STRIKING MOMENTS:
DEVELOPING A FLEXIBLE VOCABULARY
FOR IMPROVISING USING ACTION RESEARCH

by

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Abstract

"...that's my way of preparation - to not be prepared. And that takes a lot of preparation!" - Lee Konitz

What does it mean to prepare to be unprepared? Lee Konitz's deft paradox represents a challenge to the improviser: how can one practice and prepare for improvising, while simultaneously aspiring to spontaneity, newness and the unexpected in its performance? This thesis describes my attempt to resolve this central tension within my own practice.

Coming from my position as a jazz improviser in Aotearoa, my research builds on ideas from other New Zealand and Australian artist researchers[1] who have identified the need to develop personal, reflexive, and deliberate practice techniques to answer this question. I offer that "language" and "vocabulary", common and useful metaphors within musical improvisation, can be practiced, learned and applied in ways that don't inhibit spontaneity in performance, but enhance it. I propose that "striking moments"–especially engaging musical statements discovered during improvisation itself–can act as the genesis of new musical material to adopt into and adapt for an improvising vocabulary.

I show how action research methods can be used to inform an iterative process designed to change my practice, and build a framework for analysis, reflection and revision. I use a combination of autoethnographic writing in the form of a reflective journal and informal interviews and focus groups with peers to gather insights into how my developing practice method interacts with multifaceted and oftentimes contradictory ideas around personal voice, embodiment, flow, spontaneity, and musical conversation.

I present a small lexicon of tools, techniques and concepts discovered through eight months of iterative practice using this method, and offer some ideas on how it could develop in the future.

[1] Steve Barry, "On Transcribing, Deliberate and Creative Practice, and Strategies for Self-Generating Musical Language," Steve Barry, November 18, 2019, http://www.stevebarrymusic.com/newsblog/2019/10/24/on-transcribing-creative-and-deliberate-practice-and-strategies-for-self-generating-musical-language; Roger Wesley Manins, "Circles and Clouds: Advanced Concepts in Jazz Composition and Improvisation - a Modern Theory Applied to Saxophone Playing" (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2019); Jamie Oehlers, "Night Music (Compositions, Performance and Improvisations) –and– Developing a Chromatic-Intervallic Approach to Jazz Improvisation through Reflexive Practice. An Exegesis" (PhD diss., Edith Cowan University, Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, 2019).

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Introduction

It's Sunday night sometime in mid-2012 at Meow, a dive bar in Wellington, Aotearoa. The room is dark, and although smoking is banned indoors there's a certain sultry haze to the place–maybe it's just the vibe. I'm playing tenor sax with The Troubles, an entertaining, avant-garde style jazz band playing an absurd and sublime blend of swing, traditionals, world-spanning folk tunes and original compositions. The eclectic repertoire is matched by the diverse ensemble, a plethora of brass and woodwinds arrayed alongside a string quartet, bass and drums. Percussion instruments and other noise makers litter the stage.

I'd been invited to fill in for one of the members of The Troubles who was overseas, and I ended up playing with the band every Sunday night. I had just finished my bachelor's degree in jazz performance at the New Zealand School of Music–Te Kōkī (NZSM) the previous year, and I was trying to make it in the scene, teaching and playing gigs. Even before I'd gotten into playing jazz I'd been playing music and improvising in public, and I felt experienced: the "rabbit in the headlights" feeling I got when I was put on the spot at Meow was uncomfortably new.

Mid-tune, I'm urged to the front by the drummer and bandleader John, in full, manic swing, to play a solo. I put the horn to my lips, start blowing … and the band stops.

John's cut them off, and I'm left to flail around in the silence, searching for something, anything, to carry the performance. Not waiting for me to find my feet, John counts off the next tune, and I slink back to my stand. It feels like it took forever, though it probably wasn't more than a minute.

The preparation I had simply didn't deal with the situation I found myself in. The course of study I'd taken really only dealt with improvising in a very narrow sense; playing melodies and patterns devised by or derived from the greats of the jazz canon over standard song forms, accompanied by proscribed bass motion, chord sequences, and a regular, steady beat. Ros McMillan's investigation into jazz pedagogy in Australia echoes this experience,[2] as does Nick

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[2] Ros McMillan, "'A Terrible Honesty': The Development of a Personal Voice in Musical Improvisation" (PhD diss., The University of Melbourne, 1996), 4–5.

Tipping's research into the jazz scene in Pōneke/Wellington, of which I am a part.[3]

During those gigs, I spent a lot of time watching and listening to the other musicians. Why did I get cut off when other players, given the spotlight, were free to play seemingly as long as they liked? What was so engaging about what they were doing that they could carry the room like that? They seemed to have a lot to say, in all sorts of scenarios, whether calling on funky and danceable riffing, lyrical melody, frantic sheets of sound, or eerie and ethereal sonorities. I decided to make it my artistic mission to be able to improvise like that–to really say something, convincingly, in any situation. To paraphrase Lee Konitz, "to prepare to be unprepared".[4]

Subsequently my musical career has placed me in a wide variety of playing situations. I've performed in free improvising orchestras, alongside traditional folk groups, and with dancers; it has taken me to Germany, Australia, the United States, and South Korea, as well as all over Aotearoa, New Zealand. I've written, toured and recorded my own compositions and I've taken lessons with many fine jazz and improvising saxophonists. I have learned plenty more from my peers, many of whom are world-class musicians.

But my mission–to prepare to be unprepared–often seemed to elude me. More often than not, useful techniques for improvising were found on the bandstand, rather than in the practice room. Furthermore, when I had decent periods of time to dedicate to practicing, I found myself settling into routines and old practice habits–treading over worn ground–and consequently churning out prepared phrases, which to my ears sounded stale and redundant. I was striving for the creation of purely-inspired melody, moments I have felt only a handful of times, each of which I clearly recall and cherish deeply: again, these moments occurred most often while improvising with others. My practice did not seem to help generate such sparks of creativity and spontaneity, nor prepare me for the reflexive and reactive nature of group performance. I returned to study after almost ten years in order to find a better approach.

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[3] Nicholas Tipping, "Outside In: Wellington Jazz among the Discourses" (PhD diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2016), 34.
[4] Andy Hamilton, *Lee Konitz: Conversations on the Improviser's Art* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 110.

Overview

I chose action research methods as my primary tools for developing a flexible vocabulary for flexible improvising, and tested these tools both alone in the practice room and with fellow improvisers. While developing this vocabulary was my principal research goal, I developed three detailed research questions to guide my study.

1. How can action research methods be used to develop a process for preparing to improvise?
2. How do improvisers respond to the experience of practicing with these methods? How does this compare with more traditional methods?
3. How do these methods help me achieve my aims: enhancing possibilities for personal expression, spontaneity, collaboration, flexibility across multiple contexts, and the generation of new and fresh musical materials?

In chapter 1 I discuss the metaphors of language and vocabulary within, and conversation as improvisation, wherein the learned and memorised coexists with the new and spontaneous - though not without some tensions. I introduce the concept of striking moments: those occurrences within an improvisation which particularly engage the listener's attention. I look to three innovators of spontaneous melody on the alto saxophone, Lee Konitz, Charlie Parker and Ornette Coleman, to investigate how their own vocabularies enable spontaneity in their improvisations.

Chapter 2 deals with my first research question. I offer a philosophical and theoretical foundation for an emerging method for preparing to improvise in the practice room and in rehearsal that incorporates original, egalitarian and spontaneous music-making ideals, drawing on a broad swathe of non-representational methodologies: artistic practice as research (APR), activity theory, action research, auto-ethnographic writing and critical incident technique. I then lay out how the action research cycle can be employed to combine creative, intuitive decision making with methodical, analytical tools and processes in order to test how the method succeeds or fails in achieving these ideals. I discuss how I used tools from narrative autoethnography in writing a reflective journal of my practice to create data from my improvisations. I outline my study design for interviewing and engaging in focus groups with other improvisers to test the method in groups and generate more data.

Chapter 3 deals with my second research question. I draw on data from my reflective journal, interviews and focus groups to evaluate how myself and my research participants related to practicing using this method. I explore notions of selfhood, memory, place and socio-cultural location, feeling and emotional reactions, and embodiment–the physical experience. I tie these ideas together with concepts drawn from deliberate practice and flow-state.

Chapter 4 deals with my third research question. Using my data, I examine examples of materials and developmental tools that were more or less successful in achieving my aims, and why. I provide a number of the most successful concepts as examples of a developing vocabulary.

The method I developed is not a fixed process: like Derek Bailey's call for an improvising language based on "malleable" material, the process itself is fluid, designed to respond to the materials and musical context at hand, to shift and adapt according to the demands of the moment.[5] As such, this thesis is more of a snapshot of my musical development during my research than it is an elaboration of a complete method or closed system. And as much as it is a piece of research, it is also a record of my personal journey as an artist.

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[5]Derek Bailey, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*, [Rev ed.] (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1993), 107.

Chapter 1: Saying Something

Language, Vocabulary & Conversation as Musical Improvisation

Ingrid Monson, in her tellingly titled book *Saying Something,* asserts that the conversation metaphor in improvisation "simultaneously suggests structural analogies between music and talk and emphasises the sociability of jazz performance."[6] Paul Berliner's monolithic *Thinking in Jazz,* which contains perspectives from a number of jazz improvisers, features an entire chapter on developing a jazz "vocabulary", with a subchapter dedicated to the art of "storytelling" in jazz improvisation.[7] A further development of the metaphor can be seen in the importance placed by many on developing a unique, personal "voice" as an improviser.[8] Nor is the metaphor restricted to jazz improvisation: Viram Jarani, a performer of Indian classical music, says in Derek Bailey's seminal work *Improvisation; Its Nature and Practice in Music* "we are learning, if you like, a language of music".[9]

The metaphors of language, vocabulary and conversation clearly give us ample tools for thinking about improvisation, and for communicating and framing its practice. These metaphors are not without their problems, however: they throw up tensions, questions and paradoxes. What language? whose vocabulary? And what does it mean to prepare such things for an activity that aspires to spontaneity (to prepare to be unprepared)? Many commentators see the use of "known" material in improvising as problematic, or even antithetical to its ideals. The jazz saxophonist Lee Konitz, in his interviews with Andy Hamilton, says "Obviously, playing mechanically suggests a lack of real connection to what you are doing at the moment. We learn to play through things that feel good at the time of discovery. They go into the 'muscular memory' and are recalled as a matter of habit."[10]

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[6] Ingrid T. Monson, *Saying Something Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 97.
[7] Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[8] George E. Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (1996): 241, https://doi.org/10.2307/779379; Yusef Lateef, "The Pleasures of Voice in Autophysiopsychic Music," Yusef Lateef, accessed June 28, 2021, https://yuseflateef.com/literature/essays/index.html; Imamu Amiri Baraka, *Black Music*, Apollo Editions; A-185 (New York: Morrow, 1968), 157–58.
[9] Bailey, *Improvisation*, 9.
[10] Hamilton, *Lee Konitz*, 109.

The principal danger to this approach is that the musician, by recycling and rearranging familiar phrases - even if that process is happening "in the moment" - is in danger of departing from improvising altogether. Bailey sums it up in his typically acerbic manner: "Once ... playing descends to the recycling of previously successful formulae its relevance to improvisation becomes pretty remote."[11]

These viewpoints certainly resonate with me, reflecting my own dissatisfaction with the results of recycling the "licks" and "patterns" I learned in the NZSM undergraduate jazz performance programme. However, some scholars have interrogated this attitude to the use of language in improvising. In his essay *Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives*, George Lewis notes that some Western composers and theorists consider improvising to be "playing what you [already] know" rather than a pursuit of spontaneous creation, quoting composers Lukas Foss and John Cage.[12] While this echoes the concerns of practitioners such as Konitz and Bailey, it cuts across the lived experience of improvisers (myself included). "Many commentators have identified the uniqueness of an improvisation as a highly prized goal among African-American improvisers", states Lewis, referring to anecdotes from Steve Lacy, Doc Cheatham and John Coltrane, cited by Berliner.[13] Journalist, author and black music historian Val Wilmer concluded that "the sound of surprise is what counts" in all black or African-American music, improvised or otherwise.[14] Originality, freedom, and spontaneity are the ultimate expressions of musics that essentially stem from oral tradition: this requires some unpacking if the use of language and the construction of an improvising vocabulary is to be obtained in the pursuit of these ideals.

Language and the Afrological

Lewis coined the terms Afrological and Eurological to define differences in "musical belief systems that ground African-American and European (including European-American) real time music-making". Lewis clearly states that these terms are not "ethnically essential", but are instead "historically emergent", taking into account the reality of "transracial and transcultural"

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[11] Bailey, *Improvisation*, 106–7.
[12] Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950," 106; David Cope, *New Directions in Music*, 7th edition (Prospect Heights, Ill: Waveland Pr Inc, 2000), 127; Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2002), 223.
[13] Lewis, 106; Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 57; Berliner, 268–69.
[14] Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious As Your Life: John Coltrane and Beyond* (London: Serpents Tail, 1992), 2.

exchange between musics and individuals.[15] The difference lies in the value placed by improvisers on interconnectedness to one another, history and memory, on the one hand, and the "indeterminacy" and "aleatory" that were developed by composers and theorists such as John Cage on the other, which privilege the idea of the lone "genius" as an innovator. Undercutting this difference is a disavowal by Eurological theorists and practitioners of African-American influences: Cage's "radical emphasis upon spontaneity and uniqueness", Lewis points out, "arrives some eight to ten years after the innovations of bebop."[16] Anthony Braxton states it plainly: "Both aleatory and indeterminism are words which have been coined … to bypass the word improvisation and as such the influence of non-white sensibility."[17]

Lewis argues that the Eurological drive for a "pure" spontaneity, de-emphasising memory and history, emerged in part from the decline of improvising in nineteenth and twentieth century classical music in Europe, and a modernist philosophy born of post war conditions. The desire to forget that there exists a European antecedent to improvised musics (and a corresponding denial of Black Music influences) on the one hand, and the horrors of the second world war on the other, opened up the possibility of a unique European tradition of spontaneous music. Lewis states that in contrast to this desire for a clean slate "…the African-American improviser, coming from a history of slavery and oppression, cannot countenance the erasure of history. The destruction of family and lineage, the rewriting of history and memory in the image of whiteness, is one of the facts with which all people of colour must live."[18]

Such "pure" spontaneity, given its exclusionary nature, does not appeal to me. I argue that any pākehā improviser such as myself, practicing Afrological forms and systems in their own music, must reject this project of erasure, even in the pursuit of personal, spontaneous music-making ideals. Instead, we can seek a position that honours our own influences, memories and histories, and communities.[19] In Aotearoa, this might be expressed through the whakatauki "Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua: 'I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past'". Selina Tusitala Marsh offers a similar saying from a Pasifika perspective: "[O]ral traditions exhale past into present, inhale future into past. The common Pacific adage 'We face the future with our backs' indicates that appreciation and knowledge of the past is vital for

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[15]Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950," 93.
[16] Lewis, 99.
[17] Anthony Braxton, *Tri-Axium Writings*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Synthesis Music, 1985), 366.
[18] Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950," 109.
[19] For pākehā in Aotearoa, this necessarily means acknowledging our position as tangata tiriti, and our roles (and the roles of our ancestors) in the colonial enterprise, including slavery and genocide for the stealing of land.

shaping a future".[20]

Clearly these are fruitful starting points for improvisers in Aotearoa who wish to explore Afrological music-making through the lens of their culture/s (or vice-versa), though further research in this area (and its limits) must necessarily be investigated by these improvisers themselves.

A Working Vocabulary

Afrological perspectives on improvising not only point me to socio-cultural reasons for maintaining and developing an improvising vocabulary, but also provide an argument that such vocabulary might generate spontaneity, rather than inhibit it. Lewis challenges the assertion that improvisers "play what they already know" by pointing to the work of cognitive psychologist Philip Johnson-Laird, who has "termed one version of this conventional wisdom as the "motif" theory.":

> According to Johnson-Laird's construction of this theory, jazz improvisers are wont to use a set of memorized motifs, which are "strung together one after the other to form an improvisation" (Johnson-Laird 1991, 292). The scientist's own metaphor of improvisation, involving an approach to the analysis of bebop solos based in theories of generative grammars, likens improvisation to speech. This perceived similarity to speech leads Johnson-Laird to question the validity of the motif theory: "Discourse would be intolerably difficult if it consisted solely in stringing together remarks that one had committed to memory. It is this sort of stilted jumble of phrases one is forced to produce in a foreign language where one's only guide is indeed a book of 'licks,' i.e., a phrasebook[21]

Here I see an important distinction between the idea of language as a rules-based, grammatical system made up of prepared statements (such as those I learned at the NZSM and touted by Baker, Coker and Aebersold)[22] and vocabularies used flexibly in the pursuit of "discourse" or conversation. In the latter sense, Konitz and Bailey actually support the idea: they speak of the need to develop a "working vocabulary". The difference for both lies in the objective for this

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[20]Selina Tusitala Marsh, "Here Our Words," in *The Pacific Islands: Environment and Society*, ed. Moshe Rapaport, 1st Ed. (The Bess Press, 1999), 166–78.
[21] Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950," 106–7.
[22] Tipping, "Outside In," 96.

vocabulary: rather than having stock phrases that can be reproduced verbatim at will, Bailey argues for the need of "a language based on malleable, not pre-fabricated material."[23] For Konitz: "one that's flexible enough so that it can be used to reinvent constantly."[24]

Bailey, whose approach is rooted in free improvisation aesthetics and who is therefore extremely wary of prepared material, nevertheless sees its utility when applied to the arena of musical performance: "when other more aesthetically acceptable resources such as invention and imagination have gone missing, the vocabulary becomes the sole means of support. It has to provide everything needed to sustain continuity and impetus in the musical performance."[25] Konitz comes to a similar conclusion: "When I get in trouble...I have to rely on what I know more. And that's less satisfying, but necessary, certainly."[26] Both musicians recognise that a given musical scenario may not always be conducive to the kind of improvisation they prefer to engage in—one that is natural, reactive, conversational or inspired—and therefore, short of ceasing a performance altogether, there must be something to fall back on, and a working vocabulary can achieve this aim.

Oehlers offers a less defeatist argument for the acquisition of new language, that is "extending the scope of what [is] heard".[27] He argues that improvisers who play only what they are able to hear internally are "unlikely to significantly develop their harmonic language." This development is imperative for the generation of new possibilities. Bailey, too, points out the need to consistently add material to the working vocabulary, which "will be appropriate for, and which will facilitate improvisation."[28] He argues that having a framework onto which one can add new material, and with which one can integrate new material, is essential for a feeling of "freshness": "the need for material is endless. A feeling of freshness is essential, and the best way to get that is for some of the material to be fresh. In a sense it is change for the sake of change. Change for the sake of the benefits that change can bring."[29]

As a working musician who performs in diverse idioms and scenarios, I find that this attitude appeals to me: material found in the moment of discovery in one context might prove fruitful for improvising in another. A steady influx of materials also provides a relief from old, by-rote

[23] Bailey, *Improvisation*, 107.
[24] Hamilton, *Lee Konitz*, 104.
[25] Bailey, *Improvisation*, 106.
[26] Hamilton, *Lee Konitz*, 110.
[27] Oehlers, "Developing a Chromatic-Intervallic Approach to Jazz Improvisation," 38.
[28] Bailey, *Improvisation*, 106.
[29] Bailey, 108.

phrases - but only so long as they are integrated into my vocabulary in a flexible manner, rather than simply regurgitated wholesale, without regard to the situation.

This distinction led me to conclude that it should be possible to build a more flexible and personal vocabulary than that which I had at my disposal all those years ago at Meow, giving me a stronger foundation to "say something" in any situation. This conclusion poses several key questions:

1. How should I choose which musical materials to add to this new vocabulary?
2. How should these materials be practiced in order to be used flexibly?
3. How could I test the efficacy of the materials and processes used to practice them, in achieving my aims of a more spontaneous improvisatory conception?

Striking Moments: Discovering and Developing New Musical Materials Within Improvisation

Konitz describes the choice facing improvisers in using known material, and in doing so illuminates a very important idea: "If I know a pattern on a [chord] progression that feels good at the time of discovery, every time I come to that place I could play that pattern, knowing it works, rather than making a fresh try. Up to a point this is the choice you make with a working vocabulary–how much you want to flex those ideas."[30]

I immediately recognized this as a powerful reaction I often experienced, but did not yet have a name for - a sort of "aha" moment that happens when an especially engaging motif or gesture is played or heard. I chose to call these discoveries *striking moments,* referring to Bob Snyder's description of the natural process of rehearsal: "When something particularly striking occurs and strongly engages our attention, it reverberates in our awareness and we automatically replay it to ourselves"[31]

The idea of using striking moments as a starting point for acquiring and developing a flexible vocabulary for spontaneous improvisations has many exciting implications. Firstly, it answers

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[30] Hamilton, *Lee Konitz*, 27.
[31] Bob Snyder, *Music and Memory: An Introduction* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001), 53.

the question of *which* materials to incorporate. The materials that I choose are those which are interesting to me personally: I am exercising my "capacity to differentiate preferentially between alternative musical options (to say: 'I like this better than that')", which Darla Crispin[32] argues is "the preeminent element contributed [to artistic research] by artistic practice." Secondly, it redirects my preparations towards more reactive and relational ends–for striking moments (as I show in chapters 3 and 4) frequently occur *between* improvisers. Thirdly, experimenting with striking moments might produce novel musical outcomes, creating new spontaneous statements out of the old, even while engaged in preparation, or the process of developing the material.

In his work on action research in electronic composition, John Coulter elaborates on Snyder's concept, saying "In 'replaying' materials, the composer temporarily halts the produce/listen cycle". The composer then reflects, "considering the various listening vantage points and the range of actions that may be applied to the materials–including complex production strategies that may temporarily demand the full attention of the composer."[33] The difference, for my purpose, is that when a striking moment is found there is no opportunity to pause: improvisation in performance does not allow for a lengthy withdrawal from the process for consideration and analysis. As the saxophonist Steve Lacy so adroitly put it, "in composition you have all the time you want to decide what to say in 15 seconds, in improvisation you have 15 seconds."[34]

However, improvisation offers its own opportunities for the development of ideas. Lewis points out that during an improvisation "[a] listener also improvises, posing alternative paths, experiencing immediacy as part of the listening experience"[35] It follows that an improviser (who is of course also a listener) is seeing ahead, to where a striking moment might lead. The challenge for the improviser is to expand the number and the nature of these alternate paths, offering opportunities to subvert or defy the expectations that an initial statement may suggest. This means, on the one hand, developing methodically "various possible vantage points", a "range of actions" and "complex strategies", and on the other, that these processes be developed

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[32] Darla Crispin, "Artistic Research and Music Scholarship: Musings and Models from a Continental European Perspective," in *Artistic Practice as Research in Music: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, ed. Mine Doğantan-Dack, 1st ed., SEMPRE Studies in the Psychology of Music (Farnham, Surrey, UK ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 61.
[33] John Coulter, "A Scholarly Approach to Composing Electroacoustic Music," My Sonic Art: Insights and Techniques for Composing Sound-Based Music, n.d., https://www.johncoulter.info/copy-of-creative-ideas.
[34] Bailey, *Improvisation*, 141.
[35] Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950," 109.

in and *through improvisation* - to be used reflexively, according to the opportunities and demands of the moment.

This process illustrates the concept of striking moments in two ways: striking *upon* and striking *at* moments of inspiration. Firstly, it situates those fresh and creative flashes within improvisation as both the start and end point: they are the genesis of new ideas to be introduced into my improvising vocabulary, and are the ultimate aim of the process, resulting in an unending cycle of inspiration. Secondly, by acting on these moments, experimenting with diverse possible contexts and pathways, I am learning to "strike" at such moments, seeking to engage with them and maximise the opportunities they suggest, thus privileging active listening, openness to possibility and a child-like sense of play. I am preparing myself to seek out and exploit the unexpected: in essence, preparing to be unprepared.

Artist Models

Choosing from striking moments answers *which* materials should be chosen, but the manner in which it should be practiced requires elaboration, if I am not to fall back into old practice habits. This demands a robust method that will force me to evaluate my practice, which in turn demands a framework against which my practice can be evaluated. I chose a number of artist models to investigate how they used their own vocabularies flexibly, in the pursuit of spontaneous expression.

My research became focussed around innovators of melody. It was these artists who led my ear, and I naturally gravitated toward alto saxophonists (my main instrument). Three prominent improvisers stood out: Charlie Parker, a leading light of the bebop movement; Lee Konitz, who began his career as the foremost student of the Tristano School before forging his own path;[36] and Ornette Coleman, a progenitor of the free jazz movement (or "New Thing") beginning in the 1960s. Lee Konitz's commentary has already featured prominently here, providing the backdrop to my research goals. Here I discuss the influence of the other two artists.

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[36]The Tristano School refers to the teachings of Lennie Tristano (1919-1978), a pianist and educator from Chicago, later New York City. His teaching style was notable for its emphasis on emotion and spontaneity combined with a rigorous, methodical practice routine. Eunmi Shim, *Lennie Tristano: His Life in Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 123–68.

Charlie Parker is perhaps the most influential jazz musician to have ever lived: certainly he is one of the most imitated,[37] and my own playing has drawn heavily from his music. The urgency and dynamism of his lines, the presence of his sound, the surprise and excitement of his ideas, and his sheer emotional vibrancy transcends the more than six decades separating his music from today.[38]

Simply playing like Charlie Parker, though a herculean task in itself, is an unsatisfying exercise. Imitation was so rampant even in his own day that Charles Mingus was known to fire musicians on stage for using Parker clichés,[39] and the trend has continued to the present. His influence is seen in the greater body of jazz improvisation method books, which tend to highlight the use of scale, arpeggio, chromatic voice leading and harmonic substitution that were among the tools that writers and theorists have highlighted in analyses of Parker's recordings.[40]

These tools lend themselves well to transcription, but many commentators argue that these resources are insufficient for communicating the interactive, conversational modes of improvisation[41] and overlook the very aspects of Parker's playing that made him so influential in the first place.

Steve Coleman[42] claims the phrasing and rhythmic feeling of musical material defines Parker's music more than the material itself: "by far the most dramatic feature of Bird's musical language is the rhythmic aspect, in particular his phrasing and timing."[43] This echoes comments from

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[37] Gary Giddins, *Celebrating Bird: The Triumph of Charlie Parker*, 1st ed. (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987), 15–16.
[38] Brian Priestley, *Chasin' the Bird: The Life and Legacy of Charlie Parker*, Rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.
[39] Giddins, *Celebrating Bird*, 16.
[40] Kenneth E. Prouty, "The History of Jazz Education: A Critical Reassessment," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 26, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 94, https://doi.org/10.1177/153660060502600202.
[41] Bailey, *Improvisation,* xi; Steve Coleman, "The Dozens: Steve Coleman on Charlie Parker (Edited by Ted Panken & Steve Coleman)," accessed June 28, 2021, http://m-base.com/the-dozens-steve-coleman-on-charlie-parker/; Monson, *Saying Something*, 74.
[42] Steve Coleman is a saxophonist and composer whose work in the MBase Collective in the 90s and innovations through his Symmetrical Movement Concept are important developments in the jazz improvisation and Black music lineage. Although a problematic figure due to allegations from a former student of abuse of power and sexual violence, he provides great insight into the properties of Parker's music that Western sources of study have frequently overlooked.
[43] Coleman, "The Dozens."

Parker's longtime collaborator, Dizzy Gillespie: "…I would say my major contribution was in the field of harmonics…Charlie Parker's was phrasing, which I think was the most important part of the music anyway."[44] However, Coleman points out that much analysis of Parker's music tends to avoid discussing rhythm and phrasing, as the language of Western music theory concerning these is "not very well developed, apart from descriptions of time signatures and other notation-related devices." He proposes that "we could extend our ability to discuss [Parker's musical] language by drawing from the perspective of the rhythmic language of the African Diaspora"

Gillespie characterised Parker's approach as "sanctified" rhythms, referring to the ecstatic practices of Sanctified church worship: "Charlie Parker played very syncopated and sanctified. There was nobody playing like that in our style."[45] Oore notes how syncopation in African American musics "may be understood as a compositing of different rhythmic layers, a polyrhythm".[46] Gillespie describes how the congregation at the church he attended "used to keep at least four different rhythms going…the number of rhythms would increase with foot stomping, hand clapping, and people catching the spirit and jumping up and down on the wooden floor, which also resounded like a drum".[47] Oore proposes that the polyrhythm suggests community through the implication of multiple individuals, and "this community is a fundamental element in sacred ritual and rites."[48]

Whilst Coleman views the development of a certain "sentence structure" and "syntax"–i.e. Parker's playing vocabulary–in a similar way to Konitz,[49] in that these materials are somewhat prepared in nature, this is not a negative judgement. Coleman sees them as informing the most interesting and "mysterious" (sanctified/spiritual) aspect of the improvisations. He claims that in the improvised interludes of the composition *Koko,* drummer Max Roach is "anticipating Parker's sentence structures and applying the appropriate punctuation." Coleman proposes that, as the music being created is moving so rapidly, and at least somewhat spontaneously, "the internalized, agreed upon syntactic musical formations may be dealt with by some other more automated process". He argues that effectively, this vocabulary, or the syntax, is secondary to

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[44] Priestley, *Chasin' the Bird*, 36.
[45] Dizzy Gillespie, *To Be, or Not--to Bop*, 1st University of Minnesota Press ed.. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 151.
[46] Dani Oore, "Snap, Twang, and Blue Note: A Cross-Cultural Examination of Features That Accompany Temporal Deviations in African-American Musics" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2017), 295.
[47] Gillespie, *To Be, or Not--to Bop*, 31.
[48] Oore, "Snap, Twang, and Blue Note," 283.
[49] Hamilton, *Lee Konitz*, 104–5.

the conversational process being entered into, or the "semantics", which are heavily centred around African musical traditions, Parker's sanctified rhythms: call-and-response, rhythmic groupings of 3 against 4 and vice-versa, and vocal exhortations as further commentaries.[50] Coleman's assertion is heavily supported by Monson's writing on musical affinities with conversation among African-Americans.[51]

It is clear then that Parker's language is rooted firmly in the Afrological. In particular, his rhythmic language–syncopated, sanctified, suggesting community through polyrhythm–informs the conversational modes and historical referents that underpin Afrological musical systems.

The main tension between Western musical analysis and this "insider's language" and "informal slang … intuited and culturally implied" which are described by Coleman, Monson and others, appears to be that the identity of the rhythm and phrasing is not–and cannot–be fixed on a score. It is inherently relational: its meaning is derived from how rhythm is negotiated between performers, between the improvisation and the song form, and between the current performance and the historical and cultural implications of the rhythmic language used.

The implication for my research is that I must attempt to develop my vocabulary through this lens. When identifying striking moments that occur within or in relation to the music of Charlie Parker, my process must prioritise the *rhythmic* aspects of his phrases and how these might be emulated and adapted, and the utility of vocabulary for a *dynamic, conversational* approach between myself and fellow improvisers, rather than how the arrangement of tones relate vertically to chord structure.

Ornette Coleman & the Holism of Harmolodics

The music of Ornette Coleman became something of a magnet to my investigations, as it combines philosophical perspectives and practical guidance on improvising that are conducive to my aims, whilst reaffirming the ideas I found in my previous research and in the musics of Parker and Konitz.

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[50] Coleman, "The Dozens."
[51] Monson, *Saying Something*, 77–93.

Ornette Coleman[52], like Konitz, began in a style that was clearly heavily influenced by the music of Charlie Parker–as in the boppish melodies of his early albums, *Something Else!!!* and *Tomorrow is The Question*[53]–and yet also radically departed from it.[54] Also like Konitz, he was highly motivated by melody. His initial revolutions in jazz and improvising centered around melody as the basis for improvising, rather than the architecture of a song: in his words "the pattern will be forgotten, and the tune itself will be the pattern"[55]

This had the two-fold effect of allowing the improviser more freedom in following a phrase intuitively, rather than fitting a phrase over set chord structures and meter, and simultaneously creating new roles for the rhythm section as equal participants in creating spontaneous melody. Without the need to adhere to a prearranged structure, they were free to respond to melodies as they liked, and offer up melodies of their own. Some of this development is in a sense simply an extension of the push-and-pull of the harmony that beboppers like Parker were engaged in, delaying or anticipating the harmony of a song structure: Ornette took it further by allowing a development of the melody to actually define the structure itself, as it unfolds in real time.

Ornette's philosophy for improvising is one that rejects the idea of "prepared playing" or "method", as he puts it in a revealing rehearsal tape with Ed Blackwell, David Inzenzon and Charlie Haden from 1968. Altoist Chris Pitsiokos unpacks this discussion between the musicians, in which Ornette criticises Blackwell for relying on previously worked-out formulae that "derives its meaning from context".[56]

Although Ornette pushed his musicians to free themselves from the constraints of "method", he did not completely abandon the vocabulary of rhythm and blues and jazz, the music he played in his formative years, either in the sense of the shape-based melodic content or of

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[52] Referred to hereafter as 'Ornette', in the convention of jazz musicians to refer to each other variously through first, last, or nicknames ad hoc, and to distinguish him from Steve Coleman, who is referred to by his last name in this thesis.
[53] In the style of bebop–agile melodies utilising chromaticism, often played at fast tempos over largely diatonic standard song forms derived from popular songs of the 1930s and 1940s.
[54] Baraka, *Black Music*, 74.
[55] Shirley Clarke, *Ornette: Made in America* (Milestone Films, 1985).
[56] Chris Pitsiokos, "Ornette Coleman and the Emancipation of the Individual," Sound American, accessed June 28, 2021,
https://www.soundamerican.org/issues/change/ornette-coleman-and-emancipation-individual.

African-American cultural signifying.[57] Pitsiokos points out, "Such a prohibition would represent exactly the kind of method that he abhorred."[58]

Ornette developed a highly original style of motivic development, often utilising "folksong-like characteristics, to wit, longer note values, antecedent-consequent phrasing, strong references to the "home key" or "home keys" but transposing them in novel ways, Stephen Rush argues, "with absolutely no respect for the traditional hierarchy of tonality."[59] The composer and theorist George Russell described this approach as "pantonal": supporting the "implication of a tonic" at any given moment, without dictating *which* particular tonic ought to be implied.[60] This allows fellow performers to interpret and even change the tonic in relation to their own note choice, in a kind of improvised counterpoint.[61] This suggests exciting implications for the development of striking moments.

Ornette's pantonality has a striking resemblance to the studied superimposition of changes by Tristano and his protégés such as Konitz[62], and even further to their free experiments in *Intuition* and *Digression*[63], and offers a useful point of departure for my own process–both in terms of developing melodic material, and also in addressing the perceived tensions between language-based approaches and developing a spontaneous method of adopting and generating new material.

As Ornette's approach developed and groups developed, they eventually became free to change meter, chord changes, or tempi at will.[64] From the 1970s, Ornette began describing it as a philosophical system called *harmolodics*[65] This philosophy goes far beyond the individual elements I have described so far, which have been detailed in more depth by Nathan Frink and Stephen Rush.[66] Although these elements suggest useful starting points for my own

[57] Nathan Frink, "Dancing in His Head: The Evolution of Ornette Coleman's Music and Compositional Philosophy" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2016), 91, http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/27686/.
[58] Pitsiokos, "Ornette Coleman."
[59] Stephen Rush, *Free Jazz, Harmolodics, and Ornette Coleman* (New York, NY ; Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 15.
[60] George Russel and Martin Williams, *The Jazz Review,* June 1960, 9, https://www.jazzstudiesonline.org/resource/jazz-review-vol-3-no-5-june-1960.
[61] Ethan Iverson, "Ornette 2: This Is Our Mystic," *DO THE M@TH* (blog), April 6, 2016, https://ethaniverson.com/rhythm-and-blues/this-is-our-mystic/.
[62] Shim, *Lennie Tristano*, 131–34.
[63] Lennie Tristano, *Crosscurrents*, 33⅓ rpm, "Intuition" and "Digression", Recorded May 16th 1949, Tracks 6 and 7 (Capitol M-11060, 1972).
[64] Frink, "Dancing in His Head."
[65] Ornette Coleman, *Skies Of America*, 33⅓ rpm (Columbia KC 31562, 1972).
[66] Frink, "Dancing in His Head," 88–121; Rush, *Free Jazz, Harmolodics, and Ornette Coleman*, 8.

investigations, Ornette's musical philosophy must be viewed in its entirety if it is to be properly understood and inform my own approach.

Altoist Chris Pitsiokos critiques Frink's taxonomical analysis of the elements of Ornette's music, pointing out that though they accurately describe the various techniques used, "to say that these are essential features is misleading, because none of them occur consistently throughout all of his output."[67] He argues that "The key reasons Coleman's music is misunderstood are firstly, the failure to take his words about his own music seriously, and secondly, the insupportable assumption that one can understand his music by looking at the music itself, especially on the page, transcribed." Once again, the argument is made that transcription and analysis fails to identify the *intentions* behind the music in question.

Pitsiokos elaborates on Ornette's own words (which often appear rather oblique) to identify several overall philosophical themes. Examining Ornette's description of harmolodics in a 1983 Downbeat article, he says:

> first...Coleman explains that the reason, or intention, for the use of a musical tone...is being released, not just the tone itself. This places an importance on intentions, and how the performer is positioned in relation to the content he is creating

This aligns closely with Lewis's concept of the Afrological, echoed in Monson and Coleman's writing: the improviser themself is central to the logic of the improvisation, not divorced from style, content, language or history.

> second...the emphasis of "one's own logic." Each member of the band—not just the bandleader—has a unique logic that should be expressed.

This takes the matter further, asserting that each improviser's contribution is equally valid and should be afforded equal weight in a performance. This goes beyond emancipation from style and form, and a rejection of prepared playing–Ornette's concept of "method"–and extends to broader concepts of social justice. I explore how this aligns with my own moral ideals and is supported by my methodology in Chapter 2.

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[67] Pitsiokos, "Ornette Coleman."

last…the music should consider all of the parameters, conventionally viewed as discrete, as one. Rhythm, harmony, melody, time, speed, and phrasing should all have an equal place in the music. So while each musician's identity, voice, and sound is unique, his or her approach to music must be holistic and singular.

This presents a final, and extremely complex, challenge to my attempt to prepare a philosophy for improvising that can inform my process for creating a flexible vocabulary. Thus far, my concept has largely involved uncoupling the essential elements of striking moments from traditional Western musical analysis, and redefining them in terms that are more appropriate to an improvising aesthetic and an Afrological approach. Broadly speaking, this has meant rejecting a "vertical" harmonic analysis of musical content, and instead assessing material through its rhythmic quality, unique phraseology, capacity to excite conversation, and generative potential. Ornette's utopian ideal challenges me to reconstruct these disparate elements into a whole.

Chapter 2: A Method of Practice

In chapter 1 I made the case for the use of vocabulary in spontaneous improvisation. The concept of striking moments motivates me to choose from materials found in improvisation itself, offering a pathway to a more reactive and conversational practice. However, while I found a strong focus on the flexible, spontaneous and conversational vocabularies in the music and philosophies of Lee Konitz, Charlie Parker and Ornette Coleman, the questions of how to practice material flexibly and test its efficacy in achieving my aims remained unanswered.

Emancipatory Action Research

I turned to action research to develop my practice towards these ends. A methodology developed in the social sciences, it is grounded in social justice ideals that prove analogous to those found throughout the philosophy of improvisation, and yet is concerned with how discrete, embodied actions (such as those in the practice room) can change and improve practice in the pursuit of these ideals. As Bridget Somekh points out, action research literature "has built up complex theories of action as the practical instantiation of moral ideals and human aspirations",[68] a description that could just as well apply to the practice of improvisation, albeit through a more abstract medium of expression.

The theoretical perspectives of emancipatory action research by Carr and Kemmis provides a strong framework on which to build an investigation into the practice of improvisation.[69] Their attempt to redefine professional practice sits very comfortably with my own philosophies and those I have outlined previously: improvisers must "reserve the right to make autonomous and independent judgements, free from non professional controls and constraints", whilst maintaining an "overriding commitment to the wellbeing of...clients", or in the case of an improviser, their fellow performer/s.

The "autonomous and independent judgements" described by Carr and Kemmis reflect the free

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[68] Bridget Somekh, *Action Research: A Methodology for Change and Development*, Doing Qualitative Research in Educational Settings (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), 13.
[69] Wilfred Carr, *Becoming Critical: Knowing through Action Research* (Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University, 1983), 33–34.

independence of the individual improviser, whilst the "non professional controls and constraints" might be viewed as the demands of audiences, venue operators, critics, theorists - in other words, the gatekeepers of an idiom - that may affect the improvisers' choices. A commitment to the wellbeing of fellow performers means allowing and encouraging the free independence afforded to oneself. This latter point aligns with Ornette Coleman's philosophy of Harmolodics, that enables "the empowerment of each human voice within the ensemble"[70] and dispenses with "method", those approaches that are conventional and preprogrammed by education and idiom.

Somekh outlines Elliot's conception of professional practice in a way that further qualifies the actions of an improviser as a professional:

> performers are able to cope with uncertainty and change, take decisions in situations
> that are unpredictable, exercise 'practical wisdom' to decide on the most appropriate
> course of action, and exercise 'situational understandings' to decide on which actions will
> be consistent with 'realising professional values in a situation'.[71]

Somekh notes that these situational understandings are "the basis for action which integrates practical aims with moral understanding." For the improviser, the practical aim in any performance *is to create a performance*–to "say something": and this act will almost immediately create tensions with the emancipatory philosophy behind improvisation. The improviser must attempt to create a performance, improvising as freely as they can (or desire to), whilst also reacting to the other performers, the audience, the physical space, and their own instruments and bodies: and each of these contexts change, unpredictably, from situation to situation.

Improvisation as an Activity System

In chapter 1, I outlined possible tensions inherent in the idea of using vocabulary for improvising: the use of a common language between performers creates the risk that such vocabulary can devolve to simply reiterating prepared statements. I then looked to Lewis'

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[70] Rush, *Free Jazz, Harmolodics, and Ornette Coleman*, 3.
[71] Somekh, *Action Research*, 13.

concept of the Afrological, and the music of Charlie Parker and Ornette Coleman, to show that when language is used to engage in higher levels of dialogue between performers, or to center the improviser within the logic of the improvisation, without dictating they abandon style or technique, language can serve to enhance, rather than inhibit, spontaneity, creativity and individuality in an improvisation. This approach allows memory, storytelling and the individual to be present within an improvisation without abandoning the ideal of spontaneity and newness.

Looking to action research and the work of Carr and Kemmis, Elliot, and Somekh, I identified further possible tensions: the "professional practice" of improvising, that is, to create a performance, puts individual desires into conflict with communal music making (in a group) and more broadly, with the expectations of the community which surrounds the improviser.

Engeström presents a model of activity that he suggests "may be very fruitful to move from the analysis of individual actions to the analysis of their broader activity context and back again".[72] This "complex model" offered inspiration for my own attempt to illustrate improvisation as an activity and develop a framework for a wide-lens analysis of my improvisatory practice.
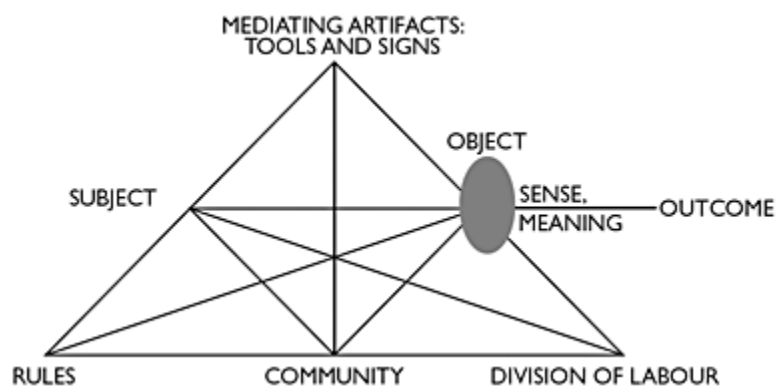
Figure 1: A complex model of an activity system (Engeström 1987)

However, simply ascribing the characteristics of improvisation to Engeström's model is unsatisfactory: it does not offer any clear distinctions, as improvisation (or improvisations) are both subject and object, artifact and outcome. Rules and division of labour may be present, or not. Further, these elements lack any moral quality: they do not guide the *intentions* behind the

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[72] Yrjö Engeström, "Activity Theory and Individual and Social Transformation," ed. Yrjö Engeström, Reijo Miettinen, and Raija-Leena Punamäki, *Perspectives on Activity Theory*, January 1, 1999, 30, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511812774.002.

activity one way or another. I instead sought to create a diagram of improvisation as an activity system which foregrounds intentions, philosophies and ideals.
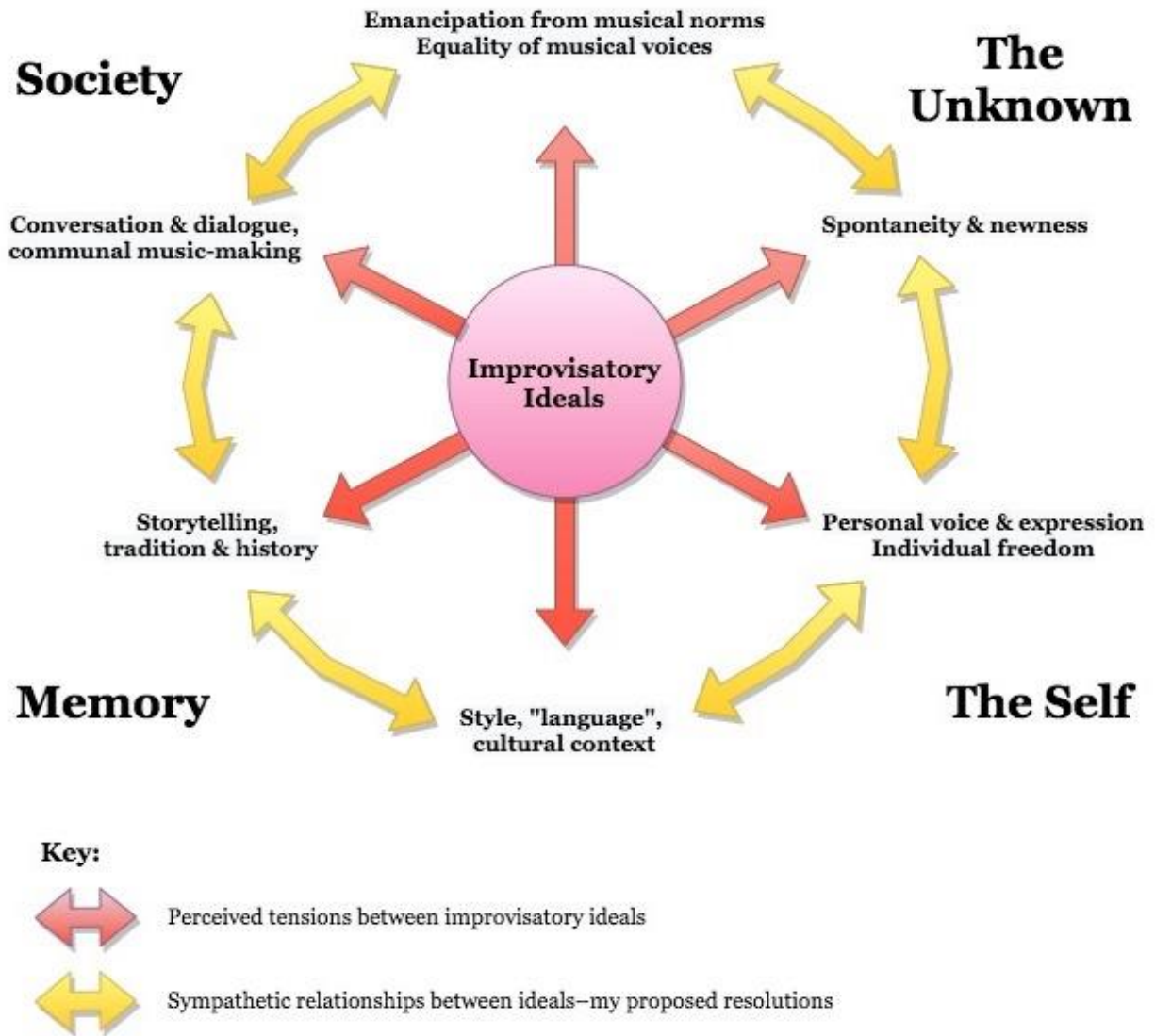
Figure 2: A diagram of improvisatory ideals in an activity system. (author's own)

In this diagram I show six improvisatory ideals in a circle. Each of these ideals exist within four broader contexts. Tensions radiate outward, like spokes, between ideals that (at least on the surface) appear contradictory: those that represent "the self", or the individual improviser, with those that represent "society", a community of improvisers, and social justice ideals; and those that represent "memory", history and context with those that represent "the unknown",

spontaneity and newness. These contexts are not strictly delineated, and ideals from each flex into neighbouring contexts. These sympathetic relationships are illustrated by the arrows, moving both ways around the circle, offering at a glance ideas for the improviser as to how to resolve the tensions.

Tensions

Most of these tensions have already been identified in chapter 1 and earlier in chapter 2, but for the sake of clarity I elaborate on them here. It is worth noting that these tensions may not exist in every improvisatory situation, nor do they represent all of the tensions that may occur. The tension between composition and improvisation, for example, is beyond the remit of this thesis.

Style vs Emancipation: Style, cultural context, and shared vocabulary refer to musical elements that are common to musicians through background, education, and/or knowledge of idiom. The diagram shows these in tension with the principles of emancipation from musical norms and the equality of each musical voice within the ensemble. Unspoken agreements between musicians, broadly defined by style, such as "we will play at a fixed tempo", "we will play this piece in the key of C", or "the rhythm section will keep steady time while the melody players take a solo" come into conflict with emancipatory ideals that seek to increase freedom within an improvisation by dispensing with conventional approaches. This tension is probably best illustrated by the work of Ornette Coleman, as described in chapter 1.

Individual freedom vs Communal music-making: Individual freedom and personal voice refers to the performer, their individual desires and individual expression within an improvisation. The diagram shows this in tension with conversational approaches within an improvisation, which refers to the activity of listening to and responding to fellow performers. There is compromise involved in performing a successful improvisation with other musicians: this tension is illustrated in Action Research through Elliot's concept of professional practice. It is also a topic of endless examination in the literature of improvisation (see Berliner, Bailey, Toop, Prevost etc).[73]

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[73] Bailey, *Improvisation*; Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 201; Edwin Prevost, *No Sound Is Innocent: Amm and the Practice of Self-Invention Meta-Musical Narratives Essays*, 1st edition (Matching Tye, Essex: Small Pr Distribution, 1997); David Toop, *Into the Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation and the Dream of Freedom: Before 1970* (New York, USA; London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

Storytelling vs Spontaneity: Storytelling, tradition and history refers to the narrative aspect of the language metaphor in improvising–for example the idea of a beginning, middle, and end[74]–and musical elements which describe a lineage to folk traditions, such as the concept of the epitritic ratio (3 over 4 or vice-versa) in jazz, which has its roots in West African drumming.[75] The diagram shows this in tension with the ideals of spontaneity and newness, which refers to the concept that an improvisation ought to be as original and unique as possible, if it to be deemed an improvisation at all. This tension is illustrated in Lewis' identification of Eurological belief systems and the accompanying disavowal of memory and history.[76]

Resolutions

As I have already demonstrated, these tensions can be challenging to an improviser. However, I offer that these supposedly contradictory ideals may have something in common, and may even contribute towards one another. As shown by the yellow arrows, each ideal relates closely to its neighbours, illustrating an agreement in principles:

Individual Expression & Style: an improvisers' individual expression may be influenced by style and cultural context. As Lewis puts it "An Afrological notion of an improviser's 'sound' may be seen as analogous to the Eurological concept of compositional 'style'"[77]

Style & Storytelling: conventions of style and idiom may be informed by narrative arc, history and tradition. The works of indigenous improvisers such as Joy Harjo and Ruby Solly,[78] who weave ancestry/whakapapa into their music are particularly illustrative of this relationship.

Storytelling and Conversation: storytelling, history and tradition may also inform communal music making. Coleman's example of Charlie Parker and Max Roach's "conversation in slang" is an example of this kind of relationship, as shown in chapter 1.

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[74] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 201.
[75] Coleman, "The Dozens."
[76] Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950."
[77] Lewis, 117.
[78] Joy Harjo, "I Pray for My Enemies," Joy Harjo, March 5, 2021, https://www.joyharjo.com/music/i-pray-for-my-enemies; Ruby Solly, "Pōneke, by Ruby Solly," Bandcamp, June 5, 2020, https://rubysolly.bandcamp.com.

Conversation and Emancipation: the principles of conversation–listening to and responding to fellow performers–are crucial anchor points for interaction when conventions of style, idiom, and role are dispensed with. David Toop's musings on his own experience of free improvisation highlight how such an approach can result in a successful performance against the odds:

> I wonder what happens if I listen closely, push in the direction of my listening, follow and lead at the same time…What does it mean, I ask myself, if I can walk on stage to play in a group, sit next to one member…who I have never met before, sit next to another member who I have known for forty years…and then we play with great intensity and closeness, shadowing each other without limitation, enabling each other…without censure?[79]

Emancipation and Spontaneity: the ideals of emancipatory improvisation may lend themselves to spontaneity and newness: the ability to play outside of conventional roles offers new possibilities within an improvisation. Ornette's music is a powerful example: as Pitsiokos claims, it is "…*individualism:* his philosophy of musical inclusion, stylistic fluidity, and the avoidance of conditioned music-making that relies on method or memory" which "often allowed his bands and compositions to stretch traditional harmony, rhythm, and style"[80]

Spontaneity and Individual Expression: one's individual expression may contribute to the uniqueness and originality of an improvisation. Pitsiokos offers that "To [Ornette] Coleman this was an important principle—it is possible to make a music where the expression of the individual is essential to the whole. One can be individual at the same time as being part of the same "unison""[81]

It follows that elements existing in tension to one another may be solved by following these relationships around the circle in either direction: for example, *storytelling* might generate *spontaneity*, through one's *personal voice,* influenced by *style and cultural context, and vocabulary* which in turn relates to *storytelling* - an illustration of Lewis' argument that

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[79] Toop, *Into the Maelstrom*, 3.
[80] Pitsiokos, "Ornette Coleman."
[81] Pitsiokos.

Afrological approaches, encouraging individualism and historical, cultural and social referents, also allow for uniqueness in improvisation.

Of course, improvisers may instead choose to weigh an improvisational approach in favour of one or more of these elements. Indeed, it is very likely one would do so from improvisation to improvisation on an individual basis, depending on context. For example, in my professional practice I have chosen in the past to favour stylistic approaches over emancipatory ones when performing for a conservative audience such as the Wellington Jazz Club, and the reverse when performing for more adventurous audiences such as those at the Pyramid Club.

My focus on resolving the tensions between approaches is motivated by my aim of finding and developing new material for my improvising vocabulary: to take a position one way or the other on any of these could exclude possibilities in this endeavor. The point of the diagram is not to strictly delineate these elements, to dictate the actions of other improvisers, or even to position myself within competing theoretical approaches to improvisation: simply it is a visual aid for resolving philosophical problems that are thrown up by my practice material, allowing me to see how they might apply to my goal of spontaneous improvisation in the broader schema: for it is unfortunate that the better I understand the philosophy of improvisation, the more difficulty I have in applying myself to practicing material. The tensions I have outlined frequently cause me to doubt the efficacy of what I am doing in the moment. Referring to Ornette's concept of method, Pisiokos asks "Where does individuality end and method begin?"–one conundrum among many that will be familiar to fellow improvisers. Referring to this framework will help me escape such paralysis by allowing me to see how the specific materials used apply to broader philosophical ideals - and perhaps even answer questions such as that posed by Pitsiokos.

Artistic Research through the Action Research Cycle

The diagram in figure 1 provides a model for analysis of my practice in the context of improvisation as a wider activity. It also offers further direction for how specific materials might help me develop a flexible vocabulary: the traditional tools of jazz pedagogy that I am most familiar with, such as elements of style, shared vocabulary, storytelling structures and the like, deal with *memory*–materials that are stored for later use. By finding and developing materials

that are conducive to, or help facilitate other elements, such as musical dialogue, individual expression, and spontaneity, I may come closer to my goal: to be prepared to be unprepared.

This requires both a change to my practice, and a framework for analysing my individual actions. As pointed out by Darla Crispin, artistic research is distinct from "the natural and intuitive enquiring of the artistic mind" in that it "encompasses something of the more systematic methods and explicitly articulated objectives of research".[82] In order to qualify this new practice as research, a process is needed that supports both personal creative exploration, and structured analysis and reflection. By drawing on artistic research principles and action research, I have developed a method that embodies this "dual quality" identified by Crispin.

Figure 3: the action research cycle (Interactive Design Foundation 2016)

The action research cycle illustrates a system for constantly revising (and hopefully improving) one's practice: "the continuous interplay between doing something and revising our thought about what ought to be done".[83] It provides a framework for the analysis of my individual

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[82] Crispin, "Artistic Research," 56.
[83] Susan Noffke, "Action Research and Democratic Schooling: Problematic and Potentials," ed. Susan Noffke and R.B Stevenson, *Educational Action Research – Becoming Practically Critical* 65, no. 4 (1995): 1.

actions, and a place from which I can move between analysis of my actions and analysis within the broader contexts outlined in figure 1, as suggested by Engeström.

Phase 1: Planning

The planning stage of the cycle has largely already taken place in my research thus far:

- **Identifying:** I have identified my desired outcome, that is, to develop a method for acquiring a flexible vocabulary that prepares me to be unprepared.
- **Informing:** this method is informed by my research thus far: how language is used in improvising; the philosophies and theoretical approaches demonstrated by my three artist models; the social justice ideals of action research; and the wide-angle lens of activity theory.
- **Organising:** my practice is organised using the appropriate methodologies, adopting artistic research and activity theory principles into action research methods.

It is this latter point which calls for greater detail. It is all very well to say that I need to change my practice, but how should that change take place, i.e. what are the *actions* required to make this change, and to consider for research? Is it enough that my research informs the manner in which I improvise in performance? Whilst I believe my performances are already so influenced, Mine Doğantan-Dack argues that "not all performers are *ipso facto* researchers". Doğantan-Dack does, however, see the practice room as a potential site for research:

> the preparatory processes that take place in practice sessions and rehearsals, can indeed be identified as research activities since the temporal structuring of these processes allows the performer to interrupt the unidirectional flow of the music, to stop and reflect on what she or he has just played, and to experiment with the music.[84]

This idea aligns closely with John Coulter's compositional process, described in chapter 1, which is itself based on action research.[85] The practice room offers the opportunity to pause, reflect, experiment with various strategies, and exercise artistic preferences between available options. As previously discussed, this process is not conducive to the *performance* of an improvisation, in which there is no opportunity for a lengthy pause: furthermore, as previously identified by

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[84] Mine Doğantan-Dack, "The Art of Research in Live Music Performance," *Music Performance Research* 5 (2012): 39, https://www.academia.edu/1489267/The_art_of_research_in_live_music_performance.
[85] Coulter, "A Scholarly Approach to Composing Electroacoustic Music."

Monson, Bailey, Coleman, Pitsiokos and many others, transcription and analysis of a recorded improvisation can easily fail to identify the real intentions of the performer. Instead, by investigating these experiments in the practice room, and testing how different materials may be used and developed flexibly in different contexts, I may engage in research, whilst simultaneously preparing myself to quickly hear and access these processes in the moment, during a performance, in anticipation of the unexpected.

With these ideas in mind, I chose to organise my practice routine as smaller action research cycles that can be completed many times during the course of the longer cycle, in order to test multiple materials and actions.
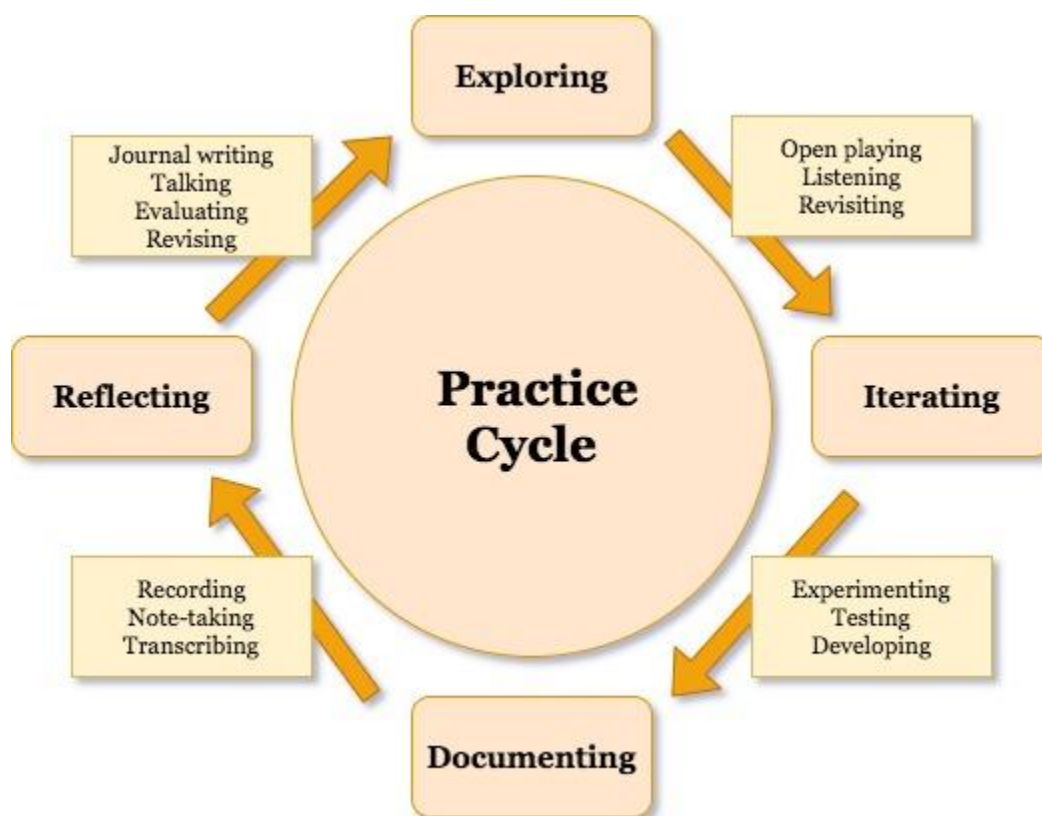
Figure 4: A smaller, practice routine-oriented action research cycle (author's own)

- **Exploring**: in this phase, I listen to recordings or improvise freely, either solo or with live or recorded accompaniment of any sort. The objective is to find striking moments: once something sufficiently interesting engages my attention, I identify the

characteristics of the material and move on to the next phase. If nothing sufficiently engaging emerges, I revisit older material.

- **Iterating**: in this phase, I manipulate these materials in the practice room. The objective is to improvise using as many possible transformations of the material in multiple contexts (though these contexts may be limited to a small number in order to not get too "bogged down" - repeating the experiments over every jazz standard in my repertoire, for example, would be tedious).
- **Documenting:** this phase takes place both during and after the practice session. I record and archive all of the improvisations, take notes on interesting developments, and transcribe especially striking moments for future revision.
- **Reflecting**: This phase takes place after the session. I reflect on how well the material adapted to the various experiments, and how useful each action or context was for developing the material. Did these help me realise my research goals? If another improviser is involved, what is their perspective? I refer to my diagram of improvising as an activity to determine how the experiments might fit within broader approaches and contexts, and revise my approach for future sessions if necessary.

In developing this routine, several more questions and hypotheses emerged:

1. By practicing only that material that strongly engages my interest– the striking moments–am I developing a more individual expression?
2. Does practicing the *development* of material, rather than the material itself, result in more spontaneous improvisation?
3. Further, does practicing in this way help engage in dialogue with other musicians and their contributions, as it relies less on pre-prepared statements?
4. Lastly, could practicing in this way in fact create new and spontaneous striking moments that could inform further experiments?

These ideas all refer to elements within the diagram of improvising activity I identified as lacking in my own playing. As a result, I organised the analysis of my actions against these criteria:

- **Authenticity**: the process helps me play in a way that feels authentic; my own personality is evident, as are the principles I have adopted of freedom and equality within the ensemble. I am *not* trying to copy or emulate.
- **Spontaneity:** the process helps me play in a way that feels spontaneous. I am *not* using prepared material, or if I am, it is out of a desire to use it *in the moment*, and not an automated response.
- **Responsiveness:** the process helps me play in a way that is responsive. I am able to quickly react to stimuli in the moment, especially the contributions of other improvisers.
- **Flexibility:** the process helps me develop material in a way that is flexible, across multiple contexts.
- **Possibility:** the process helps me play in a way that expands possibilities and generates fresh new material. I have more pathways for developing ideas, and I am creating new moments of discovery, which in turn become the basis of new material, creating a potentially limitless creative cycle.

Duos and Trios: The Practice Cycle in Group Improvisation

As well as testing the practice cycle solo, I also performed a number of these cycles in small groups with other saxophonists. This was necessary for evaluating the effectiveness of my method in enhancing conversational playing and applying emancipatory philosophy to group performance. It was also extremely beneficial, prompting me to develop materials and actions that I would not have otherwise chosen.

Research participants were drawn from among my professional networks in Auckland and Wellington. I wanted to test my practice method with expert improvisers on my instrument, with whom I was comfortable improvising. In this way, the method didn't require any change to account for significant technical or conceptual limitations or a lengthy period of time "getting to know" and gaining the trust of the other participants. As I show in chapters 3 and 4, a comprehensive mutual understanding is a must for successful group improvisation. Seven improvisers participated:

Roger Manins, saxophonist, lecturer at the University of Auckland and my mentor and supervisor. In our lessons, I tested many practice cycles with Roger. However, for ethics reasons,

Roger did not participate in any interviews.

Callum Passells, a multi-instrumentalist from Tāmaki-Makaurau/Auckland. Callum took part in two separate sessions

Louisa Williamson, a saxophonist and composer originally from Taupō, now based in Pōneke/Wellington. Louisa took part in two separate sessions.

Daniel Yeabsley, a multi-instrumentalist from Pōneke/Wellington. Daniel took part in one session.

Blair Lathan, a multi-instrumentalist originally from Porirua, based in Pōneke/Wellington. We rehearse and perform together in the saxophone/clarinet ensemble *Little Symphony* with Oscar Lavën, and our group session took place as a trio with Oscar.

Oscar Lavën, a multi-instrumentalist originally from Tauranga, based in Pōneke/Wellington. *Little Symphony* took part in one session.

Eilish Wilson, a saxophonist originally from Whakatū/Nelson, based in Pōneke/Wellington. Eilish took part in one session.

Group sessions were approximately two hours in duration. They were constructed along the same lines as a solo session, consisting of an open improvisation *(discovering),* with the aim of finding a striking moment; and a number of improvised iterations *(acting),* testing various actions in order to develop the material. I made audio recordings of the improvisations and the conversations that took place while negotiating the practice cycle together, which we could refer to during the session *(observing).* The group sessions closed with an informal interview (for duos) or focus group (for trio) of approximately 30 minutes duration, offering a chance for participants to give their perspectives *(reflecting).*

The participants were given autonomy over the practice cycle. I offered them opportunities to begin the exploration as they wished (through free improvisation, over a jazz standard, etc.), to choose a striking moment to develop, and to determine possible actions for development of the chosen material. In practice, this resulted in highly idiosyncratic sessions, and no two were alike.

All the participants performed their improvisations on saxophone (except for Blair Latham, who played bass clarinet). This was a useful control for the purposes of this initial cycle of action research, as I did not need to take into account differences in the technical demands and sonic possibilities and limitations of other instruments. Further developments involving other instrumentalists will be of great interest. How would the practice cycle work with a guitarist, a

drummer, or a singer?

Phase 2: Acting

The next stage of the process is to practice! In each smaller "practice cycle", the acting/iterating phase refers to testing a range of actions and contexts for the development of striking moments. In the broader action research cycle, I envision many of these smaller cycles occurring over weeks or months (perhaps even years?) as the "acting" phase.

- **Trialling:** the process of trialling various actions to manipulate striking moments is in a sense a form of eidetic reduction–how many ways can the material be played and still be fundamentally the same? The answer to this question isn't particularly important for my purposes: it is only a means to find variations on a theme, and to discover non-obvious pathways for developing an idea.
- **Collecting:** I make audio recordings of each improvisation to analyse at a later date. These recordings make up the raw data for my investigations..
- **Questioning:** In choosing which actions will yield the most satisfying results, a combination of intuitive artistic preference and analysis is required. In practice, these intertwine reflexively from cycle to cycle, and within cycles. When a particular action is unsatisfying, I freely move to another, or stay with the same action, but change the parameters governing it.

Although it is my aim that material be added in a holistic manner–i.e., considerations of tone & timbre, time-feel/groove,[86] pitch, rhythm etc are all integrated into meaning-making and/or emotional statements–I thought it wise to identify which elements lended themselves best to methodical, iterative experimentation.

My initial experiments made it clear that intervallic and rhythmic relationships are very well suited to this sort of experimentation: they are easily organised into categories of

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[86] Time, time-feel, and groove are terms that are commonly understood among musicians, but are slippery concepts to define: Monson and Berliner both provide detailed, but rather granular descriptions of how rhythm is negotiated between players. (Monson, *Saying Something,* 26-72. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz,* 146-159) Suffice to say, "good" time feeling or groove is characterised principally by generating a sense of movement or dance.

transformation, and literature from composition, music theory and improvisation all offer examples of various approaches.[87] Tone and timbre, feel and groove, on the other hand, did not at first seem well suited to this sort of application. I decided to apply these elements intuitively, and reflect later on how well they were integrated into improvisations using transformations of pitch and rhythm.

As I progressed through the cycles, however, it became clear that formal transformations could be inhibiting, stifling flow. Moreover, these were often insufficient to the task of negotiating an improvisation with another musician. Here I list some actions–identified here as "transformations"–which I used in initial cycles:

PITCH TRANSFORMATIONS:
There are a great many options for pitch transformation, including many formal composition tools from Western practice. I became interested in developing the means to use these tools in the moment. I hypothesised two outcomes:

1. Trying out many transformations through many iterations would yield novel possibilities for developing material
2. In doing so I would begin to understand and recognise the "sound" of certain transformations, and develop the ability to access them intuitively and freely in the moment.

Repetition: The most obvious development of material is simply to restate it. Monson argues that repetition creates "a participatory musical framework against which a highly idiosyncratic and innovative improvisation can take place".[88] However, despite its importance, repetition does not pose a creative or technical challenge, and I don't experiment much with it during my process–though it certainly ends up taking place.

Transposition: Konitz expresses a desire for playing material in different keys,[89] and this is reflected in his mentor Lennie Tristano's pedagogical approach.[90] Ornette Coleman, too,

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[87] Ludmila Ulehla, *Contemporary Harmony; Romanticism through the Twelve-Tone Row*. (New York: Free Press, 1966).
[88] Monson, *Saying Something*, 89.
[89]Hamilton, *Lee Konitz*, 105.
[90]Shim, *Lennie Tristano*, 129.

frequently made use of transposition in his improvisations.[91] Transposing material through 12 keys assists in both preparing material for use in different contexts, and generating new possibilities.

Retrograde: Reversing order of pitches in a set.

Inversion: Reversing the direction of pitches in a set.

Retrograde inversion: Reversing the order and direction of pitches in a set. This is a particularly difficult transformation to conceive and perform.

Augmentation & diminution: The width of the intervals in a pitch set are expanded or contracted: the direction the intervals move in stay the same. This can be used to create a bandwidth improvisation, especially in combination with bell ringing. (see below).

"Bell ringing": Changing the order of pitches in a set in a non-linear fashion, e.g. in a group of four pitches, changing the order from 1, 2, 3, 4, to 2, 1, 3, 4 etc. While this is a formal technique, it can be used with some flexibility to create interest within a limited set of pitches.

RHYTHMIC TRANSFORMATIONS: Other phrases may utilise unremarkable pitch sets, or in the case of longer phrases, pitch sets that are too complex to easily transform using the above techniques. However, they may yet be striking through the arrangement of rhythms or accents. They may suggest a polyrhythm or an unconventional time signature or groove through uneven note groupings, for example, or through accentuating alternating 'on' and 'off' beats, suggest a clave-like pattern.

Displacement: Material is moved across divisions of beats and measures. Particular accents or pitches within the phrase that were originally placed on downbeats may then change to upbeats, and vice versa. This transformation is best tested in contexts featuring a regular, steady pulse, and a regular meter is also preferable.

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[91] Rush, *Free Jazz, Harmolodics, and Ornette Coleman*, 15.

Augmentation & diminution: The rhythmic values of the material are expanded and contracted, essentially slowing down or speeding up the phrase. This may be used reflexively with displacement, as different rhythmic values may overlap beats and measures in novel ways.

MELODIC TRANSFORMATIONS: Certain actions are specific to both the rhythm and the pitch of a phrase. These melodic transformations tended to be somewhat less specific and were useful in later iterations when the material was more embodied and departure from it felt fresh:

Sequence: Similar to transposition, sequence occurs when the intervals of a phrase are altered to fit a new harmonic context: for example, a 1-2-3-5 pattern on a major chord could be sequenced through a change to minor by lowering the 3rd: or else such a pattern could be sequenced modally through a scale, utilising the same arrangements of pitch but changing the precise structure to fit. This was a transformation I learned at the NZSM and one I felt less inclined to try out–it did not feel fresh or spontaneous, or generate newness for me.

Fragmentation & extension: Fragmentation involves eliminating some of the pitches from the set, while extension involves adding further pitches to the set. As the pitch set becomes more familiar and some potential pathways become apparent, less formal developments such as these may be applied, or else may be used reflexively throughout improvisations that include one or more of the previous formal techniques, depending on how much preparation is required to functionally improvise with them.

Steve Barry illustrates how each of these compositional techniques "implies a somewhat different melodic direction for any line that would come afterwards"[92] supporting the idea that they may generate new, unexpected possibilities.

This list of initial actions indicates how my preparations so far left me poorly equipped to engage in an iterative process that encompasses a holistic musical concept: of the ten techniques of transformation, eight deal explicitly with pitch, only four with rhythm, and none at all address tone & timbre, intonation, articulation, dynamics, or the myriad possibilities surrounding ensemble playing or interplay with another improviser. As I show in chapter 4 however, new and fruitful actions were discovered throughout my repeated experiments.

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[92] Barry, "Strategies for Self-Generating Musical Language."

Phase 3: Observation

The latter stages, observation and reflection, are not completely separate from the acting stage. Improvisation demands decision making in the moment: I am listening to (observing) my own improvisation and evaluating it even as it unfolds. Between each improvisation, I can reflect on the previous iterations and make revisions to my approach for those following. Nevertheless, the framework is useful for revising my approach for the next session or practice cycle, as well as the overall project of developing my practice method.

- **Analysing:** I listen to the audio recording of each improvisation, and write down my responses to each in a reflective journal. Especially striking moments or fruitful actions/contexts are noted down. I also transcribe relevant portions of open conversations, interviews and focus groups with my research participants, and organise this data using a system of open coding, to sort later into categories and themes.
- **Reporting/Sharing:** this thesis provides the main framework for reporting on my research and sharing results. During the smaller practice cycles, these are not a strong focus, though I did discuss the results of my ongoing experiments informally with peers.

Listening back to these recordings immediately provides a new perspective on my playing, even before any written analysis takes place: revisiting practice sessions (as opposed to finished recordings or live recordings from concerts) is not something I had done previously. The volume of data collected in this phase is very large and very comprehensive, and proves an excellent aid to memory as I move through the smaller cycles.

Phase 4: Reflection

- **Evaluating:** guided by my study goals and research questions, I evaluate the effectiveness of the materials and actions used in each improvisation in my reflective journal.
- **Implementing:** in action research literature, this refers to the implementation of the plan, developed in the acting phase: here, I define it as the implementation of the philosophical underpinnings of my research. How did these actions demonstrate a

movement towards those ideals of community, self and the unknown as represented in figure 1 (representing Engeström's call to shift from analysis of individual actions to broader cultural activity and back again).

- **Revising:** conclusions from my reflections inform revisions to ensuing practice cycles: conclusions from my thesis will inform revisions to the overall method for my future practice.

I draw heavily from autoethnography methods in my approach to my reflective writing. Narrative autoethnographic writing, a kind of storytelling of the research experience from the perspective of the researcher, is a method that Doğantan-Dack claims can be used profitably in artistic research to "allow room for the situatedness and the subjectivity of the artist-researcher's claims to knowledge, and validate the assertion of his or her artistic value judgements".[93] Importantly, the method also makes room for the emotional aspects of the experience of musical performance to be conveyed. As well as putting the qualitative nature of the data at the forefront, Chang suggests this kind of writing is well suited for the purposes of improving my practice: "Confessional/self-critical/self evaluative writing tends to expose self–inequities, problems, or troubles–providing a vehicle through which self-narrators work to come to resolution or self-learning … personal journals and diaries may be friendly to this type of writing."[94] In this way autoethnographic writing lends itself well to the action research project. Chang also notes how such writing benefits from the idea of the self as an extension of community, which reminds me to reflect on my improvising as part of a broader cultural activity.

Outside Perspectives: Interviews and Focus groups

In order to expand the scope and depth of data drawn from my reflective writing, I also conducted interviews and focus groups with my research participants. I prepared several questions as themes or topics of enquiry to prompt feedback. These prompts were developed using concepts from critical incident technique, a methodology that "explores what helps or

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[93] Doğantan-Dack, "The Art of Research in Live Music Performance," 39.
[94] Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 1st ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 40.

hinders in a particular experience or activity" by collecting and analysing data from individuals' experience of an event.[95] In these sessions, striking moments served as critical incidents:

1. Can you recall a moment that particularly engaged your attention at the time, or that sounded particularly fresh or spontaneous?
2. Listen back - what about the moment you identified (or another such moment found whilst listening) made it particularly striking/effective?
3. Compare with other methods for improvisation or preparing for improvisation. How is this method (using the action research cycle, privileging development techniques over memorisation) different?
4. What are the implications of practicing using this method (using the action research cycle, privileging development techniques over memorisation)? Where does it lead?
5. How could the method (using the action research cycle, privileging development techniques over memorisation) be developed or refined?

However, conversations tended to be open and wide-ranging. As David Fa'avae notes in his discussion of talanoa as a method for research, this kind of dialogue can result in rich and detailed data.[96] Although I do not claim that I engaged in talanoa, I saw many parallels in the open and informal way I and my participants were able to freely share our stories, thoughts and feelings. I actively encouraged and engaged in these discussions, and as a result I was able to get a more honest appraisal of my method than a more formal and specific interview format might allow.

As I have shown, action research methods are well suited to developing a flexible vocabulary for improvisation. The emancipatory ideals underpinning action research are highly analogous to those of free and spontaneous improvisation and the project of equality within an ensemble as seen in the work of Ornette Coleman. The action research cycle–planning, acting, observing, reflecting–can be created in miniature to encompass a single session of experimentation in the practice room, and is also adaptable to the longer, ongoing project of improving one's improvising practice.

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[95] Lee D. Butterfield et al., "Using the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique in Counselling Psychology Research," *Canadian Journal of Counselling / Revue Canadienne de Counseling* 43, no. 4 (October 2009): 268.
[96] David Fa'avae, Alison Jones, and Linitā Manu'atu, "Talanoa'i 'A e Talanoa—Talking about Talanoa: Some Dilemmas of a Novice Researcher," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 138–50, https://doi.org/10.20507/AlterNative.2016.12.2.3.

Chapter 3: Feeling it Out

How do improvisers respond to the experience of practicing with these methods? How does this compare with more traditional methods? Over eight months of reflective journals and seven interviews and focus groups I amassed a large amount of data, and I used a system of open coding to sort this information: every time I found a point of interest, I gave it a label denoting what it broadly represented. I generated 100 codes this way, which I organised into various categories. Many of these topics dealt with the individual experience I and my research participants had of practicing using this method–physical, emotional, cultural and spiritual–and how it compared to our experience of other practice methods.

Place and Memory

Notions of place and memory are threaded throughout my observations. Frequently entries in my reflective journal begin with a note on the birdsong or insect calls that can be heard in the background. Often I'll also note the weather at the time of recording or the time of writing.

> A bit of birdsong at the start of this one! (Reflective journal 09/11/20)
>
> The sound of this room (Roger's studio in his home) is much nicer than anywhere else we've recorded! You can hear some lovely natural reverberations from the wood. (Reflective journal 21/02/21)
>
> Lots of cicadas in this session! Another grey day as I write this, so good to get a taste of nature while I sit in the lounge with the heat pump thrashing. (Reflective journal 28/02/21)
>
> I'm writing this in a cafe with the neighbourhood cat stretched out behind me having a nap in the sun, and I laugh out loud as soon as I hear Roger - he just LAUNCHES into the improvisation! It's so Rog, just joyful and intense. (Reflective journal 28/04/21)

Although on the face of it these seem peripheral to the main task of observing the content of the improvisations, on listening or reading back I find these to be deeply grounding moments. Kemmerer writes "If there is meaning in the past and in the imagined future, it is captured in the moment. When you have all the time in the world, you can spend it, not on going somewhere,

but on being where you are. So I stretch out, close my eyes, and listen to the rain".[97] Kemmerer urges us to engage in this kind of close listening, which connects each improvisation to place and the surrounding natural world (or its absence), helping me to create meaning in what I am doing.

Furthermore, these observations make my recollection of the improvisations especially vivid. The sounds of nature gently intruding on the recording, the time of day, the play of light in the room, all contribute to an almost visceral picture of the session that took place. Memory is a slippery, untrustworthy thing, and I can't be certain these reminisces reflect an accurate appraisal of the scene at the time, but they give me a clear backdrop against which I may assess the abstract materials and concepts being grappled with at the time.

These experiences represent, for me, a heightened awareness of myself and my surroundings. These are important, indeed essential in preparing myself for the fully immersive, meditative listening experience required to create an authentic and honest improvisation.

Memory, Personal Voice and Authenticity

Memory runs through the content as well at the setting of the improvisations. The same or similar materials wound through the sessions, cropping up again and again–sometimes in surprising ways:

> I've just noticed something as I notate this moment out - it's the first four notes of a standard called "Two Sleepy People", which I became obsessed with after hearing a friend singing it on Instagram. I LOVED that opening melody - it really resonated deeply with me. Maybe in part because I'd spent an afternoon playing with it with Roger just a week or so prior! (Reflective journal 11/02/21)

Some of these became favourite materials or devices, and as they lingered in my memory I would sometimes deliberately introduce them to new situations, even in scenarios where I was testing other materials:

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[97] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, First Paperback edition (Minneapolis, Minn: Milkweed Editions, 2015), 299.

I'm playing triplets, phrased at 8ths, and an embellishment pops out that would normally occur to me when using duple phrasing. Nice! Triplet line w/ embellishment again at 5:10! And again at 5:15! (Reflective journal 06/10/20)

the material fits into this context like a glove! And it creates new possibilities within it - a GREAT moment of using it in triplets at 2:14! (Reflective journal 12/02/21)

Figure 5: A striking moment. 4 over 3 phrasing with embellishment during an improvisation over "Body and Soul" (author's own)
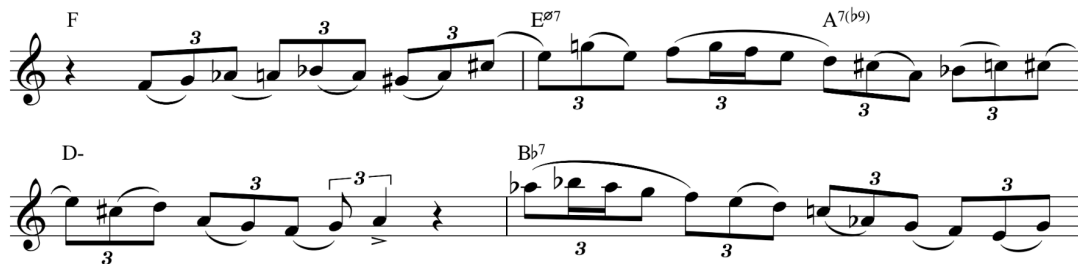
Figure 6: The same idea occurring on an improvisation over "It Could Happen to You" (author's own)

Figure 7: A synthesis of striking moments. 4 over 3 phrasing using triplets (as above), combined with a rearticulated note (author's own)

At other times I lamented *not* choosing to use these memorised ideas:

I think it's unfortunate I even up the note values for this - I want to hear more of the triplets phrased in 4 with the embellishments, like I struck on with the 2nd session with Roger! (Reflective journal 09/11/20)

If my goal is to play more spontaneously, why deliberately seek to return to an idea, even a comparatively fresh one? While this seems to contradict my stated aspiration to more spontaneous improvisation, I sense in this phenomenon something of the Afrological: my own

attempt to infuse my playing with personal history and memory. In our interviews, Callum Passells pointed out these recurring ideas aren't perhaps so unusual–that we tend to like only a handful of ideas enough to keep returning to them. Inevitably, these materials or devices will become associated with one's personal sound over time:

> (Callum) The next time you do it, you'll be thinking about the last time we did it and you can continue on, or I can continue on with an idea. Sometimes it will really stick and take forever…it sounds like sometimes you do come across something that you want to just do forever, you know what I mean?
>
> Talking about Evan Parker…there are maybe 12 to 15 clear shades of the Evan Parker solo set…there are places and certain devices and clear material that go into something even as astral as something like that. An Evan Parker performance sounds to me kind of like what we're doing, not just aesthetically but the thinking behind it, you can almost hear the gears turning…
>
> (Me) *Ideally…this is how you find the things that make* your *thing?…Because the thing that you like will keep happening, and then you'll keep playing it…it could be an infinite number of things, technically, but I think in practice it will be a very limited number of things, probably.*
>
> (Callum) I think that's true…We like only a few things [enough], for the most part…to do them over and over again. (Interview with Callum Passells 21/05/21)

Callum points out that recurring ideas (vocabulary) and freedom/spontaneity are not necessarily mutually exclusive, which undermines a fairly key motivation for this research–that I was sick of repeating myself. However, it is the expression and reiteration of an *original* or *personal* idea that changes this equation. I had become frustrated with materials I had learned by rote, perhaps mainly because they did not feel personal to me; whereas materials that I had discovered with this method, that I felt were both striking and original, that were *my own,* became embedded in my imagination and were recalled both intuitively and deliberately. In effect, I liked them: they were a result of my artistic preference. Callum offered that this is perhaps the most fundamental aspect of the method:

> deriving devices from a sound that you like, I think is the most useful way of thinking about this, and the way that you could probably codify it into something you could probably improvise for the rest of your life with! … The other part of it is you can forget about all of that, listen and find something you like and not have to be judging whatever that thing is, but rather just finding what works about it … getting an idea of why you like things, which I think lots of improvisers don't necessarily do! I like the implication that you can, if you ask yourself the right questions, and are methodical enough about it … answer the question of why you like something. (Interview with Callum Passels

26/04/21)

It seems reasonable that my personal vocabulary ought to be made up of materials *satisfying to me,* but this idea has enormous ramifications for my future practice. It represents a radical shift in my relationship to memory in improvising: in contrast to the frustrations I found in reiterating by-rote phrases, I am now relating to materials recalled from memory in ways that feel authentic to me personally.

Self and Culture

My initial investigations have helped me ground my practice in the Afrological, and my reflections so far regarding nature, physical place and memory support the notion that these ideas are coming through in my practice, helping me to "tell my own story", which Lewis identifies as an important aspect of Afrological improvisation.[98]

However, there is another story at play within the Afrological: "the history of sanctions, segregation, and slavery, imposed upon African Americans by the dominant white American culture," which Lewis argues "has undoubtedly influenced the evolution of [this] sociomusical belief system".[99] Though Lewis stresses his constructions are not delineated by ethnicity or race, nevertheless they are meant to "ensure that the reality of the ethnic or racial component of a historically emergent sociomusical group must be faced squarely and honestly."

I chapter 1 I proposed (perhaps naïvely) that a pākehā improviser in Aotearoa such as myself could face the realities of white oppression and black resistance, and implications of colonialism in my own society, through the honest enactment of an Afrologically-grounded musical practice. Lewis, riffing on Charlie Parker, wrote "what you … live comes out of your horn".[100] My focus on emancipatory musical ideals was motivated in part by the idea that the reverse might be true: that what comes out of your horn is how you live. However, the data I collected did not necessarily support this idea.

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[98]Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950," 117.
[99]Lewis, 93.
[100]Lewis, 119.

References to social and cultural location of the self were notably absent from my personal reflections, interviews and focus groups. Few participants chose to speak about the method in those terms–though it must be noted that few of my prompts addressed these ideas. Eilish was the only participant to volunteer something in this area: she proposed that her gender (she/her) might have had an effect on her appetite for risk-taking, with negative consequences for her approach to improvising.

> I have a tendency to not give myself enough freedom in this genre. I wonder how much of that is related to gender stuff as well … say there's a young boy building something and it breaks…they did a study on it I think, in a playground, say [they're] playing on something and they fall over or whatever…the response from members of the public is always like "oh you can do it again … OK it didn't go well that time but that doesn't mean you can't do it this time" whereas for young girls…the response was way more like "oh be careful, be careful" or "oh I'll help you with that" you know? … Maybe that has affected … my own thinking. (Interview with Eilish Wilson 28/05/21)

Practicing with this method gave Eilish a supportive environment and tools for encouraging greater risk taking:

> it's cool because even if I haven't fully understood what you're talking about, we're going to go somewhere interesting anyway. It feels like there's kind of no wrong answer … (Interview with Eilish Wilson 28/05/21)

I asked Louisa Williamson in our second interview whether she found this method to have a relation to social or cultural location. Her response was similar to Eilish's: these issues were certainly present in her thinking, and tied into ideas around creativity, but the sessions did not prompt anything in that direction for her.

> (Louisa) It's definitely something I've been thinking about a lot. What our musical identity is, and where all the different things that tie into it and where it all comes from and stuff. But I don't think practicing like this would … unless I was actively thinking about [it]. I dunno, I don't feel like it would make me think about that sort of stuff.
>
> (Me) *It's not prompting you in that direction, and it's not necessarily asking … or answering those questions?*

(Louisa) Yeah, I feel like practicing like this more … it just makes me think of questions of creativity…I know that everything I play is just sort of a culmination of or inspired by things I've heard before. But then is that true or is there another place where the things I play come from? I dunno, more like spiritual kind of stuff? … but I know that situating myself, where I sit with cultural identity and musical identity is probably more, you can sort of think about it in a more real, tangible sense.

(Me) *stuff that is very much reflected by literal, physical place and society?*

(Louisa) Yeah, I dunno … I have been thinking about it but I haven't got any answers! I've been thinking about it in the sense of my role as an artist and a composer, rather than an improviser. (Interview with Louisa Williamson 16/06/21)

Again, the tangibility and embodiment of place occurs here. However, they are not related to the method in Louisa's experience. While the research I have done in preparing this method of practice has helped me personally to situate myself socially and culturally as an improviser, without this background work the method does not guarantee that other participants will be able to draw similar conclusions for themselves.

Participants did, however, often place our activity within the broader context of improvised music in Aotearoa. Dan Yeabsley referred to the current culture around Pyramid Club in Wellington[101]; Blair Latham described his experience of playing free improvised music with Jeff Henderson and others during the early 2000s; and Jeff Henderson also featured prominently in my second interview with Callum.[102] It is clear from my interviews that participants regard my research as having much in common with the experimental and free improvised approaches of those musicians and scenes.

Similarly, many participants also referred to the jazz performance degrees at the NZSM and similar institutions on their improvising or the culture of improvising in Aotearoa–though often obliquely, and not by name. Despite being a common area of experience among local improvisers[103] participants were frequently critical of the pedagogy of such programs. Eilish, for example, found the experience of demonstrating prescribed elements of jazz improvisation from

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[101]An artist-run organisation and venue dedicated to experimental practice, located on Taranaki Street in Pōneke, Wellington. Pyramid Club provides a physical and conceptual space for artists whose work falls outside the scope of commercial performance venues. https://www.pyramidclub.org.nz/

[102] A well-known improviser, composer and multi instrumentalist, Jeff Henderson operated and managed experimental music venues *The Space* and *Happy* in Pōneke/Wellington over 10 years in the 1990s and early 2000s. https://iiiirecords.bandcamp.com/

[103] Tipping, "Outside In," 99.

the curriculum still lingers in her playing, restricting her from playing more freely:

> (Eilish) I guess I'm still washing off the academic music time that I had, which was really good for me as a player, but I get a bit in a box of, like "Oh I've got to learn this ii-V pattern and *then* I've got to apply it" (Interview with Eilish Wilson 28/05/21)

Eilish refers to a culture of testing within the university, wherein grades are assigned to a significant extent according to how well the improviser is able to apply a codified set of materials to standard repertoire, rather than the demonstration of an individual voice[104] or attempts at spontaneity. This approach has been a focus of criticism in scholarly discourse for "removing jazz from its cultural roots and thus divesting it of its meaning."[105] Blair Latham and Oscar Lavën had similar critiques of mainstream jazz pedagogy:

> (Blair) It does feel like a lot of people I hear play who are younger, around town who have come out of the school … it sounds very much like some sort of oblique exercise …
>
> (Oscar) The thing about people coming out of academic jazz courses … the thing that they're aping is not actually a real musical style. It's not bebop, for sure! … It doesn't sound like Bird or Dizzy or Monk to me at all, it's got none of the charisma, none of the dynamism of it, you know?
>
> (Blair) I think it's that they've whittled down stuff, but they've taken the essence out of it … (Focus group with *Little Symphony* 20/05/21)

The "charisma", "dynamism" and "essence" Oscar mentions in reference to these musicians (all of whom are exemplars of the bebop movement) are features of an Afrological approach. Lewis notes that bebop was "transgressive" in 1940s Apartheid US, challenging Western notions of structure, form and expression. Thus, these conversations, which appear to be aimed solely at the limitations of institutional music education, are in fact circling around the complex question of the cultural location of improvisers–especially jazz improvisers–in Aotearoa.

My method is open to similar criticisms: Oscar pointed out that by focussing on the minutiae of a musical idea (for example, a pitch set) during iterations, devoid of a shared understanding or cultural starting point, our improvisations risked sounding like the oblique exercises that Blair

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[104] Tipping, 101–2.
[105] Tipping, 96.

described. Oscar offered that shared listening to more open or free form improvised music could provide a better platform for mutual understanding:

> I'd be keen to listen intently to one or two albums that have free aspects...and once we're all on the same aesthetic, cultural page, I think it's going to really help us make little bits up, because it's coming from a sort of place, rather than coming from a void of notes or pitches. (Focus group with *Little Symphony* 20/05/21)

Oscar's insistence in our group knowing the work that has gone before us in the free improvised space recalls something of the spirit of the whakatauki "Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua", reminding me that my method should be informed by the "ancestors" of this music, especially when interacting with Afrological forms. Therefore, while my research was informed by perspectives from free improvising musicians, especially Ornette Coleman and Derek Bailey, future research in this area could delve much deeper into the philosophies and processes of the progenitors of free improvisation, especially the African-American creators of the "New Thing" in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States.

Emotional Responses: Satisfaction, Frustration, Judgement.

Emotional responses were very much present in the interviews and personal reflections. For example, I frequently reported feeling "satisfied" or finding certain materials or techniques "satisfying" to play when I felt the process was working:

> I think when it's really happening I'm embodying the ideas, the sound or the vibe, more than the specific phrase in these improvisations, and that's very satisfying." (Reflective journal 25/03/21)

> It's satisfying to hear the holistic aspects of the music coming through in these sessions. (Reflective journal 28/04/21)

Conversely, when I felt the musical results were poor, I reported feeling dissatisfied:

> ...there's plenty of rhythmic interest, but too bitsy and repetitive in the melodies to be

truly satisfying. (Reflective journal 28/02/21)

…it's a bit tricky to pull off, and I don't always come out of it satisfyingly. (Reflective journal 09/03/21)

Research participants also reported similar feelings of satisfaction when they felt things were working musically. Describing an improvisation that generated a number of unexpected cadences, Louisa said "I found it satisfying, it still sounded right and natural." Again, the reverse was true when she felt the process "got in the way" of making music: "…it felt like the first improvisation we did was really fun and free, and the more we talked about it in between, the more I started thinking about it, and the less satisfied I felt."

Conscious thought during improvising tended to disturb other research participants as well, interrupting their "flow". Participants were especially affected by feelings of judgement–that what they were improvising was somehow "wrong": as Daniel reflected, "It's funny…we're playing away and I'm thinking "am I doing this right, am I doing the right thing?…am I playing the right notes?" Callum noted similar feelings during our first session: in one particular improvisation, consonant intervals between us jumped out at him as wrong–though there was no stipulation that we *weren't* to play consonant intervals, and Callum reported being able to push this thought to one side. Similarly, Louisa found herself questioning certain choices, and then challenging her own feelings of judgement: "Sometimes I thought it should be more of a question-and-answer. But also I was thinking "who said it should always be question-and-answer?"

The goal-oriented nature of the process may have played into this phenomenon. Although during the sessions I was careful to not introduce any expectations of greater spontaneity or originality, clearly the participants intuited that this was the purpose of the exercise, and as such avoided or were critical of "safe" moments or choices. Daniel plainly stated it was his intention to play idiosyncratically: "I know for me, I was trying to do weird rhythms, I didn't want to go into the 4/4 sort of swing thing, 'cause we don't need to." Callum took a similar attitude: "You start [our improvisation] with the chromatic scale, and the second you go "I'm not going to play the chromatic scale" you go "actually what *can* I play?" I'm not going to just play a D major scale, fuck that!" This implies that in practicing with this method, participants were setting a higher bar for spontaneity and freshness than they might in other scenarios.

Judgement played a large role in my own emotional responses. These were frequently borne out of problems with not-yet-embodied materials or techniques: I often described such moments as "frustrating": "I'm struggling to play with a good time-feeling. I sound frustrated (I even curse in the first minute or so)." (Reflective journal 06/10/20)

However, it is too simplistic to acknowledge satisfying moments or sessions as successful, and unsatisfying or frustrating ones as unsuccessful, as frustrating periods during improvisations were frequently catalysts for especially spontaneous statements:

> This particular whole-steps-descending in half steps thing is totally pervasive in my playing and I'm sick of doing it without thinking about it...that frustration translates into ever-faster subdivisions as I try to obscure it. A moment of madness - it's hectic playing, beyond my usual technique!" (06/10/20)
>
> ● Link to recording "It Could Happen to You" duo with Roger Manins: https://youtu.be/j3breOkGTrs?t=461

This phenomenon occurs several times, and suggests that the limitations imposed by the process can generate fresh materials by forcing an improviser to find new and original interpretations within them, rather than abandoning a particular idea, as they would be free to do in a less structured or methodical improvisation.

> There's two cool moments in this, both I think born of frustration - a fast run at 1:19 where I whip off a combination of the new stuff and some older, under the fingers (embodied!) thing. It's really freshened the old stuff up! Interesting! (Reflective journal 12/11/20)
>
> I think we both get the hang of it and simultaneously feel frustrated, but for whatever reason it starts to develop from there, we get a good hookup and conversation happening through to the end. Nice! (Reflective journal 11/02/21)

In these situations, as saxophonist Oehlers notes "embodied information and not-yet-embodied (consciously applied material) may reflexively intertwine at times, where rapid processing and 'inspired' thought mix."[106] While this has proved to be effective at times, Callum was wary about using the method in this way too often:

> There's definitely something to be said for pushing yourself into trying to do something

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[106] Oehlers, "Developing a Chromatic-Intervallic Approach to Jazz Improvisation," 121.

that you can't do physically...but that's not, I think, what this [method] is for. This is for figuring out what you *can* do, and inside of that, what you *like* to do (laughs) and then finding a way to codify it so that you can call upon it easily. (Interview with Callum Passells 21/05/21)

The implication is that the frustrations outlined here are not sustainable long term. Instead, what is already (or close to becoming) physically embodied on the instrument can be put to work using this method for finding and storing personal materials and devices for an improvising language.

Stepping into the Void:

In contrast to these scenarios, where the parameters of the task inhibited myself or the other participants' ability to freely improvise, sometimes the parameters were set *too loosely* for the participants' comfort. In these cases, they professed feelings of uncertainty or fear, of "stepping into the void".

(Oscar) there's an aesthetic cloudiness to it that we're all trying to feel it all out...I don't know if we quite felt our way through that cloud, or I didn't (laughs).

(Blair) ...it's harder here because you're kind of stepping into the void. You have to work out instantly what you and you are playing. Do you do that by osmosis...or do you technically work it out in your mind? (Focus group with *Little Symphony* 20/05/21)

(Daniel) It's always a bit scary coming into these things...because I haven't done much of this playing, I don't want to say free jazz, but....Open playing in a way....It's interesting though because I've been playing music as well for a wee while and I'm still like "oh shit, we could play anything!" (Interview with Daniel Yeabsley 14/05/21)

These anxieties are far from ideal, and there are obviously areas that could be improved in the method to deal with such uncertainties. For example, it's possible that allowing or even encouraging participants to lead the initial explorations would be an improvement, giving them more confidence. However, Daniel noted such an approach may have resulted in more habitual playing: "if we'd been like 'OK we're going to play *blah blah blah',* I would've just gone to my same old shit..."

As noted earlier, Oscar professed a lack of knowledge of free improvised music, and this led to some discomfort over the lack of structure and purpose he perceived in the session. "I haven't checked out enough free music to really properly do it, you know?...I find it tough to find meaning in what I can contribute to what we're doing now". Oscar's desire to reach a shared "aesthetic, cultural page" through listening to more open or free improvised music together reflects a desire for better mutual understanding.

The cyclical nature of the method–of repeated iterations, of revisions based on analysis and reflection–appears to effectively answer these problems. Even by the end of our first session, Daniel was already so much more comfortable that he felt he was able to take the material and actions we'd worked on into a new context, with other musicians who were unfamiliar with the concept:

> We've done a bunch of it now, it feels like we've practiced this, whatever this thing is, I would definitely feel fine just totally playing over a whatever tune, because even if the other people are like "what the hell is Daniel doing?" ... I know I'm confident of this idea now, this concept. (Interview with Daniel Yeabsley 14/05/21)

Louisa, too, was much more confident by our second session:

> (Me) *Did it feel less ... like swimming around, or void like? More like a clear motivation?*
>
> (Louisa) Yeah maybe because the initial idea was so strong ... [I] feel quite comfortable, you know we're sort of on the same path, the same wavelength of what direction we wanted it to take, maybe? (Interview with Louisa Williamson 16/06/21)

Similarly, Louisa was of the opinion that she could easily bring these concepts to another group: "It feels like it would be pretty easy to transfer. It's just one little conversation, you know?"

These reflections show that emotional responses are not separated from the method, they are embedded into it. Critical thinking and analysis (which are so important to the research) can quickly lead to judgement, and then to frustration and dissatisfaction. When this leads to new and novel outcomes, this is clearly a good thing; when it inhibits the all-important child-like sense of play, or flow, it clearly is not. Conversely, when improvisers felt there was not enough structure or shared purpose built into the improvisations, they felt uncertain, even fearful. In the fluid state of improvisation, such things are not easily managed: but navigating these difficulties,

as well as the problems of technique which I discuss here, eventually led me to some conclusions on how to better balance these forces, to the benefit of the improvisations and the experiences of the improvisers themselves.

Trips and Stumbles

Many of my reflections on my practice method deal with the dual mental and physical aspect of grappling with the materials and the various actions (techniques, processes, devices or transformations) applied to them on my instrument. While I have adopted Ornette's central tenet of harmolodics that "music should consider all the parameters",[107] I often found that one or more of these elements that make up a holistic musical concept were missing from my improvisations:

> I am definitely having trouble fitting the pitch cell to the harmony of this framework, and am using more of the 'memory' stuff I've worked out previously for this form…if working out ideas like this in improvisation results in this sort of 'fuzzy' playing, I won't achieve a 'holistic' sound (combining all the elements of musicality, tone, time & feeling, full emotional engagements etc) whilst doing it - there may always be these moments of uncertainty, stumblings. (Reflective journal 05/10/20)
>
> The lumpy 8th notes are even more of a problem in this one - it's the first thing I notice! Yuck. It gets smoother as it goes on. (Reflective journal 12/11/20)
>
> Some incredible groove, and also some very clumsy stumbles in this one! (Reflective journal 28/04/21)
>
> …*still* trying to get the retrograde in, which *still* feels clunky here. (Reflective journal 28/02/21)

Such "trips and stumbles", as I identify them, represent a disconnect between "theoretical" and "embodied" knowledge. Essentially, when conscious thought was applied to improvising in an effort to introduce a new idea or concept, this would interfere with the primarily subconscious (that is, learned or *embodied*) activity of playing with a full and feeling tone, strong, accurate time, and solid groove.

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[107] Pitsiokos, "Ornette Coleman."

Getting it Under the Fingers

My research presupposes that improvising using action research methods can assist the improviser in adding to their vocabulary. However, in our first interview, Louisa challenged the notion that improvisation in the practice room was necessary for embodying new material. For her, working separately on mechanical practice and mental practice–exercising the imagination–produces good results:

> I think in my playing there's been a lot of benefit in … disassociating playing, like improvising, with what you do in the practice room, somehow, in your head. You can disconnect them. What I usually do in the practice room is usually very mechanical, and just boring stuff. But then … there's listening to music and other ways of practice that can get you there [being creative], rather than actually practicing improvising. I feel like I do a lot of practicing in my head, coming up with melodies or whatever…I think for me, I feel like my approach is just to master the instrument, but also doing a lot of work, listening to stuff … a lot of different music, and doing other things to nourish the creativity. To try and apply it [the mechanics] to that. (Interview with Louisa Williamson 10/05/21)

In my focus group, Oscar offered a similar opinion:

> Oscar: I feel like I'm currently practicing in a very prescribed way…I basically just transcribe [and play] technical exercises.
>
> (Me) *It doesn't prevent you at all from being creative?*
>
> Oscar: No. I'm currently on the whole, practice of technique is practice of creativity. (Focus group with *Little Symphony* 20/05/21)

Louisa prefers improvisation to happen without the conscious thought and the application of concepts or ideas that my method requires:

> I like [the idea of] the conscious brain, the subconscious brain, and then the superconscious brain. And when you're in the practice room, you're basically just exercising the conscious brain, doing mechanical stuff, and then it seeps into your subconscious. And then improvising and all the crazy weird shit, that happens in the superconscious brain. That resonates with me. (Interview with Louisa Williamson

10/05/21)

These views question the effectiveness of the method as a tool for incorporating vocabulary, but were not shared by all the participants. It's possible that the need for a more or less mechanical practice routine depends on the needs and abilities of the improviser at the time. Both Louisa and Oscar regarded the idea of iterating on ideas in improvisation as an advanced concept, and not for students or beginner improvisers. Both also spoke of the need for creative and historical/cultural homework away from the instrument. Conversely, Daniel was keen to try it with his students straightaway:

> (Louisa) I think it's probably an advanced concept. If I had students I wouldn't push [this] idea on them too much. I would push the mechanical stuff more, but still have it as a concept to think about. (Interview with Louisa Williamson 10/05/21)
>
> (Oscar) I think practicing like this is for people who are our level at least....[students] should be just learning the shit, in my mind anyway.
>
> *(Me) You're talking about having a vocabulary and a style and having a technical facility on your instrument?*
>
> (Oscar) ...and educating yourself [on]...what style of this folk music that we're playing [is] and who played it before you...There's a lot of reinventing the wheel starting from what the notes are called and what the rhythms are...the notes don't matter. It needs to be more holistic, I think. (Focus group with *Little Symphony* 20/05/21)
>
> (Daniel) I want to do this with my students now, because I've been doing improvisation...with the high school kids...I think it's a really good way of actually getting really close to what happens when you improvise. (Interview with Daniel Yeabsley 14/05/21)

Daniel's attitude may reflect a certain sense of fatigue that arrives after many years of practicing mechanically. Regardless of the utility of a mechanical approach, which he acknowledged, it only produces results so long as the improviser is motivated to practice in such a way. Certainly, Daniel's sentiments in this regard echoed my own:

> (Daniel) This way you get to find [personal material] … it's not like "here's a book about pentatonics, and this is how you practice them..."
>
> *(Me) I've done a lot [of mechanical practice] and I don't feel like doing it anymore.*
>
> (Daniel) Yeah same! … and then you get to a point...

(Me) Maybe it's like treading over worn ground...

(Daniel) It definitely would benefit me! (Interview with Daniel Yeabsley 14/05/21)

Hearing It

In our first interview, Callum Passells suggests that this method of practice contrasts with a more "mechanical" approach, wherein the aim is to be able "recall" the same or similar materials in improvisation:

> [There's also] getting mechanically fit, for example ... playing a shape through a scale or through a chord progression or something like that, so that you can recall something like it ... more about having it under your fingers I guess. (Interview with Callum Passells 26/04/21)

He acknowledged that although my method does not prepare the improviser in this manner, it may yet train the "ear" (or the *imagination* of the improviser) to recall the same or similar ideas, similar to Oehler's notion of "aurally embodied" knowledge:

> this is cool, this is almost like the "ear" version of that, right? There's nothing necessarily under your fingers that you're getting, but you are able to move a concept through a context...you're able to latch on and have this little factory or this method of doing a thing. (Interview with Callum Passells 26/04/21)

Callum's "factory" of ideas relates closely to my hypothesis of generating possibility: instead of developing the facility to perform a discrete motif, the method prepares the improviser to hear certain possibilities, as in Coulter's "various listening vantage points and the range of actions that may be applied to the materials" and be able to choose from among them and apply them to the musical context at hand. This gives me the confidence to enter each performance "with a clean slate" as Konitz puts it.[108] Eilish agreed, and also offered such preparation could help train not only the *technical* aspect of "hearing" an idea and applying it to one's instrument, but also the inner, *emotional* aspect as well, with implications for the development of one's personal voice:

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[108] Hamilton, *Lee Konitz*, 104.

(Eilish) Alexa Tarantino….she's able to be very free…and she said she'd do this on gigs, find something from the melody…as a starting point, she'd always find something before she was about to solo, whether it's *something that someone's just played*,[109] or the melody….and then take that and apply it to an entire chorus…That's kind of similar to this, in that you can apply [these concepts] on a performance.

(Me) *Do you think practicing like this would help you do that?*

(Eilish) Yeah I think so…all practice is you kind of doing everything in slow-motion, eh, for a gig?…I'm going to play my long tones real slow so that when I'm playing [in performance]…it's nice and in-tune and there's good tone…so maybe that's the same as this?

(Me) *This is the slow-mo version of finding something that you like, that you've* just *heard and then developing it…in an improvisation?*

(Eilish) Yeah, and you're training your brain to look out for those things…that maybe give you an emotional response, so you can get to be the kind of musician you want to be … (Interview with Eilish Wilson 28/05/21)

"Hearing it" as it relates to my method refers to two distinct but closely related concepts: the first, the ability to recognise something heard or recalled in the moment and apply it on one's instrument; and the second, the ability to hear, or imagine, various future possibilities for such material, that known concepts or ideas ("a range of actions") might imply. As Callum observed, it is a form of ear training–but not necessarily in the sense of recognising, recalling, or emulating a melodic phrase (for example) verbatim. Instead, what is "heard" is the general idea–an angular shape, pointillistic jabs, a glib flourish– and the implications of that idea. The difference is subtle, but integral to the proper realisation of my goals. Whereas more mechanical practice helps the improviser *physically* embody materials, this method may help the improviser *aurally* embody the material, giving them the tools to apply the idea in contexts that differ from those in which the material was discovered or developed, whilst simultaneously reducing the risk of repeating oneself.

This might seem contrary to spontaneous ideals, relying as it does to an extent on "known" models or concepts, and formulating a "method" (in Ornette's sense of a limiting, rules-based system): however, I argue that this approach accounts for what Lewis calls the "temporally multilaminar aspect" of improvisation. Instead of reducing experienced immediacy to "an infinitely small now", I am able to reference both the past and future in my playing, which Bailey

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[109] Emphasis mine

calls the "continuity of involvement" of a constantly evolving, practising approach to improvisation.[110]

Keeping You Honest

In our second interview, Callum also posed that my practice method could in fact have some utility in improving mechanical technique on the instrument, in that that the search for non-obvious possibilities might uncover flaws in technique that I was not previously aware of:

> (Callum)...in fact, maybe this is a great way to come across holes in your mechanical practice? That you go "ooh, well I played that [some mistake or stumble] so I'm liable to play that again, I may as well learn how to get it right!
>
> (Me) *So, exposing flaws? It actually has some utility for mechanical practice, but maybe it's something to take care of away from the method.*
>
> (Callum) Yeah you maybe note it down and say "that's something I need to practice later". (Interview with Callum Passells 21/05/21)

Nevertheless, we both acknowledged that the time and approach for correcting insufficient technique was better served outside of this particular method. In this sense, we find some agreement with musicians such as Louisa and Oscar, who prefer to privilege technique in the practice room in order to fulfil creative outcomes in performance.

Flow vs Deliberate Practice

The tension that is illustrated by these observations can be characterised as the tension between "flow" (as identified by Czikszentmihalyi)[111] and the "deliberate practice" described by Ericsson

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[110]Bailey, *Improvisation*, 111; Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950," 108.
[111] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, 1st ed.. (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

et al.[112] The flow state–an enjoyable sense of effortless mastery[113]–was identified by Eilish as a desirable goal, and something that was facilitated by my method:

> (Eilish) we could have been playing for, like, 30 seconds then or an hour and I wouldn't actually know … I don't know what length of time we were doing that for!
>
> (Me) *Do you think that's … flow?*
>
> (Eilish) I guess so eh! That's like the goal isn't it? … It feels like it would lead … into a direction of being able to get into that flow state more easily, all the time … Which is pretty cool … (Interview with Eilish Wilson 28/05/21)

Ericsson et al claim that the "state of diffused attention" that characterises flow comes into conflict with the concept of deliberate practice, which requires a "focussed attention" in order to properly analyse performance and apply any necessary corrective action. They note that this "highly structured activity"[114] is effortful and not necessarily enjoyable in itself. This is highly analogous to some participants' perception of mechanical practice (Louisa: "boring stuff"), which, though tedious, is necessary to embody materials and therefore support creative activity in the moment, free of the interruption of conscious thought.

Other participants identified this idea of deliberate practice as well, but were not convinced of its necessity in contributing to improvising in their own practice:

> (Callum)…you're talking about practicing mechanically and letting it just flourish out…it's that kind of, like, cooking time, it appears 3 months down the track, like suddenly this idea that I did as an abstraction is now [in my improvising]. That's not what I want out of this, what I want out of this is, I want to play a thing, I want to think about it, and it's ready, immediately…Like hibachi, it's cooked in front of you! (Interview with Callum Passells 21/05/21)
>
> (Dan) I've got a book about triads, and…you basically play every chord…we're talking about major triads, then we do all these things, then it's minor, then it's sus [suspended], then augmented, then it's diminished, then it's minor 7 flat 5…you get through 12 different chords and you can play them at 200 [bpm] or whatever and *then* you get onto

[112] Karl Ericsson, Ralf Krampe, and Clemens Tesch-Roemer, "The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance," *Psychological Review* 100 (July 1, 1993): 363–406, https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-295X.100.3.363.

[113] Kenneth Ravizza, "Qualities of the Peak Experience in Sport.," in *Psychological Foundations of Sport*, by John M Silva and Robert S Weinberg (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1984), 452–61.

[114] Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Roemer, "The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance," 368.

improvising…man, that's so bizarre, you should be doing it straight away, once you've got the idea. (Interview with Daniel Yeabsley 14/05/21)

My observations reveal that this tension, these two states, are not so easily separated. In fact, they are closely intertwined in my method. The act of setting parameters within an ideal margin of difficulty and improvising/iterating within that, closely matches descriptions of deliberate practice in improvising.[115] And in fact, improvising within an ideal set of parameters proved highly conducive to *creating* a state of flow. Referring again to Oehlers, the interaction of embodied knowledge (executed naturally during flow, or perhaps Louisa's "superconscious") and not-yet-embodied knowledge (which is adopted through deliberate practice) may intertwine reflexively with one another, a combination of these two contradictory philosophies of practice:

> We're in the flow, but we're also thinking about what we're doing. Sometimes that takes us out of it or interrupts the musical logic or holistic totality of what we're doing, but it's also putting us on a track, and helping us focus. For me, I feel like I rarely focus like this. It's a real pleasure and happens surprisingly consistently across different sessions. (Reflective journal 28/05/21)

This tension might also be described in yet a third way: in Callum's words, "practicing for performance" vs "practicing performance". Participants evaluated the outcomes of our sessions differently when viewing them as performance of an improvisation, rather than as preparatory work in the pursuit of a later performance. Again, these two states are messily intertwined, and shifted from improvisation to improvisation, or even within improvisations.

> (Callum) I did feel a little bit [of that mindset] playing with another person, like I tried a 5 note thing … and it misfired and I thought "urgh, that's embarrassing," but actually it's practice. And I actually had that thought process, "why are you getting [upset], why are you getting this feeling of "that wasn't a very good performance of this thing" and part of it is because it's being recorded and part of it is because there's another person in the room.
>
> (Me) *We* are *performing to each other, I think, and you can't get away from that.*
>
> (Callum) You can't get away from that, but the knowledge that it is practice…rather than a performance, like capital "P" performance, changes the way that I think about it.
>
> (Me) *It's maybe small "p" performance?*

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[115] Barry, "Strategies for Self-Generating Musical Language."

(Callum) Yeah exactly ... But I think the end goal is to get rid of that idea anyway, right? That there's necessarily a difference between those things, because once again, like Jeff said, you're practicing performance, you're not practicing *for* performance ... Especially when you're improvising, part of that is ... a thing isn't going to come out right, so what do you do when that happens? (Interview with Callum Passells 21/05/21)

In the future it may be of some benefit during group sessions to agree on which of these three mindsets we are entering into with each improvisation: deliberate practice, with a focus on assessment and correction; small "p" performance, wherein the strictness of the parameters gives way to a more fluid and dynamic approach; or capital "P" performance, in which the improvisation itself is the main focus, rather than a means to an end. Conversely, when the method is working best, performance-ready modes of improvisation (or as Callum put it "spontaneous composition", a term similar those used by Coleman and Konitz in their descriptions of the music of Charlie Parker)[116] emerged naturally from initial warm-up or exploratory states:

> (Me) *I didn't expect these to sound like performances...and many of them don't, but some of them do, and they're delightful!*
>
> (Callum) Yeah totally, and at the very least with a bit of shaping they could become a performance, right? Because at the very least, the devices are clear, and the material is focussed, and because you've got those two things and you're actively thinking about it, it's almost...it *is* composition, it's spontaneous composition, with another person in this case ... That's the whole thing right? ... We kind of just did the whole thing! ... Once is enough to get going with this thing, and then more is just how far down the rabbit hole are we going with it. (Interview with Callum Passells 21/05/21)

Concepts from deliberate practice, then, may assist the improviser to find new and non-obvious possibilities, and in this way are helpful to my method in achieving freshness. It is in the pursuit of *flow,* however, that this deliberate practice is adopted, for flow is what gives the improviser a sense of freedom and spontaneity. When this is achieved, practice for performance can flex into practicing the state of performance itself, which might be thought of as small "p" performance: a performance, perhaps in its intent, perhaps in its content, but not necessarily in the context of a traditional performer-audience paradigm. In time, as Callum suggests, this relatively fine distinction may eventually be shed entirely, giving way to fully-fleshed capital "P" performance states in every setting. Until then, the decision to continue to iterate on ideas in practice depends

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[116] Coleman, "The Dozens."; Hamilton, *Lee Konitz*, 22.

entirely on a willingness to go deeper "into the rabbit hole" in the pursuit of new and fresh materials, devices and concepts.

The Goldilocks Zone: Setting the Right Parameters

Looking at reflections on my own playing, it is clear that trips and stumbles occurred when utilising not-yet-embodied materials or techniques that were too difficult to perform holistically. For an optimal practice experience, pianist Steve Barry suggests that practicing should take place in a "cognitive "Goldilocks" zone (not too hard, not too easy)".[117] Thus, if precision of execution is to be obtained, either the *material* must be made easier, or the *technique* applied to it. In our first interview, Callum Passells concludes that these two elements may be balanced against one another to achieve the required level of approachability:

> the thing [the material] can be super complicated and you can have a simple device … and vice versa, you can have a two-note motif, or you can have something very, very simple and then with enough transformation through whatever device you figure out … you can build something incredibly complex as well. (Interview with Callum Passells 26/04/21)

Thus, the method is adaptable to the materials at hand: simple materials may be treated with more complex techniques, and complex materials may be treated with simpler techniques, so that they remain in the Goldilocks zone: approachable, yet challenging enough to retain the interest of the improviser–and by extension, the listener and/or fellow improviser(s).

The context in which improvisations take place provide a third complicating factor, in terms of the difficulty of embodying new materials and techniques. In many instances, trips and stumbles occurred when applying these to frameworks such as a jazz standards, with the attendant harmonic and rhythmic structures that must be taken into account:

> I am definitely having trouble fitting the pitch cell to the harmony of this framework, and am using more of the 'memory' stuff I've worked out previously for this form. (Reflective journal, 5/10/20)

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[117] Barry, "Strategies for Self-Generating Musical Language."

This shape fits well over standard harmony, but I'm struggling to play with a good time feeling. (Reflective journal, 9/11/20)

I need to spend a bit of time on the end of the bridge, it's often a challenge for me to navigate (Reflective journal, 12/11/20)

There are many possible ways to simplify the task by reducing the reliance on one of these three elements, or even eliminating it altogether. For example:

- The techniques may be applied to a smaller portion of the material
- The material may be applied to a smaller area of the context
- The harmonic content may be simplified or removed (for example, reducing the pitch information, even down to a single pitch)
- The tempo may be reduced, increased, or eliminated altogether.
- The harmonic context (i.e. accompanying chordal or modal framework) may be simplified or removed
- etc

In my solo practice I frequently slowed tempos, augmented rhythmic values, or limited myself to playing fragments of a phrase in order to achieve the appropriate level of difficulty. Occasionally, I used similar tactics to increase difficulty, creating more interest for myself to stay engaged:

Adding a couple of notes to the phrase gives it a 2 1/2-beat (5/8) length, which is interesting and keeps the character of the repeated rhythm displacing each time. It's trickier for sure! (Reflective journal 28/02/21)

A particular duo session with Roger reveals how the parameters shifted throughout a single session: first, the material was applied slowly and methodically; next, we liberalised the parameters of the pitch set in order to increase flexibility and flow; and finally, the pitch set was fragmented to allow for more granular experiments, or extended for more expansive ones.

Taking our time with this one and treating it like an exercise–just enough to iron out the wrinkles!

[Augmenting and diminishing the intervals was] a good choice I think, it's opened things up a bit … we really dive in …

[now] it's about breaking up and/or extending the phrase. It's nice, overall much more musical than the first few iterations. (Reflective journal 11/02/21)

With the right attitude, and fellow improvisers of a mutual understanding or aesthetic, even more creative solutions may be applied. On this subject, Callum Passells offered a revealing anecdote from a workshop he attended at the University of Auckland:

> One thing Jeff [Henderson] said...he was playing duo with Chris O'Connore, and he said, "let's play a tune, let's play this Charlie Parker tune." and then they played the tune, beautiful, very cool and abstract and strange, and then at the end, he's like "what's the name of that tune? I can't remember..." then he was like "I forgot the bridge as well", you know, they were trying to play and he couldn't remember the bridge, and he was like "but it doesn't matter! I can't possibly *fail* at this, because I've set the parameters. We're just going to play the thing, we *played* the song, the essence of it, we didn't even know what it was [called] but we *played* it, we played through it and we improvised on it and we played the head out, it's *jazz* as far as I'm concerned, I can't *fail* at that." And then he goes *"you* can!" and pointed at all the students! "But *I* can't". Which I thought was great!...That's the idea right, that if you set the parameter up, you can't possibly fail at *this*. (Interview with Callum Passells 21/05/21)

This story neatly encapsulates several important themes of my research; firstly the importance of agreed upon parameters and a mutual aesthetic or understanding among improvisers in realising a successful performance; secondly, the improviser's ability to set the parameters of an improvisation in ways that are conducive to the same; and thirdly concepts of judgement, "right or wrong notes", which become less and less relevant as the improviser becomes more and more of an agent in the process of improvisation. Henderson is particularly blunt regarding the last, literally pointing out that the students are poised to fail because they are playing within parameters set by their institution of study (the undergraduate jazz performance program) rather than themselves. It prompted me to reflect deeply on why I was "making mistakes" and stumbling while practicing using this method, and how I could change my approach—in attitude as much as within the tasks themselves—in order to improve the method, and therefore my experience of it:

> (Me) I think where...[I'm] making mistakes is where the parameters are ... knowing how to set the right kinds of parameters to develop ideas satisfyingly enough to maintain interest and to generate freshness, but also without giving yourself too many opportunities to fail ... it's actually the setting of parameters where [I] most often make mistakes, because I find myself trying to do certain transformations that I cannot execute, in solo practice especially where I go "I should be able to do this" and it becomes

a judgement thing … (Interview with Callum Passells 21/05/21)

Overall, I and my research participants responded positively to this method of practice. I found the experience of reflection to be of huge worth in centering myself at the heart of the project. My research participants were less grounded, and saw holes in the method where mutual understanding was missing, though repeated iterations often answered these challenges. Opinion was split as to how my method compared to more traditional modes: while some valued a more mechanical approach in tandem with other creative development away from the instrument, others saw my method as a way of getting straight to the heart of improvisation without the intermediary stage of rote-learning. I propose that deliberate practice, analogous to mechanical processes, and flow-state, which more closely represents the feeling of a "fun and free" improvisation are intertwined in this method: deliberate practice creates the challenges required to enter a state of flow in improvisation. These challenges—the difficulty of negotiating the materials and actions used, as well as the strictness of parameters—must be balanced, to sit within "the Goldilocks Zone" to obtain optimal experiences during improvisation.

Chapter 4: Where Does it Lead?

How do these methods help me achieve my aims: enhancing possibilities for personal expression, spontaneity, collaboration, flexibility across multiple contexts, and the generation of new and fresh musical materials? The concept of striking moments from chapter 1 and the recontextualising of memorised materials in chapter 3 adequately answer the question of personal expression. The rest of these goals are discussed here.

A Feeling of Freshness

From the outset my reflections show that, when it is working, the method prompts fresh and spontaneous playing. They also show that, when it is not working–principally when the parameters are too restrictive–spontaneity is also inhibited.

Playing I considered fresh generally came out of two scenarios: either the method prompted me to perform in familiar contexts differently, or some aspect of the improvisation grabbed my attention as a contrast from what I had just played.

> What I liked is how a phrase like this used in different contexts created a sound I hadn't heard before: for example, the implicit 'minor' sound of the phrase, even when adapted to 'major' contexts like the rhythm changes, created a harmonic palette that was subtly different to how I usually approach those forms. (Reflective journal 10/11/20)

Contrast is the key word here: essentially these two scenarios represent the same thing, but occurring over different time scales. In the former, the fresh playing is in contrast to previous improvisations that may have occurred, possibly over many years. In the latter, the fresh playing acts in contrast to what has occurred quite recently, within the same improvisation. In some cases, both of these types of contrast happened at the same time:

> There's two cool moments in this, both I think born of frustration - a fast run at 1:19 where I whip off a combination of the new stuff and some older, under the fingers (embodied!) thing. It's really freshened the old stuff up! Interesting!

The other moment is simply a melody at 2:56 that's almost schmaltz - except it's such a breath of fresh air after all the chromaticism, it's delicious! There might be something in this - running an idea to the ground in a performance might result in any material that follows sounding fresh and inspired, simply by contrast! (Reflective journal 08/12/20)

A third possible iteration of this contrast can be found in my reflections on using formal transformations, such as transposition, inversion, retrograde etc. I tended to find these devices were most effective when the original source material is stated first, followed by the transformation. The relationship between the two is more interesting than the transformation in isolation: this expresses in an even smaller temporal space the idea of freshness through contrast:

> Combinations of original and transformed sets sound the most satisfying, as at 1:57. (Reflective journal 19/01/21)

Figure 8: Combinations of original and transformed material in an improvisation over "Body & Soul (author's own)

Many participants expressed positive views on how the method generated freshness, subverting habitual modes of playing:

> (Daniel) I liked the songs as well ... like *Body and Soul*, because it makes it interesting, eh? ... I'm thinking of a million jam sessions, you know, where you hear people playing *Body and Soul*...going through the motions, or they're trying to play it straight ... (Interview with Daniel Yeabsley 14/05/21)

> (Louisa) I found the *It Could Happen to You* one the most challenging, by far, because...whenever I usually play that tune I play it very mechanically. I probably play

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the same solo every time. It's probably why it was so hard!...I definitely think there's benefits of being more conscious in the practice room of creativity and improvising. In my experience I haven't actually done much of that, really. (Interview with Louisa Williamson 10/05/21)

(Blair) Yeah man, anything that gets you to think a little bit differently or to snap out of your usual whatever is definitely good ... the classic [trap] is, you get into a thing, your own thing, and you're comfy with the bands you're playing with, and then you go and play with someone totally different, whoever it is, and get your arse kicked! (Focus group with *Little Symphony* 20/05/21)

Problems associated with the difficulty of improvising with not-yet-embodied materials have been covered previously in this chapter. At such times, it was not only the holistic musical elements of a performance which suffered: spontaneity was also inhibited. The problems inherent in parameters too strict for a fluid performance led to frustration, and I often abandoned the experimental play of improvising in favour of repeating material or practicing in a more mechanical fashion in order to address technical defects.

I think without another improviser I tended to revert to a more methodical approach, creating some patterns and sitting on the same transformation of the material for longer ... I sounded restricted by this material for most of the improvisations ...

Still sounds like an exercise overall ... getting away from the phrase as at 6:39, and developing the phrase as from 6:45, are more satisfying than slavish adherence. (Reflective journal 19/01/21)

Figure 9: Combinations of developing and departing from material in an improvisation over "Body and Soul" (author's own)

At other times, this frustration was a catalyst for especially fresh or spontaneous statements, as I attempted to break out of the imposed structure (see chapter 3 "Emotional Responses" for examples). This presents a contradiction: how is it that freshness and spontaneity occurred within both free, flow-like states and also prohibitive and unenjoyable deliberate practice? Again I return to the idea that these two seemingly dichotomous approaches to preparing for improvisation interact fluidly within these sessions. The challenges of methodical, iterative exploration can be frustrating and tedious, or fun and invigorating: sometimes both occur within the same improvisation. The challenge each time is to try and balance these things, and this challenge is substantially different from session to session. I can conclude, however, that the method is equal to this task: it has proved flexible enough to overcome mental or technical roadblocks, either by prompting a "break out" response as noted above, or else directing me to address the issues that inhibited fresh and spontaneous performance.

The iterative process of the action research cycle contributed greatly to generating freshness within the method, as I was able to introduce a motivation or focus on an element I felt was lacking in prior iterations during a session. In my sessions with Roger, I often requested that we try a different tack from one improvisation to the next. Sometimes I introduced materials or actions during improvisations, not spontaneously, but with this same motivation: to disrupt the trajectory of the improvisation thus far, for the sake of change:

> Repeated notes come back in here, I think this again was a conscious decision on my part...it prompts something fresh: and using the concept on this material, it's not an exact replica of the idea as I first found and developed it... It's a tool in the toolkit, rather than a specific phrase. (Reflective journal 10/05/21)

Louisa was very positive about this ability to change tack:

> that's what I love about jazz and improvising, when you do combine it with a conversation or agree on some parameters or something it can be way more fun and take something in a different direction it would never have gone. (Interview with Louisa Williamson 10/05/21)

Freshness then is the result of contrast: and contrast occurs in an endless negotiation between old and new. How old, or how new, depends on one's perspective: new in terms of the history and traditions of an idiom, new in terms of one's own practice, or new in terms of what just happened in an improvisation. Freshness may occur naturally as the result of intuitive explorations, but occurs equally as much (perhaps even more so) as the result of deliberate attempts to change the course of one's output—and again, this can be thought of in extremely wide or exceptionally narrow measurements of time. This latter approach, like the factory of ideas, seems to contradict notions of spontaneity, in that one is making an informed choice to move in a different direction. But frequently the results of these choices are exceptionally spontaneous, striking moments—as Bailey says "Change for the sake of the benefits that change can bring."

Sparking Conversation

Participants were generally positive on the subject of the method generating conversational approaches. Daniel felt that iterating on an idea offered more enjoyment and freedom to an improviser than more common approaches that privilege note-choice:

> (Daniel) I think it's a really good way of actually getting really close to what happens when you improvise. Because normally—I'm thinking about what I do with my students as well—when it's like, "we're going to play over this tune, or this scale" or something, and "here's a collection of notes" which isn't a very inspiring way to play. 'Cause there's more to it than just "choose these notes"...like "hey we're going to have a conversation, here are the words you're allowed to use!" you know? "Now start talking!"

> (Me) *(Laughs) I've never thought of it like that, that's so amazing!*

> (Daniel) And then somehow you expect...

> (Me) *You expect something spontaneous from that person.* (Interview with Daniel Yeabsley 14/05/21)

> (Oscar) I think just us all watching each other process what we're doing is great, 'cause it kind of gets you all into a community-thinking mindset, rather than just doing your own thing, you know? (Focus group with *Little Symphony* 20/05/21)

For Callum, simply practicing with another person was the function of the method that allowed for greater conversation. This is an obvious conclusion, yet in my experience other techniques of practice do not privilege working with others, despite this being the implicit (or explicit) goal of learning to improvise. Callum brought up another anecdote from Jeff Henderson which illustrates this point:

> I watched Jeff Henderson do a forum the other week…"All of you," he said to the students "are practicing in a room, trying to play your scales, but what you're actually practicing is learning to play your scales in a room…I practice playing with other people by playing with other people all the time", and I feel like this…what we're actually practicing is playing intuitively and then reflecting. (Interview with Callum Passells 21/05/21)

This reinforces the idea of "practicing performance" discussed earlier in chapter 4. One of the strengths of this method is its ready application to group improvisation, and hence performance. Future work in this area could privilege this aspect and explore relational practice between improvisers more deeply.

Eilish found the moments of unison in our improvisations to be the most interesting and mysterious aspect:

> (Eilish) I think it's kind of weird that two people … we have totally different lives and listen to different music and write different things and whatever … and then you can have those moments where … we've played in exactly the same place or … we've both gone *down,* or like, one of us has gone up at the same time as the other is going down, in a similar kind of line … I guess I just think it's crazy we can…
>
> (Me) *That there can even* be *moments of unison, given all of the variables?*
>
> (Eilish) Yeah! (Interview with Eilish Wilson 28/05/21)

This idea of unison is expressed in great depth in the music of Ornette Coleman. Edmundson-Wells describes unison in this context as "[a concept] … with a focus on the principles of motion and flow found in melodic development". It goes beyond the notion of a literal unison melody, incorporating elements traditionally perceived as non-melodic, such as

rhythm or timbre, in service of "[a] heightened connection between improvisers".[118] [ref Edmundson-Wells 11-12] John Litweiler, author of *A Harmolodic Life* suggests that "The objective of the concentrated study and practice together of the harmolodic system is to get musicians to play - to feel and think - in this kind of unison. Or as the great bassist Wilbur Ware used to say, 'Let's play this music *together*'."[119] This is analogous to Oscar's "community thinking mindset", which he saw as being the main benefit of using this method.

All of my research participants brought up mutual or shared understandings as being imperative to successful group improvisations. While many of these observations deal with shared understandings of external factors such as style or idiom, another strength of my method was how our shared *individual* understandings, between each other, developed through the sessions. In our second session, Callum noted how we were primed to develop ideas–and depart from our original prompts–very quickly:

> (Callum) I think so much is...that shared understanding, right? ... What does it sound like to play two different subdivisions of the same underlying pulse?...What does it sound like to ... accelerando and ... ritardando through each other's tempos? Those sorts of things are, for me, the obvious thing that comes up next. And it's obvious to you as well, right? But that's 'cause we think alike, I think, more than most people. (Interview with Callum Passells 21/05/21)

There is good evidence from these interviews to suggest practicing using this method encourages a more conversational approach than conventional methods. Rather than resulting from the specifics of the method, this may be correlated with the simple fact of practicing together, as a group rather than solo. I conclude that, more so than giving me tools with which I can excite conversation with other improvisers *in general,* this method helped me develop, very quickly, a more nuanced and intimate relationship with the improvisers I worked with *in particular*. This may not be a universal fact–as Callum said, "we think alike, more than most people"–but it is an encouraging sign for my future relationships with other improvisers. This excerpt from my reflective journal on my final session with Roger illustrates this:

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[118]Eamon Francis Edmundson-Wells, "The Harmolodic Milieu: How Incorporating the Philosophies of Deleuze, Guattari, and Bohm into the Improvisational Process Creates New Contexts for Expressive Music Making" (Masters thesis, University of Auckland, 2020), 11–12.

[119] John Litweiler, *Ornette Coleman: A Harmolodic Life*, 1st Da Capo Press ed.. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 150.

What a fantastic session, an absolute pleasure to listen to. What's really interesting about this is after repeated sessions, the formal method has mostly fallen away, yet we're still working on concepts, playing spontaneously, hitting more moments together and finding almost endless possibilities. This strongly backs up Callum's idea that doing this repeatedly with another person is valuable. We have achieved something of a shared language! (Reflective journal 28/04/21)

Creating Freedom

Research participants were almost unanimous in their opinion that practicing using this method led to greater freedom within improvisation. In particular, many participants enjoyed how our duo sessions departed from a turn-taking, soloist-accompanist dichotomy that defines a typical duo setting:

(Daniel) There's the whole stereotypical cliche, you know "we're having a conversation" you know, so if I'm having a yarn it's my go to talk and normally the other person will be listening...or pretending to listen...(laughs).

(Me) Do you think that playing this way breaks you out of roles?

(Daniel) Yeah definitely, I've got to do more of this...

(Me) It's not about, your role is always to support, or always be the soloist, but we have these shifting roles maybe... (Interview with Daniel Yeabsley 14/05/21)

(Louisa) it's a good exercise in listening to each other or leaving space for each other, bouncing off each other...I feel like usually when I play duo, it's usually just routinely structured into "you do it now and I'll accompany you" and then the other way around...so far with what we've done today, it hasn't felt like that...It doesn't need to be like that. It's more like you're just playing together, creating something together the whole time, rather than taking turns, which I guess is what we're used to doing. (Interview with Louisa Williamson 16/06/21)

Eilish felt like she could depart from her more typical (and more rigid) approach to improvising using bebop language on jazz standards, similar to Louisa's sense that the soloist-accompanist dichotomy could be dispensed with using this method:

on that rhythm changes [for example]...I always feel stressed out to play rhythm changes because I'm like "I don't know what to play on the bridge", and I always think of those

chords as really static and … I don't know what to play on dominant chords, I can't hear anything there. Whereas with that [our improvisation] I was purposely trying to play some "out" stuff, and it meant because I was focussing on that, I was actually quite happy with some of the other stuff that came out! … 'cause I've relaxed myself enough to not be like "oh but I'm not putting in my bebop language enough" or "oh that was terrible" … it kind of turned all that stuff off in my brain. It was really nice! … this is really good for me, this freedom … (Interview with Eilish Wilson 28/05/21)

Eilish was able to find freedom in our improvisation because the parameters we had set–attempting to conclude our phrases atypically, with surprising, unexpected pitches and rhythms–encouraged risk taking and deemphasised a "correct" or standardised approach. This led to some fresh and spontaneous musical statements, but our improvisation was still heavily rooted in the bebop style. Eilish was able to reframe her response to these parts of her improvisation that didn't meet our criteria and were more typically bebop (the "other stuff that came out") and see it in a more positive light, free from judgement.

Improvising using my method frequently combines these open approaches with standard contexts. In this Daniel saw similarities to artists from the United States "New Music" scene of the 1960s and 1970s, which saw free aesthetics interacting with the fixed forms of composition in interesting ways:

> (Daniel) I think it leads to just really cool–and I'm wondering now, it sounds to me like we're going in the direction the bebop guys sort of went in, lots of them, like they went past bebop and they got to some really interesting…guys like Marion Brown and Archie Shepp and stuff…you've still got the structures of the tunes and stuff…but treating them more like, just playthings in a way. But heaps of cool compositions would come out of [this], a lot more freedom, and freedom in people's thinking, which is important I think. (Interview with Daniel Yeabsley 14/05/21)

Daniel, Louisa and Eilish all point out that practicing with this method enhances freedom within familiar, structured contexts. This is of benefit in creating fresh musical opportunities, and also enhances the improvisers' experience of performing in these contexts. In this sense, the method helps us work toward the emancipatory goals shown in the music of Ornette Coleman and also highlighted in emancipatory action research. Furthermore, this did not exclude the use of the stylistic approaches I and my performers chose to adopt, which is also in line with Ornette's call for improvisers to use their "own logic", including their influences. However, as I pointed out in chapter 3: "Stepping into the Void", not all participants responded positively to performing with

this method when the *context itself* was very free of structure. The conclusion I made there is also relevant here: further development of the method should take into account free improvised music. I could delve deeper into the processes of these musicians to better understand how language can be applied to freer forms using this method.

A Flexible Vocabulary

Frequently, striking moments and their subsequent development revealed that the essential character, and also the most flexible aspect of the material, was not so much a musical motif, in the sense of a definitive set of pitches and rhythms, but instead a set of possibilities that were previously non-obvious. For example, the material from the solo session from 12/11/20 began as a specific fragment drawn from a melody:

Figure 10: "Tomorrow is the Question" by Ornette Coleman. Excerpt of alto saxophone melody. (author's own)

However, the *concept* of the melody is simply to approach a series of tones chromatically. Iterating on the melodic fragment itself is limited: iterating on the idea of approaching scale or chord tones chromatically is more flexible and has more possibility. It can be applied easily to alternate rhythmic settings from the original 4/4 swing, and to alternate harmonic settings from the original major tonality. Crucially, the technique required to perform this concept was already largely embodied in my playing, which meant it was performance-ready from the outset. As I noted in my journal, "It's nice sometimes to have something that slots in, rather than having to be worked over and over!"

Many of the participants found this method of practice itself allowed for greater flexibility. Eilish found iterating on an idea to be more flexible than applying preconceived licks or phrases to a context:

> (Eilish) It's way more like...the whole picture, rather than worrying about little details, that's how it feels to me...what you're talking about...is find the nugget. And then practice the nugget, so that you're actually able to use it, rather than just thinking like "I've learned this ii-V-I lick and it fits on this beat [of the bar]", so if I miss that beat when I try it's going to fuck out! Whereas if [you've] practiced the concept then it's up to you if it fucks out or not, because you made it up, do you know what I mean?...You've practiced it so you can apply it to various situations.
>
> (Me) *If you fuck it up, it's because you've either muffed it, or you've set the parameters up in such a way that you've set yourself up to fail*
>
> (Eilish) Yeah, or you haven't been specific enough about what your thing is, so you're not clear...
>
> (Me) *Do you feel like this was clear?*
>
> (Eilish) Yeah, weirdly! Well, not weirdly, but maybe it would seem, like, pretty random...it's cool because even if I haven't fully understood what you're talking about, we're going to go somewhere interesting anyway. It feels like there's kind of no wrong answer. (Interview with Eilish Wilson 28/04/21)

Eilish's feeling that there was "no wrong answer" represents the reverse of the uncertainties I described earlier in this chapter: our project was clear enough, for her, to fully engage in the attempt, even without a complete grasp of the material. However, the parameters weren't so specific (as in the ii-V-I lick example) as to make mistakes–trips or stumbles–inevitable. This is not to say that the method allows for the situation of "anything goes", but it does reframe the outcomes. As Callum points out, "that's not about laziness and it's not about low expectations .. My expectation is something cool will happen which will keep my interest, but if that's your only expectation, whether you're in the exact same place [in the form] or subdivision doesn't matter."

Generating Possibility: a "factory of ideas"

Referring to the critical tension I outlined in chapter 1 between a traditional jazz pedagogy approach to integrating materials to a vocabulary and the idea of "pure" improvising, Callum proposed this method strikes a balance:

(Callum) It leads, to me, to what I like, and what I think is the compromise, when people talk about "pure" improvisation vs working with language. The whole Tristano-esque idea of being able to play anything at any time and actually not playing "licks" or whatever, vs the large pieces of pre-composed language, being the two extremes I guess...This feels like you can improvise with language and with material, but not feel like you're trapped, essentially, right? (Interview with Callum Passells 26/04/21)

Other participants recognised this tension, and the practical need to live with it: In Daniel's words "I think it's one of those weird jazz dichotomies, where you can hold both ideas at the same time, and say both are bad and both are good, you know?...scales suck, but scales are great...it's quite philosophical, but you've got to be able to hold mutually opposing ideas eh, at the same time?"

Blair saw it as addressing the needs of the competing demands of an itinerant improvising musician: "I did a lot of it [free improvisation] but then I'm doing funk gigs and jazz gigs...now it's become more normalised that guys have a bit of vocab without structure ... it feels like it's much more normal that people go between [free and straight ahead] ... you're as likely to get a grant playing [free] improv as you are ... playing jazz.". If anything, this is the most practical assessment–an economic imperative–of the need to synthesise language with more free aesthetics.

As identified in chapter 3 ("Hearing It") the generative possibility of the language comes not from the specific musical constructions themselves, but the ability to hear and apply the broader concept of the material in question. Callum suggested in our first interview that over many iterations, commonalities may spring up which suggest the same or similar elements to previously worked-out materials.

I think if you do it enough ... you'd start to maybe have a set of, not rules, but traits about things and why they keep cropping up, the kinds of devices that would keep cropping up, in terms of transformation ...

For Callum, while these kinds of iterations were not a new concept for him, the methodical nature of the method–and, critically, the input of another improviser–helped generate new possibilities he may not have discovered on his own:

(Me) This isn't a particularly fresh approach to you?

(Callum) It's fresh doing it with another person! That's the thing that's different to me. There's definitely something about being pushed to think about someone else's input into something, because when I practice by myself, or when I work on this kind of stuff, I'm often quite satisfied fairly quickly...I'm like "oh yeah, that works!", you know? And I feel like I'm ready to do that, and I don't often pursue things as far as I should. (Interview with Callum Passells 26/04/21)

The analysis from these sessions reveals that many new striking moments occurred that could be returned in future iterations. I hypothesised the potential for "limitless possibility" using this process in chapter 2, and one entry in my reflective journal is particularly optimistic on this point:

> I'm going to have loads of great things to work on from all these sessions in terms of striking moments I haven't explored, this journal and the recordings will be an incredible source of ideas when I'm feeling uninspired in the future! (Reflective journal 26/05/21)

Co-Creating Contexts

In chapter 2 I theorised that this method could help apply language to diverse musical contexts. I remain equivocal on this point: I am not satisfied I have tested enough musical contexts to make a conclusion either way. In particular, the limitation of improvising in groups made up only of other saxophonists, whilst expedient, offers a fairly narrow range of variables.

However, I discovered an unintended but extremely pleasing outcome from practicing with other saxophonists using this method: frequently we were able to create a structure—a context within which to improvise—not from a predetermined source such as a composition, but from our own repeated experiments. For example, in a duo session with Roger, the use of repeated notes in a phrase prompted us to try an improvisation in the style of J.S. Bach:

> At the suggestion of Rog, we used a Bach-esque, flute prelude/cello suite vibe as a starting point...Nice that the *material* is what is suggesting the *context,* rather than the reverse, as is usually the case. (Reflective journal 12/02/21)

This concept allows context to emerge naturally from our improvisation. We are engaged in a cooperative attempt to find form and meaning in our improvisation, rather than attempting to adhere to a pre-arranged structure. Daniel offered how different this was from the "trial and error" of emulating other musicians and memorising vehicles to improvising over:

> (Daniel) We've spent years of just trial and error…and having listened to the music, as well, so we've taken a structure from what we've heard [in the past], eh? Whereas now we're going, "let's take a structure from what we create together" (Interview with Daniel Yeabsley 14/05/21)

Similar to my conclusions around nature and physical space, this project contributes to deep listening and a focus on the present moment. Daniel found the experience of building a structure together created a colourful, highly metaphorical mental image:

> when it was just me and you … we're building these cool lego castles or weird, ornate, baroque palaces out of sounds … and that's really cool, and then there's all these different rooms in them, and some rooms have, like, fountains in them and then you can see curved archways and that sort of stuff, that's sort of what I'm thinking, when I was playing. (Interview with Daniel Yeabsley 14/05/21)

Another example of this close listening was the joy of hearing, very clearly, two or more similar timbres creating improvised chords or intervals. Simply playing long notes together, which often began as warm ups to the sessions, resulted in many of the most satisfying improvisations:

> (Callum) this particular instrumentation and the phenomenology of it being in the room, being close, I find … really takes over your ear and lets you hear the subtleties of two close voices vibrating against each other. (Interview with Callum Passells 26/04/21)

> (Louisa) I feel like my favourite part was making cadences. And probably we were both hearing different cadences maybe but it still ended up making a cool [sound] … The cadences were always delightful, even if we were playing a semitone apart, it was still interesting. (Interview with Louisa Williamson 10/05/21)

> (Daniel) I thought our tones worked … we're in the same vibe, tonally and intonation wise. (Interview with Daniel Yeabsley 14/05/21)

Over repeated iterations improvisations became less methodical and step-by-step and more exploratory. Usually, when I engaged in a second session with a participant (or in the case of my

lessons with Roger, over many more sessions) the number of steps involved in discovering an idea, experimenting with various actions , and arriving at successful improvisations reduced markedly. In my second interview with Callum, our warm up progressed into a satisfying improvisation without any intermediary iterations:

> *(Me) To me [it feels like] the warm-up is already where the iterations are supposed to hit. Because we decided to warm up…the context has already been decided upon–which is arbitrary anyway–and..once we're warmed up and we understand what the thing is, then it's time to iterate, so it becomes about note groupings, and…we can get out of the chromatic thing, and now what are the shapes? But with this same intent. Which in a sense defeats the purpose, of being methodical, and in another sense is entirely the point because in the practice room we're trying to get to the stage where we can do this process in real time!*
>
> (Callum) doing it a second time, I don't think it's beside the point…we've skipped a couple of steps, because we already know what those steps are going to be!…We've thought about this … "OK, Jake's moved on from that and he's doing this thing, OK, I should move on too"; or "I should stay the same and see how they sound apart from each other"; or "I should do something that furthers this improvisation", and it's not that it's not methodical, 'cause it is still methodical, because that's exactly what I'm thinking, that's the thought process, "I am going to now start thinking about range", or "I'm going to be deliberate in my note choices, my interval choices", while still keeping what I think is essential about it … (Interview with Callum Passells 21/05/21)

Other participants described this ability to set up a context and then naturally depart from it very positively:

> (Louisa) It was cool that we kind of moved away from the motifs [at the start]. I guess we started very angular at the start of the session. In my mind sometimes I was thinking "oh we should probably stick to that motif" or whatever. But it was cool that we just ended up doing that nice melody stuff at the end. (Interview with Louisa Williamson 16/06/21)

Referring to the excerpt from my reflective journal earlier in chapter 4 ("Conversation"), I also responded warmly to this development of the method.

Later cycles revealed more abstract devices which were more suited to quickly creating the sound of a performance. The actions performed in these iterations are quite dissimilar to the formal transformations I originally proposed in chapter 2. While I could, in my reflections, identify a particular motif as having a more or less flexible character, for example, or a particular iteration as offering a more or less flexible iteration of an idea, I began to abandon this analysis

over time. The kinds of ideas that carried from session to session, that were adaptable to many contexts (or even generated new contexts) were concepts of much less rigid specificity: concepts that allowed for free and open improvisation, within a clear and easily understood framework that enabled a shared understanding, that could be easily adjusted to varying degrees of more or less difficulty. This isn't to say that the formal transformations of specific materials weren't worthwhile: but after repeated experiments and interviews, it became clear that these very specific actions were tools for practicing *for* performance, rather than practicing performance *itself*.

The more I use this method, the less I focus on easily identifiable motifs: the search for language turns away from an accumulation of terms and phrases and towards a kind of dynamic, reactive fluency: a personal improvising voice.

A Small (But Growing) Lexicon

Callum and Eilish both suggested that the practice method could be refined over time to include a sort of categorisation or taxonomy of materials or devices. Here I offer a short list of these, the most successful concepts, along with recorded examples of them being used in improvisation.

LONG TONES IMPROVISATION: As noted earlier in chapter 4, warm-ups consisting of long tones tended to develop into meditative improvisations, with points of interest where two lines arrived at rest together to create a chord or cadence.

- Duo with Louisa, "Exploration": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Uq89bfvLgI
- Duo with Callum, "Exploration": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9Nuv0V_8A4

FINGER-MOTION IMPROVISATION: Later in my research I introduced a warm-up focussing on the smooth and even motion of the fingers, before introducing a full sound using the breath. These resulted in more rhythm-focussed, sometimes even percussive experiments.

- Duo with Callum, "Warm-Up": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97EiYg1HQus

IMPLYING POLYRHYTHM: phrasing in duple meter using triplets (e.g. emphasising groups of 2 or 4) was a common action, and could be applied to various materials. This implication could theoretically stretch to an unlimited number of relationships, though my facility with these limited me to within phrases of 5, 6 or 7 at most. This action often occurs as a direct result of augmentation and diminution of a phrase.

- In-lesson duo with Roger, "Body & Soul":
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VWZAk5lDz4

BANDWIDTH IMPROVISATION (or "CELLS"): improvising within a narrow "bandwidth" of pitches was a common action, which again could be applied to various materials and even in conjunction with other actions. It's a particular focus of Roger Manins' practice and one that often took place during our sessions.[120]

- In-lesson duo with Roger, "Rhythm Changes":
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymwyyRBi2cU

PIVOT POINTS/AXIS: Another tool from Roger Manin's toolkit, this involves improvising around an axis of one or more tones.

- In-lesson duo with Roger, "Pivot Points":
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHD1o2aO6_8

ON/OFF ARTICULATIONS: The use of articulation to stress certain notes in a phrase can be used to create both dynamic and rhythmic interest. Frequently the use of such articulation implies certain groupings as identified in "implying polyrhythm" above. This same approach can be used to imply a line or structure within "sheets of sound".

- Duo with Daniel "Augmentation/diminution":
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NY7AZ3URYik

JOIN THE DOTS: later, some improvisations used this same idea, but muted the line in between the articulated note of the phrase (off/on articulation). This results in a spacious, pointillistic

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[120]Manins, "Circles and Clouds." xii

sound, but implies line in a similar fashion.

- Duo w/ Louisa "Off/On Articulation":
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkHkne8m_GE

GAMES: Some devices were simply game-like concepts, invented in the moment (and often negotiated with another improviser) to suit the material. These were simple rules to apply in an otherwise quite open brief, for example:

- One of us will improvise a counterpoint to a melody. Duo with Callum "Oleo":
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cd83FH-h8ag
- Create a Bach-esque improvisation through shifting bass notes. Duo with Louisa "Shifting Bass Notes": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uE6iEJe3-JY
- One of us plays a regular (set) phrase, the other an irregular phrase–essentially trading. In-lesson duo with Roger "Exploration/trading":
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9ZM_f9Ab1I
- We will attempt to suggest a melody or form by hinting at or playing "around" the structure. Duo with Louisa "Beatrice":
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moUA_cOvwnk
- The end of a phrase must land on a surprising or unexpected pitch and/or rhythm. Duo with Eilish "Lester Leaps In": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQNchTTdSdc

A New Way of Talking

While I have identified many areas in which my method meets my specific research goals, I have also developed a way to communicate effectively about improvising with my peers. Monson writes of the "informal, social and metaphorical manner" of speaking about music that is typical to improvisers,[121] and many of the terms I have used to label musical materials, actions and broader concepts from my research such as "goldilocks zone", or "stepping into the void" reflect this approach. My research represents just the first cycle in an action research process designed to change my practice, and this ability to communicate complex ideas about improvising puts

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[121] Monson, *Saying Something*, 74.

me in good stead for future cycles. I hope to communicate these concepts quickly and easily to other improvisers I work with in the future, so that, as Louisa remarked, "It's just one little conversation".

Conclusion:

I set out to develop a flexible vocabulary for improvising. What emerged is not simply a practice routine or set of tools: it is a personal philosophy for improvising, informing an iterative process designed to change my practice, and a framework for analysis, reflection and revision.

A vocabulary for improvising is not the contradiction in terms that some commentators might claim: one's vocabulary can enhance, rather than inhibit, fresh, spontaneous and conversational improvised performance. I have chosen to acknowledge and privilege Afrological approaches towards the use of language in my playing, rejecting the "pure" spontaneity of the Eurological perspective, which has grounded my personal practice, and suggest this could be fruitful for Māori and Pasifika improvisers who wish to engage in the Afrological, as it relates to preexisting cultural frameworks. These improvisers should be at the forefront of this research. Further work is needed in order to face, "squarely and honestly", the history of slavery and oppression underlying Afrological music making, and the implications for improvisers in confronting racism and colonisation in Aotearoa.

The first part of my research question asked "how can action research methods be used to develop a process for preparing to improvise?" I have shown that action research methods are well suited to developing a flexible vocabulary for improvisation. The action research cycle–planning, acting, observing, reflecting–can be created in miniature to encompass a single session of experimentation in the practice room, and is also adaptable to the longer, ongoing project of improving one's improvising practice. The action research cycle is designed to be reflexive, and the model for my practice method changed over time as I reacted to the results of my improvisations and interviews and focus groups with my research participants.

The second part of my question asked "How do improvisers respond to the experience of practicing with these methods? How does this compare with more traditional methods?" My research proved grounding for me personally, centering myself in the embodied act of improvising in a way that allowed me to enter a more focussed and deeper listening state than other methods of practice. This was not necessarily the case with other improvisers, though they responded warmly to the creative opportunities and focus on listening and interaction that this method offered. My own investigations and interviews with participants revealed dissatisfaction

with how improvisation is taught within academic institutions. Further research into informal training or ways of learning that existed before the institutionalisation of jazz could prove fruitful.

This practice method is not a *complete* method: it does not necessarily help me physically embody new materials, and in that sense does not replace other, more mechanical methods of practice. Some participants valued a more mechanical approach in tandem with other creative development away from the instrument, while others saw my method as a way of getting straight to the heart of improvisation without the intermediary stage of rote-learning. This highlights a tension between ideas from deliberate practice and the concept of flow-state, which I suggest intertwine in my method. Care must be taken to balance strictness/openness and difficulty/ease of parameters in order to create a mutual understanding and an optimal experience during improvisation.

The final part of my research question asked "How do these methods help me achieve my aims: enhancing possibilities for personal expression, spontaneity, collaboration, flexibility across multiple contexts, and the generation of new and fresh musical materials?" Using striking moments as the genesis for new ideas, I have developed a system for finding new materials and creating a vocabulary that is personal to me. The concept privileges my artistic preference, as well as training my ear to listen out for, and react to, especially engaging events in improvisation. My research shows that this method can assist improvisers in finding freshness and freedom within familiar forms, and enhances a more fluid conversational approach that dispenses with arbitrary roles. My method generated many new striking moments during improvisation, proving its generative potential.

There is further research to be done in developing actions that deal with musical elements other than pitch and rhythm. Further research could also delve deeper into the distinction between tools of development (practicing *for* performance) and tools for generating scenarios, states or contexts conducive to improvisation (practicing performance). Nevertheless, the way of talking about improvisation with my peers that I have developed stands me in good stead for this work.

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