the composition creates a sense of foreboding, and unsurprisingly leads to a change in the drums and bass. The drummer moves to sticks and the bass also moves to Db, playing it as a rhythmical pedal, also utilising the motivic material's offbeat eighth-note characteristics. The alto continues to play over the top, assuming the role of soloist, until he lands on an extended technique of a multiphonic at 02:55. This is repeated several times, building tension and leads to the bass adding the second note of the pedal at 03:08, in a further reference of the material. At this point the drums also greatly increase their activity, moving around the kit and the cymbals with single and double stroke rolls. The saxophones also return to denser, more soloistic approach and at 03:34, while still the only performer explicitly referencing a pulse, the bassist plays the bassline in its entirety. On bar nine of the bassline, the drums play a crash cymbal to mark the end of the dotted quarter-note motif and joins the bass at tempo on the downbeat of the following cycle.

This is an important moment of release and shows the importance of all musicians knowing all of the written lines. The bassline could easily be lost in the middleground and foreground playing up to this point, but the drummer recognising it and preparing a switch from rubato to playing at tempo here allows the music to spontaneously develop directly in that moment. This allows us to address Nachmanovitch's (1990) question of how to address the balance of "structure and spontaneity, discipline and freedom". In this situation, the knowledge and awareness of the motivic composition allows the music to be simultaneously structured and spontaneous. The structure is there to be utilised if and when the performers see fit and can be utilised in a spontaneous manner. Nachmanovitch's freedom is in the where, when and how the motivic composition is presented, while the discipline is in each performer's understanding of the material, as well as their state of awareness and presence in recognising it occurring around them.

Such recognition is also heard from the tenor saxophone in this passage. Beginning with a pick-up in the last bar of the first iteration of the bassline, at 03:45, he plays a nine-bar rubato phrase that is another example of a middleground adaptation of the composition (figure 16).



Figure 16. 'I'm Benter' – tenor saxophone middleground. Source: Author

The opening three bars of this tenor saxophone middleground section combine several elements of the written material. The same rhythmic cell from the top voice of the melody is used, while the starting note of the bassline is utilised, although rather than an ascending whole-tone, it is here played as an ascending semitone in bars one, two and four and as a perfect fifth in bar three. This is an example of the flexibility of a motivic composition: in a more structured or developed composition, to perform a melody with a semitone difference would be considered questionable. In this context, however, due to the strength of the rhythmic cell and also the conviction of the performer, the intention and movement towards the composition is clear.

In bars five and six the descending F – Eb – Db phrase is a contraction of the written melody in bars two and three, which has the note sequence A – F – A – Eb – Db; the same with the addition of two As. From bar six, the tenor saxophone plays the written phrase from bar six of the written middle voice, albeit with a different pulse to where the bass is playing. In bars eight and nine, the ascending Gb – Ab – Bb followed by the E – Gb – E – D – Ab turn, are a rearrangement of the last two bars of the written middle voice of E – Ab – Bb – Gb – Eb – Db. This use of similar melodic cell structures also provides a way of improvising with or towards written material. In this occurrence, it is framed by six seconds of tacet from both horns, while they wait for the bassline to resolve and they both return with the written middle and top voices at tempo at 04:08. This is a further example of “stylised” silence (Sutton, 2001).

From this point, the motivic composition is repeated four times, with the tenor saxophone alternating between the middle voice (on first and third repeats) and the top voice (second and fourth repeats). The final iteration of the composition was physically cued in the studio to create a concise end to the performance and provide a juxtaposition to the opening, which featured the four voices each performing disparately.

4.1.7 Example 2b: ReDiviDeR – I’m Benter. Recorded at Meadow Studio, Wicklow, Ireland on the 13th January 2020

Line-up:

Nick Roth – Alto Saxophone

Colm O’Hara – Trombone

Derek Whyte – Electric Bass

Matthew Jacobson – Drums / Composition

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/gfi8b27lmjvg10j/I%27mBenter_Mere-Nation_ReDiviDeR_Jan2020.mp3?dl=0

For this second performance of I’m Benter, performed by quartet ReDiviDeR, there were two days of consecutive rehearsals plus a live a concert leading up to this recording studio session. All members of the group were already familiar with the piece, having first performed it in April 2018 at the Workman’s Club in Dublin (the recording of which is used for the demonstration of the adaptation of Schenkerian analysis earlier in this thesis).

The result of this recording session was the third full length ReDiviDeR album ‘Mere Nation’ (Diatrobe, 2020). In many ways, this album is the culmination of the practical development assumed by the research undertaken for this PhD. Being the longest serving group exclusively featuring my own compositions, ReDiviDeR’s style has developed in parallel to my own compositional and improvisational work. At a concert the night before this recording session, all the material was performed without breaks, giving the artists freedom to play the material spontaneously, as well as to create sections fully abstracted from any written material in addition to the motivic compositions themselves. However, in order to make the most efficient use of the allotted studio time and being conscious of the mental energy required to perform in such a manner, it was decided to break up the set of six compositions, recording them in three groups of two instead. This is similar to the sentiments of interview participant Izumi Kimura, who stated in discussing a possible studio session with bassist, composer and improviser Barry Guy, “when I was talking to Barry, if we were recording in his studio then we probably will have more written or more agreed stuff, so each one will be a piece” ([Appendix 1\(e\)](#)). In the

case of the ReDiviDeR recording, this allowed for spontaneity while also providing sufficient time to get multiple takes of each composition. Of the two takes recorded of this track in the studio, this version was chosen for its collective sense of dynamics, and, as the opening track for the album, its organic progression into the second track.

As this track was predetermined as track one, the decision to start with the composition was made in the studio. For that reason, there was a count in, and the two horns and the bass all begin by playing the bassline. This is performed twice, before the trombone takes the middle voice and the alto saxophone takes the top voice. This is also repeated twice, at which point – 00:48 – the musicians depart from the written material. It is not fully abstracted, however, with much of the character of the composition maintained, most noticeably the tempo and use of broken eighth-notes. The first two bars of this improvisation feature the rhythmic cell from the first bar of the written top voice in the bass in a middleground prolongation (figure 17).



Figure 17. 'I'm Benter' – bass middleground #2. Source: Author

This two-note cell is played at intervals of three quarter-notes, and is intervallically heard in its original whole-tone form of Db – Eb, then as a semitone C – Db and then again as a whole-tone but up a fourth to Gb – Ab. In the third and fourth bars, the cell is elongated, being rhythmically displaced by an eighth-note, the second note being repeated and the addition of a third note. This four-bar bassline is another example of spontaneous improvisational development that uses common compositional techniques.

This bass middleground is used as a starting point for a dense group improvisation, with all four musicians playing linearly with overlapping, predominantly eighth-note lines. The dynamic drop from the drums, and the switch to drier rim clicks and closed hi-hat sounds provides a lot of sonic space for all of the musicians to fill, as well as affording them space to develop their interactions. These interactions gain momentum until 01:48, when, following an ascending line, the bass lands on an upper register chordal pedal, this intensifies the alto saxophone playing and drumming. The former moves towards multiphonics and flurries of sixteenth-note phrases and the latter begins playing an open hi-hat punk style beat around

02:00. The trombone reacts by following the bass with a mixture of rhythmic single-note accompaniment and long tones, rising in response to the bass.

The end of this foreground section is signalled by a one-bar accented drum fill at 02:15, following which, the drums outline the rhythm of the written bassline. The other three performers join at 02:22 on bar three of the bassline and play a middleground version, with alto saxophone playing an elaborated version with an improvised eighth-note line over the last bar. This is another example of both the ability for the drums to interact with the composition and spontaneous arranging as the return of the compositional material is instantly brought about in the moment, without any visual cues or predetermined ideas.

On completion of this iteration of the written material, the alto saxophone, drums and bass continue performing the composition while the trombone solos on top. On the following repeat, the trombone and alto saxophone swap functions, with the latter soloing. This is yet another example of spontaneous arranging. While the concept of trading or exchanging solos is common in the performance of jazz standards, it is less popular in free improvisation. However, the presence here of the motivic composition provides a platform over which the two horns can take turns improvising over, while the other plays the written material. This was not discussed prior to the recording but might have been an instinctive reaction by the horns to delay the reappearance of the middle and top voices of the composition and maintain the levels of intensity. This can also be seen as an example of ‘turntaking’. Existing in both conversational and musical analyses, this concept comes from the necessity to “communicate and receive a response to that communication” and reveals “the sophisticated skill required of the improvising musician and the creative tension that occurs when musical form and intercommunicative purpose co-exist” (Sutton, 2001).

After this brief series of exchanges, at 02:56 the alto saxophone returns to the top voice of the melody, while the trombone plays the middle voice and the bass continues with the bottom voice. This is the final iteration of the written material, as the bass and drums catch only the first two eighth-note cell in the following round and the horns play long notes. The drums continue to play through these long notes, also added to by the bass, leading a foreground segue towards the second piece on the album.

4.1.8 Comparative Analysis:

The immediate difference to address between these two performances of I'm Benter, is their structural uses of the written material. In the Naked Allies studio session, the band begin by performing as four individual voices, all abstracted from the composition. They gradually combine their voices, moving towards the motivic composition until it is explicitly performed several times to finish the track. In contrast, the ReDiviDeR version starts explicitly with the written material, becoming slightly elaborated from the material before returning to it. It is then fully elaborated before leading into the next piece on the album. The reasons behind these differences cannot all be said to have occurred spontaneously. As mentioned, there was discussion with the band members on how the ReDiviDeR version should start as it was the first track on the album. However, the malleability of the motivic composition itself is evident in that the similarity of these instrumental line-ups – two quartets each featuring drums, electric bass and two horns, with no chordal instruments – and performance contexts – private studio recordings for album – has resulted in such differing results.

The exact same lead sheet of the ten-bar composition was brought to both of these ensembles. The encouragement of the musicians to develop the material improvisationally, with a great degree of flexibility is rewarded with two highly different but successful performances of the same non-structured motivic composition. This is an example of Sawyer's (2000) idea of 'collaborative emergence'. The piece itself emerged from the composer's aesthetic beliefs and historical experiences and background, while the two performances themselves emerge out of each group's collaborative interactions – both leading up to the performance in rehearsals and public performances and in the moment of creative practice in the studio. There is also an emergence of new musical motifs, adapted and developed from the motivic composition and as a result of elaboration of this material. Using the same method as in the analysis of 'Tricky', comparisons of the structure or form of these two performances of 'I'm Benter' in relation to the levels of elaboration of the motivic composition are found below (figure 18).

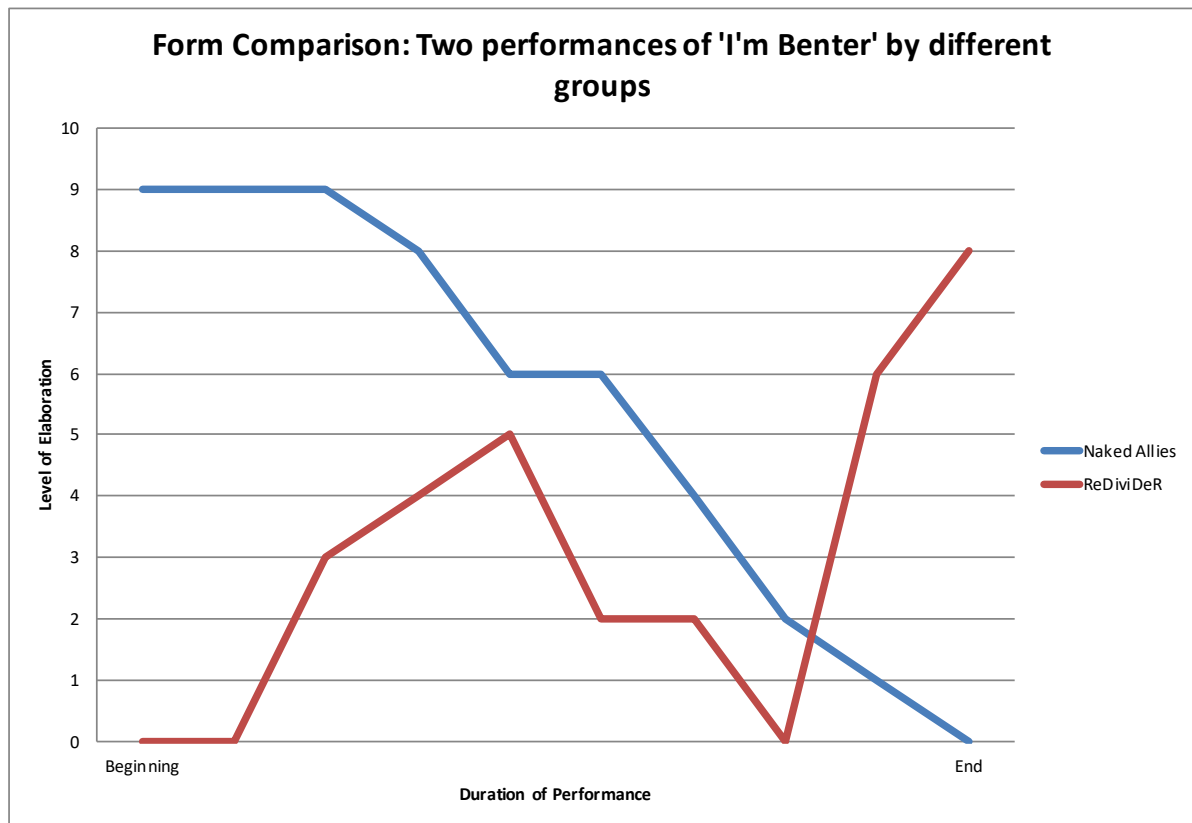


Figure 18. 'I'm Benter' – Level of Elaboration comparison graph. Source: Author

4.1.9 Initial findings from analysis of performances of the same motivic composition by different ensembles:

Sawyer (2000) suggests that:

Some improvisations are relatively boring, repetitive, and structured; others are inspired, fresh, and original. When one examines the ethnomusicological literature, one finds that in all improvisational genres, there is the same tension between structure and creativity.

The aim of these motivic compositions is to try and keep improvisations as inspired, fresh and original as possible, with the aid of highly interpretable material that can be performed without predetermined structures and with as much repetition as the performers feel is necessary given the various parameters surrounding the performance.

This first comparative analyses of two motivic compositions, performed by four different groups in three different performance contexts has provided a strong starting point for this research. It has confirmed some inductive ideas and has also offered some interesting areas of concentration for further analysis. For example, it would provide added insights to compare performances of a motivic composition before and after a rehearsal and also to compare a performance of a motivic composition by the same ensemble in the same context on separate occasions.

Drawing from the literature reviewed previously, and in particular Feisst's (2016) look at how a musical work's 'object character' and 'fixedness' are challenged by classical composers such as Young and Cage, in this case these characteristics are challenged by the performers. With FarJam and Naked Allies, in theory, by not having spent much time with the material prior to the performance, it could be considered that they were more challenged. In contrast, Whyte | Jacobson and ReDiviDeR, having spent more time with the material over several rehearsals, ended up sticking closer to the written material. Taking the average levels of elaboration from each of the graphs above: FarJam's was 4.9; Whyte | Jacobson's was 4.2; Naked Allies' was 5.4; and ReDiviDeR's was 3.

Using these novel scales and analytical methods allows us to bring Sawyer's (2000) collaborative emergences, Nettle's (2009) PoD, Jost's (1994) motivic chain-association and Iyer's (2016) work on embodied cognition all together in the context of improvised group interactions and developments of motivic compositions. Deciphering these performances to one number (average level of elaboration) is not intended to devalue or objectify the artistic nature of the actions but is rather a means by which we can comparatively discuss and make sense of the previously discussed balance between freedom and constraints.

4.2 Analysis of Performances of Same Composition by the Same Ensemble in Different Contexts

The second category of performances under investigation in this thesis is performances of the same motivic composition by the same ensembles in different contexts. As with the previous category, the performances were documented over the research period from 2016 to 2020. For the practical submission of this PhD, this category features three different motivic compositions, three different ensembles and performances in Ireland, Switzerland and the USA. For the purpose of the following written analysis, and for consistency between categories, two of these compositions will be analysed and the performance of these compositions by different ensembles will be compared. These motivic compositions are ‘Suite for Eirik’ and ‘Cicaplast’ and the ensembles featured are Blowout Fracture and again ReDiviDeR. The remaining composition from the practical submission is ‘BK’, performed by Naked Allies. The changing contexts being observed are conjectural, locational and social.

4.2.1 Suite for Eirik

In January of 2017, Swiss-based trio Blowout Fracture were invited to take part in a two-night residency at Théâtre de l’Oriental in Vevey, Switzerland. This was part of the Suisse Diagonales Jazz series, mobilising local artist and allowing them to perform around the country. Blowout Fracture is a trio originally featuring myself on drums with German bassist Alexander Binder and Swiss guitarist Laurent Météau and formed while the three musicians were studying together at Lucerne University in Switzerland. However, shortly before the ensemble’s third European tour, bassist Binder requested that he play guitar instead of bass, due to the fact that he was mostly playing guitar in several other projects at that time and felt more comfortable on that instrument. After discussing possible scenarios, it was decided that to facilitate the request but not lose out musically on low end frequencies and general bass functions, I would play synth bass as well as drums. In addition, the now two guitarists would also supplement their sonic arsenals with octave pedals, allowing them to simulate the bass when needed. Following on from the success of the tour, it was agreed that the group would continue in this format, so that when the Vevey residency was offered, this same instrumental set up was used.

All members of the group are also composers and the use of motivic compositions seemed particularly apt for the two guitars and synth bass version of the project. This was also appropriate personally, as it is a considerable added complexity to play two instruments simultaneously and having to deal with less written information eases that burden and allows me to adapt creatively and spontaneously to the performance context. Finally, all members of the group are experienced improvisers and are comfortable developing ideas in real time as opposed to performing through-composed or structurally restrictive material.

The following analysis will investigate performances of my composition 'Suite for Eirik', recorded on consecutive nights at Theatre de L'Oriental in Vevey on the 20th and 21st January 2017. For these concerts, Blowout Fracture performed just the second movement of the full three-part suite, written in memory of Eirik Tofte, a Norwegian colleague of mine who died tragically in 2013. This two-voice movement is one of the more diatonic motivic compositions explored in this thesis, mainly existing in the key of B minor (figure 19). It features a four-bar passage that is repeated three times, followed by a four-bar passage with an alternate final two bars. These entire sixteen bars are then repeated openly with performers encouraged to develop the material.

The main features of the bassline are the intervallic leaps, mostly of thirds and fifths as seen in the first two bars, and the alternative offbeat fourth bar ending. The main features of the top melody line are its constant use of syncopation and the rhythmically displaced fourth time ending phrase, where the notes B, C#, and D are repeated.

suite for eirik

MJacobson

♩ = 155
straight

1, 2, 3.

OPEN

Figure 19. Motivic Composition 'Suite for Eirik'. Source: Author

4.2.2 Example 1a: Blowout Fracture – Suite for Eirik. Recorded at Theatre de l'Oriental, Vevey, Switzerland on the 20th January 2017

Line-up:

Laurent Meteau – Guitar

Alexander Binder – Guitar

Matthew Jacobson – Drums / Synth Bass / Composition

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/ida8pob1zqz4noz/SuiteForEirik_BlowoutFracture_Vevey_20-01-2017.mp3?dl=0

A specific form or structure was not discussed prior to this performance of Eirik's Suite. However, in the context of the other material being performed and the overall set length of

approximately 45 minutes, it was suggested and agreed that it would be a good idea to keep the piece relatively short, evident in its duration of 04:26.

The piece begins with a frantic foreground drum solo, moving around the kit with the snare drum turned off, featuring constant rolls and sudden open hi-hat swells. There is no pulse evident until 00:54, when several decrescendoing cymbal chokes indicate the end of the drum solo and the two guitars enter with Binder playing the bassline and Meteau playing a rhythmic variation on the melody; an improvised middleground. The drums do not play a supporting groove at this point, but rather go back to a more soloistic role, playing out of time. Timbrally, however, the drums focus on the parts of the drum kit that would normally be associated with a groove – the hi-hats, bass drum and a rim click on the snare. This provides a connection to the listener and other musicians. Instead of the lack of tempo causing high levels of rhythmic dissonance, there is still a sense of familiarity.

This technique is similar to that used by influential drummer Paul Motian on the track ‘Mesmer’ from *Garden of Eden* (Motian, 2006). On that track, Motian imitates a regular swing groove – utilising the ride cymbal, snare, hi-hat and bass drum – but with a fluctuating pulse. This is a style that Motian was renowned for, but also one that led to divisive critical opinions on him. Important jazz writer and critic Nate Chinen (2006) claimed, “Motian’s minimalist percussion is as subtle and steady as a heartbeat, even when it more readily suggests a cardboard box tumbling down the stairs.” The idea of performing in such an unorthodox manner is consistent with the aspiration of a non-structured improvisational performance of a motivic composition. Affording the artists equal freedom to play in a more conventional manner or to play as if ‘tumbling down the stairs’ at any given moment.

The drums continue with this approach for four repeats of the written material, before playing in time with a highly syncopated groove, now on the hi-hats, bass drums and snare drum turned on. These iterations of the material with all performers playing at tempo bring us towards a further background performance. This groove builds over another four repeats until, at 01:27 a big drum fill suggests a change in material.

This change comes with Binder moving to the alternative fourth time ending and Meteau now moving to the bassline, but rather than doubling it, he rhythmically displaces the motif (figure 20). This is a prime example of middleground development - with the original bassline motif

as the background, this is a spontaneously adapted elaboration. It creates tension due to the rhythmic friction with the original but retains a sense of familiarity to the listener.

Figure 20. ‘Suite for Eirik’ – guitar middleground. Source: Author

After four further repeats of this four-bar form, there is another switch at 01:49, with Binder now moving to the melody and Meteau moving to the bassline. Binder has also now added a reverb effect to his guitar so that the melody carries more weight and there is a clearer distinction between the two instruments. This gives the effect of it being a definitive version of the material and after four repeats, act as a launch pad for improvisation. At 02:08 Meteau begins the written bassline but then prolongs it in another middleground event, while Binder’s improvisation also features an extension of the offbeat idea with moving descending diatonic intervals of a third in answer to the bassline, which he repeats (figure 21).

Figure 21. ‘Suite for Eirik’ – guitar middleground #2. Source: Author

As seen above, the start of Binder’s improvisation starts with Meteau playing the written bassline notes, but in the third and fourth bars they are rhythmically straightened so that they are all on beats 1 and 3. In the fifth bar, however, he starts the line on an A, before moving up

to the root note, B, on beat 3. The next bar sees the introduction of some chromaticism with a major seventh leap down to C natural as an approach to the root again in beat 3 of the sixth bar. The bassline's motivic feature of triadic leaps is kept alive with a descending major third to a G in bar seven, before an octave leap leads down a tone to a dominant (F#) to tonic (B) resolution in the eighth bar. These four bars are an excellent example of how a motivic composition can be developed spontaneously, while keeping the integrity of the piece intact.

The developed bassline is also noteworthy, as the four-bar solo line improvised by Binder above is repeated, meaning that it is heard on top of both the original bass notes and the improvised middleground development. This line is also a strong example of middleground development as it takes both the rhythmic offbeat theme from the melody and the use of triadic interval leaps. Bars 5 – 8 above are now an entirely developed new section, which could quite conceivably have been composed through standard techniques, but instead were achieved spontaneously through the experience and improvisational skill of the performers and the simplicity of the composition itself.

The improvisation continues, with Meteau moving further away from the written bassline and starting to deviate from the written half-notes and moving more towards the syncopated motif of the melody line from 02:18. Binder's improvisation at this point also intensifies with a long stream of eighth-notes. This builds to 02:30 when a fortissimo eighth-note triplet fill on the snare drum signifies a change is coming and the section duly reaches its climax two bars later when the trio simultaneously leave a bar with only sustained notes before returning with the composition in the following bar (figure 22). This shows how valuable the use of space can be, both in creating tension and expectation for a listener, and as a means of pre-empting change in group interaction.



Figure 22. 'Suite for Eirik' – use of space before return to material. Source: Author

This is another prime example of an improvised passage reaching a very succinct ending completely spontaneously, communicated only through musical expression. The triplet fill on the snare drum in the first bar of figure 6 acts as a call to the other musicians, coming out of context with what has previously been played by that instrument. After a return to a more regular drum pattern in the following two bars, the quarter-note triplet figure acts as the catalyst for the following empty bar. It should also be noted that as the original written figure features a four-bar pattern, the band continue to feel that four-bar form. This is something that comes very naturally to most professional musicians, having spent large portions of much of their careers dealing with forms made up multiples of four bar phrases. In this situation, it makes it natural for the group to break in the final bar of a four-bar cycle and come back in together at the start of the following cycle.

Following this climactic break, Meteau returns to the written bassline. Binder does not return to the melody, however, and the trio play loosely with the material, gradually deconstructing it. The eight bars from 03:02 are the sparsest example of this break down (figure 23).



Figure 23. 'Suite for Eirik' – middleground development. Source: Author

This breakdown sees the use of three of the main characteristics of the piece, firstly the offbeats, secondly the intervallic leaps and thirdly the rhythmic displacement. Binder's improvisation has here broken down into small two-note phrases of descending intervallic leaps, starting on offbeats and landing one eighth-note later on downbeats. These two note cells are displaced, starting variously between different offbeats in the bar. The intervals themselves vary between fourths, fifths and sixths, all of which are featured in the composition itself – the fourth and sixth in the melody line and the fifth in the bassline. Meteau's use of the bassline is also now heavily displaced, with the pick-up in the first measure (figure 23) normally occurring two beats earlier. This displacement is clearly displayed below (figure 24) with the improvised melody breakdown in the top stave and the original in the bottom stave.



Figure 24. 'Suite for Eirik' – background and midground comparison. Source: Author

Following this breakdown of the material, the synth is heard for the first time at 03:16, performing the bottom voice, which is doubled by Météau's guitar. The function of this introduction is to return to the composition and bring the performance to a conclusion. As drummer and composer, this is another advantage personally in adding the synth, allowing me to directly influence the direction of the music with pitch-based information. While the dynamics, touch, colour and feel of the drums has a great effect on the development and shape of motivic compositions, the ability to play the material as it is written on the page can elicit a different response from the other performers. In this case, it results in both of the guitars returning to the composition in its original form, with Binder also joining the bassline from 03:31 an octave above Météau. At 03:50 Binder moves to the melody, and exactly as written the first ending is played three times before the group finish together on the fourth time ending. It is also interesting to note that although at times the research has shown that having overly-involved structures can have a detrimental effect on the improviser's spontaneity, in a scenario such as this one, the 16-bar structure provides the band with a very clear ending to succinctly bring the piece to a close.

4.2.3 Example 1b: Blowout Fracture – Suite for Eirik. Recorded at Theatre de l’Oriental, Vevey, Switzerland on the 21st January 2017

Line-up:

Laurent Meteau – Guitar

Alexander Binder – Guitar

Matthew Jacobson – Drums / Synth Bass / Composition

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/7858dz0alcll810/SuiteForEirik_BlowoutFracture_Vevey_21-01-2017.mp3?dl=0

For the second night of Blowout Fracture’s residency, the group performed mostly the same set of pieces again, including Suite for Eirik. This performance will now be analysed, before comparing the significant similarities and differences in the two versions of this motivic composition.

For the start of this performance we again hear a count-in, unsurprisingly leading the performers to begin with background material. Meteau plays the bottom voice while the drums play a shifting groove featuring the bass drum, hi-hats and rim clicks on the snare. On this occasion, however, the alternate fourth time ending is performed every second ending, halving the entire length of the cycle. After two rounds of this eight-bar cycle, Binder joins with the top voice melody, performed using an octave pedal effect on his guitar. This effect can add a synthesised signal an octave above or below the original input signal. In this case it gives the melody a muddier sound, almost appearing as counterpart bassline with the original. This is performed four times, without any utterance of the fourth time ending, while Meteau continues to alternate evenly between the two bottom voice endings.

At 00:36 Binder also drops to the bassline and follows Meteau’s restructuring of the riff. At this point the drums also move from a rim click to a snare sound, which, combined with the doubled bassline, creates a sense of heaviness. After two cycles of the now eight-bar pattern, Meteau moves to the melody at 00:52. For this presentation, he uses chorus and delay effects on the guitar, and it is heard an octave higher than before. This gives it a much stronger sense

of melodicism and creates a greater sense of distance between it and the bassline. This is another example of how in the right hands and with nuanced control of one's aesthetic instrumental choices, the exact same material can be utilised in starkly different ways, fulfilling a variety of functions in a purely improvised setting.

As Meteau moves to the melody, he also moves to the written fourth time ending structure, which is performed a total of twice. This displays the potential to alter a spontaneously established structure at any moment, once the artists accept the freedom and control that they are afforded in the context discussed here. Directly following the second performance of the written material, at 01:25 there is a very sudden drop in dynamics and density. The effect of this abrupt change in direction on those in attendance is indicated by an audible 'whoop' from an audience member at 01:27.

This is an example of the reciprocal nature of the social context imbued in a live public concert setting, one which would not be present in the more one-sided recording session. Such an affirmation of connection demonstrates Iyer's (2016) "mutual embodiment", with the listener and performers simultaneously experiencing the performance, and the former embodying that experience with an expressive outburst. It also acts as instant positive reinforcement of what the musicians are playing, encouraging them to continue in a similar vein.

Binder, continuing with the octave effect on his guitar, plays a broken version of the bassline, while the drums also play in an extremely broken and sparse manner, featuring dry sounds on the bass drum, snare, hi-hats and rim clicks. Meteau, meanwhile, plays a mixture of rapid descending lines and chord clusters interspliced with long pauses.

After the development of some playful interaction between the guitar and drums, where we hear fragments of the bassline, echoed by sparse short eighth-note phrases on the drums with between them, at 01:57, Binder returns to a middleground development of the bassline (figure 25).

Figure 25. 'Suite for Eirik' – bassline middleground development. Source: Author

Above we see the use of the composition to create a feeling of disjointedness and fragmentation. The bassline notes are swapped randomly between the two guitars, while the drums also play in a deconstructed manner. In the seventh bar of figure 9 we hear a descending glissando from Binder, which increases tension, followed by almost two complete bars of silence by all three performers. This extreme use of space is broken by the final three notes – G, F# and C# – taken directly from the fourth time bassline ending and performed by Meteau to spontaneously cue the other musicians back on beat one of the following bar. This is another use of the composition as a musical cue in a highly improvised setting in the midst of an abstracted passage.

Following on from these two bars of silence, at 02:09 the performers do not, however, return to the written material. Instead, the drums play a dotted quarter-note passage over four bars, Binder plays strong and very sparse chromatic bass notes, while Meteau introduces an off-kilter, dotted eighth-note upper-register dyad. After four bars at 02:13, the group move to a sixteen-bar foreground section. Although relatively abstracted from the written material, the continuation of the same pulse results in this section not sounding overly obscure. The drums play a backbeat on the snare drum with a heavy hi-hat accent on beat '2' and Binder continues the sparse, chromatic eighth-note feel from the previous bars. Meteau continues with the dyads, but now more rhythmically obscured. This creates a guitar equivalent to the Paul Motian 'tumbling down stairs' effect on drums and is highly contrasting to the strong rhythmic sense coming from the other two musicians. The tension between these approaches comes to a climax in the twelfth bar of this foreground section when, at 02:23, the drums drop out.

At this point, without the interaction of the drums, Binder is pulled towards Meteau's obscured sense of pulse, resulting in a brief sense of chaos. On further analysis, however, the pulse is not abandoned completely, and the drums return with a crash cymbal on the original downbeat after the sixteenth bar of this section. These five bars are an excellent musical demonstration of the conflicting themes of freedom and constraints examined in this thesis. The sense of abandon and release combined with the connection to the composition results in a powerful interaction between the three performers.

Reacting to the re-entry of the drums, the guitars now return to a middleground performance of the bassline and after eight bars, they return to the written bassline at 02:36. Interestingly, Binder plays the written sixteen-bar structure, while Meteau plays the halved, eight-bar structure. This creates some rhythmic dissonance in bar 8, but the familiarity of the material and the fast tempo means this does not create any issues. At 02:52, Meteau moves to the top voice of the composition and Binder stays on the bassline. The drums continue to drive the composition with a half-time backbeat and offbeat snare hits mimicking the melody. The composition is played with two full sixteen-bar cycles before the band end together on the final respective A and C# notes of the melody and bassline on the 'and of 3'.

4.2.4 Comparative Analysis of Suite for Eirik:

These two performances of ‘Suite for Eirik’, recorded just 24 hours apart in the same venue, with the same performers on the same instruments have distinctly different shapes, structures and tempos. The count-in to the performance on the second night resulted in it starting with the written material, while the first night’s performance starts with an open drum solo. These different approaches allow one to adapt a non-structured motivic composition to a particular set list and avoid the difficulties inherent in a composition with a set structure. The two documented performances also each have differing tempos, with night one having a BPM of 208 and night two a BPM of 238. With a more structured composition, a difference of 30 BPM would seem extreme, but the strength and clarity of the key characteristics and background material allows the tempo to fluctuate, without impinging on the inherent qualities of piece.

Both performances make use of space at similar points. At the end of improvised sections on both nights, the group collectively and spontaneously leave a bar empty. However, the results differ, with the group returning to the composition on night one and continuing with a new improvised foreground section on night two. This interesting comparison suggests that utilising compositional and improvisational devices will not necessarily lead to the same results, enhancing the hypothesis that non-structured motivic compositions can vary through different social and conjunctural contexts.

Using the same level of elaboration graph as in the previous investigations, we can see that these performances of ‘Suite for Eirik’ on average had relatively low levels of overall elaboration. Apart from the drum solo at the beginning of the performance on night one, these performances remain in time and it is also noteworthy to mention that both performances also stick to groups of four, eight or sixteen-bar cycles. This is unsurprising, given that “multiples of ‘4’ often predominate in musical structures, particularly in popular music, whether in subdivisions of a 4/4 metre or in groupings of units that constitute form” (Coleman, 2016) and that the structural characteristics of this composition itself also fit into this form.

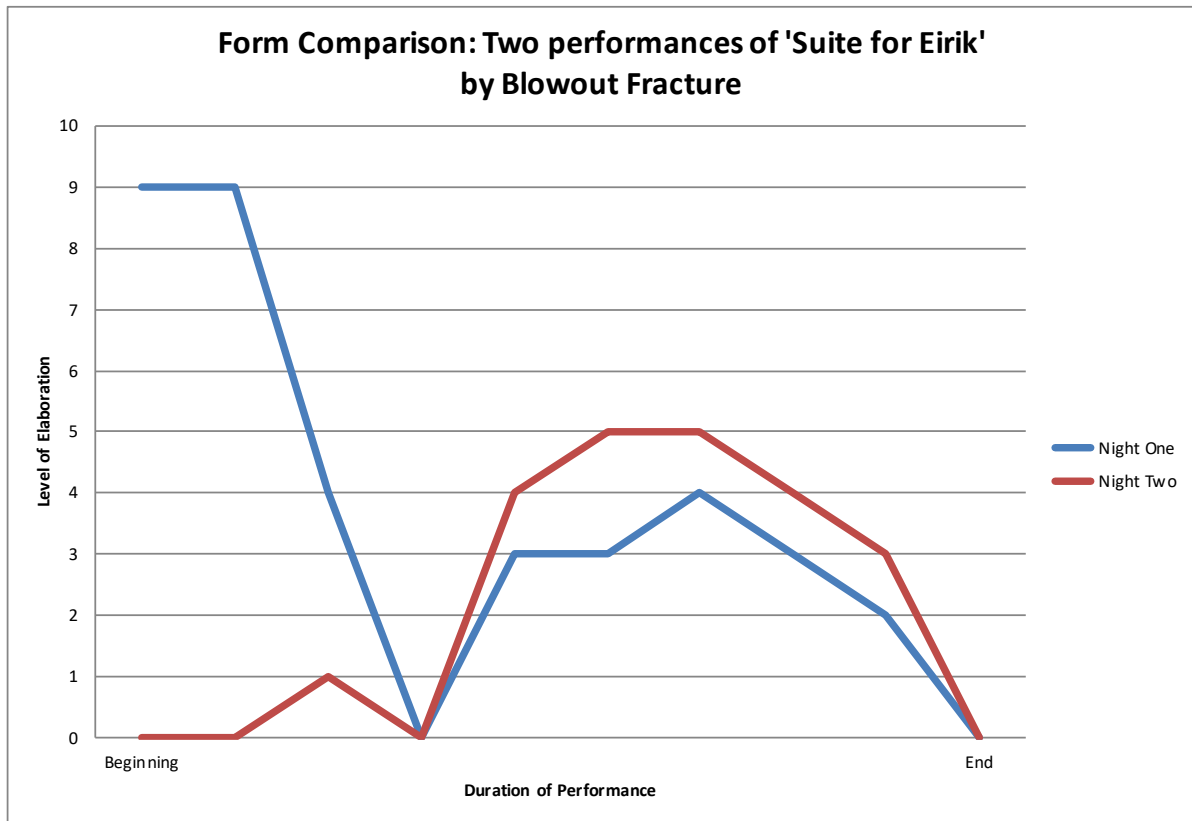


Figure 26. 'Suite for Eirik' – Level of Elaboration comparison graph. Source: Author

As we can see from the graph above (figure 26), despite vastly contrasting openings, from a third of the way through, both these performances follow similar structural arcs and levels of elaboration. The average level of elaboration for night one is 3.7 and the average for night two is 2.2. It could be posited that the lower levels of elaboration than previously investigated motivic compositions are as a result of the more diatonic and common structural elements of the writing. If the musicians are challenged into performing material that they are less familiar with, then they are perhaps less likely to fall into usual harmonic or structural modes of improvisation. This initial finding is from a small sample size but warrants more in-depth analysis in further research.

4.2.5 Cicaplast

The central motif for this composition (figures 27 and 28) is a twelve-tone row, composed with specific intervallic structures and resolution points in mind. As discussed previously, the tone row technique was developed by Arnold Schoenberg in the 1920s and was predicated on a means of departing from the constraints of regular tonal harmonies (Vander Weg & Stewart, 2001). Occasionally used in the current practice, particularly by leading improviser and composer Tim Berne, its construction in this case is intended to avoid a sense of chromaticism, so that despite containing all twelve notes of the chromatic scale, it has a more diatonic feeling.

The row is to be played six times: rubato and interpreted rhythmically freely. Between each hearing of the row, the first to sixth-time endings each feature a different interval as a vehicle for a short improvisation. The instruction for the improvisers is to use the intervals to create juxtaposition with the performances of the row. This use of specific intervals, as opposed to using the entire row to improvise on, is a magnification of my central thesis idea of paring down written material to its core motifs. In a sense, the main twelve-tone motif is divided into six sub-motifs. While constraining the improviser with regard to their choice of notes, it also pushes them to find creative sonic and textural techniques in order to keep their improvisations interesting. In terms of structure, this motivic composition is more involved than others submitted as part of this thesis. However, as with all improvised performances of motivic composition, both the composition and structural instructions are given as a suggestion, with the underlying condition that the musicians can choose to follow them or not.

The final (sixth time) ending introduces tempo for the first time, with a 5/8 rhythm split into a division of three plus two. The original row is then played using this rhythmic pattern, only now repeating the first eight notes (A) and then the final four notes (B) in an AABB form. This section is then open for improvisation. To finish the piece, there is a fermata on the last note of the row in bar 24, before the row is mirrored with a written inversion, to be performed mezzo piano and ending with a slight ritardando before the last note.

This piece is also written as a single line only, with no additional counterpart or harmony lines, further reducing the motivic composition premise that any member of a group can play the material at any time.

cicaplast

MatthewJacobson

A very slowly, rubato

The musical score is written in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. It begins with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The first staff contains the following notes: G4, A4, Bb4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4. The second staff contains: G4, A4, Bb4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4. The third staff is labeled '1. improvise with this interval' and shows the interval between Bb4 and Bb4. The fourth staff is labeled '2. improvise with this interval' and shows the interval between Bb4 and G4. The fifth staff is labeled '3. improvise with this interval' and shows the interval between G4 and Bb4. The sixth staff is labeled '4. improvise with this interval' and shows the interval between Bb4 and G4. The seventh staff is labeled '5. improvise with this interval' and shows the interval between G4 and G4. The eighth staff is labeled '6. improvise with this interval' and shows the interval between G4 and G4. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Figure 27. Motivic Composition 'Cicaplast' Page 1. Source: Author

2 cicaplast

B ♩ = 180

23 (last x)

25 *slight rit.*

mp

Figure 28. Motivic Composition 'Cicaplast' Page 2

For the following analysis, three performances of this composition by ReDiviDeR will be analysed and compared. These consist of a rehearsal session, a live performance and a studio session, all recorded over three consecutive days in January 2020. These were leading up to and part of the recording of a new album of ReDiviDeR material, based on the research conducted in this thesis and as mentioned previously, largely seen as the key creative output of this work.

4.2.6 Example 2a: ReDiviDeR – Cicaplast. Recorded at a private rehearsal in Sandymount, Dublin, Ireland on the 11th January 2020

Line-up:

Nick Roth – Alto Saxophone

Colm O'Hara – Trombone

Derek Whyte – Electric Bass

Matthew Jacobson – Drums / Composition

Audio: https://www.dropbox.com/s/wynbscn30rlt4zj/Cicaplast_ReDiviDeR_Rehearsal_11-01-2020.mp3?dl=0

The documentation of this performance was part of a private rehearsal for a concert and recording session in which several pieces were to be performed without breaks in between. The opening of this track is the last few moments of a segue from a previous piece. We hear the first note of the first performance of the row from the alto saxophone at 00:06. As suggested on the page, the performance is rubato and very slow. This is echoed by low grumbling multiphonics on trombone and contrasted by a dry, sparse groove on the drums. This lasts until the row is finished at 01:26 and the group collectively remain silent before the first-time ending begins at 01:31.

At this point the bass enters with the first note of the first-time ending – Bb. The drums move to light brushes around the kit and cymbals, while the alto saxophone and trombone perform upper register multiphonics, not specifically related to the written pitches. The bass then also introduces the descending major third interval, Gb. The bass in this scenario is providing a platform for the rest of the group, connecting the rest of the band's foreground work with the background material. The bass then leads into the second iteration of the row at 02:28. This is another example of the ability of any group member to cue the material, particularly as this is a single line melody.

The bass repeats the second note of the row, B, several times, an effect which is then immediately reacted to by the alto saxophone, who begins his own slightly delayed performance of the row by repeating the first note, D. This demonstrates the opportunity for spontaneous and collective melodic and rhythmic development of a sparsely written line. The two instruments continue to loosely perform the row together, while the drums continue with brushes with increased activity and the trombone provides improvised low notes in accompaniment to the melody. There is a slight fermata on the penultimate note of the row, A, before the bass performs the final note, G, as a harmonic at 02:54.

The second-time ending begins with the bass once again taking the lead on the written interval, this time trilling rapidly between the Db and B. The trombone this time also joins the written material, droning on a low B and the alto saxophone takes a more of an accompanying role, playing small intervallic cells from the row. The drums meanwhile contrast the lower register tones by concentrating on higher cymbal sounds. At 03:58, the trombone swells a low multiphonic into a sudden rest, suggesting an end of the improvised passage, which the alto saxophone picks up on and starts the third performance of the row at 04:02.

This occurrence of the row moves considerably faster than the previous two, and for the first four bars the bass continues performing the B to Db trill from the second-time ending, providing an overlap between two sections of the written material. The drums move away from the cymbals and plays with hands on the shells. This row ends at 04:15, with the trombone creating a minor third harmony on the last note by moving to a Bb instead of a G.

The third-time ending is more active than previous endings, with the drums moving to rapidly moving sticks on rims. The other performers react by also playing much shorter notes and phrases. The bass repeats the second note of the written interval, Eb, the alto saxophone plays short cells of atonal notes and the trombone plays intensely active, quiet upper register flurries. The bass also adds the first note of the interval, E and also performs double-stops with the two notes together, adding to the intensity of the section. The alto joins with rhythmic variations on major seventh interval around 05:15 in the upper register. This causes a crescendo in the group dynamic and this is punctuated by a sudden cymbal crash in the drums at 05:27. Although this brings no sudden change to the passage, at 05:41, the alto reintroduces the row for the fourth time.

This version of the row lasts only seven seconds and features further spontaneous arrangement as the trombone joins for bars three and four only and holds the Db while the alto continues through the final two bars of the row. The group continue to use the repeated note effect, and this continues into the fourth-time ending. The F to Ab ascending minor third creates a blues-sounding motif, accentuated by the bass, who begins the passage by playing the interval as triplets, a common rhythmic feel for the blues (Ripani, 2006). The drums return to the Paul Motian 'out of time' approach, seen earlier in the analysis of 'Suite for Eirik', increasing the tension with several press rolls on the snare drum. The bass expands on the interval, playing around an F blues tonality with even rhythmic values. The horns solo lightly over this drum and bass accompaniment with similar tonal choices until a snare drum to floor tom to bass drum fill cues the fifth performance of the row at 06:34. This again shows the ability of any member of the group to musically cue the material. Although the drums cannot utilise the melodic material, the urgency of change can be elicited with clear instrumental expression.

This time the row is performed together by bass, alto and trombone, although the trombone ends on the penultimate note, A with a low growl. The drums play over the row, actively all

around the kit and cymbals with several snare drum rolls. As soon as the trombone hits the low A, however, the drums return to the rattling sticks on rims approach. The alto continues to use the last note of the row, G, playing rhythmically with an octave interval. The bass meanwhile plays an indistinguishable low rumble. At around 07:10, the trombone interestingly joins in with an ascending minor third interval of F to Ab. This is most likely as a result of thinking the group are on the fourth, rather than fifth-time ending. However, the intention of concentrating on one interval achieves the desired effect, particularly as the other artists are also not performing the written material at this point. At 07:21 the trombone moves to the written fifth-time ending interval of G and A. The group then build intensity until the alto returns for the final performance of the A section row at 07:41.

From the last two notes of this row performance, the drums introduce the 5/8 rhythmic pattern for the B section, subdivided into three and then two eighth-notes. The other musicians do not immediately join, instead continuing the rubato feel from the row, but at 07:55 the bass joins the drums with the descending major second interval G to A. The horns then join the pattern with a mixture of long notes and short motifs, generally in the tonality of G major pentatonic. This builds until the alto establishes the B section at 08:23

As the alto has not physically cued the new section, during the first two bars of the B section the bass and trombone are still improvising on the sixth-time ending. However, the level with which the performers are listening to each other is evident in the speed at which they join the alto in performing the line. By the fourth eighth-note of the second bar of the section, the trombone has joined the alto in performing the written line and on the downbeat of bar three, the bass also joins. This shows that the clarity of the composition and the group's familiarity with it allows the performers to fluidly introduce a new section with very little group dissonance.

After the first occurrence of the B section, the horns then begin improvising over the material, while the bass continues with the written line and the drums play an accompaniment-style groove, predominantly with the ride cymbal, bass drum and snare drum. The trombone uses more long notes in his improvisation, while the alto plays more actively, often referencing or returning to the written line for one or two bars at a time. The ability to play 'in and out' of the composition in such a manner also promotes its adaptability between the worlds of improvisation and composition.

At 09:00, the trombone plays a rhythmic variation on the repeated first four bars of the line, performing with constant eighth-notes instead of the written long notes. On the fifth bar, the alto seamlessly takes over, the written line while the trombone begins soloing over the repeat of those two bars. This is a further case of clearly executed spontaneous arranging of compositional material. On the following repeat, the repeated note effect is taken up by the bass. At 09:12, the five eighth-notes pattern triggers a middleground rhythmic modulation, with the subdivision of three and two being replaced by a dotted eighth-note followed by sixteenth-note feel, with the duration of each bar remaining unchanged (figure 29). This is an example of a complex middleground elaboration of written material.



Figure 29. 'Cicoplast' – middleground modulation. Source: Author

This modulation continues for another complete performance of the row, with the drums playing a fast backbeat pattern to emphasise the change in feel and the alto improvising sixteenth-note lines in further attestation of this development.

At 09:26, the group collectively return to the original 5/8 feel, although the alto continues improvising with sixteenth-note flurries and the trombone remains on long notes. After one further repeat, at 09:35, we hear another spontaneous arrangement technique as the trombone moves to a half-time rendition of the row, while the alto and bass continue with the written line (figure 30). The impact of hearing the row at two tempos simultaneously results in the drums physical cueing the final inverted version of the row (09:45) to finish this performance.



Figure 30. 'Cicaplast' – half-time middleground. Source: Author

4.2.7 Example 2b: ReDiviDeR – Cicaplast. Recorded at a public performance at the Dublin Jazz Coop, Workman's Club, Dublin, Ireland on the 12th January 2020

Line-up:

Nick Roth – Alto Saxophone

Colm O'Hara – Trombone

Derek Whyte – Electric Bass

Matthew Jacobson – Drums / Composition

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/cp757apyy6v8lty/Cicaplast_ReDiviDeR_DublinJazzCoopl_12-01-2020.mp3?dl=0

The documentation of this performance is from a public performance in which six motivic compositions were played as one continuous set. At the opening of this recording, we hear the final moments of the transition from the previous composition, 'I'm Benter', into the start of 'Cicaplast'.

Initially, we hear the bass playing a staccato disintegration of the previous piece's material, while the drums play rapid and dynamically fluctuating dry sounds on rims. The first

performance of the row is heard at 00:05, unison by the horns. At the end of the row, the bass and drums then blend with the horns. The drums move to sparse, wetter cymbal sounds in conjunction with trills on alto, glissandos and breath-like sounds on trombone and lower register mutterings on bass. The written first-time ending of Bb and Gb is essentially ignored here, an option afforded to the performers at all times. The second performance of the row is introduced at 01:00, again performed by the horns and again with the drums and bass fulfilling a secondary function, continuing their improvisation from the previous section.

The second-time ending begins at 01:08. On this occasion, the trombone performs the written interval of Db and B, shifting between them with some added multiphonics. The alto plays short altissimo flurries, occasionally referencing the Db. The drums sweep quietly with brushes on the snare and the bass interacts with the alto's flurries with a similar approach in the lower register. The third row is physically cued by the alto at 01:43 and is also performed by bass and trombone and drums move back to cymbals, although still with brushes.

Immediately following on from this rendition of the row, the horns remain tacet. Interestingly, however, rather than moving onto the third-time ending interval, the bass returns to the second-time ending notes, reversing them to B and Db. This is most likely not a conscious decision, but rather a simple mistake. The interval is performed with increasing rhythmic subdivisions, as well as the ascending whole-tone interval, mimicking the effect of a bouncing ball. The trombone and drums follow this effect, with the latter hitting the floor tom with a stick and adjusting the pitch by applying pressure to the head of the drum. This is another example of an extended technique being used to enhance group interaction in real-time. It also adjusts the instrumental functionality of the drums, giving it the ability to interact with the pitch contours of other instruments, as opposed to only their rhythmic approach. The alto uses the 'bouncing ball' motif performed by the other three instruments as a base for soloing, with ascending and descending scalar passages.

At 02:36, the alto brings in the fourth performance of the row. This is followed by a severe decrescendo at 02:41. The drums create a sense of continuity with several hi-hat foot crashes, before moving to rapid rolls between the rims and toms, which the alto follows with runs of similar rhythmic density. The trombone juxtaposes this with long lower register notes, taken from the written fourth-time ending interval of F and Ab, while the bass is tacit. This direct

dialogue between the drums and alto continues until a collective pause is reached at 03:37 and the bass joins for the fifth occurrence of the row.

The horns and bass all perform the row in unison on this occasion and the drums play actively around the drums and cymbals, punctuating the end of the row with an accented cymbal crash at 03:44. This is followed by another sudden decrescendo before the drums re-enter with extended technique cymbal scrapes at 03:48. The trombone copies this with pianissimo upper register cracked notes and the alto plays soft long notes. The bass contrasts this with a low, continuous strumming effect, based around an E. At this point, no instruments are referencing the written interval of D down a whole-tone to C. At 04:49, we see a further example of the melodic capabilities of the drums, as the alto attempts to match the pitch emitted from the cymbal scrape. The effect of this communication between alto and drums greatly changes the context of the usually industrial, percussive sound to a more melodic one. This dark, brooding passage comes to an end at 05:01, when the alto reintroduces the final performance of the row.

This final A section repeat is performed by alto and bass, while the trombone continues the effect of the fifth-time ending. On completion of the row, the drums set up the 5/8 rhythmic pattern by playing a shifting groove between ride cymbal, bass drum and snare. Having not performed the written intervals in the previous endings, there could have been confusion as to which part of the form the group were on. The clarity of the B section material and its presentation by the drums shows another strength in a motivic composition. The group are all comfortable with this material and as soon as they hear the drum groove it is clear that section A is over. The bass does, however, at 05:09, provide a link between the A and B sections of the composition by joining the drums at tempo but with a pedal using the final note of the row – G.

The alto plays the written B section material at 05:18, over the bass pedal and drum groove. The trombone then joins the bass, playing off the G and occasionally using a Bb as a secondary note. This is another example of spontaneous middleground arrangement of the written material, using a combination of two different sections of material (figure 31).

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Cicplast' – middleground pedal. It is presented in three systems, each containing three staves. The top staff uses a treble clef, while the middle and bottom staves use bass clefs. The first system includes the annotation 'or sim...' above the middle staff. The score depicts a melodic line in the upper voice and a dense, rhythmic accompaniment in the lower voices, characteristic of a 'pedal' style.

Figure 31. 'Cicplast' – middleground pedal. Source: Author

After two repeats of this middleground development of the composition, the trombone and bass continue the pedal accompaniment pattern and the drums continue with the groove, while the alto begins to solo. At 06:19, the alto stops playing melodic lines and joins the sustained pedal note approach. The group, working in a general G minor pentatonic approach, use the pedal to build tension, furthered by increasing frequency of drum fills and dynamics. At 07:05, the horns stop playing, signalling an end to the section and the drums play a floor tom and snare drum eighth-note fill into a roll around the kit to musically cue the written B section. The group then play one unison version of the material, before the trombone goes to a halftime version of the written line and the alto improvises.

This section is then repeated six times. The alto continues soloing but for the first three repeats references the row with increasing frequency. For example, the note at the start of every four bars on the first repeat, the note at the start of every two bars on the second repeat and the first two notes at the start of every two bars on the third repeat. These notes are interspersed with sixteenth-note chromatic lines. This is another example of improvisational development of compositional material, using the composition as background material for soloistic passages. On the fourth repeat, at 07:46, the drums begin to play a double-time groove, with the snare drum on quarter-note downbeats. The trombone reacts to this by leaving the written material, instead playing long, lower register chromatic notes. On the fifth repeat the alto plays the written material, while the trombone keeps playing low notes and on the sixth repeat re-joins the line. There is an audible “yeah” from the drummer at 08:05, signifying this is the last repeat. This demonstrates the possibility of verbal communication as a cue in a non-structured improvisation. In this scenario, if necessary, a bandleader has the option of signalling to ensure that all group members move to the last section together, which they do, finishing together on the inverted row at a low dynamic.

4.2.8 Example 2c: ReDiviDeR – Cicaplast. Recorded at a private recording session at the Meadow Studio, Wicklow, Ireland on the 13th January 2020

Line-up:

Nick Roth – Alto Saxophone

Colm O’Hara – Trombone

Derek Whyte – Electric Bass

Matthew Jacobson – Drums / Composition

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/7xxujn1ad45du36/Cicaplast_ReDiviDeR_MereNation_Jan2020.mp3?dl=0

This documented performance of ‘Cicaplast’ comes from the commercially released ReDiviDeR album *Mere Nation* (Jacobson, 2020). Two versions of this track were recorded, and this track was chosen as the most appropriate for the album based on its movement and flow from the previous piece.

This version opens with the final moments of the segue from 'I'm Benter', in which the drums are soloing sparsely and softly on toms, with occasional scrapes on the snare drum head. The rest of the band join, following a physical cue, at 00:09 with a unison rendition of the row. The first-time ending, beginning at 00:25, sees the bass drop out and the drums move to scattered brushes. The horns play quiet long notes using the Gb from the written notes of Bb and Gb. This ending is brief, coming to a natural end at 00:40, before the bass, alto and trombone join for a second unison row at 00:43.

For this second-time ending, the drums drop out, while the bass develops a one-bar motif in 5/8 at 00:55, starting from the last note of the row – G – and utilising harmonics. Simultaneously, the alto repeats a three-note motif of consecutive ascending major sevenths – Ab to G to Gb. This cell is performed at an unrelated tempo to the bass motif, although the middle note G connects the two parts. The trombone performs an extended technique with upper register rapid tonguing. Although the three musicians have improvised distinctly separate parts, their commitment – shown through repetition – gives the section a strong sense of motivic development. Also, the written notes of Db and B have been largely ignored.

The third A section row is performed at 01:26, with the drums returning with brushes on cymbals and the other musicians in unison. At 01:36, instead of going to the written interval, the alto repeats the last two notes of the row, A and G. The drums move to sticks, muting the snare with one hand while striking it with a stick in the other. This sound is imitated by the bass, who hits his strings percussively. This display of the bass acting in a non-melodic fashion, is the reverse example of the drums acting in a melodic sense, shown earlier with cymbal scrapes and pitch-bending. Although sparse, the trombone very lightly references the composition with a high E, played with heavy vibrato.

The fourth row is heard at 02:03, performed over rumbling drums. There is a pause at 02:11 until the trombone enters explicitly with the written fourth-time ending minor third interval of F to Ab. This is performed very slowly and is followed closely by a similar approach on alto. The bass and drums work together, the former playing low glissandos, copied by more pitch altered floor tom work by the latter. At 02:53, the row returns with similar rolling drums to the previous iteration.

In the fifth-time ending the bass and trombone can be heard using the written D and C, while the drums perform cymbal scrapes. The alto improvises small melodic phrases around a G major tonality, often landing on the D, in conjunction with the trombone and bass. This again shows a combination of written and improvised material co-existing simultaneously. This short section naturally concludes until the final A section row is performed 03:36.

After the final notes of the row are played, the drums introduce pulse and the 5/8 pattern with ride cymbal, bass drum and snare drum with the wires turned off. The alto references the sixth-time ending notes of A and G, using the major second interval in short eighth-note rhythmic motifs. The bass uses the A as a pedal note and the trombone plays bursts of chromatic notes. The drums and bass develop their accompaniment and the horns solo, often using minor thirds in their lines – the first two intervals of the row are descending minor thirds. At 04:40, snare wires are turned on and there is a lift in dynamics and intensity.

At 04:57 the alto again emphasises the minor third, but with a straighter rhythmic approach, and the other three performers immediately follow, temporarily modulating the 5/8 pattern into a 2/4 pattern with an underlying shuffle triplet feel. This lasts for approximately ten seconds before the original pattern returns. The bass continues to play the descending major second pattern and at 05:28 the alto plays the first two notes of the row on downbeats consecutive bars. This appears to signify the return of the composition and eight bars later, following another floor tom and snare drum eighth-note fill on the drums, the bass, alto and trombone play the B section material in unison. After one repeat, the trombone moves to the halftime row, while the bass and alto continue as written. At the end of this repeat, the band play the written fermata on the last note of the row and then perform the final inverted row once to finish.

4.2.9 Comparative analysis of performances of Cicaplast:

These three versions of ‘Cicaplast’, taken through three different performance contexts contain several noteworthy similarities and differences. Of all motivic compositions included in this thesis, ‘Cicaplast’ has the most involved compositional structure. However, there remains a considerable amount of freedom, evident in the different structural approaches of the three performances. The levels of elaboration of the six written intervals also vary considerably in each presentation.

The initial, and perhaps the most obvious, difference in observing these performances is the speed at which the material moves. In the rehearsal performance, the first occurrence of the row last approximately 80 seconds. This is drastically reduced to around 20 seconds for both the public performance and the recording session. The entire length of each performance also diminishes from ten minutes and four seconds (rehearsal) to eight minutes and 26 seconds (public performance) to six minutes and 25 seconds (recording session). This outcome could be as a direct result of the environmental and social pressure placed on the performers in each scenario. It would follow that, at a rehearsal, with no outside listeners either present or later via public release of the material, the musicians felt free to try things and were less conscious of self-editing. In the live performance, with listeners present in the room, but again no sense of the material being listened to a later date, the musicians were a little more selective. Finally, in the studio – fully aware that the material recorded would be a lasting, unchangeable document available to the public – the musicians were most selective, reducing the length of the performance by almost 40% from the rehearsal. This outcome would also align with the research on social context, conducted earlier in this thesis, which suggested that rehearsals in Ireland are more “laid-back” than in other locations (Langley & Breese, 2005).

The written form for this piece contains six endings that essentially function as their own motivic compositions. Each of these can be adhered to explicitly, developed or ignored completely. The analysis of these sections has shown that there was a willingness between all performers to take up all three of these options. Generally, at least one musician references the intervals, occasionally they all choose to interact with each other without any reference to the written endings and, most infrequently, they all explicitly perform the written material. Analysing the performances in terms of both the artists’ individual input, as well as the group output that emerges as a consequence comes as a result of Swayer’s (2012) previously discussed concept of “collaborative emergence”. This posits that in analysing such a creative process, it is essential to look at the actions of the group as well as that of the individuals.

The decrease in duration throughout the series of analysed performances – and their more concise nature – also reflects various work on “the enactive perspective” (Schiavio et al, 2019). In a pedagogical context, their research found that when given freedom by their teachers, novice improvisers developed their skillset through the provision of feedback and sharing of ideas in a collaborative context. This could also be said to be happening in ReDiviDeR’s shared

experience of this piece, and their negotiation of this motivic composition through varying social contexts. They are developing their skillset in relation to both this composition, each other and their environment, resulting in a higher level of interaction by the final performance.

Similarities in the performances include the use of rhythmic modulation, the focus on extended techniques and the use of pedal point to develop tension in the B section. In both the rehearsal and recorded version, the group ‘straighten’ the 5/8 pattern, superimposing a 2/4 or 4/4 time signature, keeping the duration of each bar the same. In the former, a subdivision of sixteenth-notes is used for a double-time feel, whereas in the latter the group use a triplet subdivision for a shuffle feel. This demonstrates that even using similar developmental devices, the musicians do not ‘settle’ on a device working in a given context, but continue to react in the moment, using the same device in a different way. This is further corroborated in the ensemble’s use of pedal point. In the public performance and recording studio session, the bass employs a pedal to great effect in the B section. In the live performance, however, the pedal is based around a G, while in the studio, it is based on an A. This is despite the composition – the same twelve-tone row – remaining the same. This is another example of the group using the same device adaptively in different contexts.

The added structure included in this composition means that there are relatively similar comparative levels of elaboration in proportion to the duration of each performance (figure 32). However, it is evident that average levels of elaboration were lowered with each performance. The rehearsal has an average of 4.3, 3.9 for the public performance and 2.8 for the studio session.

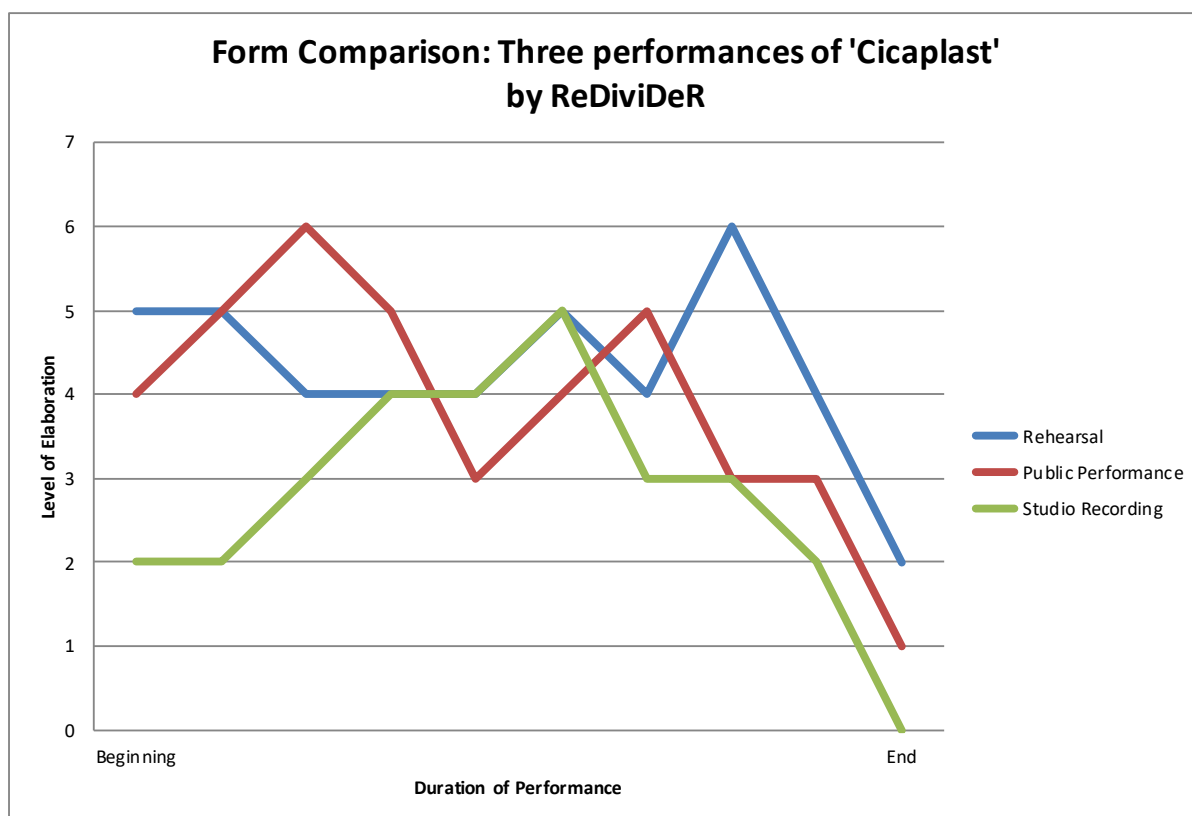


Figure 32. 'Cicaplast' – Level of Elaboration comparison graph. Source: Author

4.2.10 Initial findings from analysis of performances of the same composition by the same ensemble in different contexts:

The two examined pieces under this category have established some key findings. Various documentation of both compositions was descriptively analysed in the context of spontaneity, group interaction and social context and initial findings have shown that, despite the motivic composition for each performance being identical, the output varies greatly in different situations.

The two compositions analysed vary in their structural approach, although both contain more form-related information than the other motivic compositions featured in this thesis. The four written endings in 'Suite for Eirik' and the six written endings in 'Cicaplast' give the performers more structural information to consider when improvising than would generally be suggested in a motivic composition. However, the musicians in both cases show that with a clearly portrayed element of trust from the bandleader and composer, the material may be adhered to or ignored as they see fit. As discussed in the literature review, Rose (2017) has

presented the “redundant binary of improvisation versus composition”. In the context of the performances analysed here, it is clear that the musicians are guided by the compositional material, but also feel free to ignore it where necessary. This exposes the grey area between improvisation and composition, illuminating that the two can co-exist and backing up Rose’s refutation of their existence as opposing forces.

The analyses of these compositions also suggest that the use of improvisational and compositional devices during performances does not impinge on the sense of unpredictability or spontaneity. While the successful use of such a device might encourage the performers to use it again in a later performance, it does not mean that it will be utilised in the same manner. In both performances of ‘Suite for Eirik’, improvised bars where all bandmembers remain tacet are heard. In the first performance such silence is followed by written material. However, in the second performance, a similar bar of silence is followed by further improvisation. The literature has presented the comparison between silence in linguistics and in music (Sutton, 2001), showing that there are two main uses of silence in music; “stylised” and “interactive”. The former most likely developed “out of compositional techniques, with the improvisers informed of this either by training or exposure to pre-composed music”, while the latter “has its roots in communication between people and could well be a unique feature of improvised music.” It could be argued that in the first performance of ‘Suite for Eirik’ the use is “stylised” as it is succeeded by a return to compositional material, whereas the second occurrence is “interactive”, featuring as more of a collective conversational pause without any immediate change to the musical setting.

A similar comparison of the same musical devices having different outcomes is found in ‘Cicaplast’, where harmonic and rhythmic devices are utilised in different contexts in the different performances, including the use of pedal point and rhythmic modulation. These pedal points occur with different note choices and the modulations occur with different rhythmic subdivisions. This implies that where the musicians are encouraged to follow their own instincts, they will not necessarily recreate successful performances and thus fall into the same tropes that creative musicians and composers have been striving to avoid for many years, and that would traditionally occur with a fully structured compositional arrangement.

Contrary to this, we do also see the continued use of the same device throughout different performances. In the B section of all three performances of ‘Cicaplast’, the trombone plays the

written twelve-tone row at the speed of one note per bar as opposed to two notes per bar as written. The positive effect of this technique on the performance was discussed after the first rehearsal and, while not added to the score, this presumably encouraged the use of it again in both the live concert and recording session performances. Such interaction shows that the development of a motivic composition is not purely based on once off performances. Following Sawyer's (2012) concept again, the 'emergence' of the pieces analysed here is based on the coming together of both the artists' individual decisions and the groups' interaction, both 'in the moment' during performances and in open and honest discussions around the performances. The openness of a non-structured motivic composition also means that, while the device used by the trombone was successful in the performances analysed here, it could just as easily be left out in a later performance, if the performer's instincts led him away from that decision.

4.3 Non-musical Motifs as Vehicles for Improvisation

4.3.1 Performances using painted images as a motif for improvisation in a small group setting

'Fingerpainting' is a trio project featuring Japanese contemporary classical and improvising pianist Izumi Kimura on keyboard, jazz bassist and composer Ronan Guilfoyle on bass guitar and myself on drums. As well as using simple conceptual ideas for improvisation, such as a general groove, tempo or a pitch register, the group also uses painted images by pianist Kimura as vehicles for improvised pieces. In order to place my analysis of these performances in the context of both art forms, I have undertaken additional research from various backgrounds. I have attempted to connect visual imagery to different stages of the improvisational process, whether in physical form pre- and mid-performance, as in Fingerpainting's work or in the more cerebral sense, as in White's (2011) artist-led self-analysis of the improvisational process in terms of shapes, colours and textures. The similarities between the emergence of free improvisation in music and abstract expressionism in art from the 1950s have also been particularly well documented by artist and academic Matthew Sansom. His doctoral thesis (2001) in the area of free improvisation and his own work as an artist across a variety of media and contexts allow him to concisely describe the formalities in both worlds that lead to the development of these new methods of art and music-making.

To begin with the latter's work, Sansom acknowledges that due to his own research history and interests, his description of free improvisation is based mainly on the UK scene in the 1960s, led by Derek Bailey, Cornelius Cardew, Keith Rowe and Eddie Prevost among others. As is described elsewhere in this thesis, these musicians developed new approaches to improvising as a response to the American styles of bebop and later hard bop, which required a huge amount of technical proficiency and, as argued by Jost in *Free Jazz* (1994), lead to a homogenous sound by its proponents. The UK scene, which strove to free itself of formal organisation, whether harmonic, rhythmic or structural, lead to a much greater heterogeneity in both the style of individual performers and groups. Around the same time, artists who felt inhibited by formal classical obsessions moved towards a much more abstract style of painting. Important artists in this movement, all with greatly differing and at times conflicting approaches and methods include Jackson Pollock, Wassily Kandinsky, Mark Rothko and Francis Bacon.

One adept comparison described by Sansom is that of Pollock's "drip-painting" method, in which he would literally drip or pour paint onto a canvas, and guitarist Keith Rowe's method of turning his electric guitar on its back and placing a variety of random objects on it. As Sansom (2001) depicts, the end goal is the same in both:

Artists explored the nature and function of art on its own terms through explorations of the medium's intrinsic formal language of line, tone color, composition and texture. In Abstract Expressionism these elements are foregrounded alongside the (essentially modernist) agenda of an artist seeking maximum of interaction with these qualities as a means of self-expression. The breaking down of functional and formal elements of the "musical tradition" provides the musical parallel to these developments... Free improvisation draws from these trends and, along with Abstract Expressionism, represents a highly personal and abstracted use of its medium (approached, ultimately, as "sound").

In White's (2011) doctoral essay on 'Visualisation in Jazz Improvisation' the use of visualisation as an analytical tool in high-level jazz improvisation is studied in detail. This is achieved through interviews with three prominent jazz trumpeters, all of whom cite "visual experiences of colors, shapes, contours, or transcription – elements not directly related to the aural information typically described in the improvisational process". He states that "these individuals may describe their improvisations or the process as containing certain shapes, textures, or colors; visual, not aural stimuli and ideas." While Sansom is exploring the similarities between improvisation in the visual and musical worlds, White is investigating visual experiences as a result of improvisational music processes. However, the literature has not specifically dealt with the use of visuals as a vehicle for improvisation as the following analyses describe.

As a composer and improvising musician, my attempts at merging the two worlds discussed above will of course have a one-sided output. The attempt here is to use images from the visual art world to simultaneously connect musicians, providing them with a stimulus that takes them out of their comfort zones – leading them away from habitual playing – while affording them a large degree of spontaneity.

It should also be noted that both the current practice and the literature contain a large presence of work involving graphic scores as compositional and improvisational techniques. For example, long-time AACM member, trumpeter and composer Wadada Leo Smith has devised his own systemic music language, “Ankhrasmation”, in which improvisers respond to images to create improvised performances (Borgo, 2002). This system, however, requires large amounts of study and knowledge in order to realise a performance. While the rewards of such projects are impressive, the aims of this category are to explore the use of images in a more spontaneous manner, without having spent time studying them.

4.3.2 Example 1a: Fingerpainting – Recorded at a private rehearsal at Dublin City University, Ireland on the 21st September 2018

Line-up:

Izumi Kimura – keyboard

Ronan Guilfoyle – bass

Matthew Jacobson – drums

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/6zumcymk881aube/painting_fingerpainting_rehearsal_DCU_21092018.mp3?dl=0

Image:



Figure 33. 'Fingerpainting 1' – image by Izumi Kimura. Source: Author

This recording is from an informal private rehearsal in Dublin City University. The image (figure 33), created by pianist Izumi Kimura, had not been seen by the other two musicians before the time of the recording. There was no discussion about either the painting or the musical interpretation of it before the performance began. The idea was simply to use the image to provoke an improvised musical conversation between the musicians. One parameter, implied rather than explicitly set, was the duration of the piece. The performance was part of a two-hour rehearsal for an entire set of music; therefore, it was clear to all musicians that the performance of this one piece should not take up a disproportionate period of the rehearsal.

The piece begins with solo bass guitar playing upper-register muted strings in an un-pitched, percussive manner. In relation to the image, this could be a representation of the scattered clusters of small dots or paint dabs. The first we hear from the other musicians is at 00:38, when the keyboard enters with a slow-moving, relatively diatonic right-hand line with a piano sound and harmonic swells with a synth-pad like sound in the left hand. This is very contrasting to the bass opening, and in an instance, the context of the performance changes. It is as if this

piano part has added colour to the piece - representing the bright green, red and orange from the painting. Over the following minute, the bass continues in a similar vein, but moves into a slightly lower register, while the keyboard transitions the single line into a more chordal approach. At 02:15, the drums join, almost mirroring the keyboard chords with short cymbal flurries on brushes.

At this point, the right-hand keyboard drops out leaving only the swelling synth sound. The drums have now taken over the 'colouring' role previously performed by the piano. The bass begins moving towards pitched notes and as soon as the synth pad drops out, clearer notes are heard and the drums also introduce toms, still played with brushes. The playing becomes very active, with drums and bass conversing using sporadic notes of a greater dynamic and attack, as if punctuating the conversation and perhaps expressing the dots on the painting of greater colour intensity.

At 03:16 the keyboard returns, this time with an electric piano sound in both hands, and playing a calm E minor pentatonic figure, juxtaposed with the more frenetic bass and drum playing. This could exemplify the brighter green and orange colours in the painting juxtaposed with the darker black and purple patches. The bass is then pulled towards this tonality and moves towards a fifth to root type movement. The keyboard playing also intensifies, with flurries of notes occasionally departing the tonality but landing on diatonic notes with the same added intensity and attack heard earlier in the bass and drums. All three musicians are now playing at similar levels of intensity, so rather than each of them portraying a different part of the painting, it is as if they are all portraying it in its entirety.

At approximately 05:05, the drums begin playing the cymbals with the wire end of the brush, again lifting the intensity of the performance. This appears to push the keyboard to play faster passages and also to add more dissonance. Although there is no explicit sense of time or pulse, each member of the trio now establishes their own parts in a motif that is loosely transcribed approximated below (figure 34).

Figure 34. 'Fingerpainting 1' – rehearsal motif. Source: Author

Over the following minute, this motif (figure 34) is developed with keyboard flurries in the left-hand growing in dissonance and the drum pattern performed with gaps of various lengths. Meanwhile, the bass underpins the other instruments' denser parts with a sparse but constantly changing rhythmic low E. From 06:05, the drums and bass settle into an almost trance like groove, although still no real pulse is discernible. The piano continues to create a scurrying effect, as if the notes are scattered dots from the painting. At around 06:45, the keys completely depart from the motif and descend into atonality. This leads to a short ascending chordal figure that ends abruptly at 06:58. Following the sudden absence of the keyboard, the drums reduce their pattern to just ride cymbal and fade out over a few seconds to leave one final low E bass note.

[4.3.3 Example 1b: Fingerpainting – Three Pastels. Recording of a private rehearsal at Dublin City University on the 27th September 2018](#)

Line-up:

Izumi Kimura – keyboard

Ronan Guilfoyle – bass

Matthew Jacobson – drums

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/2n6cy9u01ncgvz5/three-pastels_fingerpainting_rehearsal_DCU_27092018.mp3?dl=0

Images:



Figure 35. Fingerpainting image 2 – ‘Three Pastels’ by Izumi Kimura. Source: Author

This recording is taken from a second private rehearsal at Dublin City University, on the 27th September 2018. Again, the paintings were created by Kimura and had not been seen by the musicians prior to the rehearsal. No forms or structure were suggested, although in this instance there were three paintings, all with similar colours but different stroke direction and shapes. Again, the time constraint of a two-hour rehearsal with other material to perform, suggested a general duration proportionate to the other pieces.

In this case, the first musical reaction of the three performers to the images is similar. All three begin very actively and with little repetition. The drums execute press rolls around the snare and toms, alternating with bursts of drier single rolls on rims. The keys play rapid two-handed overlapping chromatic lines, while the bass also plays in a linear chromatic fashion but with slightly less density as the keys. The players appear to be evoking the cloud-like nature of the whirling pastel in the first image (figure 35), with a continuous bombardment of notes from all instruments and very little angular rhythmic or melodic content heard.

Following a few seconds of tacet from the bass, he enters forcefully with a broken pattern at 00:32, which elicits an immediate response from the keys, who play a much slower, strong descending line of Eb down to C, C# down to A. This sounds out of character to what has come before and although the keys then return to the faster, more active approach, this brief departure appears to act as a presage to later events. Shortly after, at 00:51, the trio very suddenly drop in volume, intensity and activity.

The bass echoes back to the earlier thirds pattern in the keys by slowly moving between a B and a G#. The drums depart from the barrage of drier sounds and now move towards much sparser, wetter cymbal sounds. The keys remain tacet for ten seconds before entering with

staccato chord clusters. At this point the drums also return to dry, scraping sounds on rims, mixed with short cymbal sounds. It is very clear that the trio have moved to a new section, although if this were the second painting (figure 35), their interpretation of it is not immediately clear. The drop-like playing from the performers, almost reminiscent of rain, could be compared to the vertical lines from the image, juxtaposed with the more flurried nature of the lines in the first image and first section of the performance.

The bass sticks almost entirely with the B to G# notes, occasionally varying their lengths, while the keys occasionally depart from the chord clusters with short chromatic linear bursts. At 01:57, there is another sudden section change, this time with the drums taking to brushes and the bass moving to a repeated B note syncopated eighth-note figure at around 155BPM. The keys feel their way into the tempo with chromatic sixteenth-note figures with a similar shape and rhythm, before briefly settling on an almost montuno-like two-handed figure at 02:13 (figure 36).



Figure 36. 'Three Pastels' – keyboard and bass syncopated motif. Source: Author

Throughout this section, the drums play a non-repeating groove with brushes moving between the hi-hats, bass drum and snare, creating a strong sense of forward momentum. Offbeat accents are caught on open hi-hats and bass drum, which play off and occasionally coincide in moments of great release with the syncopated bassline. This sense of momentum could be perceived as an embodiment of the lines on the painted image through the creation of linear patterns.

Although very active, with lots of eighth-note fills, the use of brushes also allows the drums to sit in their own sonic space and do not feel like they are overpowering the other instruments. This is similar to the low B being played by the bass, constant but not distracting. However, the bass also intersperses the low rhythmic notes with higher pitched glissando notes from an

A, sounding almost as if there was a fourth instrument present. While the drums and bass continue to surge with the pulse, the keys develop the earlier montuno idea with distinct two-handed patterns. Generally, these consist of four sixteenth-notes in the right hand followed by a chord in the left hand, followed by a similar melodic phrase but with three sixteenth-notes this time followed by a chord in the left hand. This idea is repeated with short breaks of approximately one quarter-note in length before another pattern with slightly differing melodic information is performed. This rhythmic motif is transcribed below (figure 37).



Figure 37. *‘Three Pastels’* – keyboard two-handed rhythmic motif. Source: Author

At 02:50, there is a clear departure from this motif as the keys move to a constant stream of sixteenth-notes with no break. This lasts for around ten seconds until at 03:02 the run ends with four arpeggiated chord clusters. The other musicians also catch the final chord, bass with one final low B and the drums with an open hi-hat and bass drum. The ending is tight and sounds as if it could easily have been written or pre-determined. This can partially be explained by the fact that, in terms of duration, the third section had reached the same length at which the previous two sections had ended. Perhaps the musicians were in some sense ‘looking for an ending’. This ‘way out’ was then provided by Kimura’s clear break from the material with her longer sixteenth-note line, as if forewarning that something was about to happen, followed by her very clear final chordal gestures.

In Sutton’s (2001) doctoral thesis *‘The Invisible Handshake: An investigation of free improvisation as a form of conversation’* this gesture would be described as a ‘process of negotiation’. These processes are necessary to avoid the piece ending prematurely or equally that the piece continues for longer than all performers want, purely because they cannot find a suitable place to end. During time spent at the School for Improvisational Music in Brooklyn, director and trumpeter Ralph Alessi described this situation aptly as “looking for an exit from a highway – if you see one, you just have to take it. But, if you miss it, there will always be another one that you can take” (personal anecdote).

As in the second image and corresponding musical section, there are no instantly obvious parallels with the third image and section. The presence of a strong pulse in this section could be a stimulus of the horizontal lines in the image. Regardless, the presence of three clear images without doubt triggered three very distinct musical sections. Without the images, it seems unlikely that the improvisation would have taken such shape. The similar lengths of the three musical sections, all of which last around one minute, were also possibly informed by the similarity in size and colour of the three images. This again shows the impact in performing with some kind of motivic material present. It is highly unlikely that, without such an image as a vehicle for improvisation, the three musicians would have settled on three sections of equal lengths.

4.3.4 Example 1c: Fingerpainting – Recording of live public performance at the Dublin Jazz Coop, the Workman’s Club, Dublin, Ireland on the 30th September 2018

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/o6jsgpxpyawx9oh/paintings_fingerpainting_workmans_30092018.mp3?dl=0

Images:



Figure 38. ‘Fingerpainting 3’ – by Izumi Kimura. Source: Author

This recording is from a live performance in the Vintage Room, upstairs in the Workman’s Club in Dublin on the 30th September 2018. The performance was part of the Dublin Jazz Coop

series, an artist-lead initiative to provide creative musicians and improvisers with a space to play with no costs associated. On this occasion, Kimura brought two paintings to be performed live in front of the audience of about 15 people. Once more, the other musicians had not seen the images before the performance and were to be played as part of a set of approximately 75 minutes with eight other pieces being performed. The images were shown briefly to the audience before the performance but were left on a music stand pointing towards the musicians and away from the audience during the performance.

The opening section of this improvised interpretation of Kimura's paintings features all three performers creating unusual textures on their instruments. The drums create metallic scraping sounds by dragging knitting needles across the rims of the drum shells, the bass plays upper-register harmonic glissandos and the keyboard plays sparse upper-register chromatic clusters with a broken toy-like sound effect. These drum scrapes could be considered to be conveying the black blotches and emanating whisps in the first image (figure 38), while the sparser drop of sound coming from the bass and keys suggest the brighter drops of blue and yellow in the same image.

Starting from 00:34, the bass begins to add short staccato bursts of the same upper-register harmonic note that featured in the glissandos. This is merged with the drums, which begin to play more on the heads of the drums, although still with knitting needles, keeping the dynamic relatively low. This merge is accentuated when the two instruments drop out simultaneously at 00:51, meaning a keyboard cluster at the exact same moment gives the effect of a very sudden temporary change to a different colour, much like in the image. The drums and bass start to increase their intensity with denser passages and from 01:21, the bass begins to play longer bursts of non-harmonic notes.

The bass notes continue to drop in register until, at 01:57 the group appears to collectively move towards the second image, particularly emphasised by the keys moving from longer sustained clusters to shorter staccato motifs that mirror the bass. At the same point, the drums switch knitting needles for nylon brushes, resulting in a softer sound, although the intensity they are played with continues to increase, meaning the dynamic itself does not drop. The three performers all continue to play rapid flurries of notes with the introduction of a general D tonality. At 02:25 the bass and keys develop a descending D pentatonic motif (figure 39) conveying the spirals in the second painted image (figure 38). The drums also emulate this

descending motif with a repeated fill moving from snare, tom, bass drum to crash cymbal. Although there is no explicit sense of pulse, there is a general pulse to the motif they have created, so that it is now heard almost in canon. This staggered repetition technique again highlights the circling nature of the image.

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: piano, bass, and brushes. The piano part is in 4/4 time, marked 'swing rubato', and features a descending D pentatonic motif with triplet markings. The bass part also features a descending motif with triplet markings. The brushes part has a rhythmic pattern with triplet markings and a final cymbal crash.

Figure 39. 'Fingerpainting 3' – D Pentatonic motif. Source: Author

This motif lasts for a little over 20 seconds, before the keyboards return to more chromatic surges. The bass and drums quickly follow, with the former going back to the upper register and to its starting point of the glissando. The drums settle on a long roll mostly concentrating on the snare. The keys play quickly shifting tremolo chords on top of the more static backing before settling on a D pedal. The drums fade out first and the bass repeats a short descending D – G# tritone figure before also fading out with the keys.

4.3.5 Comparative analysis of performances using painted images as motifs for improvisation

In comparing the analysis of these performances by Fingerpainting, the same image was only ever used once, so comparative analysis of performances based on the same image is not currently possible. However, the approach of the musicians and their interactions with each other and the painted images does provide some noteworthy findings.

In each performance, there is a clear sense of the musicians mirroring shapes, colours and textures from the images in their musical choices. For example, the dots in the image provided

for example one are musically represented by muted non-pitched bass notes. Another example are the lines in the images from example two, which create a sense of pulse and linearity in the music that is not heard in the other two performances. Furthermore, the dark and abstract nature of the first image in example three, unsurprisingly creates the most experimental musical reaction, with all the musicians creating extended technique soundscapes with little communication with each other.

In discussion about the topic of how the material affects her performances, Fingerpainting pianist Izumi Kimura states ([Appendix 1\(e\)](#)):

I think it is all about the intention of if it is open-ended or if it is going a certain direction or has to go a certain direction. Where it is going, that's what matters, more than where it is coming from.

This strong belief in the “intention” of a piece is reflective of Iyer’s (2016) work on embodied cognition, discussed in the literature review for this thesis. Kimura here answers his question of whether empathy for an action comes from the replication or understanding of that action, or from understanding the “intention” behind the action. Iyer also discusses the sense of mutual embodiment or shared time in the temporality of a musical performance. This is also relevant to the performances in this category as, in a regular setting, a painting or visual image would not feature such mutual embodiment due to observers taking variable amounts of time to perceive it. However, in the scenarios analysed here, the paintings are mutually embodied by all three performers – and in the case of the live performance also with the audience members – as the time spent observing the images is shared by all present.

In response to cognition studies (Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2010) suggesting that participants had more empathy when observing images based on their own socio-cultural identity, Iyer also questions whether visual and audio cues result in a different experience of our sense of belonging. The fact that the images above do not contain any explicit connection to such identities might also allow both performers and live audience members to mutually embody these visual cues without an inherent bias towards an identity that they associate with. Cognition studies of performers and audience members when experiencing an improvised

performance with abstract painted images is beyond the scope of this research but could present highly relevant findings.

From the analyses above, it is clear that as well as interacting with the images as a spontaneous source of inspiration for musical content, there is also a large amount of group interaction occurring. This is particularly evident in the structural characteristics of the performances. In the absence of any prior mention of the total duration of each piece, there are musical cues in the performances that signify endings or movement from one image to another. Such cues could be present regardless of the presence or otherwise of motivic material. The provision of such material, however, results in a shared context from which to communicate such intentions to end a piece. This is illuminated by the fact that all three performances end with general 'agreement' from all performers – in no case is one musician left performing on their own at the end of the piece for any extended period. Each musician's final utterances are either simultaneous or within a few seconds of each other.

4.3.6 Performances using text as a motif for improvisation in a small group setting

“Since antiquity... literary history has been continually confronted with various analogical couplings of music and poetry” (Hollander, 1956). The inextricable link between music and text has been abundantly apparent and well-documented throughout history. Whether a libretto is written for a composer to create an opera or a “literary theory is used as a model for music criticism” (Rosand, 1992), the two media have played great roles in each other’s artistic and cultural development. As explored previously in this thesis through music-notation and image-based media, this category aims to investigate the results of using text as a catalyst for an improvised musical performance. Again, as in the other categories, this is to take place in the specific context of non-structured improvisational performances.

Although many musicians have experience using text as part of a compositional process, it is less common for it to be featured as part of an improvisational process, apart from select improvising vocalists. Even in the context of a jazz standard, it is common practice for a vocalist to use the lyrics for the composed section of a performance, while scatting (using wordless syllables) for the improvised section. There are relatively few vocalists truly comfortable improvising in an open manner with lyrics in the same way instrumental musicians develop musical elements. Examples of exceptions in the current practice include Lauren Newton’s ‘Wordsong’ from *Soundsong* (2006), Phil Minton’s ‘Riverrun’ from *Mouthfull of Ecstasy* (Les Disques Victo, 1996) and Lauren Kinsella on ‘Thought-Fox 1’, from Lauren Kinsella / Alex Huber *All This Talk About* (Wide Ear Records, 2012). These three vocalists provide a cross-section of the music scenes formally considered contemporary jazz, free improvisation and new music and are reflective of historical movements as diverse as the UK free jazz scene, 20th century aleatoric classical music and opera. A clear compositional marker for the vocal extended techniques used by these artists would be Luciano Berio’s (1998) *Sequenza III* for female voice (first recorded in 1965).

The basis for this category of investigation, however, is not specifically how vocalists approach text. It is more concerned with an ensemble’s interaction, spontaneity and sense of motivic development when using a non-musical motif as an example. The group documented in this exploration is Clang Sayne, established by vocalist, guitarist, improviser Laura Hyland in

London in 2008. Following her return to Ireland in 2012, she began collaborating with Irish cellist, composer and vocalist Judith Ring, saxophonist, clarinettist and singer Carolyn Goodwin and myself.

The format for developing Hyland's pieces would regularly be that she would send the text in advance of rehearsing with the group. She would then bring non-structured compositional ideas to be developed with input from all the performers over a series of rehearsals and performances. However, with her text 'The Portal' (figure 40), she did not wish to use any compositional material, but instead her intention was to use the text itself as the inspiration for improvisational development. The documentation analysed in the following section took place in 2018, both during a residential rehearsal period in Cullenstown, Wexford and a live performance at Ergodos HQ, Dublin. Below is the version of the text sent to the group prior to this rehearsal period, although it was also noted by Hyland that she had amended the fourth line to "and the angle of the light falling on a building".

The Portal

It will come when least expected,
in a word recalled from casual conversation,
or some arbitrary link
between birds in flight
and light upon a building.
There's the chink - move quickly!
The way into the Otherworld is fleeting.

© Laura Hyland 2014

Figure 40. 'The Portal' – text by Laura Hyland. Source: Personal Correspondence

4.3.7 Example 2a: Clang Sayne – The Portal. Recorded at a private rehearsal in Cullenstown, Co. Wexford, Ireland on the 19th June 2018

Line-up:

Laura Hyland – Acoustic Guitar, Vocals

Judith Ring – Cello, Vocals

Carolyn Goodwin – Bass Clarinet, Vocals

Matthew Jacobson – Drums, Percussion

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/cgg5hxzrfn2blqi/Portal_ClangSayne_Cullenstown-Rehearsal_19June2018.mp3?dl=0

This improvised performance of Laura Hyland’s text ‘The Portal’ was the first of several versions of the piece performed during the rehearsal period. No discussion about its form, structure or any specific musical elements took place prior to playing.

The performance begins with the bass clarinet establishing an Eb tonality with repeated notes and octave jumps in the lower register. This is juxtaposed with an extended technique in the drums, plucking the broken wires of a music box resonating on the head of the snare drum. At 00:48, Hyland sings the first three degrees of a rising major scale, further establishing the tonality. The clarinet and voice then both establish a descending semi-tone glissando motif, from Ab to G. This motif is then utilised in the first hearing of the text, at 01:57 (figure 41). This is an example of the use of an improvised motif being spontaneously developed as a melodic line.

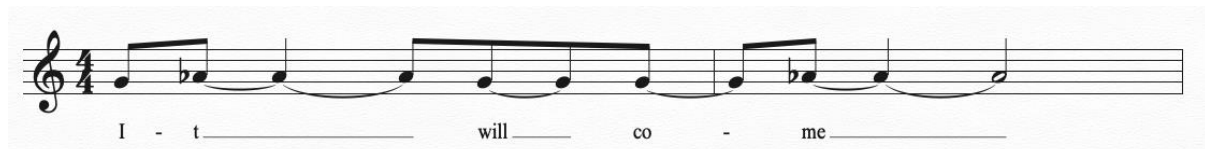


Figure 41. ‘The Portal’ – semi-tone motif. Source: Author

The second line of the text is then sung very slowly, with the addition of a Db to the melodic content, suggesting an Eb Mixolydian tonality. At 03:13, Hyland returns to the first line of the text again. The drums are now more active, also playing with a hand on the drums and splash cymbal and the clarinet also plays with more variations around the tonality.

After a second performance of the first two lines, there is a change in feel. The drums introduce shakers, Ring's voice is heard more clearly now, interacting in harmony with the bass clarinet. Hyland now performs lines three, four and five at a much quicker rate than previously and at 04:45, blends her voice with Ring and Goodwin, creating close harmonies. The drums continue with shakers but also adding a chopstick, quietly hitting cymbals and scraping drums.

There is a large drop in intensity at 05:40, when Goodwin and Ring fade out. The drums now create a low rumble with a mallet played on the batter side of the bass drum. Ring, Hyland and Goodwin now add extended vocal techniques, with breathing sounds and low growls, based around a Db. Out of this tonality, Hyland returns to the first line of the text again, adapting to the music by now suggesting a Db Aeolian tonality in her performance of the line (figure 42).



Figure 42. 'The Portal' – Ab Aeolian melody. Source: Author

Hyland moves through the first five lines of the text quickly this time. The cello is heard creating distorted sounding harmonics, while Goodwin and Hyland improvise short phrases in the Db Aeolian tonality.

At 09:00, Hyland introduces the penultimate line of the text. Mirroring the “move quickly” in the text itself, the lyrics are presented at a much faster pace here, still in the key of Db Aeolian (figure 43). Hearing the final line of the text and the descending pattern that it is set to elicits a *ritardando* from the mallet on bass drum effect and the group all fade out soon after.



Figure 43. *The Portal*' – final phrase. Source: Author

4.3.8 Example 2b: Clang Sayne – The Portal. Recorded at a private rehearsal in Cullenstown, Co. Wexford, Ireland on the 19th June 2018

Line-up:

Laura Hyland – Acoustic Guitar, Vocals

Judith Ring – Cello, Vocals

Carolyn Goodwin – Bass Clarinet, Vocals

Matthew Jacobson – Drums, Percussion

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/we5d0kp0awphs9f/Portal3_ClangSayne_Cullenstown-Rehearsal_19June2018.mp3?dl=0

This documentation is the second performance of the piece from this rehearsal period. No discussion specific to the arrangement or structure of the piece took place in between the performances.

This version of the piece opens with cymbal washes with fluctuating dynamics and a tremolo effect achieved by quivering a hand near the bell of the cymbal. This is joined by a croaking effect extended technique in the vocals. At 00:45, Hyland brings in the first two lines of the text at a very low dynamic and in an A pentatonic tonality (figure 44).

It will come When least expected
In a word recalled from casual conversation

Figure 44. ‘The Portal’ – rehearsal take 2 opening. Source: Author

This approach continues, with cello providing shrill upper register harmonics and vocal whispering from Ring. The cello is mimicked by bass clarinet overblowing and at 01:16, Hyland sings lines three, four and five without a break as one continuous melodic line, using a similar tonal approach to the first two lines.

From 02:13, the sixth line of the text appears, with “there’s the chink” heard three times in an ascending sequence. Vocals and bass clarinet then develop a descending A to C motif, out of which, at 02:46, Hyland sings the final line of the text (figure 45).

The other-world is fleeting

Figure 45. ‘The Portal’ – rehearsal take 2 final line. Source: Author

The bass clarinet then continues this motif, expanding it into a quasi-groove (figure 46). The drums interact by adding shaker, bass drum and hands on drums, although no tempo is explicitly stated. The cello continues with upper register harmonics and Hyland improvises long tones with various repeated syllables.

loosely

Figure 46. ‘The Portal’ – rehearsal take 2 bass clarinet motif. Source: Author

At 04:10 the performers start decreasing their activity and the intensity drops. At 04:35 Hyland returns to the opening words of the text, “It will come when least expected”. As if bookending the performance and forewarning the end, the artists fade out in the subsequent seconds.

4.3.9 Example 2c: Clang Sayne – The Portal. Recorded at a live public performance at Ergodos HQ, Dublin, Ireland on the 13th August 2018

Line-up:

Laura Hyland – Acoustic Guitar, Vocals

Judith Ring – Cello, Vocals

Carolyn Goodwin – Bass Clarinet, Vocals

Matthew Jacobson – Drums, Percussion

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/f7cbj8sfuq2q2yd/Portal_ClangSayne_Ergodos_Aug18.mp3?dl=0

This performance of Portal took place as part of a short Irish tour, two months after the rehearsal period. In the interim, there were no further conversations about the structure of the piece or how it should be performed.

This piece begins with the cello performing glissandos from A up to C and back down again. This is added to by Hyland’s voice creating whispering, percussive sounds out of the opening line, “It will come”, around 00:58. At 01:15, the drums also join with an egg slicer plucked on the head of the snare drum to create resonance.

Following a gradual build, and out of quiet vocal whisperings, at 02:18, Hyland sings the second half of the first line “when least expected”. The one minute and twenty seconds that elapse between the first and second half of this line are an example of the fluidity with which the text is treated.

At 03:03, Hyland sings the second line of the text, suggesting a D Phrygian tonality (figure 47). This is followed by short improvised vocal passages, breathy sounds from the bass clarinet and faster upper register chromatic lines from the cello.

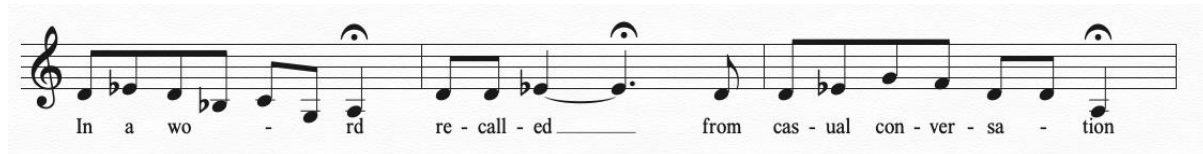


Figure 47. ‘The Portal’ – public performance second line in D Phrygian. Source: Author

Lines three, four and five are heard at 03:37 as one continuous line. The drums now move to rolling mallets on toms. At 04:20 lines four and five are repeated and at 04:30, Hyland returns to line one and repeats the text in a breathy, upper register, almost spoken tone. This quiet dynamic creates a decrescendo in the group and at 04:51, only cello remains, quietly droning on a harmonic A. This is emulated by the bass clarinet, while Hyland sings quiet, short melodic passages.

At 05:14, Hyland quietly introduces the sixth line in an almost-whispering fashion, responding to the bass clarinet and cello harmonic with an A tonality (figure 48). She repeats line six multiple times, with melodic variations.



Figure 48. ‘The Portal’ – public performance sixth line motif. Source: Author

At 06:14, Hyland moves to the seventh line (figure 49), but rather than suggesting the end at that point, returns immediately to the sixth line. At 06:26, she sings the final line again, although this time with a slight ritardando and descending melodic phrase that results in the cello and bass clarinet fading to silence.



Figure 49. 'The Portal' – public performance final line. Source: Author

4.3.10 Comparative analysis of performances using text as motifs for improvisation

These three performances using the same piece of text as a catalyst for improvised performances provide several significant structural and elemental characteristics. Despite two of the documented performances taking place on the same day and all three of them featuring the same ensemble and instrumental line-up, the analysis shows they have used a variety of tonal centres, differing structural compositions and contrasting timbres. There is a frequent use of extended techniques among all of the performers, although this is part of the developed musical language within the ensemble, as opposed to being specific to these performances.

As with the musical motifs composed and utilised elsewhere in this research, Laura Hyland's text 'The Portal' was provided to the performers with no predetermined structure. As mentioned earlier, using such text for musical exploration is not uncommon, but it would often be devised into some version of verse, chorus and bridge structure. In this case, the text itself is presented in its source form and is free to be interpreted spontaneously. While, all members of the group Clang Sayne at times add vocals, it is evident from the analysis that the musicians follow Hyland when it comes to the structural development of the piece, informed by the use of the text. This is despite Hyland – as bandleader and creator of the text – denouncing her authorial intent by encouraging all performers to individually interact with the text in any way that they are instinctively inclined. This message is at the core of a non-structured improvised performance of a motivic composition and is very similar to the one provided to the ensembles involved in my own motivic compositions, as well as Izumi Kimura's with regard to the use of her painted images as motifs for improvisations.

In the first example analysed, the text is not heard at all until nearly two minutes into the performance. The first two lines are then repeated, sung slowly in an Eb Mixolydian tonality. After an interlude, lines three, four and five are performed at a faster pace. All five lines are

then repeated more rapidly in a Db Aeolian tonality and after a small break, line six and seven finish the piece.

In the second example, the first two lines are heard after less than a minute, establishing an A minor pentatonic tonality. This is followed by lines three, four and five and after a brief interlude, line six is repeated several times. Line seven is performed and after an extended outro the first line is heard one more time.

For the third and final performance analysed, line one is stretched over the opening two minutes. Line two is heard in a D Phrygian tonality before a short passage leads to lines three, four and five, with the latter two repeated. The entire text is then repeated and after a breakdown, we hear line six multiple times in an A major tonality, line seven and then the final two lines repeated one last time to finish.

The structural use of each line of the text is and the various harmonic approaches are visually represented by their proportionate lengths in the comparative graph below (figure 50).

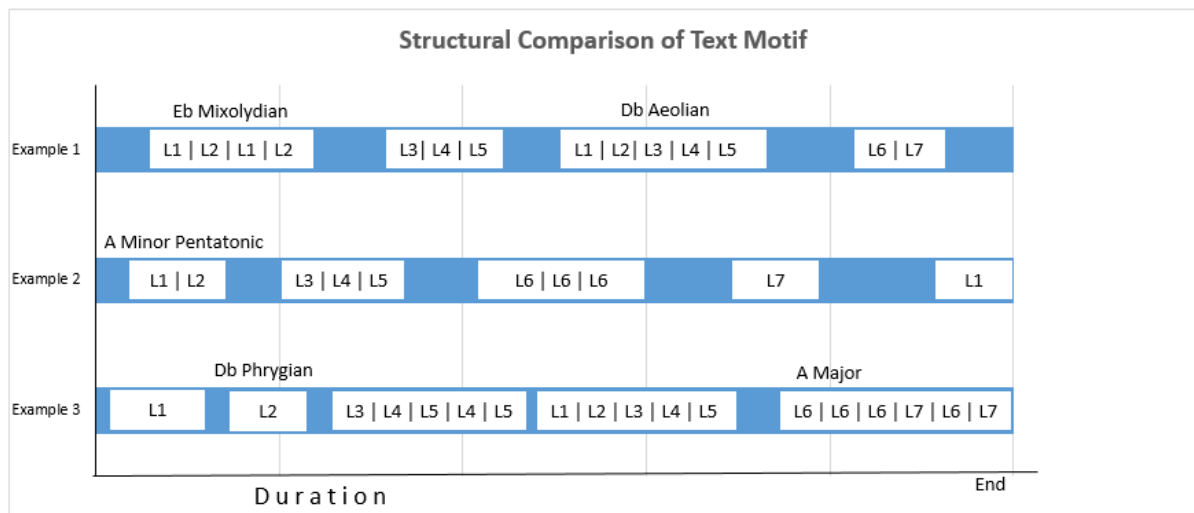


Figure 50.. 'The Portal' – comparative use of text. Source: Author

In the relatively under-developed field of non-structured text-based improvised performances, the three unique versions of improvised structural development, compared above, present its ability to afford a strong base for spontaneity and group interaction. Each performance clearly develops coherent group motifs, with regard to both timbral and harmonic choices. However,

once established, these motifs are not then relied upon in subsequent performances. Instead, each version of the text is treated as a catalyst for unique and spontaneous choice. This is displayed in the significantly different structures and tonalities used in graph above (figure 50).

4.3.11 Initial findings from analysis of performances using non-musical motifs as vehicles for improvisation:

The use of images and texts as core motifs with which artists are connected in improvised performances has shown to have been a strong catalyst for spontaneity and group interaction. It is difficult to directly compare the two, as the presence of a vocalist who can explicitly interact with text-based motifs provides the analysis with more definitive data. With image-based motifs, analysis can only speculate on the musical representation of what the artists are seeing. For further research, it would be important to document image and text-based motifs with the same instrumental line-up for balanced comparative analysis. For example, if text-based motifs were performed by a group without a vocalist, the output would be similarly implicit to the image-based motifs.

In discussion on the medium of the material presented to her in improvised contexts, FarJam vibraphonist Patricia Brennan ([Appendix 1\(c\)](#)) discusses a project with Vijay Iyer and Teju Cole that uses both images and texts as motifs for improvisational development. One such image depicted the war in Mexico – where Brennan is from – with the word “Women” written on a cross. She describes the strong emotional reaction that her musical response was informed by, due to fact that the village that the photo was taken in has very high rates of female homicide. This is an example of one’s embodiment of an issue coming out in the music and Brennan goes on to state that the “more informed you are the more freedom you have when you improvise and the less you need to rely on sort of default tendencies”. This reliance on default tendencies is precisely what motivic compositions aim to alleviate. While the motifs themselves aim to embody enough of the composer’s identity as to elicit an honest and emotional response from the performers, there needs to be an awareness in not being overly restrictive. There is a potential danger that this will alienate an artist’s sense of identity.

This is an important viewpoint when discussing findings. The same motif, whether musical,

image-based or text-based, will be greatly affected by the intention and direction of the bandleader or creator of the motif. This is connected to the social element of a performance, as well as the familiarity with one's collaborators. The latter of these points has been clarified throughout this thesis, as all groups documented have already performed together and developed a strong sense of trust.

With regard to the social element of these performances, there is a potential for such non-musical motifs to provide artists with a catalyst for improvisation that is less steeped in their social and cultural identity. Following on from MacDonald and Wilson's (2016) work, in which they have clearly established such a sense of belonging among groups of jazz musicians, these motifs have the capacity to bring musicians together without being restricted by tropes or clichés connected to that identity. By discussing a literary or visual topic but through communication skills developed in music, there can be a sense of freedom. This is much the same as the sense of freedom that musical motivic compositions aim to provide musicians by challenging them to avoid their improvisational habits or muscle memory patterns.

4.4 Non-standard approach to jazz standards

The final category under investigation in this thesis, is the use of jazz standards as non-structured vehicles for improvisation. Traditionally, when improvising with standard jazz repertoire, musicians adhere strictly to the written form of the piece. One of the first mantras learnt by students studying jazz is ‘always keep the form’. These forms are generally dictated by the chord progression over which the melodies are composed. The forms most commonly featured in jazz standards include the twelve-bar blues, the 32-bar AABA tune and the 32-bar AB tune (Coker, 2010) and the overall structure of a performance involve the performance of the melody followed by an improvisation over that form before returning to the written melody to finish. As discussed in the literature review, this ‘head, solos, head’ style of playing had developed from the initiation of jazz in America in the late 19th century and early 20th century (Gioia, 2011).

It should also be noted, however, that in terms of motivic development of written material, that is very much a common presence in the performance of jazz standards. In particular, spontaneous elaboration or elongation of written melodies is encouraged, and considered part of a successful performance. Although this largely takes place within the pre-existing form, it can, for consistency with the adapted Schenkerian analysis method, be considered a middleground development of the background (melody) material.

Similar to the premise behind writing and developing motivic compositions as catalysts for non-structured improvisations, the idea for the non-standard approach to standards taken here is to allow the material to develop spontaneously, without any predetermined form. There is some precedence for this in the performance of jazz standards, with intros and outros often treated as open-ended and particularly notable sections for spontaneity. These are the most common moments in which a performer is afforded space to utilise extended techniques or take risks that they might not take while playing over a specified form.

This approach – that a 32-bar AABA form does not have to be adhered to during improvisations – is one that might cause consternation with certain musicians. As with all of the output in this thesis, there is an underlying condition that the musicians have been specifically chosen based on their willingness to perform in this manner. This is particularly important in improvising

with a composition that already has a specified form. With an original motivic composition with no predetermined form, the performers are asked to spontaneously create a form themselves. In a non-structured performance of a jazz standard however, the performers are asked to actively disengage from ‘keeping the form’ – a skill they have spent years developing – as well as spontaneously creating their own.

There is limited output in the current practice that takes a similarly non-structured approach to performing with standard repertoire. Some of the few examples however, are Anthony Braxton’s *19 Standards* (Braxton, 2010) and *23 Standards* (Braxton, 2004) and two self-releases from Trio New York – featuring Ellery Eskelin on saxophone, Gary Versace on organ and Gerald Cleaver on drums – *Trio New York* (2011) and *Trio New York II* (2013). These artists represent a delineation of the contemporary jazz, modern jazz and free improvisation scenes that have grown out of the historical developments set out in the literature review from early jazz, bebop and free jazz. Eskelin (Avakian, 2013) describes his group’s approach as follows:

We know that there are probably six or eight tunes [jazz standards] that we might incorporate in some way, without me prescribing any kind of a treatment or rules at all for how those may or may not happen. It’s simply a matter of real-time musical negotiation between us, listening very hard to each other.

This aligns very closely with the approach of a non-structured improvised performance of a motivic composition and, in particular, the performance style of ReDiviDeR, the main creative outlet for this thesis’ output. There are traditionally many of these so called ‘rules’ when it comes to improvising with standard jazz repertoire, not simply ‘keeping the form’. These include instrumental functionality, rhythmic or at tempo approach, traditional harmony, individual solos and presence of melody. Altering or removing these conventions or ‘rules’ can also determine that a performances of jazz standards is non-standard.

Instrumental functionality in improvisation includes the idea that in the performance of a jazz standard, the bass will play a walking bass line, the drums will play a swing groove, chordal instruments such as guitar and piano will either accompany the soloist with the harmony or else solo and a wind instrument or vocalist will solo (Kernfeld, 1997). Removing these

conventions can be a freeing experience, leading to added spontaneity and more fluid group interaction.

Another important convention is the presence of tempo or indeed the use of a swing feel when improvising with a jazz standard (Belfiglio, 2008). The latter is something that became less conventional in the 1960s, with Miles Davis' second quintet in particular introducing a rock-influenced feel with straight eighth-notes (Gridley, 1983). There have also been considerable historical influences in jazz from Brazilian and Afro-Cuban music, which have diversified the grooves associated with the genre. Another later development was the 1980s M-Base movement. This was led by alto saxophonist Steve Coleman and used complex rhythmic patterns with the influence of Black American popular culture such as funk and hip-hop (Clayton, 2009). There are examples of members of the M-Base collective using this style in the performance of jazz standards, such as Steve Coleman's track 'Verifiable Pedagogy (from Pedagogy and Confirmation)' from the album *Def Trance Beat (Modalities of Rhythm)* (1995), which is based on Charlie Parker's 'Confirmation'.

The very presence of a constant tempo, following more jazz student mantras of 'don't drag' (slow down) or 'don't rush' (speed up), is another generally accepted convention in the performance of jazz standards. In order to give performers full freedom however, speeding up and slowing down would appear a reasonably natural means of group interaction, if performed intentionally. As well as fluctuating tempos, approaching jazz standards without the presence of tempo at all is equally unusual. Paul Motian – mentioned previously in this thesis for his 'tumbling down the stairs' approach to drumming – provides one of the few recorded examples of such an approach.

The removal of these rules or conventions, in addition to an optional adherence to the written harmonic form, is key to the non-standard approach to standards and the pieces analysed in this category will be examined with these characteristics in mind. An example of this from the literature is found in UK improvising pianist Matthew Bourne's (2005) PhD thesis. In exploring solo performances, he aims to expand "the language of improvisation through interdisciplinary interaction". Bourne makes use of a sampler to spontaneously create mixed media performances and on disc 1, track 5 of his accompanying portfolio, he performs a treatment of Thelonius Monk's 'Round Midnight'. At one point, a recorded sample of this composition is heard, before being disturbed by a siren-like sound. While the context of this

performance is different to the output in this thesis, Bourne also adopts a similarly non-structured framework.

As discussed in the context of motivic compositions, in an ideal situation the performers here will also be familiar with the material, to the point where they do not need the sheet music in front of them. To ensure this, as mentioned in the methodology, the participants in the following performances collectively decided on the standard to be performed with a non-standard approach, based on their prior and in-depth knowledge of the pieces.

Four pieces are included in this category in the accompanying practical output to this thesis: ‘Alice in Wonderland’, composed by Sammy Fain and performed by Big Spoon; ‘Boo Boo’s Birthday’, composed by Thelonius Monk and performed by Sanders | Jacobson; ‘All Or Nothing At All’, composed by Arthur Altman and performed by Fireplace Dragons; and ‘Tea for Two’, composed by Vincent Youmans and performed by Insufficient Funs. Two of these tracks will be analysed here – ‘All Or Nothing At All’ and ‘Boo Boo’s Birthday’.

4.4.1 Example 1: Fireplace Dragon – All Or Nothing At All. Recorded at a public performance at Billy Byrne’s, Kilkenny, Ireland on the 6th July 2017

Line-up:

Keisuke Matsuno – Guitar

Simon Jermyn – Electric Bass

Matthew Jacobson – Drums

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/49up5aznxiariue/All-Or-Nothing-At-All-FireplaceDragon_BillyByrnes_July2017.mp3?dl=0

‘All Or Nothing At All’ (figure 51 and 52) was composed by Arthur Altman in 1939 and made famous by Frank Sinatra’s hit version, released in 1943. While it has a standard form of AABA (written on the chart below as ABCD), it is slightly unusual in that it is 64 bars long, with four 16-bar sections, as opposed to the traditional 32-bar form with eight-bar sections. The first two A sections, both with tonalities of A minor, are identical apart from the very last bar. In the

second A section, the chords in the last bar move up a semi-tone to Bb minor seven and Eb dominant seven, in preparation for a modulation to Ab major in the B section. The final A section returns to A minor before resolving on the relative C major to finish.

The A section melody is simple, featuring mostly diatonic notes from the key centre of A minor with long notes and some passing notes as quarter-note triplets. The B section melody is also diatonic to the new key centre of Ab major, although features slightly more rhythmic intensity with the use of repeated notes.

All Or Nothing At All

Med. Swing

Music by Arthur Altman
Lyric by Jack Lawrence

A

All or noth - ing at all,

Half a love nev - er ap - pealed to me,

If your heart nev - er could yield to me then I'd

rath - er have noth - ing at all.

B

All or noth - ing at all,

If it's love there is no in - be - tween,

Why be - gin, then cry for some - thing that might have been? No, I'd

rath - er have noth - ing at all. But

©1939, 1940 MCA Music, A Division of MCA, Inc. ©Renewed 1967, 1968 MPL Communications, Inc. This Arrangement ©1988 MPL Communications, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used By Permission.

Figure 51. 'All Or Nothing At All' Page 1. Source – New Real Book 1

C A^bMA^7 B^bMI^7 E^b7

please don't bring your lips so close to my cheek, _____ Don't

A^bMA^7 D^bAb A^bMA^7 E^b7

smile, or I'll be lost be - yond re - call, _____ The

B^bMI^7 E^b7 B^bMI^7 E^b7 C^7

kiss in your eyes, the touch of your hand makes me weak, _____ And my

FMI FMI^7/E^b D^b9 C^7 E^7

heart may grow diz - zy and fall. _____ And if I

D AMI $AMI^{(MA^7)}$ AMI^7 AMI^6

fell un - der the spell of your call, _____

AMI $(GMI^7 C^7)$ B^b9

I would be caught in the un - der - tow, _____

GMI^7 DMI^7 E^7

So, you see, I've got to say no, no,

AMI FMI^6 C^6 (E^7)

All _____ or noth - ing at all.

Alternate changes for first 4 bars of letter **C**: $A^b A^b+ | A^b6 A^b+ | \frac{2}{\#} |$

Figure 52. 'All Or Nothing At All' Page 2. Source – New Real Book 1

This performance was recorded at a live concert as part of a short Irish tour with guitar trio Fireplace Dragon. The trio rehearsed together for the first time in Berlin in the days prior to

this tour, performing a mixture of original compositions from all bandmembers and standards. All three musicians were comfortable and positive about the idea of performing non-structured improvisations with the materials gathered and this was reflected in the output of this tour.

The recording opens with the bass playing a one-bar upper register straight eighth-note A pedal riff. The drums join with loose flutters and sweeps on brushes around the drums and cymbals. The guitar joins with swelling diatonic notes with a delay effect. The use of harmonics in the bass, sustained chorus effects in the guitar and the generally soft dynamic that all the musicians are playing at gives the group a strong sense of blending in this intro section. At 00:44 the bass moves the pedal to a lower octave for a few bars before moving to an upper register harmonic pattern of B descending to G. This signals a change and after eight bars, at 01:09 the guitar brings in the melody.

As the chords remain on an A pedal, the bass continues playing the same eighth-note rhythmic pattern, resulting in very little change of mood. The drums also continue with brushes, playing in a very open manner with very little repetition. In the second half of the second A section, the drums superimpose a feeling of $\frac{3}{4}$ before resolving in the last bar. This precipitates an upcoming change in atmosphere in the following section. At 01:53, the drums and bass both play a dotted quarter-note pattern starting on the downbeat of the B section (figure 53). This adds to the lift of moving to a major key. The bass resolves the pattern every two bars however, while the drums continue the grouping until it resolves with an alteration of the pattern after eight bars. The guitar picks up on this and plays the melody in two-note chords, rhythmically displacing it so that it lands with the bass on the ‘and of 2’ in the second and fourth bars. This is an example of a middleground performance in the context of the melody of a jazz standard.

The musical score for Figure 53 is presented in three staves. The top staff is for guitar, the middle for bass, and the bottom for drums. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The guitar part consists of four measures of chords: a whole note chord with notes G2, Bb2, and D3; a half note chord with notes G2, Bb2, and D3; a whole note chord with notes G2, Bb2, and D3; and a half note chord with notes G2, Bb2, and D3. The bass part consists of four measures of eighth-note patterns: a whole note chord with notes G2, Bb2, and D3; a half note chord with notes G2, Bb2, and D3; a whole note chord with notes G2, Bb2, and D3; and a half note chord with notes G2, Bb2, and D3. The drum part consists of four measures of a dotted quarter-note pattern: a dotted quarter note on the downbeat, followed by an eighth rest, a dotted quarter note on the second beat, followed by an eighth rest, a dotted quarter note on the third beat, followed by an eighth rest, and a dotted quarter note on the fourth beat, followed by an eighth rest.

Figure 53. ‘All Or Nothing At All’ – melody middleground. Source: Author

On the return to the final A section, the drums continue the dotted quarter-note theme, while the bass returns to its original upper register eighth-note pattern.

The solo form begins at 02:36 and although this passage ostensibly functions as a guitar solo, there is considerable interaction between all members of the group. In particular, the drums act almost as a second soloist, performing linearly with little repetition of parts or traditional groove patterns. The group continue to adhere to the 64-bar harmonic structure until the guitar solo ends after two repeats and the bass begins at 05:22. After one complete round of the harmonic form, the guitar brings back a middleground developed melody at 06:43. The drums intense activity over this first A section leads the guitar and bass to perform in more accompaniment roles for the drums in the second A with no iteration of the written melody. This continues for the rest of the form and the drums reduce dynamics and rhythmic intensity in the final eight bars.

At 08:04 the group again perform the melody, this time at a very low dynamic and with much less activity than previously. The harmonic form finishes at 09:28, at which point the group begin a spontaneous and extended outro over the last four chords of the piece: Amin – Fmin6 – C6 – E7. This is a common ending to a performance of a jazz standard, repeating the ‘turnaround’ or chord changes of the two or four bars (Rinzler, 1999). These endings are often performed a set amount of times, although in this scenario, with Fireplace Dragon, it is treated as another section over which the band interact and build tension.

The bass and guitar start this outro by playing the chords as whole-notes on the downbeats of each bar. The drums take advantage of this space by playing with great activity, performing in a rolling manner around the drums and cymbals. At 09:45 the guitar adds some syncopation to its comping pattern, increasing the intensity. This continues until 10:26, when the guitar moves to an arpeggiated, continuous sixteenth-note pattern. At 10:51 the guitar adds a short repeated eighth-note melody motif, in an attempt to direct the group towards an ending (figure 54). The bass also picks up on this, adding repeated eighth-notes to the root movement. The drums also react, moving away from the rolls and towards a more constant backbeat. This more settled interaction is an example of a spontaneously developed motif to elicit a change in group dynamic, this time in the context of a jazz standard. This section signifies the end is near and

after a sudden decrescendo from the guitar, the three performers end suddenly on the downbeat of the final chord (E7) at 11:18.

The image shows a musical score for the outro motif of 'All Or Nothing At All'. It consists of three staves: a treble clef staff, a bass clef staff, and a guitar staff. The treble clef staff has four measures with notes and rests. The bass clef staff has four measures of eighth notes. The guitar staff has four measures with chord diagrams and notes. The chords are labeled as Ami, Fmi6, C6, and E7. The guitar staff uses 'x' for muted strings and 'o' for open strings.

Figure 54. 'All Or Nothing At All' – outro motif. Source: Author

4.4.2 Example 2: Sanders | Jacobson – Boo Boo’s Birthday. Recorded at a private rehearsal at Ocean Ave, Brooklyn, New York, USA on the 9th January 2017

Line-up:

Nick Sanders – Piano

Matthew Jacobson – Drums

Audio:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/sr6jdn0abronwii/Booboos-Birthday_Sanders-Jacobson_NewYork_Jan2017.mp3?dl=0

‘Boo Boo’s Birthday’ (figure 55) is a Thelonius Monk composition first recorded in 1967 and released on the Thelonius Monk Quartet album *Underground* (1968). The form of this piece is AAB, with eight-bar A sections and an unusual five-bar B section. The A section starts in C major, followed by shifting dominant seven chords – common in Monk’s compositions – before landing on Db Lydian for the last two bars. The melody on top of these chords features eighth-notes, eighth-note triplets and much syncopation, also frequent Monk compositional techniques. The B section starts with a G minor seven chord before a chromatic sidestepping ii – V leads it to F major for a bar before returning to C major for the final two bars.

This composition – and much of Monk’s music in general – is appropriate and adaptable for a non-structured improvisation approach, in fitting with the motivic compositions written and analysed elsewhere in this thesis. This is largely due to his motivic approach, often taking one rhythmic or melodic cell and displacing or sequencing it throughout the written material. This supplies the improviser with a motif with which to develop spontaneously, not necessarily in strict adherence with the harmonic form. It can also provide a reference point around which group interaction and spontaneity can be constructed and broken down. This is demonstrated by Bourne’s (2005) non-standard approach to a Monk composition in the practical output of his PhD.

Boo Boo's Birthday

Medium swing

THELONIOUS MONK

(A) Cmaj7 B7 E7
 mf
 F7 E7 Eb7 3 D7 Dbmaj7(#11) 3 1. (Db7)
 2. (Db7) (B) Gm7 3 (Db7b5) Gb7
 Fmaj7 Cmaj7 F(#11) Cmaj7 (fine)

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 International Copyright Secured All Rights Reserved

Figure 55. 'Boo Boo's Birthday'. Source - Thelonius Monk Fake Book

This performance was recorded at a private session in Brooklyn, New York in January 2017 at the apartment of pianist Nick Sanders. The session was not in the context of rehearsing for any public performance. Sanders was a mutual acquaintance with whom I had wanted to collaborate

with based on his improvisational approach and the session was organised on this basis. We performed both standards and original compositions for the session, all with a non-structured approach.

No particular structure for the piece was discussed prior to the performance, although the approach was apparent from the context of the session. The composition was also familiar to both musicians, meaning both artists could perform by memory without a lead sheet, focusing on improvisational development and group interaction. The instrumental line-up of piano and drums duo is also a non-standard component of the performance. There is some precedent for piano and drum duos in improvised and creative music, for example Hans Bennink and Misha Mengelberg's *Bennink Mengelberg* (1981) and 'Piano and Drums Improvisation 1' from Anthony Braxton's *Quintet (Tristano) 2014* (2016), featuring Braxton on piano and Mike Szekely on drums. In the context of jazz standards, however, there are few examples of such instrumental line-ups.

This performance starts with a one-beat snare drum press roll pick-up into bar one, when the piano begins the melody. This continues at around 138 BPM, with the drums performing in a linear and highly interactive manner. The piano adds some anticipations and rhythmic embellishments to the written melody, but as mentioned previously, Monk's motivic use of the dotted quarter-note phrase in bar five and eighth-note triplet to quarter-note on beats '2' and '3' of bar six are utilised by the duo as reference points. This creates a connection between the dense rhythmic activity of the drums and the piano's embellishment of the melody.

At 00:29, the B section melody begins, and the drums react to the piano's staccato phrasing by switching to a double-time feel, with heavy use of ride cymbal and rim clicks. The dotted quarter-note motif is again used as a release of tension built up in the final bar of the melody. The original, more open and less groove-based approach from the drums is returned to for a second iteration of the melody, starting at 00:38.

On this repeat of the melody, the piano makes further middleground rhythmic elaborations on the written material, but again returns to the dotted quarter-note F7 to E7 chords at 00:45. On the repeat of the A section, at 00:52, the piano further elaborates on the composition by displacing the melody with triplets and laying back on the pulse. In conjunction with the drums creating a Motian-esque 'tumbling down stairs' effect on drums, this creates the feeling of an

absence of pulse. On this occasion, the piano returns to the bar five motif but the drums do not, resulting in continued feeling of disjointedness. The written background material is again used to alleviate the tension, but this time it is the quarter-note triplet melody in bar seven, which the two musicians play in unison at 01:04. The B section is then performed loosely before ending with the written melody in the final bar.

Improvisation over the form begins at 01:16, with the drums dropping in dynamics and performing a slight accelerando of quarter-notes on ride cymbal, snare drum and bass drum. At 01:27, over the last two bars of the first A section, the duo to connect again, playing a group of straight eighth-note or double-time over the last two bars of the A section (figure 56). The beginning of the piano phrase here is the written descending phrase of C, G, F, before following with a scalar Db dominant phrase, landing on the sharp nine of the scale, E.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Straight 8s". It is written in 4/4 time. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a piano melody. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains a drum pattern. The piano melody starts with a quarter note, followed by eighth notes and quarter notes, with a descending line. The drum pattern consists of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, indicating cymbal crashes or snare hits.

Figure 56. 'Boo Boo's Birthday'. *middleground development. Source - Author.*

The improvisation continues, adhering to the structure of the harmonic form. On the B section of the first repeat of improvisation, at 01:46, the piano again focusses on quarter-note triplets, this time displacing them with single eighth-note triplets. The drums accompany these triplets with rolls around the toms and cymbal crashes before again releasing tension on the final bar of the with unison dotted quarter-notes.

The start of the second repeat of the form sees the unconventional use of a collective decelerando by the duo. The piano's laid-back phrasing on swinging eighth-note passage at 01:57 causes the drums to follow with a swing pattern on the ride cymbal that slows down considerably. The pulse on through these bars has been reduced by over 20 BPM to approximately 116BPM. This is potentially as a result of the unusual instrumental line-up. Often, a bassist would perform the function of a quarter-note timekeeper in such a scenario, so

even with one or two other bandmembers deviating from the pulse, there would be no underlying change.

In the midst of these shifting tempos, the drums and piano mark the downbeat of bar five, with a crash cymbal and bass drum and block chord respectively. This clarifies that they are in agreement on their place in the form amidst the swirling pulse. From beat '3' of the seventh bar of this A section, at 02:09, the piano performs a loose triplet-based chromatic rising and falling pattern in octaves, which creates further ambiguity of pulse. The drums react to this by performing single-stroke rolls around the snare and toms with a similar lack of pulse.

The second A section begins at 02:13, marked by the piano by referencing the melody, while the drums continue with the rolling patterns. The first four bars of the second A section are highly abstracted from the pulse, with piano playing a long trill followed by a descending flurry of notes, ending in a strong chord. The drums magnify this chord by immediately suspending on an open hi-hat. There is then a two second pause from both performers, from 02:20 to 02:22, before they return on the downbeat at bar five of the material. This interaction appears to be based more on intent listening and musical cueing than adherence to strict form or pulse. This is an important example of musical flexibility and fluidity in the context of a jazz standard.

The final four bars of the material then return to a more static pulse of 116 BPM. The piano plays the written melody and the drums perform in a traditional jazz accompaniment style on ride cymbal, snare drum and bass drum before the B section begins at 02:30. The piano continues with the melody, while the drums continue with more standard accompaniment. The duo both catch the final bar of the form once more, before a drum solo begins at the top of the harmonic form at 02:40.

The drum solo is accompanied by light piano block chord accompaniment and adheres to the harmonic form for two repeats of the A section. From the B section however, at 03:15, the form becomes slightly abstracted. The piano ceases its accompaniment and while the drums possibly intend to continue over the pre-existing form, when the piano next uses the dotted quarter-note motif, at 03:34, it is placed on beat '4' of the fourth bar of the A section, one quarter-note away from the drums. In another display of group interaction and spontaneous adjustment, the drums immediately follow the piano. This alteration to the form is clarified in the following A section at 03:52, when both musicians clearly play the motif in unison.

A middleground B section occurs at 04:01, with the piano performing a right-hand upper register arpeggio passage and a variation of the melody in the lower register left-hand. This is also at a slower tempo again of approximately 99 BPM.

The final repeat of the harmonic form begins at 04:13. The pulse is yet again obscured before the dotted quarter-note motif brings the duo together on bar five. Following a decelerando on the final bars of the section – again instigated by quarter-note triplets by the piano and taken up by tom hits on drums – the second A section features a sudden accelerando, with a double-time piano solo. A lower register F – E in the piano at 04:40 cues the tempo back to 116BPM before the final B section melody is performed with a half-time swing pattern accompaniment on the hi-hats. The performers end together on the final written bar of the piece at 04:57.

4.4.3 Initial findings from analysis of non-standard of jazz standards:

Despite the performance context of both analysed performances of jazz standards being one of non-structured improvisation – as well as all the musicians involved being comfortable and highly engaged in such an approach – it is evident that there is a proclivity towards keeping to a predefined form when playing over functional harmony with inherent structures. This is displayed in the graph below depicting the comparative structures of these performances in relation to the levels of elaboration of the composition (figure 57). The average levels of elaboration for these performance are 1.2 (All Or Nothing at All) and 1.1 (Boo Boo's Birthday).

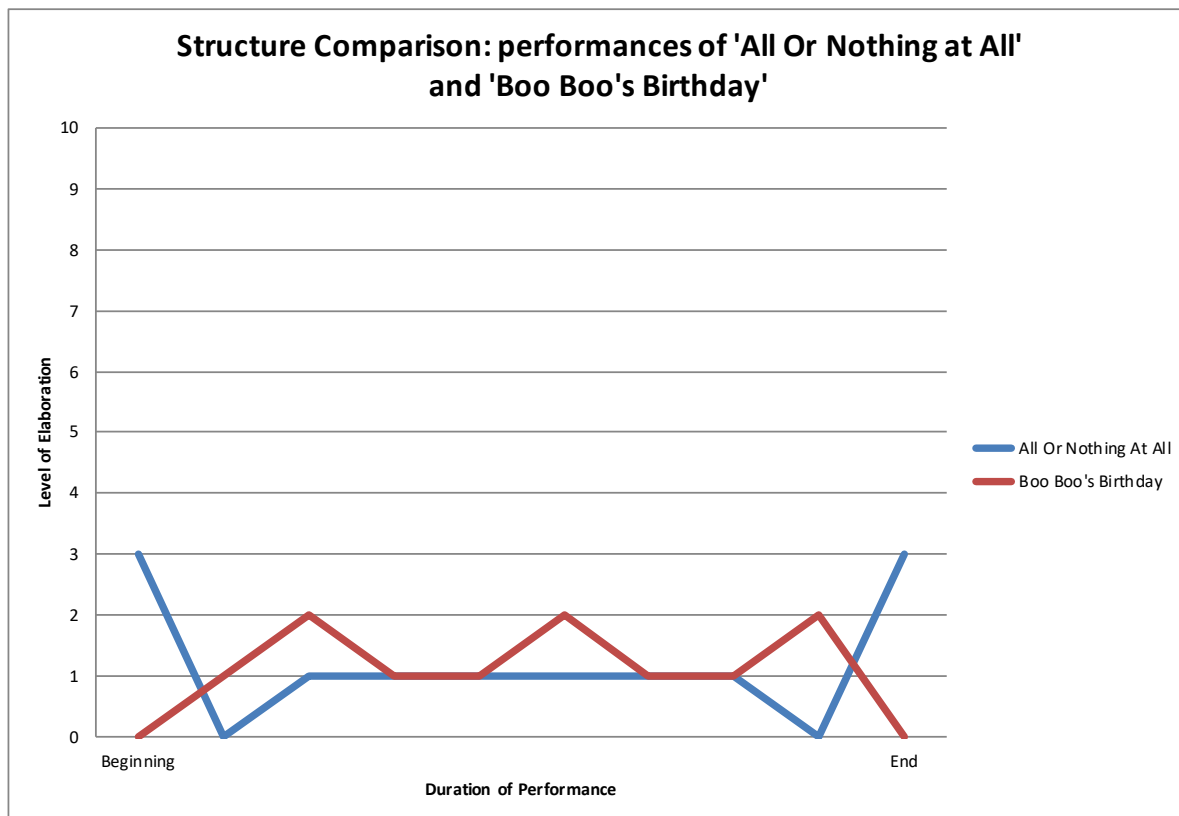


Figure 57. *Non-standard Standards – Level of Elaboration Graph. Source: Author*

It could be posited that these low levels of elaboration due to adherence of the harmonic are habitual and as a result of years spent learning to ‘keep the form’, or perhaps there is also a feeling that musically the artists are able to interact and express themselves with spontaneity even within that set structure. This would also be an affirmation of research on cognitive processes when improvising within a specific genre that showed an automaticity with regard to lower-level musical structures and concentration on higher level processes such as communication and feel (Berkowitz, 2010).

As mentioned in the introduction, intros and outros to pieces are common sections to perform in a more abstract manner, and this is the case with Fireplace Dragon’s performance of ‘All Or Nothing At All’. While new motifs are spontaneously developed in these sections, and later utilised, once the harmonic structure begins, the group do not deviate from it. Similarly, in Sanders | Jacobson’s version of ‘Boo Boo’s Birthday’, the harmonic form is adhered to for the entire performance, apart from one quarter-note discrepancy between the duo, which is immediately resolved.

The non-standard approach is applied by the latter performers' unconventional use of shifting tempos. This technique is also assisted by the motivic nature of the composition itself, with rhythmic and melodic cells frequently used as reference points in the form. There is also a non-standard approach in the instrumental functionality of both performances, with the drums often acting as an instigator or disruptor, as opposed to the more orthodox role of an accompanist in these settings. This is reflective of the more interactive style developed by Tony Williams in the 1960s through his work on key recordings such as *Point of Departure* (Hill, 1964) and *Out to Lunch* (Dolph, 1964) and represented in current practise by downtown New York drummers such as Tom Rainey and Nasheet Waits (Bakkum, 2014).

It is also important to note, that in the context of standard jazz repertoire, there is a lot of elaboration of material occurring, regardless of form or structure. This is illuminated by Simon Jermyn in his thoughts on improvisational approaches to motivic compositions ([Appendix 1\(d\)](#)):

...there is a very long tradition, however we define jazz, of taking something relatively simple and complexity is brought through the improviser's language, just abstracting something, even hearing somebody play a standard. And I don't mean super abstracted the way people might play standards today or playing them in a different metre, superimposing harmonics. Even going back and thinking of Coleman Hawkins' solo on Body & Soul, there is a huge amount of abstraction and complexity that is there that is not present in the song.

It is this form of "abstraction" or elaboration of the compositions that takes place in the performances of standards analysed here. The improvisers' language is brought out in interaction with both the other musicians and the written material, even though it is transpiring simultaneously to obedience of a set structure.

4.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, performances of motivic compositions have been analysed individually and comparatively within each of the four categories. Several important points of discussion have emerged from the descriptive, transcriptive and adapted Schenkerian analysis undertaken. These include the levels of elaboration in relation to the complexity of the material and the amount of predetermined structure, the comparative levels of elaboration with regard to the performance context and the interactive processes involved when using non-musical motifs.

In the first category – the same composition performed by different ensembles – initial findings have shown that there was variation in levels of elaboration of the same motivic compositions performed by different groups, as well as diversity in the structural approaches of those performances. The disparity in improvisational developments of motivic compositions has been connected to Feisst’s (2016) comments on the challenging of a composition’s “fixedness” by modern classical composers such as Cage and Young, though the focus here has been more on the performers than the composer. The ensembles’ different approaches to the same material has also been seen as a result of the “tension between structure and creativity” found in all improvisational genres (Sawyer, 2000).

The second category of investigation focussed on performances of the same composition by the same ensemble in different performance contexts. Despite some added structural elements in the compositions featured here compared to other categories, output once again varied greatly in each example. Findings in this category address the “redundant binary of improvisation versus composition” (Rose, 2017), elucidating their ability to coexist as opposed to working against each other. The repeated use of various improvisational techniques is examined, including metric modulation and pedal points, as well as the comparison of silence as a musical and linguistic expression (Sutton, 2001). The repeated use of such techniques in different performances, using varied sonic characteristics (different rhythmic subdivisions, harmonic note-choices and lengths of silences) to create different outcomes, is also presented as a demonstration that motivic compositions can encourage spontaneity as opposed to habitual or muscle-memory style approaches to performances of the same piece by the same ensembles. Performances in this category are also described as a “collaborative emergence” (Sawyer,

2012), due to the combination of ongoing individual and group processes that were vital to their creation.

The hybridised methodologies developed and presented in chapter 3 were found to be appropriate for analysis of the above categories. The adapted use of Schenker's background, middleground and foreground sections to demonstrate varying levels of elaboration of the same compositional material by different ensembles, or by the same ensemble in different contexts, allowed for a comparative tool of general measurement. While background and middleground sections were used as analytical focus points, the very presence of foreground sections was seen as the key point when comparing to other performances in this research, rather than the exact content of material in those sections. The adapted use of these sections also allowed for graphic representation of such measurements in relation to performance duration and thus the creation of visual depictions of the improvised structure of each performance.

The next category of investigation presented non-musical materials as catalysts for improvisation. While the analysis of subsequent performances was completed using similar methodologies to previous categories, challenges were faced due to the presence of vocals in performances using text-based materials. The ability of a vocalist to explicitly represent the motivic composition could not be compared to instrumental performances using image-based materials. Furthermore, the singular performance of each image-based motif and the multiple performances of the same text-based motif also resulted in initial findings being limited in terms of comparative possibilities. Considerable levels of interaction and negotiated communication (Sutton, 2001) were found within each of the two subcategories, but more consistent and controlled performance contexts would need to be established for a meaningful comparison of such findings.

The impact of embodiment on the use of non-musical media in musical improvisation was also discussed. Specific examples from the interview series accompanying this thesis were utilised, illustrating that the presentation of certain texts or images elicit individual emotional responses from different artists based on their own sociocultural identities and musical experiences (Brennan: [Appendix 1\(c\)](#)).

The final category of investigation featured the non-standard performance of jazz standards. Initial findings showed that even in an open-ended context and with clear intention from the bandleader that improvisations could be non-structured, performers did not deviate from the harmonic form of the compositions. This could have been a result of genre-specific cognitive processes that encourage automaticity of lower-level musical processes and a concentration of higher-level musical processes such as communication and interaction (Berkowitz, 2010). Within this example, the harmonic form is suggested as a lower-level musical structure. The accompanying interviews were again shown to be a successful element of the chosen methodology as they were utilised to provide an alternative performer-based viewpoint, with Jermyn ([Appendix 1\(d\)](#)) identifying that even in traditional, structured performances of jazz standards, there is constant and considerable elaboration taking place. Instrumental functionality was also explored in this category, as the drums in particular take an unconventional role in the documented performances. This is reflective of the more interactive approach of Tony Williams-inspired downtown New York drummers (Bakkum, 2014).

In the following chapter, the results that have materialised in each category will be discussed comparatively with the other categories, as well as in relation to the research questions and gaps in the knowledge established through the literature review.

5. Comparison of Key Findings

Having completed analysis of performances in each of the categories of investigation, as well as comparative analysis within those categories in the previous chapter, we now proceed in this chapter to assemble those initial findings to garner results in connection to both the literature and the research questions. This is also aided by thoughts and observations collected from the series of interviews with performers in the documentation.

5.1 Structure and Complexity

From the initial findings in each category, results suggest that when improvising with motivic compositions that contain more detailed inherent structures, artists are more restricted with regard to their elaboration of the material. The compositions that contain the most detailed formal structure in this research, ‘Suite for Eirik’ and ‘Cicaplast’, had the lowest average levels of elaborations. The complexity of the content itself, however, does not appear to have as great an effect on the outcome of improvised performances as the structural elements. For example, motivic composition ‘Tricky’ contains advanced rhythmic concepts, however analyses of two performances with different ensembles, show considerable levels of elaboration. This aligns with Sparti's (2016) assertion that placing a performer in “unfamiliar expressive areas” puts him or her at “the very limits of his creative capacity”. If this assertion is understood to mean that such areas push an artist to elaborate as much as possible, then for the example of ‘Tricky’, while the performers may not have had great experience improvising with a 7:3 polyrhythm, the lack of structure allows them to concentrate on interacting with the material and the other musicians.

This finding is further supported by the artists’ adherence to inherent forms in the category of non-standard performances of jazz standards. Despite guitar trio Fireplace Dragon performing a set of mostly non-structured improvisational performances – for example ‘Opener’ from the practical output – and agreeing in advance that the form did not have to be adhered to, when it came to performing over the jazz standard ‘All Or Nothing At All’, the group complied explicitly to the form, once the harmony had been established. Performing in a non-structured improvisational manner in this category of investigation, with jazz standards as motivic

material, would perhaps need more refined performance strategies and justifies further research.

The lack of research on this topic is perhaps not surprising, given the dearth of recorded output that features non-structured performances of jazz standards. A considerable amount of research has discussed elaboration and innovation within the context of structured improvisation (Berliner, 2009; Monson, 2009; Cho, 2010), featuring the extensive work of pioneers such as Miles Davis, Bill Evans and Charlie Parker among others. However, there remains an absence of knowledge related to the relatively limited output of artists in which standards are performed with non-structured improvisation – Ellery Eskelin’s *Trio New York* (Eskelin, 2001) and *Trio New York II* (Eskelin, 2013), and Anthony Braxton’s *19 Standards* (Braxton, 2004) and *23 Standards* (Braxton, 2010) being some of the few examples.

The findings of this research on the impact of levels of compositional complexity and structure can also be enlightened by Berkowitz’s (2010) cognitive work in the area of genre-specific improvisation. His research finds that when improvising in a given genre, musicians concentrate on higher-level processes such as interaction and feel, while there is a greater degree of automaticity with lower-level functions in relation to stylistic elements such as scales, chords and rhythms. The motivic compositions analysed in the current research are made up of such stylistic elements and thus aim to alleviate communicative performance constraints, perhaps a reason for the levels of elaboration and creativity found. However, with the use of standard jazz repertoire, the performers appear to have absorbed the harmonic form of the material into their automaticity. Thus, in order for the performers to concentrate on communication and interaction, the intent for the improvisation to be non-structured has been relegated.

Throughout this research, an aspect of performing non-structured improvisations that became apparent was restriction coming from the intention of the bandleader, as opposed to the content of the material itself. David Toop (2016) asks, “Can any music be imagined in which the composer’s instructions form an unassailable law, a pure line between intent and consequence?” Toop is of course discussing instructions that suggest musicians should perform only the material presented. The instructions featured in this research have been the opposite, encouraging the musicians to play as much or as little of the material – or anywhere on a line

of elaboration between these two – as they see fit. However, the question of whether the performers will fully take these instructions on board, is just as valid.

Although in the context of structured improvisation, and with a semiotic focus, the topic of bandleader intention has also been explored by Christopher Smith's (1995) investigation of Miles Davis' desire for "attentive musical flexibility that would lift the players to the level of co-composing interpreters; one that would encourage them to respond to the improvisational moment with the same alert freedom that he did". Smith finds that Davis achieved this through "ambiguous, nonverbal communication", as well as visual and sonic cues. This creation of the unexpected through momentary communications resulted in a "sense of heightened possibility". Such a sense of "individual expression, empathic interaction, and creative response to shifting content" is also key to the performance of motivic compositions in the practical output analysed earlier and its achievement through ambiguity is concurred in conversation with experts as part of the accompanying interview series to this thesis. Several of the musicians spoke about restriction coming from the intention of the bandleader, as opposed to the content of the material itself. Bassist and guitarist Simon Jermyn ([Appendix 1\(d\)](#)) declares:

unless there is something really pivotal, asking too much sometimes inhibits the performance or I take the instruction too literally or to heart and it inhibits what I play. I think it is better if the composer or bandleader hasn't specified then I will assume that it is all open and generally in my experience that leads to better music-making. So I can really listen.

Similar to pianist Kimura's ([Appendix 1\(e\)](#)) comment on the effect of the creator's objectives that, "if it is written a lot or it is a really small amount of material, it all depends on what's expected by the person who wrote it", this insinuates the importance of the intent of the composer or bandleader. Taking away performative responsibilities in improvisational contexts can help adjust the balance between freedom and constraints. This can help to create Peters' (2009) ideal of "a collective language of care and enabling", in which his expansion of Berlin's (1969) negative and positive liberties theory provides us with the concept of negative and positive freedom in improvisation. This correlates to a situation where the intent of a composer has not been clarified and there is no material provided, resulting in individual performers being left with the chaos of positive freedom. On the other hand, the findings from the various categories of analysis in this thesis, as well as comments from interview

participants, suggest that with clear intent from a composer and a clearly-presented non-structured motivic composition, the performers can communicate with the “pure, aesthetically cleansed language of communal love” of negative freedom (Peters, 2009).

5.2 Instrumental Line-Up and Functionality

The disregard for traditional instrumental functions in the performances analysed previously is a reflection and development of the 1960s free jazz scene, with artists including Ornette Coleman and Eric Dolphy composing and performing in a way that afforded artists on all instruments the freedom to interact in a more spontaneous manner (Gioia, 2011). As discussed in the literature review, such interaction has largely been ignored in the analysis of improvising artists. While Berliner (2009) presented improvisational studies in a very traditional structured jazz format, and Monson (2009) rhythm section interaction in a similarly functional context, dedicated research on non-functional instrumental interaction within the context of composed material appears warranted. As presented earlier, such an approach is exemplified in the current practice with downtown New York artists such as composers and bandleaders Tim Berne and Craig Taborn (Bakkum, 2009).

While the range of ensemble sizes is relatively small within this study – featuring only duos, trios and quartets – the results suggest that with only two performers, there are lower levels of elaboration from the written material. This can partly be attributed to the functions of instruments present. For example, if a group features only drums and bass, there is only one performer capable of explicitly expressing the written melody and harmonic material or soloing using that material at any one moment. Alternatively, as seen with guitar trio Blowout Fracture performing ‘Suite for Eirik’, the presence of drums and two guitars allows one guitarist to both explicitly and elaboratively perform the material, while the second can improvise freely over the top. With drums and only one other instrument, as in Whyte | Jacobson performing ‘Tricky’, the double-bass tends to either stick closer to the material or vastly elaborate it. These results are corroborated in Jermyn’s interview ([Appendix 1\(d\)](#)). As a bassist and guitarist, he admits that his reactions are different depending on which instrument he is playing. In particular, he believes that when playing the bass, himself and the drummer “could affect a lot of things, in a way that I couldn’t have done as a guitar player”. This suggests that even when adopting a highly interactive approach, and disavowing traditional instrumental hierarchies, such

connections between instruments are still apparent and can affect the outcome of a performance.

In the case of drums and piano duo Sanders | Jacobson performing Monk's 'Boo Boo's Birthday', considerable fluctuation of tempo was apparent. This could be as a result of their high levels of interactive intensity, which in the case of a piano trio would often be underpinned by the supportive function provided by a static pulse from a bassist. This, however, can also be seen as a stylistic choice by an individual performer of any instrument. In the current practice of contemporary jazz, for example, bassist Taurus Mateen often fluctuates tempo, while performing in an accompanying fashion in Jason Moran's piano trio album *The Bandwagon* (2003). This can also be connected back to Berkowitz's (2010) cognitive finding that "stylistic constraints alleviate performance constraints". If we include a walking bassline-style accompaniment as a stylistic constraint, its presence allows Mateen to interact by breaking previous performance constraints such as sticking to a consistent tempo. Thus, the combination of playing over standard harmonic material in a structured way due to stylistic constraints as discussed above, as well as the lack of a constant accompanying bassline, could account for an interactive and non-restricted tempo approach as in the instrumental-specific Sanders | Jacobson example.

The findings presented above – that when more than one melodic instrument was present, there was a greater likelihood of one performer explicitly stating the composition or improvisationally developed versions of it in an accompaniment fashion, while the other(s) made a greater departure from the material in a soloistic fashion – suggest that middleground elaboration of material is more prevalent as an accompanying function than as a soloistic function. This could be seen as an individual choice of the performers analysed in this thesis, but it can also be associated with the improvisational importance of Pressing's (1988) "referent", Nettle's (2009) "PoD" or Jost's (1994) "motivic chain-association" explored in the literature review. Traditionally, all of these concepts have been used to describe the actions of the *soloist* in an improvisational context. However, in the context provided for the performances of motivic compositions in this research, the removal of instrumental hierarchies means that the simultaneous improvisational developments of all bandmember were analysed, as opposed to only the soloist. This resulted in the finding that, in order to develop accompaniment passages from the material provided, performers often allowed passages to

naturally evolve from one idea to the next, much in the same way that Dolphy developed his solos (Jost, 1994) or Persian musicians improvise their performances of a radif (Nettl, 2009).

Extended instrumental technique has also emerged as an important aspect in the analysis of varying instrumental line-ups and functions in this research. Almost all performers documented have employed some form of extended technique in expressive attempts to elaborate on motivic compositions or interact with other band members. Examples of this include cymbal scrapes and pitch-adjusting a floor tom with a hand on drums, multiphonics on woodwinds, the use of various effects pedals on guitar and keyboard, flutter tonguing and breath noises on trombone and whispering and clicking noises on vocals. These techniques can be seen as a development of the 1960s establishment of the AACM presented in the literature review, as well as Dolphy's previously mentioned performance of Varese's *Density 21.5* for solo flute, Berio's (1998) *Sequenzas* or saxophonist Evan Parker's metaphorical "conveyance of heightened meaning and immediacy" (Borgo, 2005). They can also be seen as a testimony to the importance leading artists of that era placed on such techniques in relation to group interaction and spontaneity. The development of this importance has also been discussed with regard to the ecological psychology-based concept of "affordances" and how the relationship between improvisers, their bandmates and their social and musical environments creates an "embodied feedback loop" (Hannaford, 2019). Within the environment that the AACM and the Free Jazz movement created, extended techniques became an important form of expression and fed into their compositions and inspired other artists within that scene to explore them further (Lewis, 2008). This has continued on in the environment created by the current practice of artists such as creative music drummer Tom Rainey and French improvising guitarist Marc Ducret, as discussed earlier, as well as in the environment created by the group of artists involved in the practical output of this research, as shown above.

5.3 Social Context

From the practice-led investigations of this thesis, evidence suggests that public concerts and recorded studio sessions resulted in more concise performances of motivic compositions. This is despite general anecdotal suggestions – confirmed by Patricia Brennan ([Appendix 1\(c\)](#)) – that importance should be placed on "being in the moment" whatever the context. A possible reason for this could be informal discussions by ensembles after such performances and the

development of a piece through a series of performances. For example, after a rehearsal of a composition, there is often discourse around successful or unsuccessful elements of the performance, leading to a more concise live performance.

In the case of ReDiviDeR's documented rehearsals of 'Cicaplast' ([page 131](#)), there were concerns about the transition from the A section to the B section being too sudden. Members of the group suggested that – for the subsequent live performance and recording – greater rhythmic intensity could be introduced in the B section before the performance of any notated melodic information. Also, all members of the group commented on their enjoyment of trombonist Colm O'Hara's instinctive decision to perform the B section of the composition in half-time. These two informal discussion points thus created extra options or agreed limitations for future performances of the piece. This mixture of written and informal verbal limitations furthers the collective sense of development of this music and reiterates the importance and benefits of performing such music with artists that one either has a strong personal relationship with or enough trust to be able to communicate honestly and clearly (MacDonald et al, 2012).

This is also similar to the discussion above of how restrictions can come from a bandleader's intention, although in this case it is from the ensemble's collective intention. This combination of the individual process of O'Hara's improvised decision during the rehearsal performance and the group process of collectively discussing the decision afterwards and the emergent results in later contexts is also a further example of Sawyer's (2000) "collaborative emergence". Sawyer (2012) asserted that such creative processes could not simply be explored through the individual participants' actions alone but rather through both those and the interweaving facets of group interaction.

Furthermore, it was identified that due to the financial and time constraints associated with recording in a studio, it was deemed necessary to impose slightly more structural restrictions on the musicians than in other contexts. Despite the intention to give maximum freedom to the performers, there was general acceptance from performers that in some contexts, there was comfort and freedom to be found within those restrictions. This is presented by interview series participant Izumi Kimura's ([Appendix 1\(e\)](#)) description of discussing the recording of otherwise non-structured improvisational music with bassist Barry Guy. She suggests that in such a context, they would treat each piece "more like a composition" and that "if we were recording in his studio then we probably will have more written or more agreed stuff".

Such restrictions were most notably evident in the recording session for *Mere Nation* (2020) with ReDiviDeR in the Meadow Studio, Delgany in January 2020. The group had spent several years developing a continuous musical approach to performing written material, with no breaks between compositions. This idea developed from an attempt to afford the artists maximum freedom to perform to their strengths as both improvisers and players of complex rhythmic material. The motivic composition aimed to stimulate their rhythmic capabilities and resulting segues between compositions to provide space for improvised foreground sections. However, after several rehearsals and a public performance leading up to the studio date, it was agreed by all band members that given the time constraints and the amount of energy consumed performing in this way, it would be advantageous to split the session, performing six pieces in three groups of two, as opposed to one continuous set. This allowed space for the artists to perform in background, middleground and foreground contexts, while also providing the opportunity to record multiple takes of each two-composition section.

This approach can also be seen in correlation with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of "flow" state, described in the literature review. While such a state is achieved as a result of an optimal creative experience, it appears, from the findings here, that in order to achieve the intended outcome, the context of a performance contains other factors that influence that optimum. Research has already found that flow state is a motivating factor for improvising musicians (Biasutti & Frezza, 2009), thus the parameters and musical structures may need to be altered in varying contexts to ensure the task remains engaging and demanding (Dillon & Tait, 2000) without the infringing of external social factors. Therefore, reaching such a state can certainly be seen as a result of a successful motivic composition performance. It cannot be said that such a state was found for the entirety of ReDiviDeR's studio session, but it was found that shorter recording sections resulted in a more optimal creative experience.

The documentation and subsequent analysis of motivic composition performances through several contexts has shown that what emerges at the end of such a sequence contains clear differences to the initial offering, including elements such as duration and levels of elaboration. In both 'Suite for Eirik' and 'Cicaplast' – explored in the investigation category of the 'same motivic composition by the same ensemble in different performance contexts' – the final performance in a series was the shortest in duration and also had the lowest levels of elaboration. This suggests that, as performers become more comfortable with the material, they interact with it in a more succinct and direct manner. Likewise, in initial stages when less

familiar with material, they appear to rely more on improvised foreground material with less connection to the composition itself. This is reflective of research in cognitive studies within improvised music (Berkowitz, 2010; Van Der Schyff, 2019; Schiavio et al, 2019).

Such studies have shown that, as improvisers become more familiar with their bandmates' reactions in a collaborative environment, their cognitive constraints at a lower level (musical elements such as pulse and feel) become alleviated, thus initiating the prospect of an optimal creative experience due to space for higher level cognitive functions such as interaction and spontaneity. Such findings are also reflective of cognitive studies in a pedagogical context that found that students developed their improvisational skillset through shared interactive experiences and providing each other with feedback (Schiavio et al, 2019).

In the case of this research, the shared experiences of each ensemble have resulted in more concise performances. To once more take a linguistic analogy, this could be akin to conversing with somebody that one has previously never spoken deeply with and taking a period of time for the communication to become meaningful. However, when conversing with somebody that one has shared several similar communications with, a much shorter exchange can result in a more purposeful outcome. This sense of the benefits of shared experiences by improvising ensembles was agreed by all interview participants, with Rorke ([Appendix 1\(b\)](#)) stating that when a group plays together a lot, “you get to a point where you have become familiar enough with everybody’s language that there is a kind of fluidity where you are able to then dialogue between the musicians really at a higher level”, while for Jermyn ([Appendix 1\(d\)](#)), “all of the other stuff on that path is as important and meaningful – practising, rehearsing, listening, talking – it’s not just a performance.”

5.4 Musical, Text and Image-based Media

While some analytical difficulties arose due to the lack of a common musical reference point and the collection of only a single performance of each image, results in the category ‘non-musical motifs as vehicles for improvisation’ show that there were considerable amounts of collective musical motivic development in performances. With several performances using the same text as a catalyst for improvisation, it was found that musical output varied greatly, while retaining a strong sense of group interaction and focussed development of improvised material.

From the analysis of all performances it is apparent that, regardless of motivic medium, the performers were capable of distinct structural responses using the material supplied and that these structures did not become ritualised. This is shown by the three varied structures improvised by Clang Sayne in their performances of text-based piece ‘The Portal’ and the structural diversity in Blowout Fracture’s two performances of ‘Suite for Eirik’ on consecutive days. As mentioned in the initial findings, such results are not presentable from image-based motifs as each image was only performed once. However, each performance did display that the artists engaged with the material on a structural level and, as with the other media, structures emerged through a combination of individual performers’ engagement with the material and group interaction.

With regard to the open-ended and collaborative approach of Clang Sayne and in response to a question about whether the ensemble’s output is more a result of rehearsing or shared experiences, bandleader Laura Hyland (Carry, 2017) states:

It’s both: rehearsing, and exactly as you say, being aware of each other’s playing to the point where it becomes fluid and cohesive. It’s also a case of choosing to play with people whose playing I like, and who like the music I write and the way I play. That cuts out a lot of work really. Often there isn’t much need for discussion or arrangement as everyone just appreciates what everyone else does.

This is reflective of Rorke’s earlier comments about the “fluidity” of dialogue and shows that, although the medium is different – with the use of text-based materials here as opposed to standard notation – the same processes and ambitions are in play. The view that levels of awareness around each other’s playing leads to increased fluidity is also complementary of Berkowitz’s (2010) conclusion that stylistic constraints can reduce performance constraints. Hyland’s sentiment around the curatorial element of choosing who plays her music also echoes the ensembles documented in the practical output using music-based materials. As both bandleader and composer for these ensembles, I have continuously acknowledged the importance of choosing musicians based both on their own specific knowledge bases, our interpersonal connections and our levels of communication, as illuminated in the work of MacDonald et al (2012). Hyland’s opinions and the documented output show that that is no different for her in the case of Clang Sayne.

Connecting the text-based approach further still to that of other media, Hyland (Carry, 2017) elaborates:

We're all free to respond to each other as we play, so that the music becomes a living organism. Composition and improvisation are much like gardening to me in this regard: there's a balance between manicuring plant growth and letting it grow wildly out of control.

Similar to my creation of music-based motivic compositions in this research, Hyland sees her text-based material as a means of addressing the “balance” between chaos and order. Her description of the music being like “a living organism”, as well as harking back to the concept of “affordances” in improvisation (Hannaford, 2019) – due to their shared roots in ecology – is also clearly evident in the findings of performances of her text-based piece ‘The Portal’. Each performance features distinct structural use of the text (manicured plant growth), as well as moments of full elaboration and extended techniques (out of control growth).

Although Jost’s (1994) “motivic chain-association” and Nettle’s (2009) “PoD” concepts, discussed in previous chapters, were developed in a musical context, they can equally be applied to the findings from the analysis of text and image-based motif performances. The latter concept can be equated to a line or phrase from a portion of text, or a section or particular characteristic of an image. These ‘points of departure’ are then developed improvisationally, in the same way that the findings have shown artists develop musically notated motifs. This development often materialises in the style of the former motivic chain-association – identified with free jazz musicians such as Ornette Coleman – in which one idea would grow naturally from a previous one and is present in much of the documented output from non-musical motivic compositions. This is found in both the development of individual ideas on each instrument, as well as in motifs developed as a group in reaction to the text and paintings.

An example of this is in the first rehearsal of trio Fingerpainting ([page 126](#)). From approximately five minutes in, each instrument develops their own separate motifs in reaction to scattered dots in the painted image, culminating in a group motif ([figure 2](#)) that continues to be collectively developed until they drop out one by one. A further example occurs in the opening minutes of Clang Sayne’s first rehearsal of text-based piece ‘The Portal’ ([page 140](#)).

A clarinet motif develops from a repeated note into a semi-tone glissando, which is picked up by the cello and then employed by the vocals in the opening line of the text ([figure 22](#)).

As discussed in the initial findings, the three media used as catalysts for improvisation are also connected by work on embodied cognition (Iyer, 2016; Van der Schyff, 2019). Regardless of whether music, text or images were used, the results have signified that what is important to all of the performances is the engaged action from all of the musicians. This engaged action, as specified in 4E cognition (Schiavio & Van der Schyff, 2018), has taken place through the *embedded* nature of the output through the shared social and cultural environments it has occurred in (whether public or private), the *embodied* nature through the gestural use of instrumental extended techniques found throughout, the *extended* nature through the input of each individual artist's extensive knowledge base into each collective performance, and thus, through each of these actions are *enacted* via the “repertoires of action” that are this research's practical output.

It is clear that individual performers all react differently to motifs, regardless of what form they are presented in. A musical motif can elicit a certain feeling or emotion in a performer in much the same way that an image or piece of text will – connected to their sociocultural backgrounds, musical experiences and any number of incidental factors – which in turn will have great impact on the outcome of their improvisation. What is consistent in all of the motifs, and is represented in the music analysed, however, is their attempt to provide an inclusive starting point with which to start a musical conversation. This allows the musicians to feel safe in the situation and if the open-ended intent of the bandleader is clearly communicated, then these starting points can be a trustworthy launchpad for a creative optimal experience.

[5.5 Chapter Summary](#)

These results have outlined the successful elements of this research, as well as the areas that warrant further investigation and several key findings have been identified. Within the topic of structure and complexity, more developed structures in motivic compositions seem to restrict the levels of elaboration of material, though content complexity may not have a large impact on elaboration of material or structural development. This has been compared to previous musicological research involving structured improvisations (Berliner, 2009; Monson, 2009;

Cho, 2010) and is informed by cognitive work on lower-level stylistic automaticity in improvisation alleviating higher-level communicative constraints (Berkowitz, 2010). A further important suggestion is that bandleader or creator intent can set the tone for an optimal balance between freedom and constraints. This has been correlated to a semiotic approach to Miles Davis' bandleading intention for improvisers to be "co-composers" (Smith, 1995), within a structured improvisation context. This discussion is also connected to philosophical principles of freedom (Peters, 2009; Berlin, 1969) and is broadened by the insight of interview participants Kimura ([Appendix 1\(e\)](#)) and Jermyn ([Appendix 1\(d\)](#)).

Other findings include smaller numbers of performers resulting in lower levels of middleground elaboration and middleground elaboration often featuring more as an accompaniment than soloistic function. These considerations have been discussed with regard to historical developments in improvisational interaction (Gioia, 2011; Bakkum, 2014) and previous work on traditional instrumental functions in improvisation (Berliner, 2009; Monson, 2009). It is also once again examined with regard to stylistic and performative cognitive constraints (Berkowitz, 2010) and is augmented by Jermyn's ([Appendix 1\(d\)](#)) performer-based observations on instrumental functionality. The improvisational development of such accompanying instrumental functions is also discussed in relation to musicological work originally intended for soloistic approaches (Pressing, 1988; Jost, 1994; Nettle, 2009).

A further finding under the topic of instrumental functionality is that extended techniques can be regularly utilised as a means of group interaction or motivic development. This has been explored via the significance of its development in improvisational practice over the last 60 years (Borgo, 2005; Lewis, 2008). Its presence in the practical output of this research has also been compared to its description as being part of an affordance-based concept of embodied feedback loops (Hannaford, 2019).

Under the heading of social context, public performances and studio sessions were found to result in shorter, more succinct performances of motivic composition. This finding was discussed in relation to performer-led perspectives by Brennan ([Appendix 1\(c\)](#)) and Kimura ([Appendix 1\(e\)](#)) and work on sociocultural theories in communities of improvisers (MacDonald, 2012). The combination and coordination of individual and group processes in action here are also related to the concept of collaborative emergence (Sawyer, 2000). Greater structural restrictions in a studio resulting in a more optimal creative experience was considered

in relation to flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) and previous cognitive studies in musical improvisation premising that state as a motivating factor (Berkowitz, 2009; Sawyer, 2012; Biasutti & Frezza, 2009, Van der Schyff, 2019; Schiavio et al, 2019). This is once again expounded by performer opinions (Rorke, [Appendix 1\(b\)](#); Jermyn, [Appendix 1\(d\)](#)) on social context, as well as developments of linguistic comparisons in improvisation (Sutton, 2001; Monson, 2009).

The provision of non-musical motifs as a strong platform for motivic development and group interaction has been informed by the artist-led perspectives of Hyland (Carry, 2017) and Rorke ([Appendix 1\(b\)](#)), and the connection of these perspectives with musicology (Jost, 1994; Nettl, 2009; Hannaford, 2019), embodied cognition (Iyer, 2016; Van der Schyff, 2019) and 4E cognition (Schiavio & Van der Schyff, 2018).

6. Conclusions

The aim of this research was to investigate the practice of improvisational performances of non-structured motivic compositions. The possibility of qualitatively evaluating the creation of such work, to which I had been drawn since a young musician, was intended to enhance my development as an artist, as well as addressing the absence of certain fields of research in the literature. Without such focussed attention and research, such development would have been considerably slower and difficult to achieve to the same degree.

The development of hybridised methodologies undertaken in this thesis followed from gaps identified in the literature review. In particular, the adapted use of Schenkerian analysis' background, middleground and foreground sections makes an original contribution to knowledge in the analysis of improvised performances of motivic compositions. Using these methods, I have analysed the above output and subsequently discussed the results in the context of the lacunae in the literature that I had previously established. A mixed-method interview series with four leading improvisers, all of whom feature in the practical output of this research, has provided broader insight and subjectivity from experts on these topics. This was particularly effective given the absence of literature specific to the field of non-structured improvisational approaches to motivic compositions and is a further contribution to the knowledge in this field.

This research has made several contributions to the topic of non-structured improvisations using motivic compositions. It has responded to the relative dearth of academic literature in this field, finding firstly that, in relation to structure and complexity, when performing motivic compositions with more detailed forms, elaboration of material was restricted. Conversely, the complexity of the material does not appear to have had as great an effect on levels of elaboration. This finding has been discussed with regard to previous musicological work (Berliner, 2009; Monson 2009; Cho, 2010) and in relation to the limitations provided by lower and higher-level cognitive processes (Berkowitz, 2010).

Furthermore, it was found that the intention of the bandleader was key to the levels of restriction felt by the performers. Although similar findings have been discussed previously in the context of semiotics and structured improvisations (Smith, 1995), this thesis contributes

originality of thought by positing them in a non-structured improvisation context and expounding them in relation to philosophical work on principles of freedom (Berlin, 1969; Peters, 2009). A further important finding in this category was the considerable scope for further research in the area of performances of jazz standards with non-structured improvisations, particularly as a reaction to the current practice of Eskelin (2013) and Braxton (2014).

In relation to instrumental functionality, it was established that, in the analysed output, middleground elaboration is more prevalent as an accompanying function than a soloistic one. This has been connected to both cognitive (Berkowitz, 2010) and musicological work (Jost, 1994; Nettl, 2009). In the same topic, it was shown that extended techniques were consistently utilised across all categories, both as a means of elaboration of material and group interaction. This was discussed as an extension of historical musical developments (Simosko & Tepperman, 1996; Borgo, 2005; Gioia, 2011) and “embodied feedback loops” (Hannaford, 2019).

Under the theme of social context, another finding was that public concerts and recording sessions resulted in more concise performances than rehearsals. This has been discussed in relation to sociological interpersonal connection (MacDonald et al, 2012), as well as work in cognitive psychology (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Biasutti & Frezza, 2009; Berkowitz, 2010; Van Der Schyff, 2019; Schiavio et al, 2019). These cognitive studies have shown that over a period of shared experiences, improvisers’ higher-level cognitive constraints are diminished and the experience of an optimal creative state (flow state) is a motivating factor.

With regard to the three media – music, text and images – used as vehicles for improvisation in this research, it was found that each medium resulted in varied structural responses and was capable of being a catalyst for high levels of group interaction and motivic improvisational development. This was discussed comparatively using musicological research (Jost, 1994; Nettl, 2009) as well as the insight and perspective of performers ([Appendix 1\(a\)](#); Carry, 2017) involved and 4E cognition (Iyer, 2016; Schiavio & Van der Schyff, 2018; Van der Schyff, 2019). The use of these media as catalysts for improvisations are connected with 4E through the embedded shared environments, the embodied extended technique gestures, the extended group potential through the input of individual performers and are enacted through the practical output of this research.

6.1 Personal Impact

The research initiated for this doctoral thesis has been hugely impactful on my development as an artist over the past four years. I have undertaken a wide-ranging review of the literature on improvisation, focussing on various themes including group interaction, spontaneity, freedom versus constraints and social context. This allowed me to identify gaps in the knowledge, which my output aims to address. Original practical output has been created through 11 motivic compositions that have been performed by 15 different ensembles in four countries around the world.

Additionally, intense analysis of 17 of these performances is something that I can build on in future practice, enhancing performative situations I am involved in, in any discipline or genre, both personally and for colleagues and collaborators alike. These analyses have also provided me with deeper insights into the specific benefits and restrictions in the use of motivic compositions of different media as catalysts for improvisation. These can be particularly illuminative in an educational sphere. As discussed in the findings, the use of text and image-based motifs can result in highly interactive and spontaneous improvised performances and encouraging such exploration could assist in broadening the development of novice improvisers.

These compositions and performances have also featured in three album releases: Noriega, Rorke, Jermyn, Jacobson *Naked Allies* (2019); ReDiviDeR *Mere Nation* (2020); Origin Story *Good Friday* (2020). *Mere Nation* can be seen as the culmination of the processes and strategies explored in this thesis due to the ensemble's longevity (established in 2007) and thus greater quantity of shared collaborative experiences accumulated. Furthermore, as the exclusive provider of original motivic compositions for ReDiviDeR – as opposed to sharing contributions in the other groups – I could achieve greater depth of focus on the specific composer/bandleader/performer approach that has evolved from the theoretical research and practical output of this thesis.

6.2 Future Research

Furthermore, the multi-category approach to the practice-led investigations of this research has created several possible future strands for research. While all of these categories were found necessary for a complete investigation of the research questions focussed on, their broadness meant that resources were more limited within each field than would have been the case for a narrower point of focus. The research, output, analysis and findings achieved in each of these categories are now very strong points of departure for future research. Such future research projects might include an investigation of non-structured performances of jazz standards and separate controlled examinations of text and image-based materials as vehicles for non-structured improvisations. There is also potential for more narrowly focussed articles responding to key findings including bandleader intention and instrumental functionality in non-structured improvisational performances of motivic compositions and levels of elaboration in non-structured improvised performances using motivic compositions. The possibility of carrying out such future explorations personally, in collaboration with others and seeing other researchers and performers carry it forward is a deeply rewarding and exciting outcome of this thesis.

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Appendix 1(a):



INTERVIEW INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Participant,

You have been invited to take part in an interview on improvisational approaches to motivic compositions. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important that you understand what the research is for and what you will be asked to do. Please read the following information and do not hesitate to ask any questions about anything that might not be clear to you. Make sure that you are happy before you decide what to do. Thank you for taking the time to consider this invitation.

I am a practice-based PhD student at Ulster University, exploring improvisational approaches to motivic compositions. For the purpose of this research, motivic compositions are short pieces of material with only one or two undeveloped motifs or ideas. These might be musical - melodic, harmonic or rhythmic for example - or they could also be non-musical - an image or piece of text for example.

As part of my portfolio, I have written compositions and performed them with many musicians. I am now analysing these performances to see how the written material affects the improvisations, particularly with regard to spontaneity, creativity, interaction and musical development.

In order to better inform this analysis, I am now planning on interviewing several of my peers - most of whom are featured performers from my portfolio – to get an idea of their own approaches and feelings towards these kinds of musical situations.

The aim of this project is to gain a deeper view of the improvisational process not just from

academic literature in the field but also directly from the performers. It will also assist me in giving a more objective analysis of the performances.

I have created a set of interview questions related to my research and all participants will have the choice of responding to the questions in person, by Skype or in writing. In the case of the former, I will meet you at a time and place of your choosing, and with your consent, audio record our conversation and later transcribe it. If Skype is preferable, with your permission I will record a Skype conversation and later transcribe it. If you would prefer to answer the interview questions in writing, then you can do so in your own time and email me the results.

The questions asked will mostly pertain to my research questions. For example, ‘how does performing with written material but no set structure affect your improvisations?’ and ‘how does the complexity of written material effect your improvisation?’

On completion of these interviews, they will be transcribed and stored safely on Ulster University servers. Your answers will be included as an appendix in my dissertation and quotes may be used to illuminate analysis of my portfolio. This study has been reviewed by a review committee in accordance with the University’s ethics procedure. You can contact the University Research Governance section for further details if you require them.

Many thanks,

Matthew Jacobson

Jacobson-M@ulster.ac.uk

+353868641108

Appendix 1(b):

Matthew Jacobson

PhD Researcher

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Ulster University

Interview on improvisational approaches to motivic compositions

Subject: Daniel Rorke (DR)

Recorded on Skype on the 20th September 2019

MJ: How do you feel playing over that stuff [compositional material with sections where there is no predetermined structure]?

DR: The best stuff, all the keepers on that recording [Naked Allies – Rorke, Noriega, Jermyn, Jacobson – Orenda Records 2019] are the moments when the musicians are intersecting with the compositional material in some way... even if you are violating it, that's a way of interacting with it. Bad improvised music doesn't do that... it doesn't have that dialogue basically. It's a dialectic between the composition and the improvisation.

MJ: If you bring material to be performed in that way, is there a limit to how much you can do to that material?

DR: It can be more restrictive but it can be funny – sometimes I think placing more limitations kind of oddly equals more freedom too. I've heard Scandinavian improvised music that is much closer to a classical thing, it's like a third stream thing, very very composed but there are moments of improvisation and that is more confining I guess for the musician but it's not necessarily without a whole set of opportunities for creative people. But the thing is too if you are a quartet you are listening with four sets of ears, and four minds so you've got the other musicians interpreting the written material in a way and you are hearing that in real time, it's not just you and the composition, it's you and the others negotiating what is that dialectic between composition and improvisation and that's kind of the role of the musicians I would

say – to negotiate what are the questions that this composition is asking and how do we respond to those questions.

MJ: That is one of my points. I wouldn't get any random musicians to play this kind of music. There is a huge amount placed on either the relationships I already have with the people I'm playing with or what I know about them or what I have experienced from them before by listening to their music. They are not just random people.

DR: Absolutely. If you are writing and I know you are playing drums I have an imagination of what it is you might do and that definitely helps. And you see it a lot more than say in the straight ahead jazz scene, which is less ad hoc I think than the creative music scene. People have relationships, the music might be completely improvised, completely unrehearsed, but there are kind of a structured tree of musical relationships between the musicians.

MJ: So what do you think then specifically with rehearsing? There might be an idea sometimes with more improvised music that you rehearse less? You know the idea when you are in rehearsals where you rehearse the written stuff but not the improvised stuff?

DR: I think that can be quite a good tactic in a way, it's not the same performative act. Like a rehearsal is not a performance, and you don't want to perform with that sort of cognitive landscape that you would have during the rehearsal. To me it makes a lot of sense to get the compositional material tight and just fix those very pragmatic structural things "we're coming out on the three and here" or whatever it is and then let the improvisation be an improvisation and not something that you're sort of semi prescribed by rehearsing. I think there's sort of a weird uncanny valley with those rehearsals where if you don't rehearse at all you can get a really high creative improvisation concert and if you begin to rehearse a lot you get like a slump where it's a bit like you've problematized some of the relationships between the composition and the improvisation. But then say you go on tour or start playing a lot, you get to a point where you have become familiar enough with everybody's language that there is a kind of fluidity where you are able to then dialogue between the musicians that really at a higher level. Not only do you know the material well, you know each other really well and you have sort of transcended both. Hearing Tim Berne's band after they've come back from a European tour is like oh wow you guys are on!"

MJ: At that point you don't even know when they are playing the written material or when they are improvising because that is how far it has transcended.

DR: When I did my thesis I was really into Edward Vesala's Finnish group Sound & Fury, which is about a nonet – it varies depending on what project they are doing — and I can't tell, it was Ira Hali sent me the scores, because I was saying I have listened to this music a lot and I am still not sure, because they improvise in a compositional way, and then the composition is written with this real empathy for the compositional thing. This thing of when are you improvising and when is this composed were really hard to differentiate. They would play on that too. They would have compositions where they had written six bars of something and then the six bars would be slashes. They purposefully try and blur that line, that was really the project.

MJ: Is it often in Vesala's music that there is structure to the improvised section?

DR: Yeah it is actually. Especially because they have a real mixture, they might have a harp, electric guitar and a bunch of horns and so there will be open sections but especially on the recordings they run pretty solidly to the score.

MJ: So it is an interesting comparison to Tim Berne's music where it is in a different context where the improvised sections are more open with no specific structure?

DR: Absolutely, there is other music too where compositional stuff is cyclical and things will happen for unspecified amounts of time until the band is at a certain level of energy and then somebody will raise their head and you are into that section, which I think are like two poles on that same relationship, investigating that relationship from those two angles.

MJ: And sometimes even without the nod. I have been at concerts with people like Tom Rainey and Tim Berne and they know each other so well that when we are listening we are like how did they know that was going to come? Where they went back to the head or stopped. I've been to those shows and I was like how did they know.

DR: I think that goes back to what you were saying about the really strong relationship. There is something in the tone of the alto when he is at that point that they just kind of know that's

where he gets to before. Like when you speak to a friend and you are like are you ok? There is just something in their voice, and just sort of know there is something that goes beyond.

MJ: Like a cognitive kind of thing?

DR: Yeah and this speaks to another interesting issue that I was very interested in when I wrote my thesis. I was writing about things that really weren't too different to this because it is the third-stream thing. You are talking about the relationship between composition and improvisation. It is very hard to make those two things flat. In fact I think most people aren't interested in that. Normally there is a power imbalance where improvisation is really the powerful force there and the composition sets up a context in which to improvise. Or, say with some of Vesala's music the composition is the thing and the improvisation is kind of integrated into it so the composition has this kind of higher authority, a higher power. But say in Tim Berne's music I would say the improvisation is the higher power level than the composition.

MJ: Me too. I think Tim Berne would say the same thing. When you try to ask about his compositional methods he says "I just write things down" and then he'll reference Julius Hemphill as somebody who inspired him and say "I checked out a lot of Julius Hemphill, and now I just write stuff".

DR: Yeah he is a force.

MJ: We were talking about how something might develop over a tour or rehearsals. What if you are in a different context like a recording studio? How does that then effect those situations where you are paying or improvising with written material, as opposed to when you are just playing written material and you are in the studio and maybe you have less to worry about as you just have to play the notes right? Whereas there is a lot of other stuff going on when you are playing.

DR: Exactly. And you can have all of these environmental considerations when you are playing a gig too. It's distracting over here or the sounds not right or it is right or the alto player had three beers before he came on stage and he is on a different... I think studio is a harder thing. I think the challenge is to make that feel somewhat like that live, you need that energy, and it's

hard to get that energy with the cans on in the studio. You might have the bass player in another room, you are looking at them through glass.

MJ: And you have no people to feed off

DR: Absolutely, which is super important. Especially for improvised music. Which is another reason it is hard to rehearse that music. It's really hard to deliver that to nobody. I find that hard anyway.

MJ: And have you found there is a difference in the way people rehearse in different scenes? Do you think that context changes in different places?

DR: It is definitely a thing but I would say the scene is not a geographic scene. You know the guys like Oscar [Noriega] that you would play with here in New York, are connected to those free jazz players in Norway or Paul Nilssen-Love and those guys. That's the same. Do you know the book *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Andersen? He is talking about communities as a form of imagination, not necessarily a geographic thing. So, I guess I am asking how do you define scenes. If you are going to say do people in Oslo rehearse differently then no not really because those guys rehearse in the exact same way as the guys in Brooklyn would do it, because they are kind of part of the same network. But then if I play with some of the other guys I know in Norway who are a bit more straight ahead then they have a different kind of way of being because they are sort of in a slightly different subcultural band. But that might be the same as if you were to rehearse with some guys in London, it wouldn't be geographic specific.

MJ: And the same in Dublin and Australia?

DR: Absolutely. I would say again it depends who you are playing with. I feel like I did rehearse a lot when I was in Australia, but it might have been the age I was when I was there. When you have been playing awhile and playing this music awhile you are like 'I've got this' – we'll rehearse the written material and everybody sort of has a trust and confidence and you know each other. But when you are younger you tend to rehearse more. I thought it was more important when I was younger too.

MJ: I guess it is also because things are almost non-existent in Ireland in general stylistically speaking. Like there isn't a free improv scene particularly to rehearse with but there would be people in my experience in Ireland are a lot more laid back. We turn up for a rehearsal and we'll have a cup of tea and we'll chat for an hour and then we might do a bit of playing. And I found in NY it really wasn't like that at all. If you book a session with anybody it is always two hours. You don't even say how long. You just get in, play for two hours and then you leave, and that's the deal. And I like that. Sometimes it is nice to see people, but why not do that later or afterwards. I wonder whether those rehearsals are more to do with what's happening in that specific musical style or network of people. Has that developed because of the necessity of that music. If that music needs a certain kind of atmosphere in that rehearsal, but like you said it could have a lot to do with the level of musicians. Like people in NY are all working really hard on the music anyway, and otherwise there would just be no reason for them to be in NY. And also most of the people in NY aren't actually from there anyway so they have made this big sacrifice to be there. And therefore you're not going to just spend ages hanging out talking about the music. That's already clear. It's already evident because you are all there anyway.

DR: That's right. There is a practicality to the working life of a professional musician and how much you are willing to ask somebody to rehearse your music. A friend of mine was at a masterclass. You know Gilad Hekselman? He was at a masterclass in Norway and he had Mark Turner in the band. Mark Turner is reading all the tunes and one of the kids there in Oslo is like 'why doesn't the saxophone player know the tunes?'. And Gilad says 'when Mark Turner is in your band you don't ask him to learn the tunes'.

MJ: And presumably you don't need to ask him to rehearse either?

DR: I would think there is no way those guys rehearse that music. It's just like he's got it. He shows up and he does it. You send him the music before the gig. He checks it out. He's all over it, it's fine. It's that trust in professional competency. I think it's the same though. The music that we have been playing is more creative I guess in inverted commas on the surface, but it's essentially the same thing. There's a sort of shared language. It might be a little more divergent in the straight ahead scene, but basically people know when the drummer plays 'this' you've heard something in that universe before and you know you can go 'there' or 'there'.

MJ: And we all probably felt that a lot in the recording with Simon and Oscar also because a lot of the references were clear and some of the strong influences being things he was on [recordings that Oscar played on] for all of us?

DR: Absolutely. I've listened especially to those Endangered Blood records a lot, and to have him right there was like "yeah, ok, this is sorted". I wrote the tunes with that vibe in mind and now you [Oscar] are here playing them. Because we really didn't rehearse that much at all. It was really quite minimal. I have the recordings somewhere of those rehearsal. We blew a little bit, but it was mostly checking out written material, getting the heads together. Once the heads were together I felt pretty confident it was going to be alright. It turned out alright I think, the record. I'm quite pleased.

MJ: To be honest I think I like it more and more on every listen. I've been listening to it more and then Bernard [Clarke] playing it last night. I was like "this is good"! I had a really nice comment the other day. Have you met Neil Crowley the drummer from Alarmist? I met him in town and he was like "oh I heard you on the radio last night – I knew it was you straight away, just from your drumming". That's the loveliest thing somebody could say to you.

DR: That's lovely. That is pretty much the highest compliment you can get.

MJ: And listening back I do think that I felt that that is music, not even on my own tracks, but that is in general music I like to play and feel I can totally be myself, a real reflection of the music that is the most honest. Because I play in a lot of bands and I am really lucky and have a lot of freedom in what I do, but that kind of music where it is the space in between.

DR: When you have a focus and you are writing tunes that fit in with that and you are playing with musicians who are on the same sort of bandwidth. And that gets back to your thesis, when you have those conditions in play, you don't necessarily have... Yeah I mean that is the thing isn't it, there's like a whole dialectic loop, where you know the improviser so you are composing for the improviser who is hearing the composition, who is then reacting to the composition. So you get this full feedback loop if you have that opportunity to compose for a certain context.

MJ: Completely. And we all generally get the best results in those situations?

DR: Absolutely. There is this whole feed of micro dialectics, where there are certain conversations that happen because you will write some phrase that will be referring to some musical aspect. So when I did my thesis I did one of these, like a Skype interview with a guy from the University of Iceland, a kind of Philosophy and Logic, he was really into formal logic stuff and he was talking micro dialectics, where certain aspects of a narrative will have these sort of micro dialectic loops, a large narrative discussions, but there are little discussions within this. Certain aspects of language which I think are applicable to music. You might write some really small thing – say you are writing and you are going to playing with Oscar [Noriega] so you write some little thing, it might not be specifically something that you took from him, but you have an aspect, your response to his music but then he is playing and he might reference that so there is this little loop that you can identify, which is a useful analytical tool I think. You can definitely get in the weeds with that too.

MJ: Like getting into really small cell-motifs or look at this one interval he is using that was somewhere in the piece that I didn't even think about before.

DR: Exactly. And you might be able to trace that back to free music that he has done that you can go into. That's also like how group musical languages in communities develop too. You hear Chris Speed do a thing with the minor third and a tone, so you do that, but then you might modulate, but then somebody else hears that and they do something else that.

MJ: Like Chinese whispers

DR: Yeah but less blatantly racist! It must be fun writing this stuff though? Even the process of mixing and editing this recording, I had to make judgement calls about what would stay and what would go. Which is good, it kind of helps you codify your own musical personality. I will often listen back to things and there will be stuff I didn't anticipate, it's improvised so you haven't prescribed it and it's interesting, I didn't think I would play like that on that tune. And then after more listens than you really care to have you have sort of internalised that thing too. I don't know how accurate this it but I heard an anecdote about Andrew Hill, that he went through a period of only listening to his own music in order to reinforce his own identity.

MJ: Interesting, the opposite of what a lot of people do and struggle with. Listening back is interesting especially when you have to do it analytically or critically for a record or editing or

whatever because I find it is hard not to listen like I am behind my instrument. Everything floods back— like I am there I'm in the room, this is what's happening and then when something weird happens like there were a couple of bits where I was like that's got to be an edit in the drums I wouldn't have done that. The feeling was so perverse, it was like no, I wouldn't do that, and I still don't know what they are about.

DR: I'm sure it's not an edit! I went back and checked.

MJ: It couldn't have been, it was only in the drums. I just did a weird thing, and I don't think I would ever do that by choice. So when I listened back I was almost uncomfortable. So I think it's hard to listen back sometimes and try to be a bit more honest or to hear the thing as a whole. I don't think it is always useful to be listening that way from your instrument because you want to hear the overall take.

DR: I have found when I was doing that record and previous things that I also feel a responsibility that I have to get from that music. Because I have to try and hear what the bass is doing and if I'm just tuned into what I played on the saxophone it's hard to really have a focus that the bass was really on and you might end up with parts in your recording or choosing a track that the guitarist is not happy with. You might have played really well or played all your hip shit on that but it didn't groove. In fact, I think that is quite often the case because if you have a whole bunch of hip language you want to play that's all a bit contrived, you are not quite in the moment. Whereas those times when stuff happens that you don't expect, they are often the best takes, because you are actually behind your instrument, you are hearing it as a band, a bit more at least.

MJ: The other thing I have been looking at in my thesis is the idea of the motifs coming through different media. So for example I have done stuff with Izumi and Ronan where Izumi has brought in paintings. Or then with Laura Hyland doing stuff where she was bringing in poems and text.

DR: Have you checked out Wadada Leo Smith's graphic scoring stuff? I did a class with them when I was doing my undergrad. He has a really sophisticated way of interpreting colour and shape and form into graphical scoring. It is a whole discreet language that he has

MJ: Which way around does he do it? Does he reflect music in the images or the other way around?

DR: I think it's both. I think he has that developed to the point that when he makes a graphic score, he has an image of the music that he wants to achieve from that. And he is also eloquent enough to be able to communicate that to the musicians, so that he gets what he needs.

MJ: He is someone who has been a reference of a reference in a lot of what I have done, but I have constantly skirted around it.

DR: He is heavy actually. I am sure there is information online I wouldn't be surprised if people had written dissertation about his stuff and I'm sure he has written stuff about it too. I mean he is sort of tuned into the whole Braxton vibe. There are some tomes, some Braxton tomes, I'm not sure how you would get them. I think they are really obscure academic things that go through all of Braxton's music. There are like three big volumes. A friend of mine at the Sydney Conservatory go them to buy them. Or inter-library loans...

MJ: I think that is all the thesis questions, unless you have anything else you can specifically think of.

DR: I don't think so.

MJ: Thanks, I'm going to stop recording now!

Appendix 1(c):

Matthew Jacobson PhD Interview Transcription

Patricia Brennan (née Franceschy)

Skype, 27th September 2019

MJ: So basically my PhD – and I probably told you a little about it last time I was in town – but basically the idea of improvising with small fragments of material, because that's the way I've always really liked playing and a lot of music I like listening to is that kind of improvisation where we are not playing over specific structures but also it's not completely free, in a sense that there's probably something on a page. I know we have played like that a little bit, when we played with Keisuke [Matsuno – guitarist], that was very much the vibe of small bits of material. So I'm just wondering first of all, if you have any immediate thoughts or how you feel being in that situation affects you as an improviser? Is that something you enjoy doing or do you find it puts you in a different space when there is material rather than just playing with people or improvising over set structures?

PB: So, I try and treat it like when there is changes in the music or not changes in the music I end up treating it the same. And I think the information I am given – if it's a melody or some kind of sub-harmonic content implied on the melodic content that is given, or even just the rhythm that is given or sometimes if it's just a drum beat, all of that is enough information to create some kind of improvisation. And so I actually prefer that kind of structure, where there is a little bit of freedom but a little bit of a suggestion of what you should be playing. Also when I do improvise when there is nothing, complete improvisation I tend to try and grab ideas from other people and then follow the same processes as if those ideas were on the page. And again it could be just a short cell or motivic cell that the drummer plays and that's enough information for me to build something from there. Obviously the more material it is, like if it's just one measure or within one measure I can have four different cells that I can use. Just rhythm or even melodic content and I can use them to develop from there. So for example in that case if there is more than one cell than I can for example four different themes if there are four different cells. So that really gives me way more material. Now, having said that what I was saying that I treat tunes with changes the same way, I mean the changes kind of reflect anyway what is already on the page. The melody is based on that particular chords, so I tend

to treat just the melodic content as my information for improvising. And so it's kind of like the freedom is always there depending on the context. Even if it's completely without anything or very restricted when you have changes on the page and so on. I think that's the sort of approach that I like to take, to kind of feel that freedom no matter what. So yeah, it's interesting because when you don't have anything, especially when you talk to students about it, a lot of people really don't know what to do. Because they immediately go into the idea that "oh, I don't have anything so therefore I don't know what to do". However the information is there, even if you are the one that initiates improvisation you are the one establishing that initial motif, and then from there you can really develop and now that improvisation also is informed – and I find that this is almost a necessary thing in this kind of improvisation – it is really informed as to all your musical library that you have within you because you are not really pulling from licks or anything like that, you are just kind of informing yourself sometimes unconsciously "oh I did that and this from this other tune that I heard ten years ago". So sometimes I encourage students to listen to a lot of music, be informed in a lot of styles, because that is the research that you have to pull from to be able to improvise in this kind of context. So I don't know if this answering the question?!

MJ: Perfect! Super interesting. And some people might say when there is no material, sometimes there is a worry that the stuff that you come up with might be a little bit more based on muscle memory or a little bit more habitual. Like if you just starting talking to someone having a conversation with them the way you just go through usual tropes or you might start talking about the weather, if there is no topic pre-decided, which is one of the things I like about the idea of when you set the topic, or you say this is what we are talking about, then it is easier to get in depth quicker.

PB: Even what you just said is a really cool thing, because when I try to teach about this it is tricky, because it is very personal. And everyone has their own kind of tactics to approach it. Even when you don't have something to talk about you start talking about mundane things like the weather or whatever, but just by mentioning something about the weather then immediately that conversation starts to develop from that particular root. So that's what I mean even if there is nothing. Let's say the drummer plays like "boom, kah" [imitating bass drum snare back beat] then that becomes the theme – like bass drum, snare. And that's another thing that you mention like coming from muscle memory and it's interesting there is that thing in this type of music or improvising, I think people start to develop licks and start to develop almost, how do you

say, almost like not predetermined ideas but default, things that people end up doing. And also I tell my students just try to be sensitive to what you *really* think is needed in the moment and not so much what you really think *should* happen in the moment. You know? Based on whatever rules people keep telling you and all these teachers. Just really try to serve the music, and that's where it comes to where I said the more music you listen the more you start to develop instincts of what things usually happen in music, the responses that usually happen and that are more natural. So eventually it will come from that place instead of coming from the place of thinking about it and I *should* be doing this – “oh he played like this really fast idea so therefore I must do the same”, or “I'm not allowed repeat myself”. I have all these students and sometimes they have all these rules, and I'm like “who decided that? who said you you're not allowed to repeat an idea?!” If the music is calling for that... So ultimately it really comes down to just basic instincts that are developed by your life in music. And your experience and so I think sometimes when you have musicians that are younger they tend to default into those things of like more theoretically than coming from that instinctual place. And that is normal because they don't have as much experience doing it. So it's a tricky thing to never, even within that free sort of space, it's very dangerous to also fall into those restrictive places, almost like in really swinging music and playing a bunch of licks.

MJ: That's great. One of the things I've been trying to look at is how developed the composition can be. So one of the ideas is trying to get all the compositions down to the raw material, and then to play with people and say well look I'm not going to develop the stuff compositionally because I'm choosing to play with these musicians that I trust and that I like the decisions that they make, so I am just going to try and give them as little information as possible and then just trust that they will make good decisions as we go. And I'm trying to work out is there some kind of line or where is the line of how developed do I want the material to be to begin with or starts restricting their freedom.

PB: I think obviously it depends. I remember seeing a set here and it was four trumpets. It was Dave Ballou and you're probably familiar with Dave Ballou? And Russ Johnson, Danny Gouker was in it and I think the other trumpeter was Kenny Warren. They did this set and I had no idea, I mean it sounded like everything was completely pre-composed, and then I thought it was all Dave Ballou's compositions and I was like can I see the compositions? And it was a literally just a page with whole notes on it. I was like what?! That sounded completely composed. So I think the element of trust of course, you know the musicians and their

tendencies, and I've been in situations like that with people who are writing music particularly for me and then what I usual tend to do and how I play. I think it really depends on all those different factors – how well you know the musicians, how much you trust their instincts, this is where it brings us back to the first question. Their instincts, the way they play is based on that information they have as musicians and in their personality and so on. So you know they are going to do their thing. So based on that I don't think you really need to be so specific in the composition. But I think sometimes there might be circumstances where even after a concert like that you had something that you really really liked and you want that to happen again and that's where restrictions really start to happen. Not so much because of the limitations of the musicians, but maybe more from the place of where I really like that. And maybe the compositional process is more of a long one, where it is developed throughout different performances. So I think it is a tricky question because I always deal with this question myself when I write music. How much should I really write?! Do I even need to write this right now? And they end up playing that or something better than what I was writing... So it's interesting because sometimes I play with musicians... I did this thing with Vijay [Iyer] in a big band, and he had very detailed parts for everyone but then at the end he ended up being like "don't worry about the part just do whatever you want"! So sometimes you have times when you do end up writing a bunch of shit and even though he knew the musicians he was working with, but then at the end of the day he ended up being like "I trust you do whatever you want, use the page as a guide". So then that's the thing it could come back to that first question. Maybe it becomes just a guide for the improvisation and not necessarily playing it verbatim. It's a tricky question. Because there is no yes or no answer to it. I think it depends on the particular instance. In my case the only time I end up limiting people is when I really really like something and I really want to hear that thing again in that moment every time.

MJ: And in that case would you also be very specific structurally about the amount of times you want to hear it or do you prefer to leave those kinds of things open? There are two kind of things – there is the actual development of the material itself and then there is the structural element of how many times you hear it, or where do you go from that point, or at what point that material comes in?

PB: Yeah, I think that also depends. There are moments where I do want a particular set of times, to respect it. And also I do tend to change my mind too. There are moments where you know what, just do whatever times it feels like right now. I especially think in this kind of

music and when you deal with musicians that tend to play this way, the line is very blurry between what could be completely pre-composed and what shouldn't be, you know? If you are dealing with improvisers that are capable of... that you can trust them, that they have good instincts. Most of the time you ended up limiting yourself because sometimes it is compatibility. Maybe you are not compatible with that musician no matter how good he is. And in order to make it work you might have to write what you really want to hear from that person. It is interesting because I have friends that maybe sometimes I really want to play with them but sometimes it just never happens you know? It is just so hard! With some people, no matter how much you want to like them, you don't end up clicking well. It sounds weird but...!

MJ: That's interesting. In those situations, maybe using slightly more strict compositional direction can be helpful.

PB: Also it really depends how you see written material too. I never see it as restriction, I just see it as more information to use for improvising. But then it really comes down to that person really telling you know what I really want you to play what's on the page. In this concept we are talking about, free improvising kind of really having that freedom. When I write music for people and if they start doing something with it actually that's kind of what I want, even though I did write something for them. Because that's the way I will treat it. It is more like a suggestion. It's more like that is the vibe I am thinking, and you can take it from there.

MJ: And would you say that to people explicitly normally in a rehearsal, or do you think just because of the people that you are playing with, they kind of know that anyway - that they are to interpret the material that way?

PB: I think sometimes I will say something. I try not to say much the very first time. Actually, I did a gig in April with this band, and we played a bunch of music that was really hard, but I knew it really well, Noel [Brennan - drummer] knew it really well, but then the people that I asked to play... I was realistic about it because we didn't have much time. So it was like, this is the music, don't worry about playing it perfectly. And sometimes I would be like, here, you can accent some of the notes of the melody, even if it's not necessarily in time it's cool. So in that case I did give specific instructions on how to treat the written material. But sometimes I like to just see what they do and take it from there. And if they are really not doing what I

thought they were going to do with the material then I really start to kind of steer the ship a little bit more.

MJ: And how did it work out with that gig?

PB: It was cool. It was kind of an experiment band that I am doing right now. Noel is doing turntables. At the time he was playing drums and had the turntables next to him and he had a lot of stuff. So we might do that project again but rebrand it. I have a Stone commission here, so we might just specifically focus on the electronic part with the turntables and trying to expand on it. There's visual manipulation, that you can use the turntable to manipulate the video and I'm going to have a percussionist instead of a drummer and bass and vibraphone. The thing is too for the percussionist I am giving him sort of free range to use the sort of drum beat that I am writing as a guide, as a sort of "that's the vibe there". And there is a lot of specific material but also, again my approach is if they do something with it that I like then that is cool.

MJ: And do you think then with a project like that, how do you think the rehearsals affect that? Some people seem to have this idea that when you are rehearsing you just rehearse the written material and tend to not spend too much time on the improv stuff. And some people say "no it's important, the improvisation parts are just as important". But all that kind of feeds into context or performance. So it feels different doing that just in a rehearse space, than improvising in front of other people, or in a studio or whatever the context is?

PB: I think for rehearsing even the improvisation, it's important. Just because I mean even if you know each other well, it is almost like you are practising reacting to those instincts. And sometimes they even seem like playing a sport. Like playing basketball for example, you don't know what's going to happen that game. As a player you do all these drills, but what you practise is almost doing like mock games, that lead to whatever situation presents in that moment. So I think practising improvisation – I like to do it. I know a lot of people and I've been in bands where we just do the melody and "yeah we'll be fine, we'll be fine"! I think it's important to practise that too. Even if it's all an improvised gig it's good to get together and play once. To sort of get an instinct, a sense of how people react. Especially when you don't know them. You don't know the musicians. You can kind of get a sense of the musical personality of the person just by playing with them once. I would prefer to practise at least once before the gig so you have an idea how it's going to go. In this instance, since there is written

material, what's important to me is that the skeleton of the music is there, and a lot of it is on my shoulders, so that kind of takes care of a lot! But then the rhythmic element, I am going to meet with the percussionist a few times, because he has a lot of that skeleton as well. And then the bass player and Noel, they kind of have their own thing going on, that could be inserted even on the day of the performance. But I still would prefer to do it at least once before, just in case! You know again it goes back to instincts, just like you need to know your own instincts too you want to be familiar with the instincts of the other people. And sometimes it takes more than one try. But sometimes with people you have that initial click, almost like you have known each other for years. From a personal level and that turns into a musical level too but you've never played them and you're like "wow it feels like we've played for years".

MJ: That's always a good feeling. And what about the difference between taking compositions like that through a bunch of rehearsals or one or two rehearsals and then a concert and a sometime in the recording studio? Do you feel that the contexts... How big an impact does that have do you think? Some people say it is hard without the energy you get from a crowd or those people, and then things end up a bit safer in the studio but I'm not always sure if that's true. What do you think?

PB: It's interesting. I mean I don't know, for me particularly, it doesn't really have an effect. You know like if it's on, it's on! No matter where I am, but I do know what people mean when the audience or that live performance gives you that certain kind of pump, just a little bit. And I feel it too, but as far as my approach to whatever musical experience we are about to have, is the same. And it really comes back to, I mean something that I try to be really strict with myself – really be in the moment, really react to what the music is asking for in that particular moment. So I am already too involved in that particular thing that I really have time to think about the space or the situation and so on. But again I can say the benefit of a live performance is you do feel a little bit of that excitement, that's true when you perform. And maybe that sort of helps for the improvisation to be even more focussed, but I guess what I am trying to say is the focus should always be there no matter what. Just because it is a rehearsal and you are in somebody's house doesn't mean that the music is less meaningful. Sometimes I have better rehearsals than performances. And I think a lot of people feel that way and then once the music starts you are just in it no matter where you are at.

MJ: Or I guess because sometimes the stuff that is happening in the room or the crowd can actually be a distraction and it can take you out of the zone or out of the moment. Which you say doesn't help. Sometimes when you arrive and you are in a soundcheck and it all feels good and then whatever happens and then you go and eat something and then you are thinking about what you ate or whatever happens and then when it comes to the gig it's really not happening.

PB: Totally. I think at the end of the day we are humans, and we do get influenced to whatever is happening in our lives, so I think that the ideal would be to always be completely there, which is an exercise that I try to do every time but I know it doesn't happen all the time. Sometimes it is hard to be really in the moment. Maybe you have a family thing or maybe... And that does come into play, into what you are doing. Yeah it's really interesting I remember I don't know maybe it was at SIM when we were together. I think Tim Berne was talking about how sometimes he will have really shitty gigs. Like all improvised. I've been there too! Like the rehearsal was awesome and you're all pumped but then it's just not happening. And you are like "what the fuck? What's going on?!" So I think when you have individuals on stage you don't know what they are dealing with in that particular moment, and sometimes it just doesn't happen for whatever reasons. I don't think the consequences really have to do with it.

MJ: And is there anything you do in particular to try and help? Like you were saying you try to always make sure you are really present and in the moment when you are playing. Is there anything that you do to try to achieve that or improve that?

PB: Definitely. I hate using the word rules, because I really think there isn't any. But definitely I think there are certain instincts that if I notice a person is struggling maybe I will jump in and help them or maybe try to steer or go completely away from what's happening and just bringing in completely new material, almost like starting over and see what happens. So yeah definitely I think there are things that you can do to kind of help. It is almost like you are in a conversation and all of a sudden it starts to turn really awkward and you are like "oh let's, what about..." It's kind of like that I think. If you really see that something isn't happening the first thing is I take a step back and just see what happens with that first. And then just jump in and steer the ship in a completely different direction and see if that helps. And I think everybody tends to have a similar reaction to it too. Or they do something completely opposite or maybe the drummer has to play super loud, or I think there are definitely tactics to kind of try to help the situation and maybe get out of that hole.

MJ: That's cool. Or even just for yourself sometimes, I think if I find myself starting to drift off I need to give myself a jolt with the paddles just suddenly do something really different.

PB: I mean it's almost like there's a... I'm a fan of the Office. The American version and I think you know somebody was saying that when the situation gets really awkward just make a complete random noise, then there is something to that in music. Just really do something that is completely unexpected to kind of shift the attention from what's going on in that moment.

MJ: So the last bit of my research media this may or may not be applicable is just a little bit of comparison between different media. So looking at when material is presented in text form or in image form. So not even necessarily as advanced as graphic scores, but more people who are improvising who are looking at the same painting. Or people who are presented with a poem and then just play inspired by the poem. If you have any experience of playing in that way, or your thoughts of how that affects your improvisation.

PB: Yeah actually it's interesting last season I did this whole project with Vijay and there was no score and I guess the score was based on the photographs and texts of this writer. The writer is called Teju Cole and he wrote this book called 'Blind Spot' and he's also the photographer. Basically the whole set was based on the photographs that he was presenting, and then every photograph had a little description and that's the book actually, so it's a photograph and has a little kind of text that goes underneath and then you move onto the next photograph. And so I remember the first gig that we had with that project, what we were given were the photographs and the text in advance to sort of get into the vibe of each photograph. And I mean just like in music there is emotional content, that you get from reading a book or from watching a movie or looking at a painting or whatever so that was already common ground to do something. And for example, there was a photograph about, one of the ones that I will always remember, was a photograph about the war in Mexico and it was a cross that had the word 'Women' on it. And it was taken in a city where the homicides in women are very high in the country and so it kind of touched a very emotional place for me. So there are kind of ways that I play when I come from that place. So whenever I saw that photograph immediately my sense will start to play in a certain way, so I think you know emotional content is something that you use for that. I think a lot of musicians tend to kind of pool from imagery to improvise as well. And there are all these exercises that people do like 'play clouds' or play whatever you know, there's a musical translation to that. So in that particular project it is interesting because everyone sort of has

their own response to those pictures too. So it will be sometimes funny because there will be a moment where I had an idea of it but then Vijay will come in with something completely different. Or the trumpet player or whoever was the third person, the third person always changed. It was always piano, vibes and maybe bass, maybe cello, maybe trumpet whatever. And so that was another interesting thing because then you are talking about perception. How do you perceive that particular circumstance? Maybe for them a cross on a ground is a peaceful thing so you connect to that place and then you play from that place. So that kind of comes back to our other questions. We all have our own personal perception of music, and our musical context is when you see an idea on the page you kind of approach it based on your own personal experience. That might be different than yours or anybody else so then you come into a place whereby you have to find that balance. And sometimes it will end up working out because even if I was coming from a more anxious almost emotional place and be just a little more calm that in itself is kind of contrasting because there's always that duality in everything. But there were sometimes like for example, talking about words particularly, there was a picture that was taken in Alabama and then the text talked about John Coltrane's 'Alabama' and that particular song you immediately think about that standard and how you have that low rumble on the piano so you have that option. Do I literally quote what that text is talking about or do I focus on the picture? What we ended up doing actually because what the writer wanted us to do was hint at that song.... But then young John Coltrane was coming from that really deep emotional place and whatever was happening in that moment with civil rights, so the song has a very strong meaning. Again it comes from... [interruption] So it's an interesting thing but I don't think it is that foreign. That's what I am trying to say with all of this. When it came to playing with all those people and in that context and then you're also going back to all those other things like being sensitive to those other persons that are improvising, people's instincts, how they are reacting to the text or situation. And even the author himself, he will narrate with us, he was part of the improvisatory project as he will pace himself based on what was going on in the music. Sometimes he would take a really long pause because there was a lot going on and then he waited until the energy would go down and then he would bring the next picture and the text down. So it was tricky because then the long arc of the presentation, it was kind of an hour or so, so kind of going through all those different images and different emotions different colours and it was a little challenging too in that way to also keep the big picture in mind.

MJ: That's great. I mean that's loads of really good information. Basically the point of this is my PhD is practice-based so I have recorded a bunch of things I have done. Including even

going back to stuff like rehearsals we had years ago [FarJam – trio with guitarist Keisuke Matsuno] and then I am analysing a lot of it and trying to discuss it in relation to these questions and rather than just me just analysing and saying stuff that is not always objective because it is me, it's great to have other people's thoughts that then place the analysis in a more objective context. So I can be talking about whatever recordings and then describe how in a moment, I might have a good quote from something that anybody has said in an interview that then puts into context or makes sense, which is really helpful.

PB: The other thing that I think is in a general sense of what I was saying that the more informed you are the more freedom you have when you improvise and the less you need to rely on sort of default tendencies... You know one of the things that emerged in college, studying with Stefan [Harris], this is within really restrictive changes and studying harmony but he was also coming from the place of saying "my goal is to listen to a sound and be able to react to it" and whatever harmonic melodic way I feel, like, based on what my ear has been trained for. So, I think all the more informed you are... I am not saying that theory isn't important or licks... That's the thing licks end up becoming almost like a crutch, because you are not really learning the background or the essence of them, it's almost like a parrot, you are just spitting out. You're not necessarily aware what is the meaning of it. I think all the really unique musicians share the same commonality no matter what kind of music you play whether it is bebop or free improvisation, you are coming from that place of knowledge and just the essence of music you know. But you are able to react appropriately. So it's like the more informed you are the more informed your decisions will be.

MJ: I guess that can become... Like the difficulty in that – and obviously I think that too and it's really important to be super open-minded but then there is the issue... ideally you learn everything about everything so you can communicate with anybody but that's just not realistic or you don't have time to do that so at some point maybe you just have to decide a little bit which roads you want to go down or what you want to get a little bit deeper in. Maybe because some things feel more natural or you connect more with certain kinds of sounds or somebody feels more comfortable playing bebop or playing eighth-note lines over changes and some people feel a deeper connection with being a bit more abstract.

PB: And then there are certain, narrowing the kind of music you listen to and all of that and you sort of start finding your own voice in that sense. It is really hard because I have students

– I teach at the New School – and I have students that sometimes you can see that they are so lost because they are trying to cover everything. One day they are listening to a Chris Potter record and the next day they are trying to check out Matt Mitchell and then the next... And you're just like "wait, what is going on right now"? There's so much stuff going on and I think also in New York it is easy to get lost because there is so many things thrown at you constantly so I think it's also being sensitive to what you're attracted to musically. And then you can start delving deeper into it. And that sort of information you are pulling from and that will be your own language and voice and all that.

MJ: Yeah, and I think it's easier and can become more enjoyable to check out all those different things when you are a little bit more comfortable or a little bit more understanding about where you are coming from yourself. I know I am probably never going to write really straight ahead music, and that's fine. It's not like I'm never going to play it, but I feel less of a connection with that than a lot of other stuff, but that doesn't mean... I think that just helps me then when I listen to that music. There's no attachment or no idea that it *has* to be what I do. I can just enjoy it for what it is. And I think sometimes when you are younger and you are not quite sure of your own place then it can be a bit stressful listening to all this different kind of music, you are like "oh but maybe I should do this or maybe I'm going to do that or what do I do how do I do it it's too hard"!

PB: Totally! But then you know when you are in that place, at first it is like you should cover the basics. And when I say the basics I don't mean you should play bebop or anything, just you should know your basic harmony, you should know how to hit a snare drum you know? All these things and then build from there. But I think definitely, it all comes down again to instincts and doing what is true to your heart and not what you are *supposed* to be doing at that time. If Matt Mitchell is the hottest thing right now that doesn't mean you need to be playing that kind of music. But if it really resonates with your heart then go ahead and do it. But I tend to see that a lot, especially with younger – and in New York schools particularly because you get to choose from whomever you want to study with, so there are no restrictions. So it's a little bit tricky I think. I'm glad that I wasn't an 18 year-old in New York city!

MJ: I don't think I would have liked that either! I definitely felt the difference between trips to New York from the first one to then the last couple. It's just so different being there when you are just comfortable with yourself or in yourself and you know what you want to do. It just

becomes so easy to just enjoy everything and just be really inspired by everything and not feel threatened or challenged or scared by it all...

PB: Yeah you already know what you want to zero in on. It is a whole journey man!

MJ: It sure is. Who knows where it is going to take us?!

PB: It is good to talk about these things or really get to think about it because otherwise you just kind of do it and you are in your own head and so...

MJ: I mean that is the main reason I wanted to do this PhD, it was for that reason. I felt like I could just continue to float and do all these million different things and never really stop to evaluate or think about it and be like “why am I doing this?” and “what am I trying to do?” and “am I being successful?” and “am I achieving the results that I want?” or do I need to think about things differently. Not that I have got answers to any of those questions yet but it is good to think about it and question it.

PB: And I think sometimes the answers change with time. Eventually I think it is connected really to who you are and your own personal experience because that is kind of what comes out in what you are doing. And especially in this context, a more open context and so on. But I think something that I do see happening is people try to structure it because you have to teach it somehow so all these things start to happen like these rules. I get the students who say they were told they aren't supposed to repeat an idea. I am like “who told you that”?! I can understand the person that told him this, like why. Because you know in free improvisation workshops, ok we will try not to repeat each other but it's not like a rule. Maybe in that particular context that was too much or whatever but I think it is hard to explain because it is an artform, also it is a type of language but it is a little bit harder to teach because it is more broad and it comes from deeper places.

MJ: Brilliant. I am going to press stop recording.

Appendix 1(d):

Matthew Jacobson PhD Interview Transcription

Simon Jermyn

Skype, 27th September 2019

MJ: I guess we have talked about my PhD before but in general what I'm doing is looking at the effect of supplying improvising musicians with written material, but in a context where there is no prescribed forms or structures. In the way that we play in a lot of projects together. So do you have any thoughts on the effect having some written material has on your thinking as an improviser?

SJ: I suppose it depends on a lot of things. It depends on the specifics of the written material and how it's presented. Sometimes written material might be some kind of a repeating structure or material that implies some kind of form. And the form might be a two-measure vamp or a five-measure vamp or a melody that goes around. That's already a form and so questions like "do we get into a form and stay with it" or "can we go come and go with it" or "can the material be completely pulled apart and abstracted" – that affects it.

MJ: And whether that is specified on the chart or in person? Would you ask that in person?

SJ: I used to ask those questions a lot and now I'm trying to ask less because I think unless there is something really pivotal, asking too much sometimes inhibits the performance or I take the instruction too literally or to heart and it inhibits what I play. I think it is better if the composer or bandleader hasn't specified then I will assume that it is all open and generally in my experience that leads to better music-making. So I can really listen. I won't make a decision before we start playing. Somewhere in the back of my mind I will be aware of some options and then listen and play and see what other people are doing. I think it is nice as much as possible to incorporate things that are in the composition so that that improvisation based on that composition is specific to that composition and is not just like any other improvisation. But it's also... I also enjoy just bringing parts of my own vocabulary and sometimes that can mean that the improvisation is a complete departure from the written material or even a reaction to the written material in a way that maybe the written material is extremely rhythmic so the

improvisation becomes extremely ambient or vice-versa. I think for me the thing is to step back and in general being aware of as many approaches and strategies and tactics as possible. And then if I am as aware as I can be of all those then I think that helps me be more present in the moment with the other musicians. And so I don't really have an agenda or a thing I am forcing on it. Of course that has happened too, a little bit, or a lot, but it is something that I try to not bring into it. I try to make so that this is not practising, this is performance or playing together and to be less judgemental. When practising there's judgement, there is an agenda and there is limitations. And I think it is important to make a distinction in the mindset. Also I try to have performative aspects of my practise so that I am not just running exercises. I try to get used to really improvising but I do think it is important to make a distinction between practice and performances. And performance does not necessarily mean public performances, just playing with other musicians.

MJ: Sure. I constantly allude to the fact in the research that I have chosen the people I am playing with, or the improvisers in those situations are normally chosen because of their musical personalities or because of the choices they make so it's not just random. Everyone is there for a reason and you wouldn't just choose to play in this way. Being able to play in this way is also probably quite a specific skill and there is quite a small amount of musicians that you would probably ask to play like this in any scene?

SJ: Definitely. Because I have had the experience with that sort of material and approach with the wrong musicians can really fall flat on its face. And that sort of approach with the right musicians can really be transcendent and surprising and an amazing experience.

MJ: Either in your own experience of playing in this way with your compositions or with mine or anyone else do you find is there a limit to how much you can put in the composition itself either structurally or just in terms of information? A big part for me is trying to work out are there some kind of lines where there is an amount that is optimum to get the best results? I'm trying to have almost no compositional development in the material I hand people, because the idea is I will let them do the development improvisationally rather than compositionally. Because every situation is different and every time you play with different musicians it is different. And rather than me saying structurally "ok this section has to be four times and this section has to be seven times and there is a cue to that one", instead of saying any of that

because I don't think there is a definitive best way to do any of that, I just say well there is this thing and there is this thing and let's just see what happens.

SJ: I think that points towards what the composer's intention is. Because there are things that both of those situations can help create that the other can't. So something like toggling between two sections very quickly, or we are going to play this section twice and this section three times back and forth or there is going to be a cue to switch between them can open up something very different to "let's see what happens". Generally if we say "let's see what happens" we are going to probably, not definitely but probably spend longer at each section and that can be great or not or maybe there is going to be confusion and the confusion is going to lead to some in between moments, which could be a lot of things. And I don't think any of them are better or worse or righter or wronger, it's about the musicians and the rapport, and if it's with people you have played with a lot, there is going to be less confusion potentially. I think sometimes confusion and ambiguity is part of the compositional intention, it's not supposed to be tight in that way. So I think they are the kind of questions I might ask. I mean generally I find it most helpful as an improviser. If there is nothing on the sheet besides from the material then that is how I want to approach it and if there are specific things that are supposed to happen then it's cool if they are there because you don't have to ask a whole load of questions and scribble in a whole load of detail. It's clear whatever it is. And that's in an ideal world, I also don't mind scribbling stuff in of course.

MJ: And what about, not so much to do with structure, but just the complexity for want of a better word or how detailed the actual composition is? What kind of effect does that have on you? For example is it easier if it is a really simple thing than a complex thing.

SJ: By nature, if the material is simple it is probably going to be easier than more complicated material but what I can put into it just comes down to my own limitations. But I mean that with no value judgement. There are people that you could present pretty complex material to and they might not be able to do much but they could still be amazing improvisers and bring something else to it. I have definitely seen improvisers in a group ignore some complex written material and leave that to other musicians and then just play their own beautiful stuff through it or on top of it and that's a way better musical result than hearing them grapple something they are not really that interested in. And if we are thinking about this in the context of jazz there is a very long tradition, however we define jazz, of taking something relatively simple

and complexity is brought through the improviser's language, just abstracting something, even hearing somebody play a standard. And I don't mean super abstracted the way people might play standards today or playing them in a different metre, superimposing harmonics. Even going back and thinking of Coleman Hawkins' solo on Body & Soul, there is a huge amount of elaboration and complexity that is there that is not present in the song. And that's a big part of the jazz tradition. I think the increasing complexity of material, I mean of course there has been a lot of complex written material in jazz too but a lot of the complexities I see happening today, aspects of them and elements of them seem to be connected to new music, contemporary classical music, European art music, that sort of thing. And so then, that leads to different things, if your starting point is very complex material then do you go the other way? I guess a lot of people try to simplify it, get the essence of it, and have that be the root of the improvisation.

MJ: What about the idea if music is challenging you then maybe you get put in a place whereby being out of your comfort zone you react a little bit differently? Obviously we are trying to always be present in the moment as improvisers but is there a danger if the music is simple that then you can fall into old habit patterns or more muscle memory? If you are being challenged or trying to play something that is quite new to you is there a possibility that then you are engaging in that very specific context, which you are not so use to, so you end up being more present?

SJ: Potentially, but I think that has more to do with the musicians and less to do with the material. Playing complex material can also tighten you up and if you are improvising with it, make you fall back on things you can execute. I know I have this in my muscle memory and I can make it work in this context. And if it's really simple then maybe I am freer to take risks and jump in the deep end. So I think that has more to do with my personal approach on the day or the night, and the people that I am playing with. I think the material can push it in either direction. I don't think that those kinds of things are only about the material.

MJ: And what about, connected to that, the idea of rehearsing that kind of material? Does that affect maybe a public performance or if there is an end goal to a bunch of rehearsals? Because people often have different kinds of approaches. When improvisers are rehearsing often they don't really rehearse the improvised stuff so much and there is a tendency to rehearse the written sections more?

SJ: Again it's situational. If there's a gig happening soon and we have one hour to rehearse then I think that probably the best use of that rehearsal time is to get the written material as strong as possible and save the improvising for the gig. Maybe do some short improvisations to make sure everybody is comfortable if there are solo sections or not even solo sections but that people have a little bit of fluidity with the written material. But if you are going to do a rehearsal and soundcheck and play the gig, I think it is silly to have played the gig in the soundcheck already. A bit like boxers or mixed martial artists training for a fight, you know that phrase 'leaving it all in the gym'? That they've peaked in the gym and in the fight they are spent, so in that kind of situation just getting the written material as accurately as possible and then seeing what happens in the performance is the way to go. But if it's something that is more of an ongoing situation then I would love to work on everything. I think that the idea that rehearsing is going to kill something is not necessarily true. Even for a band that is going to play completely improvised music, just getting together and doing that a lot, of course it might lead to ruts or repeating the same kind of stuff, but if you approach it consciously it can also be an opportunity to get into all kinds of terrains that you would never get into on a first meeting. So I think you can have an extended rehearsal period of very complex material or completely improvised material or very simple material just as a way of opening up. That tends to be less of a possibility these days because of the musical economy.

MJ: Do you think that's specific to scenes either geographically or musically, in your experience? Like the way people approach rehearsing, is that different in New York as it is in Ireland or Europe?

SJ: Before I answer that I'll just say one more thing about the previous question, which was that of course first encounters with or without written material can also be very special and have things that are unique and won't happen again and that's as valuable as something that comes out of an extended rehearsal process. But with the different approaches to rehearsing – to be honest the vast majority of rehearsing that I have done in the last ten years has been either in New York or with New York musicians somewhere else, so I am fairly used to a particular approach to rehearsal, which is people just tend to be very good readers and be good at digesting and internalising new material quite quickly. And so I want to not be the person slowing it down by having more difficulty with something than somebody else you know? And that's directly connected to capitalism, time and money. I have to go and teach or I have another

gig before or I have two other rehearsals today or don't have time to spend four hours on this or take a coffee break and chat about it.

MJ: The Irish 'starting with the tea/coffee/biscuit break'!

SJ: I have experienced bits of that and honestly it's very hard to get used to. I just... if we've put aside time to work on music... I love rehearsing. I am excited by it. I just want to get straight into it and just really do it and get the thing to the best level we can get it to. But my experience of New York rehearsing tends to be that, there have been exceptions like Marc Hannaford's trio with Satoshi [Takeishi], but that was explicitly stated at the begin – "We will meet for at least once a month for a number of years and work on this material". And sometimes that will mean spending a two-hour rehearsal on one measure or two measures. We will just workshop this material for as long as it takes to have it become good enough to perform and that may mean a two-hour rehearsal spent on one measure and doing a lot of clapping and singing exercises or exercises where we are passing around a particular rhythm or idea amongst the band. And that's what we did and we didn't do a gig for the first two years, two and a half years. But that is unusual and Marc talked about that being way more common in Australia and that it was very difficult for him to find people who could commit to those things here [in New York]. But generally the deal here is to just jump in. Also I think a lot of people play completely improvised gigs because that opens up all these terrains that composed music doesn't necessarily but it is also a way of getting straight to music-making and not having to worry about any written constraints. I think that's one of the reasons, not the only reason, but one of the reasons that that is popular here is because you can just jump right into music-making. Last night I heard Fred Frith's trio with Lotte Anker at the Stone [improvised music venue in New York curated by John Zorn] and it was an example that that trio has been playing for ages, I think almost all completely improvised music, and then they played a lot with Anker before. And it was pretty amazing just to see what they could conjure out of thin air. And they've toured and got at least two albums out as a trio. They've improvised together a lot, and I'm going to hear them again tonight and I know the record and I've seen some YouTube things. Of course they get into zones, they have developed a language and an approach together but it felt very fresh. It felt like they were very present and moving together. And it's cool to see that that is possible with completely improvised music. I mean I know it is, but it's very heartening when you encounter it because sometimes you encounter disconnection and nonsense!

MJ: And what about in terms of the instrumental line up or number of people in the band? There is a general idea that it is harder to play in this way [improvisational development of motivic compositions] if there are loads of people, rather than less people – do you find that?

SJ: Definitely. The numbers of people in the group have an effect on it. I think I use electronics and pedals and some people that I play with do that too and that allows a situation where one musician can have multiple streams happening at once, multiple voices. Of course that is possible on acoustic instruments too, pianists do it for example, but with the electronic thing it can really sound like multiple instruments. But regardless, it is all coming from one mind, one body. In my experience, anything beyond four people gets challenging in a way that below four people is not. Generally, because I can only process so much, I start being more or less focussed on subsets of the group. Sometimes that is cool and sometimes less cool. Five can work. Getting into larger things I find it very challenging.

MJ: In any context? Like whether it is totally free or with material? Do you think having material is helpful in that situation?

SJ: It's definitely helpful in my experience. It has almost always focussed a situation more than without the material. Of course there are exceptions to that. Generally three is a number that I like, four is a number that I usually like. Two is great but two is also quite exposed but I really like that. That has the flipside of the challenges with above four. I did a thing with a large group here with maybe fifteen people but it was conducted and there was written material. You can exert far less influence on the situation. For me especially switching between guitar and bass affects that. In that situation I was playing bass. So me and the drummer could affect a lot of things, in a way that I couldn't have done as a guitar player. Just the role of the instrument. Or the fact that the instrument becomes so connected to another instrument. The drums and you are sort of a rhythm section. If you are moving as a unit you can dictate a lot there. It was conducted so we were also responding to that but that was about fifteen people. But it was hard, you leave the gig and maybe you don't even know everybody's names. We rehearsed the gig and I was like I don't know half these people's names. I have done that with an octet as well where there was a lot of written material. Then of course it is focussed because there is a lot of written material, but you have a lot of people to relate to, and that can be harder because there is less of a likelihood of somebody making an adjustment to you or you to them. With three or

four people there is a lot of connection. Everybody can hear and can depend on everyone else in a way that is less possible with a large group of people. That is in my experience.

MJ: The idea of when you probably you are going to get the best results playing this music if you trust each other. That feeling that you can do anything and it will be fine because you trust the other people and you are less likely to trust fourteen other people as much as you trust one, two or three other people.

SJ: Definitely. And even if it is one person you don't know very well, having a conversation with one person is different to having a conversation with fourteen. You can get a sense of them hopefully quickly if they are open and then you can figure something out. I think great music can come from much larger groups of course and I am into it, but I think I have less experience of it and the challenges are different. I suppose another situation that I played in that was very large was with Charlotte's quartet [saxophonist and composer Charlotte Greve's group Wood River] with the choir, which was 80 people at the most. Not 80 people improvising but still there is a lot of stuff to balance there. You kind of have to define the roles a bit, like if there is a conductor, if there is a drummer - who is going to decide what. There can be conflict there. I think generally people have to defer to others. In terms of intonation the choir are going to have to default to the band. And in terms of time there was friction in that situation in terms of who is in charge of the time, drums or conductor? But the answer is the drums! You can wave your arms all you want, but the answer is drums. Once people are clear on those roles then it is possible. But in a trio if I am the bass player or if I am the guitarist I can disagree with the drummer on the time, I generally don't but I could. And I could really push it. But trying to do that with 84 people is hard!

MJ: And you were saying, as a bass player that idea of the unit with the drummer. Then when you are playing guitar do you feel more attached to some instruments more than others or more on your own?

SJ: Kind of all of those. It depends on the situation. Obviously with the bass in most situations, assuming some level of function or role is being adhered to, I want to be connected to drums. But I hate when you hear rhythm sections that just get into their own thing and just ignore if there is a soloist. They kind of just have to deal with the rhythm sections. I hate when it flips like that. I like way more when it is interactive. So being aware of things like placement of

beat, the time, the timbre of the drums and bass. Ideally I am trying to listen to everyone equally. But with guitar it depends, sometimes it depends what else is going on. Certainly if there is a horn player, trying to be very conscious of timbre and register and density and space. It really depends on the musicians and the material and all of that. But if I am playing guitar and there are a rhythm section that are playing time. I can play time too and be part of that but I can also not and just be really floaty and that won't necessarily affect them that much and so I am free to do other things.

MJ: Obviously you could do that on the bass too but the effect would be more drastic?

SJ: Yeah and sometimes I do that but sometimes that can lead to miscommunications with the drummer. Sometimes I want a drummer to play super clear time and I won't. But that generally is not what happens. Perhaps that should be a discussion with drummers. But with the guitar I think the role is just... If you are playing in a traditional format with rhythm section and non-rhythm section players, the role of the guitar can be almost anything. And the role of bass is definitely more defined. You can subvert that or whatever you want with it but if you are adhering to any kind of hierarchical thing, I feel you are freer, on guitar in that regard. The responsibilities feel different.

MJ: One of my research questions is about the performance context, which we alluded to a little bit – you were talking about how it is important to put aside when you are practising you are practising but when you are playing with people you are not doing that essentially. But then, does that change if there are people in the room, if that is a public performance or maybe in a recording studio, which is a different situation again? Does that restrict you?

SJ: All of those things definitely affect what is being played. Of course I just want to give 100% and be 100% present and go for it whether it is rehearsal, private performance, public performance, recording studio... but they definitely are all affected by the other people in the room. A full and enthusiastically engaged audience gives a huge amount of energy, there is just no way around it. And it has a positive effect usually on performance. The opposite end of that is a recording studio where the sound is dry and maybe you have headphones on, you don't have the physical proximity to the musicians as you would in other performance situations, and that can be very challenging. I have always liked the idea of inviting a small audience into a studio and playing with no headphones. It tends not to happen, but I think that's why often

records feel different than live performances and live records aren't always the best documentation of a band because it's not live so I think a great middleground would be studio with small live audience. I don't know why that's not more of a thing.

MJ: I have often thought the same thing. We all know that this can be difficult and we do get energy from audience members so why not? And there is precedent for it, you hear it in hip-hop records: often MC crews, they bring a whole bunch of people in and it's just like a party in the studio. There's a reason for that. The exact same reason we need them.

SJ: Totally. I just watched the four-part Wu-Tang Clang documentary that came out a little while ago. There's footage of them making their first record. Obviously they are a very large group anyway, but there are loads of people hanging out in the studio and there are people doing parts more than once and everybody is having a great time. And I think that just provides a lot of energy. Trying to take your third solo on some tricky form in this super sterile dry environment is kind of brutal. But anyway, all of those things affect the vibe. An unusual part of that that I have experienced in New York is that because the market is so saturated and there is so much happening all the time, you can play a gig with great musicians to a very small audience and sometimes the fact that it is a small audience in a bleak venue setting can... maybe not inhibit, but it doesn't imbue it with tons of energy and positivity. Playing with those same musicians in a rehearsal space, beautiful or shitty, can actually be more connected and fun and I think better music can come out of that. And I have certainly had the experience of playing sessions with people – improvising or playing written material – and it being extremely connected and engaged in a rehearsal setting and then doing a gig with not much of a vibe and a small audience and having it not live up to what the previous experiences were. And that leads to a thing I think is important – Steve Coleman referenced it once and somebody else referenced it in a different way and I can't remember who it was a – and it was that what the public sees, whatever public there is, is a performance or a recording, but for the musicians that are living through those experiences or for most of them, for me certainly, all of the other stuff on that path is as important and meaningful – practising, rehearsing, listening, talking – it's not just a performance. Of course a performance might be the thing that gives you the most energy and is the most thrilling but they are all essential and so... I'm not sure how I got onto this now but I think that's an important idea that can be lost. The reason I'm saying that is because it can be all that preparation to produce an end product, which is the performance. And I don't really like that idea, I don't think the performance needs to be a product, it's not a show where

it is the same every night, it is part of a process and that is where you invite people to be part of it.

MJ: But it is the only part that they see, which is where it is tricky maybe?

SJ: It is tricky and it is important to respect the fact that they have taken time out of their lives and probably paid money to sit and see you do something and of course you want to be respectful and present it and react to that in the most generous, grateful way you can. But it doesn't really change the fact that in a musician's life it is what it is, you know?

MJ: That's very interesting. I feel that could lead on to a lot of things that aren't super pertinent [to this research] about whether audiences are aware of those things, like the process, or do they think they are just there for the final product? I don't know how many audience members... It's hard, because it is very hard for them to understand the process.

SJ: Definitely, but I wonder is that important, do you think? Maybe it's important but maybe it's not important at all.

MJ: It is hard... I'm not sure whether it is important or not. But it's hard for us as improvisers to go into this situation thinking that it is not the final product when the audience are obviously quite important and they are seeing it like a final product.

SJ: I suppose it is not black and white. There is an element that is a final product, because you rehearsed it and now you are playing it for people. And again in today's musical economy that sometimes that means that you only play it once. Or even if you tour it, each audience sees it once, so in a way it is the final product. So, it's not completely untrue. But I think it is also just inevitable and fine that the experience of an artist is going to be very different to the experience of an audience member and that people's views of it are going to be very different. I mean it is a much larger topic and probably not that pertinent to the research you are doing but it leads to questions about how society perceives art and music and specifically the kind of music we make and that's why people are so free with criticisms that aren't really rooted in much thought or that can be quite... inadvertently disrespectful. Because music, and art in general but particularly music, has become so commodified and it is so much about a product and success and selling and accumulating and money, that what we are doing is the antithesis to a lot of

that. It really doesn't fit in the same.... It's crazy to me that I could have a conversation with a non-musician, potentially even an audience member and I work in the same industry as Maroon 5 or Taylor Swift and people will say "but you are an entertainer, you work in the entertainment industry". But of course I don't, I'm not. And I have had that conversation with people where they have been almost upset by that, they say "Of course you are an entertainer. I came to see you do a show".

MJ: They paid you money to entertain them!

SJ: What's the difference between art and entertainment and what is the overlap? That is a big and tricky area I think. And I don't want any of it to sound anti-audience. I am over the moon when anybody comes to see me do anything. And it doesn't exist in a way without them. But I think it is important to zoom out and contextualise it, particularly these days.

MJ: And even if it is not totally pertinent to my research it is connected to that research question at least of how does performance affect the music.

SJ: Definitely, because different kinds of audiences in different kinds of spaces... there is a very different kind of vibe between playing iBeam [Brooklyn-based small community arts space] or the John Field Room [room in the National Concert Hall in Dublin] or the Village Vanguard [prestigious New York jazz venue] or a basement somewhere.

MJ: My final question, because parts of my research are looking at similarities or comparisons or contrasts in giving the musicians material through different media. For example, providing improvisers with text or images as essentially motifs for improvisation. So I was wondering if you have any experience doing that or how you feel that affects your playing?

SJ: You mean images or text, not the same as a graphic score? Or are you thinking of them as graphic scores?

MJ: Not exactly graphic scores but I guess the result could be the same. Where there is no intention for the image or the text to have any very specific musical meaning.

SJ: I think looking at and exploring notational systems that are different than the standard European western notation system is a great idea. And important of course that they exist in other cultures. And there are people trying to come up with new ones now or trying to find ways of notating things that are new and maybe more representative of the material at hand. In my experience, text and images... I haven't found them especially helpful and maybe that's because I haven't worked with them enough. I think I would need to, like any other material, think of different strategies and ways of approaching it. A challenge for me, although I love the idea, is music is already so abstract, looking at an abstract image, or probably kind of abstract text, just the elaboration gets even more... it all becomes quite difficult to quantify. That said, I have seen people who colour in their charts or draw pictures on them or people's music books that have a chart on one page and a drawing or image on the next page and I always really like that. The same way as I visualise, when CDs were a thing, I would visualise the music on an album very much in relation to what the CD cover looked like. So the visual component has a big effect, and I do think of music visually and I do really like words. If a tune has a title or liner notes or something, all that really affects how I perceive the music. But I've never really found somebody giving me an image or text to improvise over, I just haven't got to a place with that where I would like to be. It would be great to explore further I'm just not really there yet.

MJ: It's funny, when I think of your music I think of your handwriting! If I hear your music in my head I also picture those kinds of handwritten charts. And I think I might approach a tune differently if somebody has written a chart by hand or whether it is printed. It automatically gives you a different feeling.

SJ: I used to love Joachim Badenhorst has particular charts and he would sometimes draw little characters on them. And Raf Vertessen, speaking of different notation systems, he has a load of colour coding systems. I'm not sure exactly how it works but it is a lot of work to get the charts together. Because there is both conventional notation and non-conventional, for want of a better word, notation. But the colour coding is part of it and when I have seen them they look amazing, they look beautiful they are like artworks in and of themselves. So that would definitely affect how I would conceive of something in my head.

MJ: What about when, for example, we played the Roamer stuff [project with Irish quartet also featuring Lauren Kinsella and Matthew Halpin, in collaboration with poet Chery Smyth] with dealing with text as the starting point for compositions? How did you find that?

SJ: I found it very challenging. I really like words and language. But as a starting point for something musical, it's difficult. Maybe I am just too 'in my head' with musical stuff, maybe I am too literal with it or something.

MJ: So your approach ended up being, from what I can remember, or at least one of the tunes you brought ended up being more about the music as a backing to the text?

SJ: Yeah I remember the poem. And that was a good example, maybe of through the way everybody dealt with that material... It achieved something that I wanted it to achieve, or that I hoped it might achieve. There seemed to be some kind of emotional resonance.

MJ: I did the opposite. I specifically set both the poems word for word to notes and rhythms and harmony.

SJ: And Matt [Halpin] and Lauren [Kinsella] did something a little more in the middle. And honestly I was more interested in those three approaches than my own. That would be a good thing to come back to, because I don't know why there is a disconnect there for me because I like words but I can't necessarily connect it to music.

MJ: Super. Do you have any other thoughts on any of that [the interview]?

SJ: The notational thing is good to think about it. I think there are so many possibilities that haven't been looked at. I used to have the scores to the Cage piece 'Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano' and some of the solo Morton Feldman stuff, where there was notation with just boxes that indicate registers and one of them with these chords with huge intervals and they were just spaced around the page and you could go through them in different orders and each one just had a dynamic marking on them. So that was like somewhere between regular notation and something else. And then the one with the boxes was its own thing.

MJ: And then there is the Braxton stuff.

SJ: Yeah I have a student who has been learning some of those and we have been going through them. I think in order for that to work the way it really works with his groups, that's a big study.

MJ: You have to learn the language kind of?

SJ: Yeah I think people sometimes... Maybe that's my issue with some of that stuff. Is that people tend to be like "oh yeah graphic notation, oh an image, oh yeah whatever"! And then it's like, well no, you have to really spend time with it for it to be a real thing.

MJ: Just like you spend years and years learning musical notation and what that means to you and how to interact with that...

SJ: So Braxton is probably a good example of it. I think Wadada Leo Smith might have some graph notation stuff. I know Henry Threadgill's charts use western notation but there are all kinds of instructions for playing things backwards and jumping between sections and he has his own system I think, they're not chord symbols but they imply different groups of intervals. I think it's a big area and I am interested in it but I haven't really checked it out a lot. But the answer to that is, in the world that you work in and that I work in, things are written in western notation 99.5% of the time, hence our lack of comfort and insight with other notational systems.

MJ: Cool. Happy? I am going to press stop recording now.

Appendix 1(e):

Matthew Jacobson PhD Interview Transcription

Izumi Kimura

Zoom, 15th May 2020

MJ: So, obviously you are one of the perfect candidates to have this conversation with – I was just looking up your website briefly before and the first line of your bio is that you are really interested or attracted to the cracks between improvisation and composition and that is essentially what my PhD is about. So it definitely makes sense that I am talking to you. One of the main things I am looking at is how having written material affects the way we improvise. So as opposed to just playing with no written material – which obviously we do sometimes, just improvising with nothing – but what I am really interested in is when there is some material there. So I just wonder what your feeling is on that or how you think that affects how you play?

IK: Yeah I think I used to think there was a huge difference between just playing without any material and playing with material. But nowadays it's not that different. Because there is always materials and there is a question of whether it is written notes or something else like we used to with paintings or just a word or just a concept or something that's not actually written notes. So that's a difference there as well. But actually nowadays it doesn't make so much difference in my mind. But of course if there is written music, written by someone else as material then that does matter of course. You have to treat that with respect, but it's all sort of starting point anyway. So I think if it is written a lot or it is a really small amount of material, it all depends on what's expected by the person who wrote it. Like if it's expected to go a certain way or expected to have certain results, then it makes it different. Of course it's difficult. The whole thing is different. But if it is open-ended... we would decide to play cup of coffee or play this one page of very tightly knit rhythm, it doesn't make that much difference any more, if that makes sense? So I think it is all about the intention of if it is open-ended or if it is going a certain direction or has to go a certain direction. Where it is going, that's what matters, more than where it is coming from.

MJ: And if you were the composer in that situation how do you think you would communicate your intention to the performers? Would you specifically say what you just said, or...?

IK: I'm not very good at that actually! That's something I am not good at anyway. I tend to... I think I am better at interpreting somebody else's music rather than bringing in... as you know, you did that with – I am very open-ended. If I have something I specifically want to do I just... yeah, I play on my own! That's my problem actually! I need to overcome that, maybe, or maybe I don't need to. But so I don't know if that is kind of the answer, sorry?!

MJ: No, that totally makes sense. So if it doesn't really matter what the starting point is... I guess one thing I am trying to work out or look at is how detailed the written material can be before it really restricts someone's freedom. Do you think that... is it more to do with complexity or more about the form or structure of the written material itself or what do you think?

IK: I think with this way of playing music if you are really specific about what you wrote, and complex or whatever, that is good, because that's your intention being really clear. If there's this material, which is really clear an idea and this one, which is very clear with an idea and you put them together then they sound good, convincing, because both of them on their own are really strong. In that sense what comes out after that we don't know. We have to trust that, have to have that open-ended. But, if you have this thing, which is a composition, whatever, which is really on its own, has its own universe then that is a good thing as a starting point for the improvisation. Because improvisation itself, we don't know what's going to happen. I think that ideally we all trust, and using those materials to create the space that we feel safe because we know what the other person's intention is and we also know that the other person is open to whatever comes out as well. So yeah, that's my impression.

MJ: And how do you feel then about the preparation for those kinds of performance? In terms of rehearsals or... I mean I feel like I have been in the situation a lot where, when you rehearse that music, you maybe only rehearse the written material and you don't rehearse the improvising part. What kind of an impact do you think that has? Or what approach do you like?

IK: I do think it is... I don't get that so much, the opportunity to rehearse improvising, but if I do, with some people that rehearse, actually improvising part of it, it just creates much more comfort, feels more comfortable. I think the imagination is a memory. Imagination is based on memories. So you hear it and you feel what other person is about to do or you kind of create this thing. But if we haven't practised, rehearsed the improvising part of it, and just rehearsed

the written part we still sort of get that feeling but it's not that much, so we don't really know what the other person is going to do. And then we have all these kinds of mind, little voice-imites start and we can go into that direction but rehearsing will sort that part out. So I think it is really important that we do rehearse the improvising. But we don't really do that so much, I have to say!

MJ: So like in situations, maybe like with the trio with Barry [Guy – bassist] and Gerry [Hemingway – drummer], how did you find the things developed over the course of the time that you spent rehearsing or even playing a couple of concerts and then recording? How do you think it changed?

IK: Actually the recording was the very first concert, so now I feel like oh that recording is so bad, but you know that feeling?! You record too early! But I think the rehearsing was definitely good, because I was feeling like “oh, master, please, I am paying you to play with me so come on”, that kind of mindset. And it took me such a long time to get up to the point that I don't have to be always like that. And actually it is just stupid to be like that all the time. So I needed that time myself as well, and of course music gets better, you know it yourself, after playing together. And especially if you do a performance, each time you just, you know, get more... communication level gets better. I think it was a good idea to do that – go into Annaghmakerrig [the Tyrone Guthrie Centre – a residential facility for creative artists in Monaghan, Ireland] before the first concert, because I just felt like that was needed. Rather than just start playing and I'm not there, I wasn't there. So that was definitely good. And talk about things. It's not like we were playing ten hours a day, obviously. Just sharing the space and it was good to have that. But then after that we didn't play, obviously didn't even see each other for a whole year. And then we did the concerts in Germany last December and that was... that felt much better and each time got so much better. I think it's the memory or you know, you feel, like, much better. I don't know, sorry I can't really explain it better than that!

MJ: That's ok! Do you think it is a mixture of a musical thing and a personal thing? How much of it is just your own personal comfort in a situation or how much of it is, maybe, like you say, responding to musical events that you are then familiar with?

IK: I think it's both. A combination of that. But as we'll be able to feel more comfortable then you can respond more and then you feel more confident and they go hand in hand.

MJ: That makes sense.

IK: Yeah so I didn't start with written material. Barry had lots of written materials. But his written material is not like really written, you know? It's more like just a few notes and a few chords and it's just built together kind of thing. It's not that much reading involved.

MJ: And does he explain his intention or the fact that there is none or does he have an idea of where he wants it to go?

IK: He has, but at the same time he is very open. And also all those compositions that we did already play before, he played with Gerry and Crispell [Marilyn – pianist] and I knew he had that sound in his mind. He wasn't that obviously trying to recreate or anything like that but at the same time he wasn't trying to make.. now this has to be unique. Really it was very relaxed and open. So it was fine. And I wrote a tiny bit of melody and was surprised that he was really trying to learn it! He was practising that 12-bar melody really seriously and he asked questions and just really approaching with respect. I was really surprised. And I think last December, Gerry brought this tune he wrote, when he was 23 or something! And that was really interesting, because it wasn't something that Barry would do. It was sort of based on blues form, and the rehearsal turned into a class... Barry was really sweating and that was interesting. We didn't play that tune!

MJ: Do you think even trying to play it helped the other music? Like, sometimes bringing something that's maybe... if you are trying to play in an open and improvised way and then somebody brings something that clearly doesn't give the musicians that freedom then it kind of reminds you of what you want to do sometimes?

IK: Yeah it definitely does. At the same time I'd say even just putting the information in the mix. Like, you know there is always a message. Like, why did this person bring this tune now into this environment. You can take that as a negative or a positive. It is up to us. So you can take it as, maybe this doesn't work but there is another sort of colour or another feeling or vibe that we consider. Not like in trying to get that right now, but it's just more, just another thing in the mix. I think.

MJ: Yeah that makes sense. I think I've definitely had that experience as the composer. Or trying to bring things to a band and then realise, oh actually this is too... it's just too complicated. Or it's not giving people the freedom that I want them to have. And then sometimes it can be difficult. It's like your ego that then doesn't want to let go because it's like "I brought this piece" and "I wrote it", but then at the same time I want to be improvising with people and I trust these people so it's almost like not trusting them by putting this really restrictive material in front of them.

IK: Yeah because it's a different thing isn't it. If you are in a classical kind of mindset then the music is there and we serve, we become a part, or a cog and serve for the music. That's the mindset, a lot of the time in classical music. But in improvised music, or if the music comes first, then if you have an expected result. Again this expected result, that you wanted this kind of thing to happen then each musician has to become a part for that. But in this music [improvised], it is sort of the opposite way. Each musician does their own thing and will find... That's more important actually than the end result being nice and neat. Again, the intention is what matters, I think.

MJ: And what about – I mean this might be interesting for you – one of the things I am looking at is how the instrumentation changes our feeling. So one of the things I'm looking at is playing the same kind of small compositions with lots of different kinds of instrumental line-ups or instrumentation. I wonder, for you maybe playing either piano or the Nord [electric keyboard], how you find that changes your approach, or the end result?

IK: Yeah I think it's just, yeah for me that's the only difference, I only play piano or keyboard anyway. It's just different instruments so different role, or the different colours, things like that are different. And specifically for example from playing the electric piano then it is more single line or melodic thing, bring out more melody. Piano is more harmonic. Colours and things like that. I know also you can do more inside, if you can go inside a grand piano there is that kind of possibilities, it's just different functions and yeah, I don't know. I think it is really case by case and when you are playing with different instrumentation or different people, you just adjust in the moment! That's what I do I think.

MJ: So you think you are adjusting more to the people than the instruments?

IK: Maybe both I think. Because when I play – I wish I played more – another thing I do really like doing is playing with Cora [Venus Lunny – viola/violin] for example, the duo. So when I play with her, I started playing the piano with her but then I had a gig that I played Nord because I had to, and that made it really different music, of course. Because we don't have any written material anyway, we just play with the environment kind of thing. So that made the music different altogether, was interesting.

MJ: Sure. I guess we talked about it a little bit but, maybe, how much the performance context changes how you improvise, like whether it is a live gig or whether it is a studio, whether you are just in someone's house rehearsing. Do you think that affects the end result?

IK: Yeah I think so. The energy is different. I think in this kind of way of playing the music is so much to do with that the energy's effect... Music itself changes according to the energy in the place. So in a live situation of course it is great because this is it, we are going to die after this, you know this kind of mindset can be created. And it is hard to do in a rehearsal, but it's actually nice when you are rehearsing with the people and you feel like the other musicians are feeling like that. Even though it's a rehearsal. You know like really serious, taking it extremely serious. And that makes it much better experience of course. Why don't we just do that all the time?! Because it is more fun to do it that way. So that's sort of my feeling. But it's hard to do that of course. Especially if you are just practising on your own. And it is hard to treat it like that all the time. It would be tiring too! But ideally, in an ideal world it would be nice to be able to do that all the time.

MJ: And what about then trying to record this music in a studio? How do you find that?

IK: That's really hard too I think. I don't know. I don't really. I don't think I have really done that. I did solo recording. Just go in and play and then select afterwards kind of thing. But it's hard to do that I think because it is very different energy and different kind of communication and then the mindset is different. Try to present something at the end of the day so that's a different mindset altogether, so that would be hard.

MJ: And what about, like you said your recording with Barry and Gerry was from a live recording, do you think it affects a live gig if you are then also recording?

IK: You mean, if you are recording the same set?

MJ: Yeah, like does it affect the performance do you think it's something you are conscious of when you are playing or do you try not to be?

IK: I think whatever we do decide to do, it is just practice anyway. It's just if you are going to record in the studio, maybe we decide to do the recording as more like... treat them like compositions. So I was hoping to, when I was talking to Barry [Guy – bassist/composer], if we were recording in his studio then we probably will have more written or more *agreed* stuff, so each one will be a piece. And then when we go out and play that live, don't need to talk about it anyway, because that is a lot of practice, you gain so much practice from recording anyway. So that's the good thing about recording. So almost treat studio session like a really intense rehearsal. And then go out and just play! And then it will be fine. But you know yourself because you do that yourself. I feel like I'm telling you something you already know!

MJ: No no! Everybody thinks different things! Ok and what about... obviously we had the examples of playing trio with Ronan [Guilfoyle – bassist] with the drawings that you had made, the fingerpaintings. I mean in general, do you have much experience where maybe the medium or the written material comes from something other than music? Either paintings or text or even abstract ideas? Is that still just... I mean you kind of started by saying that, whether it is a cup of coffee or written material, it doesn't really make a difference. So I guess that's similar.

IK: Yes I already started saying that. I think so. It is just different mindset maybe. If I have a note or if it is coming from more other things, then... But ideally you know anything that comes from will get to the same place after all. Because if we start from the written material, I would start by using maybe, say it's a little bit more intellect – the little bit of intellect I have – and it's more logical part of my brain or being, and if I start from painting then it is more sensual or sensory part of my being. Start there but where it's going is all going into the same, like the river going into the sea, going into the same place I think.

MJ: And when, so if when you are creating the fingerpaintings, did you have anything musical in your head?

IK: No. I should have done that more. I wasn't really.. Was more like oh today, better do it now. I wasn't really meditating beforehand or thinking so much. I suppose that's ok!

MJ: And then when you interact with those paintings, are you... what were you thinking?

IK: While we were playing?

MJ: Yeah, when you put the painting down and we all play or react to it, what do you think is happening? Or is it just the same kind of process than when it is written material?

IK: Yeah I think, I really would like to do more of that, obviously we haven't been doing it. I feel like I've only kind of tapped into it and I haven't really gone really deep into it. Maybe don't need to go deep into it but... I was just, I think when I was making the painting I was just making the painting and almost childish way of "ah I want a bit of red", just that is as far as it goes. Then when I was playing I was pretty much similar kind of thing but just going with the feelings so... sorry it's not very much PhD material, it's more Montessori material.

MJ: No no. It always is just what it is. I mean for me that stuff is like, anyway, like we say it's just a vehicle for improvisation and to me it's interesting because then, rather than the three of us or whoever is there playing. Rather than not having some kind of topic to start on, or some kind of shared reference point, it's nice to have that. Like I like the idea of it's almost like conversation starters, we don't have to do the small talk bit. Like talking about the weather or the situation – it's just a way of saying "ok, let's see how deep we can get on this topic". And maybe it works and maybe sometimes it doesn't, but it doesn't have to be, I mean not everybody has to be thinking the same thing and most of the time we are not!

IK: No it's impossible for us to be thinking the same thing. It doesn't happen. So we will always misunderstand each other anyway so...! It's just a way for if we misunderstand each other with compassion and accepting that and trusting that's all about it, I think. So yeah I found I was also... remember if we have sort of like map... maybe we use it like a map. But it's not really a map because written material is like a map because you start here and you go whatever and then you go or there is this stopping point. But that is just a starting point and can go anywhere. So if you are actually following the painting all the time then you are not really able to play because it is too much looking at, too much visual thing. So it is kind of like look at it and then

close my eyes and then play kind of. I found that that works better, rather than trying to always get the information and then play at the same time. That doesn't work, doesn't go well together or something.

MJ: I mean I guess that's similar to... I mean I would always prefer playing, if we are improvising but with written material I would always prefer to know the material off by heart, with the idea of having to read, I guess and improvise and interact it's just a lot of things to be doing at the one time.

IK: Yeah so it's the same thing in a sense. Internalise it as much as possible for that time and then play from that.

MJ: And allow to maybe give more of your attention to what's happening around rather than what's on the page.

IK: That is something that I really still need practice on a lot. Because I spent so much time sight-reading. Just as a job, sight-reading for whatever, a student or whatever and it's just different way of doing things. So sometimes if I'm not careful I go into automatic pilot of reading and sort of, whatever I'm doing I'm just reading and then sort of processing and it will come out fine, because I'm used to doing that but it's not actually, it's really not satisfying at all.

MJ: And have you found any ways of helping that situation? Are there things you can do to practise that or in real-time, any ways of getting out of that?

IK: Actually I don't do that anymore, I don't really sight-read so much anymore. Then my sight-reading skills got so bad, I can't do anything now anymore!

MJ: I'm sure it is still better than most people's sight-reading!

IK: I don't know about that now because I can't even see things!

MJ: So do you think because of that then it is easier? Like that's less your habit. Does it then become easier to be present in your improvisation?

IK: I think I am going more to that direction alright. And that's what I wanted to, and that's fine, but then feeling a bit anxious because I am really letting go of something that was sort of safety net from my previous life. Survival kit from my previous life, and that is hard to let go. But you know, that's another thing about improvisation anyway right? It's about letting go. You have to keep letting go. So maybe I just have to do that. So I've kind of accepted it.

MJ: Growth and development, pretty important!

IK: Yeah exactly, you have to evolve. We lose some things in order to get to the new territory.

MJ: Definitely. If you are being honest when you are improvising – if we are saying that's important – then it wouldn't make sense that you are always doing the same thing because you are not the same person all the time anyway. Ten years later, obviously you have changed, everybody changes. And then if you are still saying the same stuff, it might be questionable.

IK: Yeah I think honesty is the most important thing in this music. There is no point otherwise. If you are playing this type of music [improvised] then there is no point otherwise. So that's for sure. That's why it feels like there's always a constantly beginner... like I don't know anything, I'm a complete beginner from *this* moment! That's a feeling and I'm kind of getting used to that feeling so I don't feel *so* uneasy about it. Be comfortable. More comfortable about that.

MJ: Definitely. I mean... that's most of my main topics. Is there anything else you think about improvisation, or “the crack in between” in particular?

IK: The crack nowadays is so big. It's funny because I wrote that a long time ago – my website needs updating, anyway but – I was playing more written music because ten years ago I wasn't really improvising. Which, if I think about it is unbelievable. So from that time I thought the crack was really a *crack*, then I realised when I went to see the crack, that's actually quite a lot of space, there's a lot of people! So when I went down the crack I can't get up any more and is suddenly like this is where I'm living and that's it. But... I think I was writing down a few things because I had to write similar stuff for IMC [a separate interview with the Improvised Music Company]... But I think I said all of these things. It's in there somewhere!

MJ: Is there any recommendations of music that you think of as being very important or people or books or literature or anything, just any maybe suggestions for me?

IK: Do you know what? I'm the worst person to ask that question! I am like born yesterday! I am really bad at that. All these jazz musicians, especially jazz musicians, they are so much, "listen to this". There is so much and that's typically jazz musicians that they have so much knowledge and they remember these things. But I am complete opposite. I think when I read anything to with Zen stuff, I read a lot... which is quite a lot of empty space, mostly empty space. So, I'm sorry, I'm really bad! But of course I actually recently saw Derek Bailey's 'Improvisation', that documentary, which of course, that's really great. So can't really add anything, other than what is already there as a classic kind of thing.

MJ: I think it's funny that the Derek Bailey is still, even all these years later, it's like the definitive piece of work on improvisation as a broader concept. Just because it is so good I guess.

IK: Yeah that's a good documentary. It's better than the book I think.

MJ: Cool. Well they are the only questions I will stop recording now if that's ok?

IK: Ok, that's great.