

UNIFYING CONCERNS

AND

ENTENTE

Locating and Pursuing the Idiomaticity of Free Improvisation

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DECLARATION OF GOOD ACADEMIC CONDUCT

I, André Bourgeois, hereby certify that this dissertation, which is 106 589 words in length, has been written by me, that it is a record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. All sentences or passages quoted in this dissertation from other people's work (with or without trivial changes) have been placed within quotation marks, and specifically acknowledged by reference to author, work and page. I understand that plagiarism – the unacknowledged use of such passages – will be considered grounds for failure in this dissertation and in the degree program as a whole. I also affirm that, with the exception of the specific acknowledgements, the following dissertation is entirely my own work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'André Bourgeois', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Signature of candidate

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the question of *idiomaticity* in the musical practice of free improvisation. Our enquiry begins with a discussion on the difficulties of delineating this activity and of defining it in positive terms. The production of improvised performances indeed emerges at the moment of its delivery and is immediately fleeting. This has led many musicians and writers to classify the practice as "*non-idiomatic*" (and thus resistant to semiotic analysis), a designation popularized by Derek Bailey in his pioneering book *Improvisation*. Yet despite its apparent elusiveness, the genre has been able to endure for several decades and keeps spreading to new music scenes throughout the world, supported by relatively consistent ideological and aesthetic preoccupations that unify and enable its practitioners and fans.

By using a triadic semiotic model in the tradition of C.S. Peirce and by considering the different aspects of free improvisation in the light of his theory of categories, we are able to give a semiotic account of both the emergent/evanescent and the enduring/idiomatic aspects of free improvisation. Free improvisation is not at all, as some would hope, free from all conventions. One of the accomplishments of this thesis is to deconstruct the myth of free improvisation's *non-idiomaticity* and demonstrate that the practice's particular idiomatic commitments have merely been shifted away from formal idioms (such as generically codified and recognizable approaches to tonality and rhythm) and onto codes of conduct that keep the activity coherent and significant for its participants. Musician testimonies reveal that the practices of free improvisers are indeed motivated by similar underlying concerns and principles. As for agreements on the momentary value of any of the improvised performance's *formal* aspects, they find mutual (if contingent) recognition through short-lived localized formal conventions that we call "*entente*". Improvisers, however, typically *playfully deconstruct* these emergent formal conventions rather expeditiously; they are intent on not letting any *formal* commitments solidify beyond a desired liminal capacity.

In the end, any gauge for the success of an improvised performance must refer either to the underlying unifying principles that make up the core of its idiomaticity or to the momentary exigencies of *entente*.

FOREWORD

Before we begin, it is worth providing some contextual details about why I chose to write a thesis on free improvisation, thereby disregarding warnings by prominent improvisers and writers on the subject who have alleged that it was "always changing and adjusting, never fixed, too elusive for analysis and precise description; essentially non-academic." (BAILEY 1980, *Improvisation It's Nature and Practice in Music*, p.ix) The topic of improvisation has interested me my whole life. My father Roland Bourgeois is a great jazz trumpet player (jazz has always been around) and I myself am a professionally trained jazz saxophone player. I must insist immediately that although I am trained in the practice of jazz improvisation, my own practical experience with proper free improvisation remains limited at this time; I am not a professional free improviser. Actually, my recent interest in free improvisation was above all spearheaded by philosophical concerns. Nonetheless, my practice as a musician operating within the jazz idiom had already led me to wonder about many of improvisation's problems.

How can a single work be the real-time product of a group of artists with different backgrounds, whose interpretations are clearly different and whose exchanges are necessarily contingent? How do participants reach understandings in real time with regard to the appropriate developments that the performance could undergo? How and for how long do these understandings remain valid after the moment of their elaboration? What is the role of preexisting common constraints and understandings? What predates the performance? What truly arises in the moment? To what extent is an improvised work really the product of the real-time interactions and agreements that its conditions of creation propose?

Free improvisation became a practice of enormous philosophical interest to me because it seems to adopt the most extreme position out of all music practices when it comes to leaving the determination of its features entirely up to the moment of encounter that characterizes the real-time performance. In the "pre-planned" vs. "emergent" dichotomy, it represents the most radical stance as an activity that glorifies emergence. As such, it is an attractive terrain for exploring some of the bigger questions surrounding improvisation. Is its position really as extreme as some of its proponents would hope or claim? Is this even a major concern among contemporary free improvisers, since, now that the practice boasts a tradition spanning several decades, it cannot realistically be said that the activity is pursued without a basis of common understandings?

Free improvisation was interesting to me for another, more personal reason. As a musician with formal training in jazz, but whose musical interests and sphere of musical operation go way beyond this particular genre. I had been involved in a number of projects where we practiced what we considered to be free improvisation. However, I began to question my own skills as a free improviser in more recent years. I was living in Moncton, on the east coast of Canada, when a musician colleague of mine, Fredericton-based guitarist Joel LeBlanc, received a travel grant to help invite various well-established Canadian free improvisers for collaborations in various cities in the Maritime provinces. Many of them - Chris Dadge, Nicole Rampersaud, Evan Shaw, and Joel LeBlanc himself - passed through Moncton, where I served as their contact and helped organize the shows. In some cases I was invited to play, either as a guest or as a collaborator for the whole show.¹

I was improvising with these musicians, or at least I was playing things that had not been planned ahead of time, but the touring improvisers sometimes seemed out of my reach. They seemed to be playing according to sets of performance strategies and extended instrumental techniques that I was not so familiar with and that, from the impression that I got during these sessions, belonged to the common understandings of these established improvisers. This became particularly evident in formations of four or more musicians, when other members would gravitate towards these points of understanding while I had difficulty breaking away from what I knew how to do in order to really participate in some of their exchanges. (My own contributions felt too melodic, too tonal; the sounds that I produced did not show enough variety from a qualitative point of view). The touring musicians always made me feel welcome; the free improvisers that I have met over the past years have all been very gentle, generous, kind people. I felt that, every time, there was a sincere interest in what I had to say as a musician and that there was a genuine desire to integrate me in the ensemble's dynamic, even in cases where they were all more familiar with each other's way of playing than I was. I began to wonder why it is that, in the context of this musical practice that presents itself as inclusive and whose parameters make it appear so open, it was, in some cases, so difficult for a trained musician such as myself to find my place. I felt this same sense of inadequacy when I moved to Marseille and began participating in the GRIM's *Marseille labo band* sessions, despite the free public improvisation workshops

¹ One of these shows - a duet concert with drummer Chris Dadge - was released as a CD on Bug Incision records: *Spaces are the Place*.

being advertised as being open to "any instrumentalist with a minimum practice. No stylistic or instrumental criteria is applied, only the participant's motivation is taken into account".² Yet my contributions at times felt more out of place than the noodlings of total amateurs toying around with the insides of a modified piano. Was my own training acting as a kind of obstacle, preventing me from engaging the practice as it is truly meant to be? But the touring improvisers in Canada were also professionally trained... so was it the nature of the training that made the activity more accessible to them than to me? Surely, the practice had some kinds of unifying understandings that my own training had not allowed me to master well enough to feel that I could integrate this practice easily, but that I nonetheless perceived well enough to understand the sense of cohesion that otherwise animated the group's activity. Surely, some principles and devices underlie the free improvisation practice: principles and devices that, if I should master them, would help reduce the perceived gap between my performance practice and that of established free improvisers.

The purpose of this project was not to personally acquire these sets of skills, although this will likely be one of my personal projects over the next months and years. Rather it was to propose an ontology of free improvisation that is able to account for these particular difficulties. If the practice is, in theory, open to participants of all levels and backgrounds, then what makes it so difficult to integrate for some performers? What makes it so inaccessible to the average music listener? The fact that the activity finds resonance among passionate musicians and music fans throughout the world attests to the fact that a base of common understandings supports these music communities. The proposed ontology must, then, be able to respect free improvisation's lack of commitment to any theoretical or formal³ idioms, and to, nonetheless, overcome claims that it is therefore somehow immune to the organizing, constraining and, more interestingly,

² « Cet atelier régulier (environ une fois par mois) s'adresse à tout instrumentiste ayant un minimum de pratique. Aucun critère de sélection stylistique et instrumentale n'est retenu, seule la motivation du participant est prise en compte. »

³ While the notion of "idiom" is often associated with formal codes, we consider *formal idioms* to be one out of many kinds of idioms. Formal idioms are, more specifically, the kind of idioms that prescribes certain sound parameters, sound forms and sound form configurations. Philip Tagg speaks of "sound structures", by which he means largely culturally specific structuralized aspects of music such as "pitch, timbre, texture, concepts of consonance and dissonance, etc." (TAGG 1987, p.7) Many writers, beginning with Derek Bailey, refer to what we call *formal idioms* simply as *idioms*, and oppose *idiomatic* forms of improvisation to *non-idiomatic* ones. In this thesis, we will instead speak in terms of different kinds of idiomaticities. When we speak of the *formal* aspects of free improvisation, we mean its *observable* content: mostly its sound content - the strictly sonic part of music - but also, perhaps, any other cue that makes actions and parts of the process observable to all participants and is capable of generating collateral experiences. When speaking of its non-formal aspects, we refer to anything else that contributes to one's interpretation of a performance: all other aspects of what we will sometimes call the performance's "ecology".

enabling effects of tradition, convention and idiom, in order to propose new axes along which the practice's idiomaticity may be retraced.

To pursue this project seemed all the more potentially rewarding because free improvisation seems to draw our attention to areas of meaning in music that we often ignore, to other aspects of musical reality. It invites us to consider music as it emerges, for its raw qualities, its presence, its agency. As I began to attend more free improvisation concerts, I was often overcome by an overwhelming sense of the richness and profundity of these performances. I quickly accepted that my research would never expose the "essence" of free improvisation, but I also began to note and retrace some of the basic parameters and enduring unifying principles that enable improvisers and spectators and serve as the conditions for their experience of free improvisation. The next logical step was to consider ways in which the activity may be considered in positive terms, instead of perpetuating the ever common perspective according to which free improvisation is a kind of "anti-genre" and is fundamentally "non-idiomatic". From here on, the research had three major objectives, each of which now corresponds to one of the three greater parts of the thesis: elaborating ways of considering a practice and tradition whose production is fleeting, deconstructing the myth of free improvisation's non-idiomaticity, and retracing free improvisation's shifted idiomaticity.

INTRODUCTION

With the present project, I wish to open up an ontological discussion on free improvisation. As a reaction to enduring claims that the practice is non-idiomatic, a designator that has persisted in writings on free improvisation since Derek Bailey popularized it in his book *Improvisation*, I wish to propose new axes along which we may retrace the expression of free improvisation's idiomaticity. By articulating the different aspects of improvised performances⁴, we will consider the way that improvisers commit to each. On the one hand, I will propose that free improvisers demonstrate few pre-engagements to formal idioms and that their most enduring and unifying commitments must be retraced to the underlying principles of their practice: its attitudes, values, concerns, strategies, rationales, etc. On the other hand, I will demonstrate that these parameters and conditions of creation have been developed in such a way that free improvisers are able to favor the emergent and evanescent aspects of sound creation, highlight them and push them to the forefront of the performance. Furthermore, I will propose the concept of "*entente*"⁵, a kind of localized, short-lasting convention that gives coherence to the immediate, fleeting propositions of improvisers. It does this thanks to the participants' collateral⁶ (if, nonetheless, always contingent) interpretations of the real-time situation, which articulate the contribution's sonic materiality, details concerning its situation of enunciation, and the practice's unifying underlying principles.

It is not the goal of this thesis to provide an exhaustive list of the unifying underlying principles of free improvisation. Evidently these concerns necessarily change a little over time and vary according to localized and personal interests and preoccupations. Nonetheless, I will provide a preliminary set of the practice's most basic parameters, as well as a repertoire of the unifying concerns, values, attitudes, rationales and strategies that are most often talked about by free improvisers themselves.

⁴ This will be done clearly according to the model proposed by C.S. Peirce's theory of categories.

⁵ The idea of "*entente*" is one of the central concepts of this thesis. "*Entente*", which in French refers to "agreement", "understanding", "good relation", "complicity", and, more etymologically distant yet of inescapably obvious pertinence to our topic: "hearing", is the designator that we will use when referring to momentary, short lasting, and to some degree contingent conventions that allow improvisation participants to make collective use of emergent forms and performance situations.

⁶ Peirce discusses collateral observation (CP 8.178), collective acquaintance (CP 8.183) and collateral experience (8.314) as necessities for any type of understanding. Collateral experience is always of objects that are accessible to all. Of course, the experiences are never identical, since each participant interprets the object according to his or her personal interpretative habits.

Hardly any attention will be given to trends concerning manipulations of formal materials; these trends will be treated as localized collective habits that traverse the practice in a selective, accidental way, rather than an essential, decisive one. Besides, free improvisation seems intent on actively resisting delineation along such formal parameters; it indefinitely defers the conclusion of any formal determination, choosing to remain in a liminal state, on the edge, where the stabilization of its features is continually avoided. This is the playground where it truly thrives. To impose a fixed set of properties would, in many cases, be not only unfitting of the practice's dynamic, process-oriented character, but also disrespectful of its practitioners' creative motivations. Marc Guillaume, in the introduction of *Figures de l'altérité*, warns that measures of control and normalization, notably practiced by researchers and writers, can take the life right out of living popular cultural phenomena.

*This interest and this new legitimation precisely come hand in hand with measures of control and normalization that bring about the demise, swift or progressive, of these popular cultures as living cultures. The moment when these cultures no longer have the means to defend themselves is the moment when ethnologists and archeologists make their appearance. The texts that they publish are in fact graves; we embalm that which is set to disappear.*⁷ (GUILLAUME 1994, *Figures de l'altérité*, p.10)

There are indeed risks involved in any attempt to propose an ontological perspective for a living cultural practice, especially one that is renowned for its consistent lack of pre-engagement to any tradition, at least speaking in formal terms. There is, nonetheless, a tradition of free improvisation, spanning over several decades, which can now be retraced to different local scenes, networks of international collaborations, dedicated venues, festivals and record labels. The purpose of this thesis is not to retrace or describe these networks, nor is it to give a historical perspective on the practice. Many such studies already exist, where sociological considerations of particular local, national or international scenes are developed alongside additional focuses on the given community's particular ideological concerns or preferred approaches or devices (SALADIN 2014, *Esthétique de l'improvisation libre Expérimentation musicale et politique*) (SIQUEIRA 2013, *A própria maneira: bandas experimentais e música improvisada no Rio de Janeiro*) (STÉVANCE 2011, *Musique actuelle*) attest to this.

⁷ « Cet intérêt, cette légitimation nouvelle vont de pair, précisément, avec des mesures de contrôle et de normalisation qui entraîneront la disparition, rapide ou progressive, de ces cultures populaires comme cultures vivantes. C'est au moment où ces cultures n'ont plus le moyen de se défendre qu'apparaissent les ethnologues et les archéologues. Les textes qu'ils publient sont en fait des tombeaux, on embaume ce qui va disparaître. »

Let us nonetheless take a moment to situate the free improvisation practice as it is addressed in this work, even if the practice, for reasons that will be made clear in the first part of the thesis, is to this day difficult to delineate clearly. We bring our attention to a movement of improvisers whose pioneering generation began their operations in the 1960s and 1970s, first in North America and Europe. The desire to do away with scores and, as much as possible, with formal constraints, was a logical development in the ideological and aesthetic context of this period. In this sense, oddly, it was by attempting a break from traditions that free improvisation enlisted itself firmly within the canon of modern and post-modern artistic traditions. The fact that the practice has lived on for over fifty years forces us, if not to call it out on its claim to spontaneity, at least to wonder what it entails to be spontaneous for so long and whether the meaning of being spontaneous has changed over time. Nanz writes:

*Generation changes on the one hand and decade-long activity of many practitioners on the other entail a shift in the phenomenon's meaning. What holds through for so long is not pure spontaneity, but rather, in popular jargon: "classic". In other branches, this would have been considered a style for some time.*⁸ (NANZ 2011, *Aspekte der Freien Improvisation in der Musik*, p.12)

Indeed, the fact that its practitioners have continually deferred the determination of their activity's identifying features, yet have upheld their activity over time, have made efforts to create an identity for themselves (STÉVANCE 2011) and have sought recognition by established institutions (BRAXTON 1985, *Tri-axium Wrtitings*) poses an interesting paradox. On the one hand, they speak of the elusiveness of their practice, but on the other many musicians happily discuss their approach, their motivations, their concerns, the mindsets and attitudes that enable them to operate under these specific creative conditions. This has been the case for nearly all musicians with whom I discussed during the time of this research. It has also been the case since the pioneering generations of free improvisation, as attests the fact that most of the early publications on the practice were written by the musicians themselves. (BAILEY 1980) (BRAXTON 1985) If they do raise important observations on the subversive character of their activity and the elusiveness of their medium, at least under the conditions which frame their activity, they often seem not to notice that these framing conditions and the principles that

⁸ » Generationenwechsel einerseits und jahrzehntelange Praxis zahlreicher Exponenten andererseits bringen eine Bedeutungsverschiebung des Phänomens mit sich. Was so lange durchhält, ist nicht pure Spontaneität, sondern, im Jargon des Pop, »Klassik«. In andern Sparten wäre längst von einem Stil die Rede. «

motivate them are, in turn, not elusive at all. They are the points of conversion of the practice: its recognizable unifying features. This will be one of the main threads of this work.

For now, let us just say that to be enduringly elusive and subversive, as free improvisation aspires to be, is not something that has to seem puzzling. It simply means that the participants are pursuing a successful practice of deconstruction⁹. Free improvisation wants to remain relevant and, through its ongoing enquiry, hopes to renew the avant-garde character of its approach. In order to help it stay fresh, its practitioners seek to redefine and redraw the agencies that exist between its materials and actors; they thus renewably question established dichotomies, for example that of sound *vs.* noise. Deconstruction, however, neither comes from a convention-free, code-free playground, nor leads to one; it merely shifts the binary oppositions that make up our interpretation of the world, deferring them to pairs that may have gone unnoticed but that henceforth serve as collectively accessible references. Indeed, there seems to be little hope for those that conceive freedom in improvisation as a freedom from all conventions and idioms. It should be said right away that this illusory type of *ex nihilo* conception has, in any case, become less common among the torchbearers of free improvisation... even if it is still quite common for people to characterize the practice as "non-idiomatic".

From a research point of view, free improvisation becomes a natural point of interest when considering questions of convention and idiomaticity. The reason for this is that it is the musical practice that performs the most overt avoidance of engagement to any set of conventions or codes, at least formally speaking. Its usual claim is that it is the music practice that plans the least and commits to the least ahead of the moment of the performance. In this sense, should there, hypothetically speaking, be any aspects of musical life that can only be unleashed or experienced in a convention-free and code-free environment, free improvisation, then, would offer the best corpus for locating and retracing them. Cannone writes:

If we want support from improvisation in order to fuel our reflection on the question of creative processes in music, then we must look to improvisation's most radical forms, those that, precisely, bet on liberating themselves from all pre-texts; we must address what we more commonly refer to as free improvisation. These improvisation practices bring us closest to the category of "improvisation" in its pure form, and therefore closest to grasping improvisation as a

⁹ Deconstruction in the Derridean sense will be discussed later on, notably drawing on Sophie Stévanche's application of the concept to free improvisation

process.¹⁰ (CANONNE 2012, *Improvisation collective libre et processus de création musicale: création et créativité au prisme de la coordination*, p.112)

This has made of free improvisation a favored topic of discussion for many ontological questions about music creation, particularly concerning musical acts and music elaborated in real-time. (LEVAILLANT 1981, *L'improvisation musicale*) (ROUSSELOT 2012, *Instant musicien, instant musical, instant musicologique*)

From the musicians' point of view, this blank slate of a playground could grant the freedom to achieve various creative utopian ideals, free from the oppression of convention. Literature on free improvisation attests to the hopeful optimism with which musicians have embraced free improvisation as a medium to pursue social (CARDEW 1971, *The Great Learning*), political (SALADIN 2014), and spiritual (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*) (MAY 1994, *The Courage to Create*) ideals. However, these kinds of pure, ideal creative conditions are, in practice, largely illusory. Free improvisation is a social activity. The sound content of improvised performances thus necessarily exists in relations of binding agency to everything else that concerns the social space in which it is elaborated. In this case, free improvisation's "extreme" position seems compromised. Yet it is the sociality of the free improvisation process that has brought the activity back into the real world and made it empirically valuable to academics interested in its open-endedness, its inclination for emergence and its collaborative "swarm-like" properties (BORGO 2006, *Sync or Swarm: Improvising Music In A Complex Age*) (MAZZOLA 2009, *Flow, Gesture, and Spaces in Free Jazz*). Many have even defended collective musical improvisation as a model of enquiry that may prove useful in other fields such as architecture (BROWN 2006, *Noise Orders: Jazz, Improvisation and Architecture*), scientific research and business (SAWYER 2008, *Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration*), fields that are more inclined to plan, organize and coordinate things in advance. Others have drawn parallels between free improvisation and the elaboration of cultural

¹⁰ Si l'on veut s'appuyer sur l'improvisation pour alimenter notre réflexion sur la question des processus de création musicaux, il faut donc se pencher sur les formes les plus radicales de l'improvisation, celles qui, justement, font le pari de s'affranchir de tout pré-texte, et s'intéresser à ce que l'on appelle, plus communément, l'improvisation libre. Ces pratiques d'improvisation nous placent au plus proche de la catégorie « improvisation » à l'état pur, et donc au plus proche de la saisie de l'improvisation comme processus. »

knowledge (BARBER 2008, *Improvisation and the Art of Making Things Stick*) or the "world's manner of emergence"(PIEKUT 2013, *Chance and Certainty: John Cage's Politics of Nature*).

These questions are captivating, but are not the main focus of this research. This thesis, rather, takes the "risky" ontological route; despite warnings by improvisers and scholars of improvisation (BAILEY 1980), it hopes to propose some theoretical¹¹ and semiotic perspectives that may shed light on the ways that improvised performances, despite their emergent and evanescent nature, appear to bring about moments of (actual or imagined) cohesion within groups of participants.

Thus, with regard to free improvisation as a tradition, questions that are more likely to interest us than "What makes up this *art world*?" (BECKER 2008 (1983), *Art Worlds*) are: How does this practice negotiate the fact that it has engendered a tradition of non-commitment to (formal) traditions? How can such a tradition invest its performances with materials that find resonance among all (or many of) its participants? How can a tradition simultaneously thrive on both congeniality and contingency? What conditions and strategies does a practice like free improvisation set up in order to make up for the fact that it renounces to a certain form of pre-planning and pre-engagements? From a processual point of view, what devices or agreements allow a group of participants to proceed together towards open-ended developments, without committing to a particular formal objective?

We do not claim to be able to explain the "essence" of free improvisation, but rather to propose some positively identifiable enduring traits and devices that support the activity and act as conditions that may enable the achievement of its essence. Theoretical support from many writers will thus be evoked in order to stress the importance of a dynamic conception of the free improvisation performance. This will allow us to: a) account for the binding agency between its different aspects, and: b) not let the evanescence of its formal materials lead to the assumption that the practice is without other forms of commitment, other centers of convention and idiomaticity. While free improvisation makes little to no commitments to formal codes, its emerging formal materials are understood in association to its antecedents (both causal and analogical), to the personal constraints and habits of those involved, to the underlying principles that unite and motivate its participants, to the circumstances surrounding the enunciation event,

¹¹ Though the usual materials of music theory are of relevance in free improvisation, musicians' testimonies provide many detailed accounts of other kinds of enduring, unifying, recurring elements. Theory, rather than being forgotten, can be redeveloped around aspects.

etc.

We will thus affirm the importance of these dynamic links and the way that they contribute to both our understanding of particular improvised performances and the practice as a whole. To this effect, Pareyson's theory of Formativity stresses the indivisible union between a work's materiality and the formative process (the "way of forming") that led to its elaboration. Actor-Network Theory and Bakhtin/Todorov's¹² concepts of intertextuality and dialogism will also help us retrace the binding agencies that link performances and performance fragments to other elements that become constitutive aspects of the interpretation of a performance. Sophie Stévançe will be referenced often, since, in her book *Musique actuelle*, she already convincingly applies the idea of dialogism to collective improvisation.

She will also be referenced abundantly for her work in describing free improvisation as a practice of deconstruction in the Derridean sense. As a method, we may ourselves, too, apply deconstruction to certain reductionist conceptions of free improvisation. Stévançe writes:

If actualisme¹³ expresses the refusal of rules that govern a musical system and, at the same time, seems to impose other ones, we will have to deconstruct free improvisation, as conceived by actualists, as pure, entirely spontaneous inspiration.¹⁴ (STÉVANÇE 2011)

To think of improvisation in terms deconstruction helps us to put behind us two enduring, yet opposing, myths about it, namely: a) that free improvisation is a kind of purely spontaneous

¹²An important point must be made regarding our use of Bakhtin. Popularized in the French academic world thanks to Todorov's accounts of his work, Bakhtin's work is currently the object of a controversy regarding the correct attribution of the intellectual property of some of his texts. Todorov does explain that Bakhtin worked in close relation with many colleagues, notably Pavel Medvedev and especially Valentin Voloshinov, and that the correct authorship is often difficult to attribute. He proposes different configurations of co-authorship for different texts, attributing the bulk of the reflection to Bakhtin, an attribution that the French academic world took for granted until recently, with the 2011 publication of *Bakhtine démasqué (Bakhtin unmasked)* by Jean-Paul Bronckart and Cristian Bota. Pointing out a number of contradictions between different texts attributed to Bakhtin, the authors accuse him and his Russian editors of having duped the academic world by including in his corpus a number of texts that were not written by him. Bronckart and Bota go as far as to call for the disqualification of Bakhtinian studies. The controversy has yet to be settled and many questions regarding the authorship of these texts remain unsolved. Given the pertinence of the ideas at stake, we choose to welcome them in the narrative argument of this research, leaving the question of authorship to be answered by the next rounds of Bakhtinian researchers. As we await their findings, we will mostly use Todorov's attributions of authorship, leaving with him the eventual responsibility of any mislabeling. We will thus usually identify references to this school of thought using the vague, yet concise authorship label "Bakhtin/Todorov".

¹³ She refers here to a local movement of artists in the province of Quebec whose practices include, to an important measure, free improvisation.

¹⁴ « Si l'actualisme exprime le refus des règles qui régissent le système musical et, dans le même temps, semble en imposer d'autres, il faudra déconstruire l'improvisation libre conçue par les actualistes comme pure inspiration entièrement spontanée. »

ex nihilo improvisation; and b) that everything in improvisation is pre-prepared by its practitioners.

As mentioned above, one of the main threads of this thesis is the idea that improvised performances, despite their emergent and evanescent character, are supported by unifying underlying principles that are recognizable to the informed spectator. Most "conventions" in free improvisation can be retraced to this repertoire as "capacitators": conditions, values, attitudes, devices and rationales that allow participants to bring forward and appreciate works whose materials are fleeting and demonstrate no commitment to pre-existing formal codes.

We will thus effectively sort the aspects of free improvisation onto two levels: a lower, enduring level where recognizable conditions and principles unify its participants and govern their activity, and an upper level represented by the emergent and evanescent aspects of improvised performances that are meant to be determined only at the moment of the performance. We will consider this organization, characterized by an idiomatic shift, as constituting free improvisation's idiomatic particularity.

We will retrace this idiomatic particularity in semiotic terms, by exploiting Charles Sanders Peirce's three-tiered model and his theory of categories. It must be noted that Peirce rarely addressed questions of meaning in music, but that his triadic model of the sign, augmented by the interpretant (in addition to the sign/signifier and the object/signified), is completely open and able to encompass signs of all kinds, qualities, degrees of clearness and degrees of formal conventionalization. His model, contrary to most European semiotic models, is both verbal and non-verbal. It thus proves to be useful when elaborating theories of idiomaticity in non-verbal languages and fields. After all, it is the lack of commitment to any kind of formal code that has led many to persist in classifying free improvisation as a non-idiomatic practice. It is also able to account for the contingency of interpretation that dyadic models are unable to address properly, a deficiency that has led to the rejection of semiotics by a number of specialists in performance studies, notably Edward Schieffelin and Erika Fischer-Lichte (FISCHER-LICHTE 2008 (2004), *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*).

In the semiotics of music, we would also like to mention Philip Tagg, who proposes an interesting typology of signs in music (TAGG 1992, *Towards a Sign Typology of Music*)¹⁵ and

¹⁵ I have not yet had the chance to read Tagg's updated version of this text, which he recently published as the thirteenth chapter of his book *Music's Meanings* (2013)

methods of semiotic analysis that offer interesting potential by making the necessary shift away from scores and marginal compositional techniques of erudite western music in order to focus on the more "readily recognizable stereotypes of musical code" in popular music, in an effort to get closer to what is "truly 'general' in the music of our society" and "what the music around us *usually communicates as a rule*." (TAGG 1987, *Musicology and the Semiotics of Popular Music*, p.5)

Tagg's methods of semiotic analysis are concerned with identifying similarities and generalities: features of popular music that garner instant recognition and mass appeal. He promotes an "*interobjective*" approach: "which establishes similarities in musical structure between the analysis object and other music." (TAGG 1987, p.11)

But free improvisation aspires neither to garner mass appeal, nor to fuel its process with similarities; it is somewhere on the opposite side of the spectrum, voluntarily marginal and continually flirting heavily with the more elusive formal features of music. Some of its expressed objectives include the rejection of established conventions, the promotion of emergence and the exaltation of the musician's genuine voice. It thus highlights the inherent *difference* of sound materials rather than its easiest points of convergence.

Thus, for us, a question just as poignant as what it is about the semiotics of music that establishes similarity between the interpretations of different participants is the following: What is it about the semiotics of music that allows participants to pursue an activity collectively despite the facts that: a) the sound materials that they use are inherently different, and: b) their interpretations of the process at hand are inherently contingent? To tackle such a question using a dyadic semiotic model is highly problematic.

Tagg addresses questions that go well beyond the scope of dualistic models; this can be seen as a signal that they are uncomfortable with dualism. He gets somewhat close to breaking away from a dyadic model, drawing on Francès, Imberty, Lerdahl and Jackendoff, Keiler, and Stoianova to point out that "models constructed to explain the denotative aspects of verbal language can by no means be transplanted wholesale into the field of music with its connotative, associative-affective character of discourse." (TAGG 1987, p.4) He also implies that signs in music must be flexible, saying that the "process of musical association can establish banks of *interobjective comparison material* which for one single analysis object can include references to hundreds of different musical works. (TAGG 1987, p.11) However, he still sees symbolic

communication in music as an exchange of sounds whose meaning "must be decoded". (TAGG 1987, p.6) This kind of perception is typical of dyadic thought. We prefer a semiotic model according to which sounds are proposed to listeners who are then free to interpret them as they may, according to their own interpretative habits, the degree of congeniality that they and their collaborators demonstrate, and the real-time circumstances of the performance situation at hand. Only a triadic model can offer this kind of openness while at the same time promising to cover a wider range of the different aspects that contribute to the meaning of a performance. In short, neither Tagg nor Nattiez, as far as I have seen, ever adopts a completely open triadic model.

We see the limits (even the failures) of dyadic models in musical thought, particularly with regard to contingency and semiotic flexibility. The contingency of interpretations, a fact that concerns the life of all signs, has important consequences in music, a collective activity whose purposes and aspirations nonetheless do not usually involve any kind of explicit transfer of information. The musical experience thrives on contingency; its signs must be flexible. Free improvisation in particular makes constructive use of contingencies and controversies, turning them into creative devices, even depending on them as conditions that overlook the practice's lasting dynamicity and continually renewed relevance as a progressive music practice. The activity also needs signs to be vague in order for exchanges to continue swiftly, without the need to stop and explain what was intended by a particular proposition. Only a triadic model provides the flexibility to account for such phenomena without making complicated detours. When we work with a triadic model, we develop arguments that are not only more complex, but also more logical because phenomena such as contingency, flexibility and vagueness can be accounted for without abandoning the capability of a system that is detailed and explicit. The discussion may then proceed from a sound foundation.

Concretely, we will apply Peirce's theory of categories to the particular modes of distribution and expression of meaning in improvised performances and reveal an idiomatic shift that can help explain free improvisation's unique achievement in being an enduring, coherent practice despite its exaltation of emergence and its non-committal attitude towards established formal codes. The theory of categories will allow us to account for a code whose particular idiomaticity - which Peirce represents with the category of thirdness - has been largely shifted from its formal sound materials and reinvested in habits concerning its unifying underlying principles. Improvisers, whose unity is supported by these codes of conduct, are given the means

to bring out and collectively resonate with those aspects of sound that are less codified: raw quality, presence, agency - which exemplify Peirce's categories of firstness and secondness. Methodologically, Peirce's model allows us to account for the semiotic particularities of these emergent and fleeting aspects of sound, aspects that dyadic semiotic models are unable to grasp.

As I was furthering my understanding of Peirce's theory of categories by rummaging through his collected papers, I became interested in exploring other areas of his writings. As a result, this project has given way, alongside its primary investigation into ontological questions concerning free improvisation, to a kind of parallel investigation into the thought of C.S. Peirce. His writings eventually became the dominant theoretical corpus of this particular project. I soon found use for other ideas of his, notably by applying his modes of separation of ideas in order to identify some of the most basic parameters of free improvisation: the characteristics from which our conception of the practice cannot be separated. This allowed me to solidly challenge the lingering tendency to describe the practice in negative terms ("it is an anti-genre", "it is non-idiomatic" *etc.*) I also found use for Peirce's theory of vagueness. The smoothness of free improvisation's lightning-fast exchanges depends on vagueness, as does improvisers' sense that they are in control of the situation: vagueness leaves the process open to almost any outcome, as it indefinitely defers the completion of a proposition's determination.

Corpus

This particular project does not make use of performance analyses. On the one hand, there is, among improvisers, a mistrust of documents, such as scores or recordings, as appropriate representations of improvised performances. Cornelius Cardew says the following:

What you hear on tape or disc is indeed the same playing but divorced from its natural context.... The natural context provides a score with which the players are unconsciously interpreting - a score that co-exists inseparably with the music, standing side by side with it and sustaining it. (BAILEY 1980, p.103)

To sever it from its live context, to distribute it in the form of a recording, for example, would force on it some kind of conversion. Furthermore, "complete conversion from one system to another is, if not impossible, then at least totally improbable. There would always be a "left

over".¹⁶ (CAUQUELIN 2012, *La conversion, le reste*, p.21)

A true appreciation of an improvised performance would thus necessarily have to occur in conditions of real-time physical presence. Why would it be different for improvisation than for any other kind of performance? The witnessing of live creation must be done in person. This may have to do with the real-time simultaneity of multiple processes, which brings the audience member closer to the musicians' imagination. Canadian guitarist Arthur Bull says:

But there's also this part that's about imagination, you know. You're actually trying to imagine what's gonna happen next in the music. People who really like the music like it because there's this sense of immediacy like this sound happens and then what's the next sound that's gonna happen? Boom, it happens and you're very close to the musician's sound imagination. It's alive this music! (BULL 2015, *Interview with André Bourgeois*)

A second reason for not providing analyses of actual performances in the context of this project is that we will be conducting a primarily theoretical and ontological reflection and will be addressing our conception of the practice as a whole. Important leads will be provided that may open our interpretations of improvised performances to new modes of agency and ways of retracing them. However, these leads will come at the conclusion of the thesis. It felt unnatural to suddenly tag on performance descriptions at the very end of this document, knowing that they would much better serve as a point of departure for a follow-up project.

We will, however, take into account testimonies from many improvising musicians, drawing on numerous interviews that were formally organized specifically for this project, as well as other preexisting testimonies. According to Pareyson, aesthetics are at the meeting point of philosophy and experience. (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), *Esthétique: Théorie de la formativité*, p.30-31) For this reason, with this research, I wanted to enter in a dialogue with practitioners, to attentively consider their point of view and to get them to talk some more and to draw from their experience. As writes Pareyson:

An aesthetics that is stuck too deep in philosophy (empty abstraction) runs the risk of being a mere theatre of inconsequential and frivolous divagations. The philosopher cannot develop aesthetics by himself. He needs aesthetic experience. The philosopher only manages to speak of

¹⁶ « La conversion complète d'un régime à l'autre est, sinon impossible, du moins tout à fait improbable. Il y aurait donc toujours un « reste ». »

*art by extending, on a speculative plane, the discourse of the artist or critic.*¹⁷ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.30)

For the interviews conducted as fieldwork for this project, I had prepared a specific set of questions for oral interviews, to which three questions were added for a second round of written interviews. The goal was to get the musicians to speak openly about their practice and document their thoughts on the fleetingness of their medium's materials on the one hand, and the enduringness of their practice as a coherent tradition on the other. Interviews were conducted with improvisers of different age groups (and different numbers of years invested in the practice) that are still active in the improvisation scenes of small and large cities in Canada and Brazil. The interview corpus is arbitrary (Barthes gives the following definition of "corpus": "a finite collection of materials, which is determined in advance by the analyst, with (inevitable) arbitrariness, and on which he is going to work." (BARTHES 1967, *Elements of Semiology*, p.96) and largely made up of the improvisers that I had the chance to meet over the past few years and that generously granted me their time. Closing the thesis, at the end of the bibliography, the reader will find links to websites containing recordings of videos of performances by these very musicians.

Thesis structure

The development of this thesis is organized in three major, roughly equal-sized sections. The first will propose ways to locate and consider free improvisation, since the practice's production is fleeting. We will reject negative conceptions of the practice and propose leads on ways to consider it in positive terms, by turning our attention away from what the activity rejects (scores and formal codes) and towards what it tries to develop (process and emergence) We will then make the case for a semiotic consideration of free improvisation, defending the pertinence of a triadic model for the consideration of a non-verbal object whose materiality and idiomaticity are largely relegated to different aspects of the sign. Finally, using Peirce's modes of separation

¹⁷ « Une esthétique trop prise dans la philo (vide abstraction) risque de n'être que le théâtre de divagations inconséquentes et frivoles. Le philosophe seul ne peut pas développer l'esthétique. Il a besoin de l'expérience esthétique. Le philosophe ne parvient à parler de l'art qu'en prolongeant sur un plan spéculatif le discours de l'artiste ou du critique. »

of ideas, we will propose a set of default parameters from which our conception of free improvisation cannot be separated.

In the middle part of the thesis, we will deconstruct the myth of free improvisation's non-idiomaticity. We will revisit ideas such as convention and freedom in the light of the practice's particular conditions of creation. We will then evoke various theories by Pareyson, Bakhtin/Todorov, and Latour in order to elaborate on the dynamic binding agencies that link the observable formal aspects of free improvisation to other elements that contribute to our interpretations of them. Finally, we will consider the practice's particular mode of enquiry as one that is deconstructive, yet playful, drawing on Derrida (through Stévanse) and Huizinga, respectively.

The third part will allow us to retrace free improvisation's shifted idiomaticity. Using Peirce's theory of categories, we will insist that the true idiomaticity of free improvisation (its thirdness) lies in the unifying underlying principles that govern the activity of its participants and allow them to work with formal material that, otherwise, demonstrates no pre-engagement to any formal codes. Formal conventions, rather, are achieved in real-time, according to collateral experiences. Since they are of localized and momentary applicability, we call them "*entente*", a concept that will be developed extensively until the final chapter of the thesis. Finally, given the notable particularities of how this activity expresses its idiomaticity, we will elaborate new, more appropriate measures for gauging success, failure and virtuosity in the practice of free improvisation.

Note on the use of foreign language references

This research was done in the academic context of an international consortium of universities and, through each research center, I was able to consult references from the libraries of many different countries and discover works that are sometimes less known internationally. For example, while many English-language books on free improvisation are well known and heavily referenced among researchers from other linguistic backgrounds, there also exist many works on the subject in French and German. An indirect academic contribution of this thesis will be to introduce the English-speaking academic world to some of these texts.

I am a fluent reader of French, English, German, Portuguese, Russian, Italian and

Spanish. Nearly all texts were consulted in the language of their original publication. The original language quotes are given as footnotes throughout the thesis, while English translations are provided in the main text. The translations are all my own, except where it is otherwise specified. There are two notable examples of works that are referenced in an already available translation. The first is Luigi Pareyson's *Teoria della formatività*, for which a more recent and more readily available French edition was consulted (translated by Gilles A. Tiberghien and Rita di Lorenzo). The second is a series of works by Mikhail Bakhtin and his collaborators, for which I mostly used Tzvetan Todorov's translations, while sometimes looking up the original Russian texts out of curiosity with regard the original terminology. I plan on spending some extra time with the original texts because the controversy regarding the authorship of some of them (see note 12) has made me want to form my own opinion on the matter. Until this matter is settled, I chose to use Todorov's translations, compiled in a concise volume, as well as his attribution of authorship.

English translations are provided in the main text for interviews that were conducted in another language. The original language text is provided in the footnotes, while complete transcripts of the interviews in the original language are available at the end of the thesis.

Punctuation in the footnotes respect the norms of the original language. In the case of Portuguese, I use Brazilian punctuation, which, for example, uses American quotation marks. As for English spelling throughout the thesis, I write according to the American norm, except when a passage from a British writer is quoted. In these cases, the original spelling is kept.

FIRST PART

***LOCATING AND CONSIDERING
A PRACTICE AND TRADITION
WHOSE PRODUCTION IS FLEETING***

1. - ENDURINGLY FLEETING

a) Difficulties in delineation

Let us begin where many others have begun. Opening statements in publications on free improvisation have presented it as an activity that, because of its evanescent, dynamic and unpredictable character, remains notoriously difficult to delineate and analyze. More precisely, authors have said that "as a musical activity, it cannot be placed easily into a particular style-category".(RIDGWAY 2016, *Observations on Free Improvisation*) Or that improvisation is always difficult to delineate, both ontologically and through analysis.¹⁸ (COUPRIE 2012, *Improvisation électroacoustique: analyse musicale, étude génétique et perspectives numériques*, p.149) Or again that reflexive and organized analysis of improvised phenomena seems particularly problematic, precisely because they are characterized primarily by their evanescence (they vanish in the moment of their accomplishment) and their unpredictability (it is because a person finds herself in a situation that she has not anticipated that she must improvise)."¹⁹ (CANONNE 2012, p.107)

Derek Bailey's pioneering book *Improvisation*, a work that set the tone that many authors would subsequently adopt when writing on the subject, states the following in its introduction, almost as a warning to academics: "any attempt to describe improvisation must be, in some respects, a misrepresentation, for there is something central to the spirit of voluntary improvisation which is opposed to the aims and contradicts the idea of documentation." (BAILEY 1980, p.ix) Artists' books, which make up the greater part of important early writings on free improvisation, generally focus on the process through which it is brought forth or the experience that participants make of it. These accounts are sometimes mixed with unmistakably spiritual or mythical perspectives, a notable example being the writings of Cornelius Cardew.^{20 21 22} The discourse of improvisers, as documented in these texts, constitutes an enduring echo of the evanescent experiences they recount. As such, they constitute a tremendously interesting resource

¹⁸ « toujours difficile à cerner, tant sur le plan ontologique que sur celui de l'analyse ».

¹⁹ « [...] L'analyse réflexive et organisée de phénomènes d'improvisation semble particulièrement problématique, précisément parce que ceux-ci se trouvent avant tout caractérisés par leur évanescence (ils s'évanouissent dans le temps de leur réalisation) et leur imprévisibilité (c'est parce qu'une personne se retrouve dans une situation qu'il n'avait pas anticipée qu'il doit improviser). »

²⁰ Among Cardew's writings, there is the Treatise handbook (CARDEW 1971, *Treatise Handbook*) and the paragraphs of the Great Learning (CARDEW 1971 *The Great Learning*).

²¹ See also NACHMANOVITCH 1991.

²² See also MAY 1994.

for studying developments and transformations of discursive aspects of free improvisation worlds.

We have no reason to object to the use of qualifiers such as "elusive" and "unpredictable" when writers describe how formal idioms traverse improvised performances in real-time, nor for how they qualify the listener's particular experience of the performance. While the latter can be said for the unique experience that comes with the appreciation of any performance, the specific relationship that free improvisation entertains with formal idioms merits our attention because of its prominence in discourse and writings interested in the improvisation practice. Indeed, many of these texts present the *absence* of such a relationship to formal idioms as a fundamental condition of free improvisation. The codes that govern most other so called "non-improvisational" musical practices prescribe sets of acceptable treatments and modes of organization for its formal content: the formal idiomaticities of these practices explicitly prescribe melodic, rhythmic and harmonic materials. Materials envisaged by these codes can be said to have an abstract and transcendent kind of meaning: they are recognized first and foremost thanks to mental associations, they are more easily removable from their context and they are bound to other materials of these codes through strong arbitrary correlations.²³ Participants' expectations and habits are tuned accordingly and a work will be judged favorably if it demonstrates a successful representation and actualization of the code's formal prescription. In the case of free improvisation, the only formal prescription is that no explicit formal prescriptions are necessary, or even desired, ahead of the moment of the performance. For some, the ideal of free improvisation is an "improvisation generalized to all of the music's parameters".²⁴ (SALADIN 2014, p.22)

It is certainly true that the sound content of improvised performances is appreciated differently than that of renditions of pre-composed pieces. In free improvisation, formal features are the results of real-time actions and negotiations; they are deemed significant mostly for their quality and phenomenological presence, for how they insert themselves within the process that generates them, and therefore also for the contextual causal relationships in which they are involved: their agency. Formal features may be the centerpieces of improvised performances'

²³ In the terms of C.S. Peirce, of which we will soon make much more extensive use, these particular aspects of sound are thus charged with *symbolic* meaning. (PEIRCE 1931)

²⁴ « une improvisation généralisée à tous les paramètres de la musique »

"ecologies"^{25 26 27} but they are not the center of the practice's idiomaticity. Free improvisation determines little to none of its formal content ahead of performance time and, when it does, it does so without any explicit obligation towards established formal codes. Derek Bailey says that "[i]t has no stylistic or idiomatic commitment. It has no prescribed idiomatic sound." (BAILEY 1980, p.83) Free improvisation does not call for the use of any particular formal sound properties, nor does it require that its materials be put together according to any given set of formal patterns and relations. References to formal idioms inevitably occur constantly in practice, but there is nothing resembling an allegiance to any particular formal idiom. Thus, when looking only at the formal features of free improvisation, it becomes difficult to identify positively determining idiomatic characteristics. Since the sound content is fundamentally bound to each moment, descriptions of these properties can hardly be applicable beyond the scope of a single performance. "Any attempt to draw generalizing descriptions of free improvisation based on these most elusive properties, as suggested Bailey, is vowed to misrepresent it." (BAILEY 1980, p.ix)

b) In Search of Positively Defining Features

Indeed, the tendency has been instead to describe this music in negative terms. Dieter

²⁵ The idea of ecology appears in the writings of many academics. Wisnik speaks of an "ecology of sound" in his 1989 book *O som e o sentido* (in English: *Sound and Meaning*) (WISNIK 1989). His account is interesting as it not only retraces the relations that sound entertains with the world in which it lives, but also proposes an anthropology of noise as it relates different aspects of sound to one another. "There exists an ecology of sound that reflects an anthropology of noise, and that I will attempt to cover by speaking of the modal, tonal and post-tonal worlds". My translation from the original Portuguese: "Existe uma ecologia do som que remete a uma antropologia do ruído, e que eu vou tentar percorrer falando dos mundos modal, tonal e pós-tonal." (p.32) This perspective is interesting for us, since we may extend Wisnik's conception of an ecology of sound to still further treatments of sound, such as the devices that are mobilized in free improvisation.

²⁶ Vecchione also envisions the work as an ecology (VECCHIONE, *La recherche musicologique aujourd'hui: questionnements, intersciences, métamusicologie*, 1992)

²⁷ For considering ecology-type relationships between formal features and other elements of performances, as well as what the nature of these relationships can be, I like Benjamin Piekut's take on ecologies in his 2014 article *Actor-Networks in Music History: Clarifications and Critiques* (PIEKUT 2014): "An ecology is an emergent, hybrid grouping that connects many different kinds of things. It has real boundaries that mark it off as distinct from its surrounding environment, but those boundaries are variable and open. [...] an ecology contains a whole gradient of relationships, from indifferent coexistence to highly interested antagonism. Most of all, an ecology presents a variegated temporality, with cyclic processes and repeating patterns of iteration that create dynamic kinds of stasis, as well as the possibility of change. Each of the relationships in an ecology has its own history of emergence, change, and decay; some associations are fleeting, while others perdure by virtue of strong connections to other lasting actors. Most importantly, an ecology is a haphazard, unpredictable conglomeration of things and processes. [...] Distinctions between social, technological, or musical domains are difficult to make; an ecology wanders across these three and many more." (p. 23)

Nanz writes that "[i]t is [...] constitutive of free improvisation that a positive style designation be a priori nonsensical." (NANZ 2011, p.14)²⁸ Richard Scott says: "In defense of its molecular fluidity free improvisation is often defined by its practitioners more by its undefined qualities, by what it is not, by what it doesn't do and by what it avoids, rather than by its own idiomatic features." (SCOTT 2014, *Free Improvisation and Nothing: From the Tactics of Escape to a Bastard Science*, p.3) It has been called an "anti-style" (NANZ 2011, p.14) and continues to be referred to regularly as a "non-idiomatic" practice, in the sense first popularized by Derek Bailey. "Non-idiomatic improvisation [...] is mostly found in so-called 'free' improvisation and, while it can be highly stylized, is not usually tied to representing an idiomatic identity." (BAILEY 1980, p.xii) French musician and writer Matthieu Saladin, for example, sets free improvisation apart from other musical practices on the basis of its non-idiomaticity: "The specificity of free improvisation lies in the absence of a defined idiom, or at least in the refusal of reducing it to an idiom."²⁹ (SALADIN 2014, p.162)

When describing performances, writers focus on the absence of a *pre-text*³⁰ and on how the formal materials do not refer to idioms.

"When Stevens finally joins in, his fluttering hands produce tumbling metallic textures, a meterless assortment of clattering bells, rapid rolls, and punctuating thuds. There's clearly no overarching plan here. Rather, the performance is guided purely by the moment-to-moment interaction of the two musicians." (COX 2011 (2004), *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, p.251)

The relationship (or, as it is often claimed, lack thereof) that free improvisation entertains with formal idioms is a convenient starting point, as says Richard Scott:

of an attempt to develop something like a "global" concept of free improvisation. But the non-idiom may also achieve the opposite effect; rather than positively defining the characteristics of free improvisation, by locating its relationship to a negation of idiom, its meaning is perpetually deferred elsewhere, to an "other," to something else or somewhere else. (SCOTT 2014, p.4)

The need for identifying ensembles of positively defining features of free improvisation is

²⁸ „Es ist [...] für die Freie Improvisation konstitutiv, dass eine positive Stilbestimmung *a priori* widersinnig ist.“

²⁹ « La spécificité de l'improvisation libre réside alors dans l'absence d'un idiome défini, ou du moins dans le refus de la réduire à un idiome. »

³⁰ On pre-texts, see section a) of the second chapter of the current part of the thesis.

one of the goals of this research, "for a genre is not only defined by its boundaries - by what it is not - but also by its interior." (HOLT 2007, *Genre in Popular Music*, p.22) Moreover, as writes Scott, the danger with speaking only of:

what [improvisers] desire to avoid or seek to reduce, [is that we] are always fleeing definition and enclosure and we cannot define what a new conceptual territory independent of that enclosure might be or what it might manifest. [...] So instead of what is being denied, a more important question might be what specifically is affirmed by these negations? (SCOTT 2014, p.5)

Another obvious consequence of being at a loss of positively constituting properties for free improvisation is wondering how, or even whether or not an elusive music activity such as free improvisation can be taught.³¹ (HICKEY 2015, *Can Improvisation be "Taught"?: A Call for Free Improvisation in our Schools*) Indeed, by retracing defining properties of free improvisation and expressing them in positive terms, it then becomes easier to design the outlines of a curriculum. For example, instead of (or in addition to) providing specific theoretical and technical objectives (the usual building blocks of western music education), teachers or coaches may bring their students' attention to the unifying underlying principles of free improvisation: the concerns, values, attitudes, rationales and devices that allow it to be carried out. For example, the *Marseille labo band* improvisation workshops at the GRIM in Marseille are oriented towards axes of experimentation that are linked to particular values and relevant skills, with a focus on play, listening, concentration, spontaneity, and the development of one's own personal language. An email invitation to the sessions reads:

*The task consists of developing one's own language within a group of many musicians and of experimenting all facets of collective play. The main axes are obviously listening, concentration and spontaneity.*³² (MONTERA 2016, *MARSEILLE LABO BAND // Atelier d'improvisation du GRIM // prochaines sessions*)

³¹ Hickey, drawing on the research of many scholars of improvisation pedagogy, notably David Borgo, summarizes that free improvisation cannot be taught in the traditional sense, but experienced, facilitated, coached and stimulated." He provides references for pedagogical tools that propose methods for teaching free improvisation in the classroom. He also highlights the potential of free improvisation's interpersonal and spiritual dimensions for future music educators. (HICKEY 2015)

³² « Le travail consiste à développer son propre langage à l'intérieur d'un groupe de plusieurs musiciens et d'y expérimenter toutes les facettes du jeu collectif. Les principaux axes sont évidemment l'écoute, la concentration et la spontanéité. »

Educators generally view musical creation and improvisation as important (even essential) elements of a musical education, but these aspects of music rarely make up a significant portion of music program curricula.³³ However, greatly successful approaches to teaching improvisation have been developed by teachers who found ways of focusing on this activity's positively defining features and exploit how they can support the emergence and involvement of its more elusive features. We may cite David Dove's Houston-based organization "Nameless Sound", that "works directly with students from Houston's public schools, community centers, and homeless shelters" and "proposes alternative methods of music education based on creativity, improvisation and diversity". (DOVE 2014, *A Pedagogy of Improvisation: Nameless Sound in Houston, Texas*)

c) A Broader Conception of Performance: Enduring Underlying Features

This thesis does not intend to let the elusiveness of improvised performances' sound content reduce us to negative definitions. The identity and meaning of an artistic movement or music practice goes deeper than how it directly treats its formal aspects. As we saw when discussing different conceptions of the ecologies that make up performances, works are also made up of other kinds of properties. We will understand a performance's meaning as a broader experience that emerges from how participants, as they witness sequences of performance actions, draw meaningful relations between its momentary and fleeting formal features on the one hand, and more enduring performance and listening habits, ethical and aesthetic understandings

³³ My own Masters degree dissertation was about the "musical creation" component in the music curriculum in the public school system of the Canadian province of New-Brunswick. This unit, which focused on composition and improvisation, is supposed to multiply situations where students can be involved in significant experiences of musical creation. It is presented as having a particularly important, even noble, mandate: that of creating a link between students' aesthetic dimension and their personal development. It is one of the program's three general objectives (alongside interpretation and appreciation), and is meant to make up one third of the curriculum's objectives. But, as opposed to the other two general objectives, which are developed by numerous clearly elaborated, age-specific tasks and targets, the objective columns of the creation component of the program are left almost completely blank. No specific examples of activities or exercises are given. Teachers are referred to no particular pedagogical tools or resources, no ensemble configurations or activity guidelines, no clear objectives other than the above-mentioned mandate of helping with personal development. The advantage of this vagueness is that teachers are given freedom to develop activities that are best adapted to the creative whims of their students and the realities of their classroom (schools in New-Brunswick deal with very different material realities and all schools do not dispose of instruments). The downside is that this unit is in many cases left aside by teachers who focus on the elements of the curriculum that state specific objectives and for which pedagogical resources are provided.

on the other.³⁴ Since meaning is diffused in this way, and does not exclusively concern the work's formal content, it becomes all the more essential that our definition of free improvisation consider and retrace these aspects. Underlying devices and concerns stabilize the process and performance practice of free improvisation. These are not as short-lived and unpredictable as the specific sound content and musical experience generated by individual performances. They are enduring and may be described in positive terms. Moreover, it is thanks to these more lasting features that formal sound materials, since they have been left to real-time determination, are able to emerge at the time of the performance and can be deemed coherent, significant and/or useful by different participants. For these underlying parameters have been selected, kept and developed in order to optimize the improvisation process that they govern. They are the real backbone of the free improvisation practice's identity, the true center of its idiomaticity and principal carrier of its symbolic meaning.³⁵

This thesis treats underlying codes of conduct, aesthetic preoccupations and performance devices - as well as the discursive and institutional apparatus that defends them - as free improvisation's principal body of conventions and idioms. Symbolic meanings in improvised performances are interpreted first and foremost for how they refer to enduring values, attitudes, devices and codes of conduct, all features that are concerned with the optimization of the process. If symbolic meaning is interpreted because a form is understood as the rendition of a specific formal object or conventionalized form, this occurs *accidentally*. Trends certainly appear and sometimes remain popular for a long time, like a frequent use of drones or a tendency to make abundant use of extended instrumental techniques. But none of these are *necessary* defining features of the free improvisation practice, since no generic commitment is made towards them. Rather, they become part of performances spontaneously, sometimes randomly, in a non-essential way and according to rules and aesthetic preoccupations that must be located elsewhere. For the rules and conventions of free improvisation do not concern its formal sound properties, at least not directly. There are, again, in free improvisation, no across-the-board commitments to any particular formal code. Formal content remains a necessary medium, but is considered mostly for

³⁴ Since three-tiered models will be exploited constantly throughout this research, most notably influenced by CS Peirce, it may happen regularly that concepts will be articulated in three ways, hence the three "hands" in this sentence.

³⁵ We understand "symbolic meaning" in the Peircean sense. A symbol is a sign that is conventionalized to some degree and that denotes a type of object (rather than the object itself). Its effects on those that interpret it rely mainly on the convention that surrounds it, rather than existential relation or similarity. This convention is arbitrary. (RÉTHORÉ 2007-2008, p.4)

how it reflects process parameters and occurrences; product is a reflection of process and coincides with it. "Product and process seem to coincide: the sound sequence produced in the present superimposes itself to its own process of creation."³⁶ (CANONNE 2012)

d) Dynamic and Unclear Outlines: Improvisation as a Relative Status

When we think of free improvisation as a tradition boasting a coherent half-century-long continuity, there are works, artists and principles that come to mind as those that gave the practice its identity and coherence. Stévanche rightly explains that it has its own "system of references"³⁷ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.9); it "induces relationships to the musical work, strategies of production, and listening behaviors that are its own."³⁸ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.19) "It is also an artistic movement that deploys theoretical, practical, expressive and aesthetic principles through which it tends to propel winds of change from its collective bases."³⁹ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.24) It has "coherent and defensible aesthetic, identity and economic values, as well as stable systems where invariants may be observed: consistency in terms of personalities that it comprises and their geographical situation, consistency in terms of applied methods and performance spaces."⁴⁰
⁴¹ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.24) It is already documented by a body of commentaries and texts.

That enduring discursive tendencies, values and infrastructure should contribute to the definition of a genre's identity is true for any music practice, and is not specific to free improvisation. Actually, in many regards, the perspective of this thesis is to argue that free improvisation is not essentially different from other musical activities to the point of being an anti-genre or even being non-idiomatic. Free improvisation cannot be set apart from other

³⁶ « Produit et processus semblent ici strictement coïncider: la séquence sonore actuellement produite se superpose à son propre processus de création. Ou, pour le dire autrement, le temps de l'existence de cette musique se confond avec le temps de son processus de création. »

³⁷ "système de références"

³⁸ « [elle] induit des relations à l'oeuvre musicale, des stratégies de production et des conduites d'écoute qui lui sont propres. »

³⁹ « Elle est aussi un mouvement artistique déployant des principes théoriques, pratiques, expressifs et esthétiques à travers lesquels elle tend à impulser un vent de changement depuis ses bases collectives. »

⁴⁰ « [elle] possède une valeur esthétique, identitaire et économique cohérente et défendable ainsi que des systèmes stables où s'observent des invariables: constance sur le plan des personnalités qui la composent et de leur situation géographique, constance sur le plan des méthodes utilisées et des espaces de diffusion. »

⁴¹ All of these quotes from Stévanche's book *Musique actuelle* refer more specifically to the practice of "musique actuelle", which in many ways is a local variant of free improvisation, with some particular regional flavors and concerns, as it is practiced in the Canadian province of Quebec. We will not shy away from using quotes that concern such local variants or subgenres as long as they are relevant to our purposes.

practices so easily; its delineations are bound to remain dynamic and unclear.

Moreover, musical practices not typically associated with improvisation must, like free improvisation, deal with the unexpected. They must, then, make their own uses of improvisation strategies. Perhaps the biggest challenge in delineating free improvisation comes from the fact that every musical practice has recourse to some degree and kind of improvisation. Improvisation is therefore integral to all musical activity. Changes in tempo, timbre and ensemble balance are among the elements that must be negotiated in real-time, not only by free improvisers, but also by classical string quartets, for example. Ensembles of all kinds need to improvise collectively to some degree in order to adapt to a performance's particular momentary circumstances and to deal with unexpected incidents that may upset their activity. What is essentially different with free improvisation is that its practitioners, in addition to *needing* to improvise, *want* to improvise. They actually want the unexpected to occur. Improvisers strive on the unexpected, seeing it as a source of inspiration and life. It's what keeps driving their activity. Canadian singer Tena Palmer says that:

[...] if the music just happens to flow here now, which is counter to the previous moment, then that's just absolutely fine and musical and most of the time these curveballs inspire people to respond. It always seems to liven things up a little bit as opposed to resistance. (PALMER 2015, Interview with André Bourgeois)

They also want the improvisation process to be extended to additional sets of the performance's features, perhaps as many of them as possible. An often-expressed ideal is that every element of an improvised performance should emerge in the present moment.⁴² But a full range of more tempered positions exists. The features that are, among free improvisers, most commonly reserved for real-time determination and organization are the formal properties that, in most western music practices, are usually prescribed by a score or explicit plan: features like melody, harmony, rhythm and form. Of course, improvisers may intend other performance aspects to be left open to improvisation, such as the modes of interaction with the audience and performance space.⁴³

⁴² Jean-Marc Montera, who animates the *Marseille labo band* improvisation sessions at the GRIM in Marseille, regularly expresses this ideal. He readily admits, though, that it is unattainable and can *only* serve as an ideal.

⁴³ In some of its performances of Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Learning: Paragraph Seven*, the *New Music New College* explicitly encouraged audience members to participate, but left the nature of this contribution to the

Since all music practices have some improvised elements, they can all claim to be, to some degree, improvised practices. Canonne imagines a kind of continuum of performances that are the result of certain musical choices that affect the various parameters of the sonic object effectively produced.

*"On one extreme of this continuum, all (or almost all) of these choices are made ahead of the time of performance: we would find here the execution of an orchestral work with fixed sounds, for example; at the other extreme, all (or almost all) of these choices are made at the time of the performance itself."*⁴⁴ (CANONNE 2012, p.115)

Does free improvisation, as suggests Canonne, assume the latter extreme position on this continuum? Rather, our claim is that both extreme positions of this axis are illusory once we attempt to actualize them outside of abstract fantasy. As we have already mentioned, executions of classical pieces call for some spontaneous mobilizations of response skills in order to respond to unexpected performance circumstances in real-time, or simply in order to execute and gauge those aspects of performance that are not specified by the score. Heading in the other direction along this continuum, free improvisation, which relies on principles, incorporated habits and accepted modes of action, also cannot be said to illustrate the other extreme. "We should not mistake free improvisation for some "pure" improvisation that would throw us back to the fantasy of instant *ex nihilo* creation."⁴⁵ (CANONNE 2012, p.117) The enactment of such an ideal would entail the rejection of every one of a practice's enduring features, not just its formal sound content.⁴⁶

Of course, even long before approaching this extreme position, the objects that we would be dealing with, for lack of interpretable features, would no longer be recognizable as aesthetic objects or even as collectively accessible artifacts and events... much less as music belonging to a specific practice! The goal for many improvisers, especially those from the pioneering

discretion of the participants. (CARDEW 1971, *The Great Learning*) There are many similar examples of leaving the performer-audience relationship open to real-time determination.

⁴⁴ « À l'un des extrêmes de ce continuum, tous (ou presque tous) ces choix sont faits en amont de la performance: on trouverait là l'exécution d'une oeuvre pour orchestre et sons fixés, par exemple; à l'autre extrême, tous (ou presque tous) ces choix sont faits dans le temps même de la performance. »

⁴⁵ « Il ne faut pas confondre l'improvisation libre avec une illusoire improvisation "pure" qui renverrait au fantasme de la création *ex nihilo* instantanée. »

⁴⁶ We would like to refer once again to the conception of a work as an *ecology*: an emergent, hybrid grouping that connects many different kinds of things (PIEKUT 2014, p.23), where meaning is completed by tracing links between them and various circumstantial elements, as well as with underlying rules and habits of interpretation.

generations, is to see how far the line can be pushed while still remaining accessible and meaningful. Yet, even in the most extreme cases, a consensus is necessary for the practice to be inclusive and observable (even to a select few elite participants). Such an agreement necessarily implies something even slightly enduring and not totally emergent. Free improvisation's status as an improvisation practice is, therefore, also relative and dynamic.

As an approach or compositional method, free improvisation may drift away from its core scenes and be used in many contexts of congenial musical activities. Similarly, its aesthetic concerns traverse many "neighboring" practices. Compositional devices⁴⁷ typically associated with free improvisation may nowadays cross over into other practices.⁴⁸ I will not hesitate to discuss some of the "borderlands" of free improvisation as a means of "moving in and out of genre-centered discourse" (HOLT 2007, p.180) and bringing out certain relevant processual properties.

Free improvisation practices may also be known under different labels according to more regional approaches and focuses, which may translate musically to local variants of the practice. This is namely the case of *musique actuelle*⁴⁹ and *Echtzeitmusik*, labels used in Quebec and Germany respectively. In these cases, the musicians may identify to the label of *free improvisation* only partially. Stévanche writes that "[a]s a musical practice, it is a beacon that, as would indicate the various denominations of which it is the object, seems to take on many forms according to the context in which it is elaborated."⁵⁰ (STÉVANCHE 2011, p.15)

Even when a clear and consistent labeling convention would bring obvious logistical advantages - music is more easily recognized and distributed if it is packaged with a label - no descriptor finds unanimous appeal. The case is particularly complicated in free improvisation,

⁴⁷ This thesis does not treat improvisation and composition as opposing processes. Rather, improvisation is one aspect of composition, one that can take on more or less importance according to the artist's privileged approach. "Improvisation is a compositional method", one of the most often repeated Evan Parker quotes, which, as forwarded on the *Re:Flux festival de musique et d'art sonore* Facebook page, was even featured on a t-shirt available for purchase on amazon.com.

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=759942807418593&id=113061792106701, consulted December 20th 2014.

⁴⁸ Throughout these chapters, the examples given may include artists with different degrees of proximity to the core of free improvisation practices, as long as they are relevant to the topic at hand. They will include artists as diverse as AMM, Evan Parker, John Coltrane, The Liberation Music Orchestra, The Grateful Dead, and even Radiohead.

⁴⁹ It is important to note that the label of *musique actuelle* is used differently in Quebec and in France. While in France it loosely refers to contemporary popular music, in Quebec it refers to a regional genre that can be said to be the local variant of free improvisation at large.

⁵⁰ « En tant que *pratique musicale*, elle est un phare et semble revêtir, comme l'indiquent des différentes orthographes dont elle fait l'objet, plusieurs formes selon le contexte où elle s'élabore. »

where several musicians are notoriously reluctant to label their activity, precisely because they do not want it to be delineated in any strict way. Brazilian guitarist Diego Brotas comments:

*I think that to speak in terms of categories in order to define my music is to limit the public's/listener's perceptions. Experimentation can pass through erudite and popular fields, but what matters most is the experience, the performance, that creates a hybrid.*⁵¹ (BROTAS 2016)

Of course, there is no reason to doubt that in the case of some musicians, hesitation with regard to labels comes from an honest struggle to express what it is that they do in words, since they feel that words do not lend themselves well to this type of description. Guitarist Olivier Benoit confesses:

*I have a very hard time explaining what it is that I do into words. Music exists only for itself, does not require images, does not need that we attach to it notions such as emotions, characters and colors.*⁵² (JULIEN 2008, *Défrichage sonore - Musique action*, p.71)

Of particular interest to us, beyond the terminology itself, is the variety of labeling strategies employed by free improvisers who, out of concern for keeping their practice fluid and dynamic, are mostly weary of the fixating and prescribing effects of traditional designators. These strategies include a refusal of labeling, the use of many labels (along with the freedom to change them frequently), the use of vague compound labels⁵³ or the creation of original labels. All of these strategies leave improvisers with the upper hand in the genre debate, since they defer the moment where the determination of the label will be completed.⁵⁴

I am proposing, for the sake of terminological consistency throughout this work, that we conveniently stick to the label "free improvisation", except when quoting works or interviews that use another denominator. I prefer the word "free improvisation" for three reasons, all of which have to do with convenience. First, it seems to be the most widely recognized denominator and the one that triggers the least opposition among improvisers. Although these may prefer other

⁵¹ "Acho que falar em categorias para definir a minha música é limitar a percepção do público/ouvinte. A experimentação pode passar pelos campos eruditos e popular, mas o que prevalece é a experiência, a performance, que cria um híbrido."

⁵² « J'ai beaucoup de mal à mettre des mots sur ce que je fais. La musique n'existe que pour elle-même, n'a pas besoin d'images, n'a pas besoin qu'on pose sur elle des émotions, des caractères, de couleurs. »

⁵³ The *Quintavant* series of improvised shows at *Audio Rebel* in Rio de Janeiro is labeled as "evento carioca de música experimental: Free jazz, Avant-Pop, Noise-Rock, No Wave, Improvisação livre, IDM, Noise" (SIQUEIRA, p.53), a string of qualifiers capable of accounting for anything that could eventually happen during a performance.

⁵⁴ Peirce speaks of strategic uses of vagueness, something that we will discuss at length in section b) or the third part of the thesis.

labels, most will nonetheless identify to "free improvisation" and see it as a kind of loose general denominator shared with colleagues worldwide.

Second, this denomination does not over-stress any particular features regarding form or ideology; the word "improvisation" points to the most basic and generalized feature of the process itself: a focus on the unplanned aspect of performance. Some artists feel that the aspects of emergence or action should be emphasized more and have suggested descriptors like "radical improvisation", "*composition spontanée*", "total improvisation", "*Echtzeitmusik*" and "*musique actuelle*". I would still rather employ "free improvisation" since, while it continues to hint to these fundamental processual features, it maintains the denominational focus on the performance's lack of a preexisting plan with regard to formal content, which is, at first glance, this practice's most easily recognized and most concretely identifiable condition of creation.⁵⁵

Finally, the qualifier "free" is a reminder of one of free improvisers' greatest aesthetic preoccupations. Different improvisers perceive freedom differently, but it is safe to say that the concept of freedom concerns them all.⁵⁶

For all of these reasons, the proposed delineation of free improvisation in this research does not take the form of a clear and exclusive boundary. By remaining flexible ourselves, hopefully we can respect improvisers' desire not to be too contrived by the exigencies and determinations that are associated to some labels or delineation models.

⁵⁵ Later on, we will propose alternative perspectives on free improvisation that allow us to define it in positive terms. For example, rather than highlighting its lack of a preexisting plan, we will say that it actively plans to determine its content at the moment of the performance, under conditions that leave it open to the influence of many simultaneously interacting participants.

⁵⁶ We will look at different conceptions of freedom among free improvisers in section e) of the first chapter of the second part of the thesis.

2. - SOME DELINEATING FEATURES

Yet, as writes Michael Vorfeld, amid these practices that share common concerns and devices,

"when free improvisation is spoken of, it is with the intention of designating a practice with its own musical stylistic, while at the same time delineating it from other music styles in which improvisation plays an essential role".⁵⁷ (VORFELD 2011, Freie Improvisation versus Freie Kunst, p.157)

There are some basic parameters of free improvisation that find relatively general acceptance among its practitioners. We will propose a few of these compositional devices and creative concerns, elements that persist despite the practice's dynamic character and that we will treat as some of its underlying, positively defining features. They are the ones most commonly quoted in the literature and discourse on the subject and will serve as the basic preliminary delineating characteristics that will outline the object of this research in these early chapters. Then, our reflection, supported by fieldwork data and musician testimonies, will go into the details of free improvisation's most enduringly characteristic conditions of creation.

a) Planning for Real-time Organization of Sound

Real-time organization of a musical performance's formal sound features is perhaps the positive feature most commonly expressed in definitions of free improvisation. Steve Lacy famously said to Frederic Rzewski "In composition you have all the time you want to think about what to say in fifteen seconds, while in improvisation you have only fifteen seconds". (COX 2011 (2004), p.267) No discussion about improvisation can bypass the idea of the "present moment". As we will see throughout this research, it underlies all discourse on improvisation, regardless of the terms that are chosen to represent it, and regardless of the purpose of the discussion. Matthias Rousselot points out that improvisation does not seek its foundations in the preliminaries and preparations, but in immediate deliberation and instantaneous decision. It never offers the

⁵⁷ „Wenn von Freier Improvisation gesprochen wird, so ist damit der Wunsch verbunden, eine eigene musikalische Stilistik zu benennen und diese gleichzeitig von anderen Musikstilen, von denen Improvisation ebenfalls eine wesentliche Rolle spielt, abzugrenzen.“

experience of taking action; it acts, in the moment.⁵⁸ (ROUSSELOT 2013, *Instant musicien, instant musical, instant musicologique*, p.67) Advice on how to be a better improviser usually relates valued skills and attitudes to how musicians may embrace the present moment. "Faithfulness to the moment and present circumstances requires surrender." (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.21)

The idea that improvised performances are constructed "entirely" in the present can be misleading, since it suggests that the process can happen without any kind of pre-planning. That free improvisation can or must emerge entirely in real time, out of nothing, is one of the many enduring myths about the practice, one that cannot be upheld in practice. It should be noted right away that none of the artists interviewed for this research or encountered in other documented interviews see *ex nihilo* improvisation as an attainable ideal. All improvisers testify to spending designated practice time fine tuning their approach and constructively pursuing their enquiry into sound.

In the literature too, many accounts have been given of the role of planning in free improvisation. Canonne points out that improvisation as musical creation *ex tempore* was demystified long ago, notably as new light was shed on the "before" on which the practice relies.⁵⁹ (CANONNE 2012, p.113) He evokes, as examples of the practice's pre-existing features, "transmitted models" as described by Lortat-Jacob (LORTAT-JACOB 1987, *L'improvisation dans les musiques de tradition orale*), "action repertoires" as developed by Becker and Faulkner (BECKER 2009, *Do You Know...?: The Jazz Repertoire in Action*), Sudnow's "incorporated routines" (SUDNOW 1978, *Ways of the Hand. The Organization in Improvised Conduct*), Johnson-Laird's "cognitive skills" (JOHNSON-LAIRD 2002, *How Jazz Musicians Improvise*), and the "mastery of musical languages" as defended by Siron (SIRON 2004 (1992)).

To help us consider this notion of "pre-planning" more discriminately, we will borrow two expressions that have circulated in a number of writings on free improvisation: *pre-text* and *pre-engagement*. In the literature they are sometimes used interchangeably. We will consider them separately, essentially giving the term *pre-text* a vocation of formal determination, while allowing the term *pre-engagement* to encompass commitments to any type enduring feature,

⁵⁸ « [L'improvisation] ne recherche pas ses fondements dans les préliminaires et les préparatifs, mais dans l'immédiate délibération et dans l'instantanée décision. Elle ne fait jamais l'expérience du passage à l'acte, elle agit, dans l'instant. »

⁵⁹ « De manière générale, l'improvisation comme création musicale *ex tempore* a été démystifiée depuis longtemps, notamment par la mise en lumière des « avants » sur lesquels elle repose »

formal or not. This focus on the formal aspects of performances is important for three reasons. Firstly, discussion on formal aspects and the refusal to commit to them is prevalent in the discourse of improvisers. The case is the same for scholars who, when retracing the features of free improvisation and its proximity or difference with other practices, also tend to focus on its formal properties.⁶⁰ Secondly, because the formal aspects of improvised performances are the first and most consistent target of improvisers' efforts of deconstruction⁶¹. Finally, because we will later describe two shifts in the way that free improvisation expresses its idiomaticity; the distinction between (emergent and evanescent) observable formal sound properties and (established and enduring) unifying underlying principles that support the practice is the key to our ontological model of free improvisation.

The term *pre-text* has been employed by a number of writers, including Julia Kristeva (KRISTEVA 1970, *Le texte du roman: approche sémiologique d'une structure discursive transformationnelle*, p.20) and Clément Canonne (CANONNE 2012, p.112). We will use it when referring to any directions that, often in the form of written documents, but also in other forms, provide more or less explicit guidelines for the performance's execution. *Pre-texts* are necessarily prepared in advance, with the intention of guaranteeing a particular performance outcome. Scores are the classic example of a *pre-text*, but less detailed artifacts may serve the same function.⁶² Pre-texts typically govern a performance's eventual *formal* sound properties, although, as we have seen, there exist cases where other performance features are submitted to guidelines, such as the group configuration, role of the audience, etc.

Improvisers may employ a variety of pre-established directions as frameworks capable of supporting and stimulating their process to any desired degree, but free improvisation in its most radical forms calls for a rejection of any text that may prescribe any specific treatment of a performance's formal content. This last case, however, ends up serving as precisely what it seeks

⁶⁰ One example of this is John A Maurer's paper "A Comparison of Free Jazz to 20th-Century Classical Music - similar precepts and musical innovations", where the similarities are broken up into five features and tendencies: Abandoning functional tonality, New means of expression, Formal structures, Assymetry and disjunctedness, and The use of parody (which is defined as "associations with already existent material", or the juxtaposition of formal elements from contrasting traditions. (MAURER 1998)

⁶¹ This is made obvious by the fact that many improvisers, when speaking of the spontaneous, emergent aspects of their operations - the ones that are the least prescribed by any given code - don't feel the need to specify that it is the formal aspects of the performance that they are speaking about. It is understood that these are the aspects that improvisers reserve for real-time determination and that are the least.

⁶² We use the term "text" in its broader sens: "It is a coherent set of signs that transmits some kind of informative message." (LOTMAN 1977, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*) Any form of directions meant to influence or guide (or even to hinder) the improvisation process, qualifies. Including verbal directions.

to avoid: an example of an explicitly formulated *pre-text*. It gives clear instructions concerning the precise time constraints under which the creative process must be elaborated: "as the performance unfolds". This guideline is the most common *pre-text* in free improvisation and, according to some, an essential condition for anything to be considered true free improvisation. Real time elaboration of formal content is, for the purpose of this research, the first positively constitutive characteristic of free improvisation. Free improvisation's positively expressed formal requirements (or formal requirement, in the singular, maybe?) are meant to create conditions of creation that favor a certain kind of desired development; they function as *pre-texts*.

Similarly, when improvisers explicitly intend for other performance aspects to be left open to improvisation, such as the modes of interaction with the audience and performance space, they are once again acting according to set performance constraints. That the organization of these particular features must take place specifically in the present moment is an expressed element of *pre-text*. Even when artists cease to use scores, which many do, some forms of *pre-text* persist, in the form of guidelines or tacit understandings regarding formal treatment.

Pre-engagements, according to Canonne (who was expanding on Jon Elter), are things that have been decided in advance and that need not be discussed again during the action itself. The improviser "thus makes a certain number of decisions ahead of time, decisions that he no longer will have to make as the improvisation makes its course, by adopting an ensemble of constraints that will guide his future improvisations."⁶³ (CANONNE 2012, p.117) While Canonne underlines the important role of cultural backgrounds and musical knowledge as defining parameters of the improvised process, he does not seem to consider these elements to be the types of constraints that constitute *pre-engagements*. Rather, he insists that there is in free improvisation no pre-engagement to any idiomatic frameworks. We may suspect that by this he means that free improvisation commits to no ensembles of restrictions concerning its *formal* content. Similarly, when Lacy says that improvisers think of "what to say" at the moment of performance, he is clearly referring to what some call the music "itself": the sequences that make up its observable formal sound content. We will refer to these kinds of commitments to pre-established formal materials and codes as *formal pre-engagements*.

We, in contrast to Canonne, use the word *pre-engagement* in a broader sense. We consider

⁶³ «[L'improvisateur] règle ainsi en amont un certain nombre de décisions, décisions qu'il n'aura plus à prendre dans le cours de l'improvisation, en adoptant un ensemble de contraintes qui guideront ses improvisations futures. »

that unified aesthetic concerns, ethical codes of conduct and broadly employed technical and compositional devices also qualify as *pre-engagements*, defined as constraints and decisions that predate performances, and that influence, even regulate, their outcome. Consequently, we extend the concepts of idiomaticity and *pre-engagement* to any such bodies of enduring features.

Numerous subsequent sections will elaborate on how free improvisation articulates these different forms of pre-planning. For now, the reader is asked only to remember how we conceive the terms *pre-text* and *pre-engagement*, as they will be used regularly.

We consider that improvisers may reject all but one *pre-text*, understood as an expressed set of constraints concerning the organization of eventual formal sound content. Improvisation is the *real time* organization of sound; this is its most obvious positively constituting feature. *Pre-engagements*, on the other hand, are not dispensable. The coherence of the practice of free improvisation relies on the actualization of sets of *pre-engagements*, notably in the form of underlying aesthetic concerns and performance strategies, for example.

b) A Collective Activity

Solo improvisation exists and may be the configuration best adapted for the creative needs of some musicians. Evan Parker is a good example of an artist that has developed a very involved and personal approach to solo improvisation. The collective process of group improvisation, however, remains distinct due to some special conditions that it implies.

Only group configurations may allow improvisers to explore some of the creative concerns they may have, such as the political and social aspects of group improvisation. Interest in these elements is very present in the discourse of free improvisers and has even been described as essential components of their activity. Indeed, for some, the decision to invest oneself in free improvisation is a fundamentally political one. In an interview with Henri Jules Julien, guitarist Jean-François Pauvros claims the following:

*The choice of this improvised music is also a life choice and a political choice. The people who are playing it are people who haven't chosen improvised music as a career, but as a vital necessity in their way of apprehending the world, music and their life.*⁶⁴ (JULIEN 2008, p.29)

⁶⁴ « Le choix de cette musique improvisée est aussi un choix de vie et un choix politique. Les gens qui jouent là sont des gens qui n'ont pas choisi la musique improvisée comme carrière mais comme une nécessité vitale dans leur façon d'appréhender le monde, et la musique, et leur vie. »

But more importantly, artists are concerned with enquiry and progress, and collective improvisation puts artists in situations where they are effectively forced to innovate. The performance conditions of collective improvisation necessarily lead to numerous situations of conflict.⁶⁵ Creative solutions must be found to resolve them and develop further materials in a coherent manner.⁶⁶ As it involves different persons and their ongoing interactions, the eventual content of a piece depends on complex negotiations between partially overlapping, but generally contingent perspectives, experiences, interpretations and habits. The gaps between subjectivities is a sure way of obliging individual performers to be confronted to new materials and of urging the ensemble to work out group solutions on the spot. Favoring collective work in real time is thus one way that improvisers are able to stimulate emergence during performances. This comes up all the time in discussions with improvisers. Henry Schroy comments:

*I think that it can actually help to have background differences [within a group]. Music facilitates trans-linguistic exchanges; improvisation opens the door for unplanned exchange. Surprise is much cherished quality in improvisation, and it can surface more frequently between musicians that are very different.*⁶⁷ (SCHROY 2016, Interview with André Bourgeois)

Group configurations also imply very different modes of signification. Sounds are interpreted as actions and reactions in a sequence of events in causal linearity. These relations are particularly meaningful in free improvisation.

The argumentation throughout this thesis will give priority to collective processes, since the devices and values that allow group activity to proceed coherently are likely to be representative of those that underlie the free improvisation practice in a broader way.

⁶⁵ Since the medium is music, these situations of conflict can be multiplied and resolved (or not) without danger. Section 6,6 will elaborate on how musical improvisation offers itself as a safe zone for conflict, enquiry and innovation.

⁶⁶ These kinds of negotiations go on in any collective musical activity, but free improvisation extends them to new sets of properties, especially features that were previously typically prescribed by scores.

⁶⁷ "Alias acho que pode ajudar ter bastantes diferenças de background. A música facilita um intercâmbio trans-linguístico, o improviso abre a porta para a troca imprevista. A surpresa é uma qualidade bastante querida no improviso, e ela pode aparecer com mais frequência entre músicos com grandes diferenças."

c) A Process-oriented Activity

If a performance's content is the result of real-time interactions between different participants, then special attention needs to be given to process and experience, two aspects which, as improvisers' discourse generally admits, must be given at least as much consideration as the (formal, observable) product. After all, for the participating musicians, the process is the most important, pleasurable and sought after aspect of improvisation, sometimes regardless of the objectual outcome. In an interview with Henri Jules Julien, multi-instrumentalist Yannick Miossec comments on his personal experience with his ensemble *La Pieuvre*:

*To our great surprise there were then easily twenty of us, and we adored playing together. It was a horrifying mess, atrocious, with incredible strength and energy.*⁶⁸ (JULIEN 2008, p.33)

Pioneering improvisers were already professing a conception of music that sees their practice as a process-oriented rather than an object-oriented activity. "[...] Free improvisation revealed itself as a practice where [...] belonging to a specific musical category or genre seemed less important than the promised investigation into sound."⁶⁹ (SALADIN 2014, p.14) Cannone writes:

*It is thus entirely possible to think of improvisation primarily as a process - that is, as an activity, singular and spontaneous act of creation - rather than as a product (and thereby as a sonic object that may be reactualized) and thus to privilege its processual rather than its objectual facet.*⁷⁰ (CANONNE 2012, p.109)

"Play, creativity, art, spontaneity, all these experiences are their own rewards and are blocked when we perform for reward or punishment, profit or loss." (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.45) Free improvisation has, claims Bailey "no existence outside practice". (BAILEY 1980, p.x) According to Ornette Coleman, who has a similar perspective, the essence lies in the emotional experience of this process:

⁶⁸ « À notre grand étonnement on s'est retrouvé facilement à plus de vingt, et on a adoré jouer ensemble. C'était un bordel immonde, atroce, avec une force, une énergie incroyables. »

⁶⁹ « [...] l'improvisation libre se révélait comme une pratique où [...] l'appartenance à une catégorie ou un genre musical spécifique semblait moins importante que l'investigation sonore promise. »

⁷⁰ « Il est donc tout à fait possible de penser l'improvisation avant tout comme processus - c'est-à-dire en tant qu'activité, action de création musicale spontanée et singulière - plutôt que comme produit (et par là comme objet sonore possiblement réactualisable) et donc de privilégier sa face processuelle plutôt que sa face objectuelle. »

In music, the only thing that matters is whether you feel it or not. You can't intellectualize music; to reduce it analytically often is to reduce it to nothing very important. It is only in terms of emotional response that I can judge whether what we are doing is successful or not.
(COLEMAN 2011 (1959), *Change of the Century*, p.254)

These words echo Bailey's warning to academics, which we quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Let us make it clear once again that our goal is not to explain and betray the essence of the free improvisation process and how it is experienced - which is very personal anyways - but to bring out some of the enduring features and devices that support this process and allow these experiences to be brought forth.

Rather than analyzing performances in the light of the object-oriented, formal idiomaticity of *pre-texts*, we will take into account free improvisation's idiomatic shift towards process-oriented features: compositional devices and underlying creative and aesthetic concerns. These types of features, themselves rather stable and enduring (we treat them as the core of the practice's idiomaticity), are set up so that the process can be appreciated for its momentary, fleeting value, but always in relation to these stable underlying principles. This new focus gives us an alternative to chasing free improvisation's most evanescent features, and relieves us from having to describe the activity in negative terms. The way performances are experienced will be discussed in semiotic terms, most notably by elaborating on how C.S. Peirce's categories may bring out the particularities of free improvisation's compositional devices and ways of generating meaning.⁷¹

⁷¹ The way free improvisation attempts to diffuse meaning away from codes and towards quality, presence and action agrees with how C.S. Peirce's semiotic model, grounded in triadic relation, challenges models based on simple dyadic relations between signifier and signified. (Although the 3-tiered model never caught on as much as it should have, it is definitely the most advanced and the one best suited for contemporary conceptions of exchange, where it is admitted that there is always a high degree of contingency). Improvised music, as it tries to do away with the use of codified formal materials (and, especially, the score), draws the listener's attention to musical events in ways that are different from pre-composed performances. Improvisers may stress the rawness and live-ness of sound content that emerges in real time as being particularly meaningful (and we may see them as an expression of Peirce's *firstness*). More significantly, spectators will understand the emergence of these sound materials as the result of series of actions and events that unfold in causal linearity, as the process remains in motion. These causal relations are meaningful in their own right (and can be traced to Peirce's *secondness*). These new focuses (new when compared to much contemporary erudite music, anyways) effectively shift or diffuse the main sources of performances' effects and offer an alternative to more strictly object-oriented or code-oriented music. Clearly, all three categories remain important, but the weight that each one carries differs from what we can observe in other practices. Of course, since the effects of firstness and secondness are interpreted by the mind, we are always bathing in thirdness as well. Once this has been acknowledged, we are able to make analyses that are more precise. For example, we may distinguish between the firstness of thirdness represented by rawness and live-ness; the secondness of thirdness represented by

d) An Activity that Optimizes the Conditions for Emergence

I have already stated that this thesis would as much as possible try to avoid defining free improvisation in negative terms. The common tendency to do so has given rise to a number of myths that continue to shape how the public at large perceives this practice: it materializes out of nothing, it has no language, it is hostile to tradition, etc. According to many definitions of free improvisation, the idea of emergence in the present instant, as the practice's most basic performance parameter, entails the disposal of pre-planned explicit directions such as manuscripts (pre-texts), as well as the rejection of any inherited codes and devices that may impose unwanted constraints on a process that is meant to unfold in the moment (pre-engagements).

Free jazz and improvised music did away with the strict forms of jazz and classical music (tonality, chord changes, formal shape and structure, etc.). [...] In short, free jazz and improvised music abandoned virtually every prop or anchor for improvisation in order to spur musicians to play genuinely in the moment, relying solely on their ingenuity and their instantaneous responses to the contributions of fellow performers. (COX 2011 (2004), p.251)

Absence of a score or of a detailed plan is, after all, the logistical parameter that, in the most visible way, sets free improvisation apart from many activities in western music. Out of the thirteen evenings of improvised performances that I saw at Audio Rebel in Rio de Janeiro, not a single piece made use of a score and, according to my discussions with the musicians, very few guidelines were established ahead of the first downbeat.

In reality, however, improvisers' opinions on the role of inherited constraints and conventions in their practice vary: they can range from a desired rejection of all traditions to an embrace of any tradition that may come up spontaneously. But let us recall this clearly: the idea of a creative process entirely independent from codes and traditions is untenable. This is why, although the idea of a break with traditions and codes often resurfaces in discourse on free improvisation, although it was a fundamental constituent in the philosophical preoccupations of its pioneering practitioners, this idea will not be treated in the present research as a consistent determining property of free improvisation practices. Instead, the ideal of total break with tradition will be treated as an unattainable utopia that nonetheless can be helpful in fuelling creativity.

causal relations; and the thirdness of thirdness represented by the actual rules (rarely formal exigencies) that govern the improvisation practice.

There are less problematic premises on which we may retrace our ontology of real-time collective music creation. Instead of thinking of free improvisation in terms of rupture, rejection and *tabula rasa*, it is more productive to think of it in terms of spontaneity, real-time determination and emergence. Creation is a positive activity and must be described according to that which it does positively and concretely.

There is also a second reason why this line of thinking is less problematic. There is no rift among improvisers as to what kind of place spontaneity and emergence occupy in their practice. If there is one preoccupation that unifies all free improvisers, it is the desire to optimize the conditions that will maximize the emergence potential of their performances. This concern, as well as the strategies that are put into motion accordingly, are positively constitutive features of free improvisation. Besides, while all free improvisers are concerned with setting up performance conditions that favor emergence, they do not all insist on the alienation of codes and traditions. The idea of rupture, as an ideal, was certainly one of the principal motivations of pioneering improvisers, but today's musicians tend to have a more permissive attitude towards inherited idioms. This research, therefore, will tend to prefer speaking of free improvisation in terms of its push for emergence instead of its rejection of codes and tradition. In retracing free improvisation as a coherent musical movement, it will focus on its inherently dynamic and deconstructive tendencies⁷² and treat them as positively constitutive characteristics. The practice's key enduring features are designed to allow its eventual emerging formal and performance features to reach a maximum degree of dynamicity and a minimal degree of *pre-planning*.

The present thesis sees negative conceptions of free improvisation - those that see it as an anti-style, as non-idiomatic practices - as misleading. It proposes instead that the idiomaticity of free improvisation is to be relocated in its process-oriented features and devices, which have been chosen or devised in order to favor emergence. Guidelines, codes of conduct and other enduring parameters act as pre-texts or pre-engagements and provide the performance with some of its conditions of creation.

Music is free to emerge however it does in real time. Of course, the idea of emergence during performance is not exclusive to free improvisation: performances of all kinds are constantly affected by chains of real-time happenings and interactions that unfold around and despite any degree of pre-planning. The difference is that while musicians and producers in many

⁷² These tendencies will be discussed in chapters 2 and 3 of the second part of the thesis.

traditions go to great lengths to maintain control on each of the performance's details, while their ideal is to prevent the unexpected from ever happening and disrupting their activity, free improvisation tends to want just the opposite. Here, artists pursue the unexpected and are trained to thrive on it (at least as long as they are able to deem the unexpected event as significant and to integrate it in their creative process). In other musical activities, the personnel involved seeks to limit the dangers associated to music's real-time actualization, its reliance on the collaborative work of many participants, and the inevitable contingency and conflict of interpretations that arise from the use of codes that are semiotically vague. Free improvisers, on the other hand, make profitable use of these conditions. Some of them chase the ideal that every detail should emerge in real time. In any case, the ideals that motivate both tendencies, at least in their uncompromising manifestations, are, as we have seen in the previous section, illusory. Nonetheless, as far as their attitude towards emergence goes, free improvisers demonstrate an entirely different tendency than musicians involved in practices that do not thrive on the unexpected.

Their activity is particular for the way the skills that are required of them and the performance conditions that it entails are geared towards maximizing emergence and harnessing the potential of emergent materials. The fact that improvisers act without a detailed score (remember: this treatment of the score is a positively constituting constraint) is only the beginning. The ephemerality of sound, the causal linearity of the participants' contributions, the semiotic flexibility of music, the contact of different individualities, etc. - all of these default conditions, the most basic ones of free improvisation, also help to optimize the generation and treatment of emergent material.⁷³ Free improvisation's specificity cannot necessarily be retraced to its conditions of performance *per se*, but rather has to do with how the emergent potential of these conditions is maximized during the performance, instead of countered or avoided for fear of disruption, as is often done through compositional or organizational devices.

But while a penchant for the unexpected is certainly an essential determining feature of free improvisation practices, we should not assume that this entails a relinquishment of the performers' control. As mentioned above, improvisers are trained to make the most out of the unexpected. This means they know what they are doing and normally feel in control of how they are responding to the situation at hand. They have developed the right habits for this activity.

⁷³ These default conditions of musical improvisation will be elaborated in chapters 3 and 4 of the third part.

Pedro Azevedo, founder of Audio Rebel, a venue specializing in improvised music and other underground music in Rio de Janeiro, during a discussion that I had with him and a few local musicians, evoked his unease with the word "improvisation". In Portuguese (as in English), the word seems to imply that practitioners scuffle on stage to come up with makeshift performance materials in real-time. This perception undermines the fact that improvisers are competent and proficient artists who, despite working with emergent and fleeting materials, are in *control* of their activity. (AZEVEDO 2014, *Interview with André Bourgeois*) This being said, the ability to give up control is often presented as a virtue among improvisers. Stephen Nachmanovitch comments:

The surrender has got to be genuine, uncontrived, wholehearted: I have got to really abandon all hope and fear, with nothing to gain and nothing to lose. This paradox of control versus letting things happen naturally cannot be rationalized; it can only be resolved in actual practice. [...] We split ourselves into controller and controlled. (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.142-3)

As paradoxical as it may sound, improvisers' habits include skills that help them to "let go" and act in new ways, ways that constitute a break from their more methodical habits. Good improvisers have good habit-breaking habits. Thus, they manage to remain in control when they abandon control. But... how can this be?

There are countless accounts of performances where interactions are flowing so well and the process is yielding such cohesive results, that that which emerges seems to grab the reins from the musicians' hands and they are left with the sensation that they have surrendered control, perhaps to a Muse (or even to a group Muse). (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.39) They may feel things like a sensation that they have tapped into the "flow" of their "original nature" and that "raw material [emerges] from their unconscious". (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.9) Evan Parker related that there occurs "a kind of synthesis, but with some elements that perhaps you wouldn't have expected in advance. I always like that when that happens, when something comes that is more than the sum of the parts." (BOKLAGE 2010, *How New Humans Are Made*, p.389) Musical fragments are emerging in new, cohesive, exciting combinations. Nonetheless, musicians feel that they are in familiar terrain. They understand what is happening and are in control of the situation. The reason is because underlying devices and values are codified in a way that lets musicians feel a familiarity in the process, while the formal product of this process may still emerge in the form of more or less unfamiliar materials. In order to feel in control when one improvises, certain

attitudes and skills must be refined. In order for improvisers to be able to work with groups of collaborators in real time, for example, they must develop a certain confidence, promptitude, vigilance, easy-goingness, and the capacity of seeing the material at hand as a fertile point of departure for further performance acts. For the practice of improvisation is intimately bound to the hope that what emerges during live performances can transgress that which is already established and has already been accepted. Scott elaborates:

Specifically, free improvisation, owing to its unique attitude to structure and material, may even be perceived as a site of producing new and heretical ideas, emergent concepts and trajectories of thought that cannot necessarily be reduced to pre-existing sociological, political or philosophical formulations, which Attali sees as something like a pre-echo of a virtual future. In improvised music it is possible that we are able to hear not only traces of a world that has not yet come existence, but also some material evidence. (SCOTT 2014, p.8)

To recapitulate, when seeking to delineate some of free improvisation's positively constituting features, we think it more apt and less problematic to focus on emergence rather than rupture. A perspective that insists on improvisers' systematic rejection of codes and traditions cannot, without running into problems, account for the sense of familiarity and control that inspires musicians' activity, nor for the fact that improvisers are expected to develop certain attitudes and skills in order to better deal with specific sets of default conditions of creation. By centering our discussion on improvisers' quest for new and emerging ideas, we can instead describe a positive goal that is nurtured in all improvisation scenes and around which a number of attitudes, conditions, values and devices have been set up in an effort to optimize it. The accent on emergence in real time is an essential, generalized feature of free improvisation.

3. - A PRACTICE IN ACCORDANCE WITH BROADER CONTEMPORARY PREOCCUPATIONS

This chapter will demonstrate in what ways free improvisation, as a product of the mid 20th century, is ideologically coherent with the ideas of its contemporaries, both in erudite and in popular circles. We will demonstrate its consistence with broader aesthetic preoccupations of the 20th century, which is especially interesting since free improvisers have often advocated rupture from creative ideologies of their time. Yet it is precisely this idea of rupture which contributes to highlight the practice's kinship to other modern practices and intellectual movements.

a) A Necessary Development for its Time

Free improvisation developed out of creative necessity, motivated by certain aesthetic preoccupations and expressive needs of musicians of its time. Yet, as points out Stévanec, drawing from Becker, an individual's belonging to a sub-culture is also the consequence of a social necessity that he *cannot*⁷⁴ find in the society in which he is evolving.⁷⁵ (STÉVANEC 2011, p. 5, 11) The practice emerged around the 1960s in the midst of aesthetic and political concerns that characterized broader art movements of the modern period, more particularly jazz and post-serialist erudite music. Its lineage to (and eventual distance from) these currents contributed to imbue it with some of the ideological concerns that are central to it and to which it also contributed. After all, every musical code roots itself in the ideologies and technologies of historical time while at the same time producing them.⁷⁶ (ATTALI 2001 (1977)) Pioneering movements of free improvisation developed mainly in North America and western Europe, often on the fringes of, and borrowing from, other musical scenes, such as free jazz, avant-garde and electroacoustic music, but also noise music, performance art and rock music. Free improvisation also reacted *to* these other practices. In the 1960s and 1970s, the movement quickly spread. Fuelled by unifying concerns, local scenes popped up in cities throughout the world. These preoccupations are for the most part consistent with those of others in the music world of the mid

⁷⁴ Emphasis is mine.

⁷⁵ « L'appartenance d'un individu à une sous-culture est la conséquence d'une nécessité sociale qu'il ne parvient pas à trouver au sein de la société dans laquelle il évolue. »

⁷⁶ « Chaque code musical s'enracine dans les idéologies et les technologies d'une époque en même temps qu'elle les produit. »

20th century: break from tradition, resistance to constraints imposed by formal idioms (BAILEY 1980), the desire to build something new from a *tabula rasa* (BRINDLE 1975 (1987), *The New Music: the Avant-Garde Since 1945*, p. 6-7), the quest for pure forms of expression and the liberation of one's genuine voice/self (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.5, 11), the development of an approach that would allow art to express social and political ideals (SALADIN 2014). All of these are concerns that free improvisation shared with some of its modernist contemporaries.

But free improvisation also appeared at the tail end of the modern era. Nanz writes:

Seen in its political context, the development of improvisation can be interpreted as the attempt to break away from [...] dogmatic positions [...] Correspondingly, the succession of serial music, aleatoric music, open forms and, finally, free improvisation has been interpreted as a linear, logical-dialectical, coherent one.⁷⁷ Improvisers, along with their contemporaries, paved a way into the post-modern era, where many of its practitioners no longer abided to strict ideals of total rejection and new beginnings. (NANZ 2011, p.13)

More recent generations of improvisers had a similar reaction following the dogmatic stance of pioneering improvisers who had called for a new beginning and an avoidance of all handed down conventions; subsequent generations of musicians adopted a more lenient deconstructive approach⁷⁸, which opened the door to inherited codes and traditions. What counted was that the materials serve the momentary needs of the performance. These positions are both consistent with broader ideological preoccupations of the mid to late twentieth century. By describing these and other concerns that pioneering generations of free improvisers shared with their contemporaries, we may retrace some strands of free improvisation's ideological lineage.

b) New Beginnings

Free jazz and post-serialist classical-contemporary music, the two currents that most contributed to pave the way for free improvisation, were both concerned with the idea of breaking away from established traditions in order to set up the terrain for new beginnings. On

⁷⁷ "Im politischen Kontext ist diese Entwicklung [zur Improvisation] als der Versuch eines Ausbruchs aus dogmatischen Positionen [...] zu interpretieren. Analog wurde eine lineare, logisch-dialektische Folgerichtigkeit in die Aufeinanderfolge der Phänomene des Serialismus, der Aleatorik und offenen Formen und schließlich der Freien Improvisation hineingelesen."

⁷⁸ On deconstruction as a method privileged by improvisers for addressing their inevitable use of inherited materials, see chapter 3 of the second part.

the free jazz side, musicians like Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Albert Ayler, Sun Ra and Eric Dolphy had grown weary of jazz. "[...] [m]odern jazz, once so daring and revolutionary, has become, in many respects, a rather settled and conventional thing." (COLEMAN 2011 (1959), p.253) They undermined some of modern jazz's usual features and guidelines in order to destabilize their practice and allow more of its features to be determined only at the time of performance. The resulting free jazz was ignored by many critics or dismissed by them as a kind of *anti-jazz* (JOST 1994 (1974), *Free Jazz*, p.30), an assault on the jazz tradition. Jazz artists, even modern jazz players, are generally assertive of their roots and, though they strive to renew and redraw their tradition, they are also deeply concerned with conserving it. Jazz musicians are expected to be able to perform a repertoire of standard tunes catalogued in real-books (also known as fake-books) and American songbooks, a body of works that serve as guidelines or *pre-texts* to the performance. In contrast, Ornette Coleman said about his own *free jazz* approach: "When our group plays, before we start out to play, we do not have any idea what the end result will be." (COLEMAN 2011 (1959), p.254) This represents a big step towards what would come a few years later: a more radical deconstructive practice that would bear many qualifiers, but would mostly come to be known as *free improvisation*.

Free improvisation also followed subversive experiments in the world of classical contemporary music, such as graphic scores, aleatoric music, open forms and chance operations, of which it was the logical and necessary continuation. These earlier developments experimented with leaving some formal elements unspecified by the score and letting them be determined at the time of performance. Free improvisation takes these experiments and tries to push them to new extremes. Although, as we defended earlier, free improvisation is not performed completely without pre-texts or pre-engagements, it did successfully manage to eliminate the score in its traditional form. Yet, as they rejected the score, free improvisers were more vehement than their free jazz contemporaries in rejecting the codes and features inherited from specific music traditions. In its most radical form, expressed by its pioneering generations, the ideal of free improvisation was for every element of a performance to be improvised, created spontaneously without any pre-determined elements.

But although they were initially driven by the need to break from all traditions, some of these movements, because of their longevity and continued relevance, have since drafted legacies as traditions in their own right, now spanning over half a century or more. This attempt to move

away from inherited European styles ironically brought free improvisation in intimate coherence with European post-war and postmodernist ideology. Free improvisation has accordingly been accused of demonstrating an "attitude of relativist post-modern obedience"⁷⁹ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.18).

c) Undermining Hierarchies

Undermining hierarchies is the more socially and politically charged side of pioneering improvisers' desire to establish a practice under the banner of new beginnings. Equality is often stated as one of the founding principles of free improvisation. Saladin comments on the Spontaneous Music Ensemble's approach:

*Every hierarchy is abandoned, in a radical gesture of equality where each musician saw himself entrusted with the same importance for his reciprocal participation within the ensemble. He in turn had to grant an equal attention to each of the different members' contributions.*⁸⁰
(SALADIN 2014, p. 94-95)

We can see how the dismantlement of hierarchies in free improvisation, more than just an attempt to enact some social ideal, sets up some of the collective improvisation process' conditions of creation. We can also link it to many of the attitudes and ethics that are valued in improvisers: openness, reciprocity, humility, responsiveness, etc.

The twentieth century is the site of many earlier examples of efforts to undermine hierarchies. This is, once again, a concern attached to broader ideals of this period. Serialists of the Second Viennese School, led by Schönberg, Berg and Webern, had already tackled the hierarchy of the notes of the chromatic system by proposing the twelve-tone technique. The dichotomy opposing noise and sound had been challenged and relativized by figures such as Schaeffer (SCHAEFFER 1952, *À la recherche de la musique concrète*) and Russolo (RUSSOLO 2009 (1913), *L'Arte dei rumori*). Musicians and audiences are then encouraged to open up their

⁷⁹ « attitude relativiste d'obéissance postmoderne »

⁸⁰ « Toute hiérarchie se trouvait abandonnée, dans un geste radical d'égalité où chaque musicien se voyait conféré la même importance dans sa participation à l'ensemble et de manière réciproque, se devait à son tour d'accorder une égale attention à chaque contribution des différents membres. »

sensibilities to all sounds and embrace their infinite variety. The opposition of sound vs. noise⁸¹ is shifted or deconstructed. Réthoré notes the difference in attitude towards unexpected sounds/noises on the part of classically trained musicians on the one hand and free improvisers on the other. While the first may view ambient noise such as coughing, telephone rings and the such as intrusive (since they do not correspond to the score's prescriptions), improvisers may be able to integrate these "intrusions" in their work,

*[...] to which they give a touch of non-reproducible, unique, ephemeral singularity, in compliance with this movement's aesthetic. We must reach the conclusion that the integration, or the refusal of integration, of "noises" within the musical or theatrical work at hand is of aesthetico-ideological nature.*⁸² (RÉTHORÉ 2015, p.6-7)

She continues:

*"Noise", in this case, becomes a desirable auxiliary for the work, an indicator of its great freedom with regard to norms. But then, does it not necessarily change status? Personally, I think this is evident. A musical aesthetic that gives room to noises that are exterior to the expected score or work in progress transforms these noises into sounds.*⁸³ (RÉTHORÉ 2015, p.7)

In this vein, and as a component of these experiments in deconstruction, the free improvisation practice and discourse both called for special attention to be given to properties that had been neglected by western musical traditions, or rather, that had not been the main focus of its intended meaning, of artists' manipulations and of eventual codifications. Morris' book *Perpetual Frontier: The Properties of Free Music* (MORRIS 2012, *Perpetual Frontier: The Properties of Free Music*) proposes an extended repertoire of such features and supports his thesis with a sample of methodologies taken from the repertoire of free jazz and European improvisation. His enlarged perception of what constitutes a work's materials - articulated

⁸¹ Réthoré argues that, despite idiosyncratic or cultural uses, the opposition of sound and noise persists in many expressions. Sound is normally viewed favorably while noise is a nuisance. (RÉTHORÉ 2015, *Le son ou le frémissement du sens*, p.1)

⁸² « [...] à laquelle elles donnent une touche de singularité non réductible, unique, éphémère, conforme à l'esthétique de ce mouvement musical [...] On est obligé d'aboutir à la conclusion que l'intégration, ou le refus de l'intégration, de "bruits" dans l'oeuvre musicale ou théâtrale en cours est de nature esthétique-idéologique. »

⁸³ « Le "bruit", dans ce cas, devient un auxiliaire souhaitable de l'oeuvre, un marqueur de sa grande liberté par rapport aux normes. Mais alors, ne change-t-il pas nécessairement de statut ? Pour ma part, c'est une évidence. L'esthétique musicale qui fait une part aux bruits extérieurs à la partition prévue ou *in progress* transforme ces bruits en sons [...] »

through six chapters: Approach, Platform, Melodic Structure, Pulse, Interaction, and Form - extends to formal features that are not traditionally documented by scores, and even to properties other than strictly formal ones. In short, musicians have the freedom to "use whatever materials [they] acquire or manufacture while preparing" (MORRIS 2012, p.9) "Everything is material if it can be processed through actions of synthesis, interpretation and invention". (MORRIS 2012, p.40)

Improvisers also sought to break down the hierarchies of instrumentation. "They abolished the traditional hierarchy of instrumentation in jazz, classical, rock and pop, allowing any instrument to become an equal partner in improvisation with any other." (COX 2011 (2004), p.251) Prescribed roles of instruments within group configurations were challenged. This is notably the case for John Stevens' artistic vision for the *Spontaneous Musical Ensemble*. Saladin recounts:

*In contrast to the traditional distribution that condemns the rhythm section to remain at the back of the scene while soloists and quieter instruments position themselves in front, Stevens opted for an absence of hierarchy in instrumental layout. Instead of having musicians face the crowd, he privileged circular or triangular formations.*⁸⁴ (SALADIN 2014, p. 95)

Improvisers interested in developing extended instrumental techniques also challenged the traditional roles of their instruments; they eventually modified their instruments physically, amplified them or distorted them electronically.

These changes entail a toppling of the hierarchy of meaning as well. They will be discussed later on.⁸⁵

d) Establishing Ideal Social, Political or Spiritual Communities

The popular conception of free improvisation often links the practice to utopian goals that lie beyond the more aesthetic purposes of music. Indeed, many improvisers, especially in the

⁸⁴ « À la différence de la traditionnelle répartition qui condamne la rythmique à demeurer en fond de scène alors que les solistes ou les instruments à plus faible volume se positionnent au devant, Stevens opta pour une absence de hiérarchie dans les positions instrumentales. À la position frontale, il privilégia des formations en cercle ou en triangle. »

⁸⁵ The toppled hierarchies in meaning and effect will be discussed in chapter 1 of the third part in terms of Peircean semiotics, once the necessary concepts have been introduced.

pioneering generation, were motivated by the desire to investigate freedom, expansion of consciousness, political and social models, and even spiritual enlightenment. They saw free improvisation as a medium capable of serving their exploration of these preoccupations. It is important to discuss how free improvisation came about in an era of ideals.

While improvisers' enquiry⁸⁶ into sound and sound combinations is certainly aesthetically and ideologically driven, their enquiry into group dynamics is often driven by social, political and spiritual ideals. Their concern with the optimization of the collective process also confirms the social tenure of their activity.

The purpose of this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive account of the ways that social, political and spiritual preoccupations have motivated the improvisation approaches of artists and communities. These topics have been developed by others.⁸⁷ For the purpose of this research, it is only necessary to identify these concerns so that we may later understand the ways that free improvisation's default creative conditions and particular semiotics may help artists to address them.

The pertinence of free improvisation for exploring the social aspects of music is certainly the most obvious. The collective and inter-discursive nature of free improvisation makes it such that every creative act is also an essentially communicative one. Collective improvisation is social by nature. It is a creative process like so many others, but the role it reserves to simultaneity, participativity and interactivity ensures that social dynamics are directly involved in the group's creative output. Bakhtin/Todorov's recommendation for literary studies to treat its objects as social phenomena because "their "object" is precisely not an object but another subject" (TODOROV 1981, *Mikhaïl Bakhtine le principe dialogique suivi de Écrits du cercle de Bakhtine*, p.34) appears all the more applicable to free improvisation, where the dialogical relationships are far more localized and real-time interactions allow the possibility of feedback.

This particular discursive potential is clearly consistent with broader social concerns of

⁸⁶ The particular nature of improvisers' enquiry - as a dynamic, deconstructive playful one - will be discussed in chapter 3 of the second part of the thesis

⁸⁷ We would like to refer the reader to Matthieu Saladin's book *Esthétique de l'improvisation libre: Expérimentation musicale et politique* (SALADIN 2014), which offers an in-depth study of the politics of improvisation. Cornelius Cardew's work provides wonderful examples of the ways that free improvisation can be purposefully oriented to specific social concerns. Nachmanovitch's book *Free Play* (NACHMANOVITCH 1991) is one of many to explore the more spiritual aspects of free improvisation; it provides individual and group perspectives on the topic. Bailey's book *Improvisation* (BAILEY 1980) is also traversed by an underlying hint of spiritual concerns; it notably highlights the central importance of the intuited experience of free improvisation.

the 1960s and 1970s, the time when the first and second generations of free improvisers were active. Réthoré comments on this period, bringing out the importance of communication in political and social action and analysis.

The idea was that of the self-management of small-scale communities (foreshadowing the Small is beautiful of the 1970s) in which a new conception of man and the nature of social relationships, founded on fraternity, could be developed. Indeed, the barbarism of nazi ideology had rekindled a 19th century utopian ideal: the ideal of social change that is founded neither on social exclusion nor on the strengthening of the State. Homo communicans, according to Wiener, is no longer the center of the universe, from which everything departs and towards which everything converges. It has become a being with no interior, no body of its own, living in a society without secrets, fully focused on itself, a man living only of information and exchange, in a society that has been rendered transparent by new communication machines.⁸⁸ (RÉTHORÉ 2007, La Pensée triadique du phénomène de communication according to Peirce, p.1)

This translates an ideal conception of man where social relationships are marked by an intense sense of fraternity. Wiener's take on *homo communicans*, a kind of empty, disembodied being living only from external information and exchange, can serve as a powerful image for a certain ideal of the improvising musician and the improvised work. Liberated from formal pre-engagements and almost totally independent of pre-texts, the materials of improvised performances are left to be determined by the real-time exchanges of its participants. The values of community and fraternity are often acknowledged by musicians as being central to free improvisation as well. Brazilian guitarist Arthur Navarro quotes them as some of the core ideological preoccupations of his improvisation practice with the *Expurgação* collective, pointing out that their "ideological concerns have to do with musical interaction, a moment of brotherhood, as well as the fact that this practice helps them all to liberate themselves from conventional musical restrictions."⁸⁹ But more importantly, free improvisation, as a real-time collective process necessarily involving multiple players in a participative interactive way, offers musicians an interesting medium to pursue experiments in real-time communicative or dialogical

⁸⁸ L'idée visée était celle d'une autogestion de communautés de petite taille (préfigurant le *Small is beautiful* des années 70) dans lesquelles serait développée une conception nouvelle de l'homme et de la nature du lien social, fondée sur la fraternité. En effet, le barbarisme de l'idéologie nazie avait ranimé un idéal utopique du XIX^{ème} siècle [...], l'idéal d'un changement social qui ne serait fondé ni sur l'exclusion sociale, ni sur le renforcement de l'état. *Homo communicans*, selon Wiener, n'était plus le centre de l'univers, duquel tout part et vers lequel tout converge. Il était devenu un être sans intérieur, sans corps propre, vivant dans une société sans secrets, pleinement tourné vers elle, un homme vivant seulement par l'information et l'échange, dans une société rendue transparente par les nouvelles machines à communiquer.

⁸⁹ "as questões ideológicas se tratam da interação musical, de um momento de irmandade, além também dessa prática incitar a libertação das amarras musicais convencionais."

dynamics.

[Practitioners of free jazz] affirm the value of a musical community in opposition to a musical industry that solely values objects and commodities. For many, the improvised musical performance serves to create, in the midst of existing hierarchical social relations, a utopian space, a genuinely democratic realm full of cooperation, coexistence, and intersubjective exchange. Without established musical or social props, everything is held together by these intersubjective relations among performers, lines of connection that are both as strong and fragile as a spider's web, and, as such, constantly under construction and repair. (COX 2011 (2004), p.251-2)

We are now already discussing questions of politics: the idea of creating an inclusive, collective creative space that promotes freedom, community and democracy through the subversion of hierarchies. Musical freedom and equality could then serve as an expression of political freedom and equality. The collective is often emphasized above the individual (although even free improvisation has its "star performers").

Free improvisation movements throughout the world have been linked to movements of political protest, be it the 1968 protests in France (SALADIN 2014), the *Révolution tranquille* in Quebec (STÉVANCE 2011), the Adenauer era in Germany (NANZ 2011), or the civil rights movement in the United States, all of which demonstrate climates of political dissatisfaction and experimentation. Although the link between free jazz and the civil rights movement has been contested (GRIDLEY 2008, *Misconceptions in Linking Free Jazz with the Civil Rights Movement: Illusory Correlations Between Politics and the Origination of Jazz Styles*), several musical projects from this period demonstrate artists' overtly articulated desire to express ideals of political liberation through music. This is notably the case of Charlie Haden's *Liberation Music Orchestra*, an ensemble that was still active until recently and, since the late 1960s, has dedicated pieces to past and contemporary situations of political unrest, including events as diverse as the Spanish Civil War, the riotous 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, the Vietnam War, as well as racial and political strife in South Africa and El Salvador. In the orchestra's first album in particular, passages of free collective improvisation are used to represent scenes of popular uprising (notably in the piece *Circus '68 '69*).⁹⁰ Its most recent project, released in 2005,

⁹⁰ It should be noted that subsequent albums by the *Liberation Music Orchestra* gradually moved away from free improvisation, choosing instead to focus on other subversive orchestration strategies in their arrangements of songs from revolutionary times. All arrangements for the orchestra are by Carla Bley. The orchestra nonetheless continued to feature some of the freer jazz giants of the period, notably Don Cherry, Dewey Redman and Paul Motian.

was a reflection on the American consciousness at a time when the country was involved in two unpopular wars. It was appropriately called *Not in Our Name*.

The subject of free improvisation and politics is a popular one in dedicated online message boards and blogs. Commenting on the political context that inspired Belgian free-jazz pianist Fred Van Hove's project *Requiem For Che Guevara, Martin Luther King, John F. And Robert Kennedy, Malcolm X*, web-writer Patlotch says:

*[...] revolution is generally easier to carry out in music by musicians than in the world by revolutionaries. The album cover can raise eyebrows today but the disc was recorded one year after Che's death and six months after Luther King's assassination. That the project should be associated to Malcolm X will surprise no one. With regard to Kennedy, it could seem like a gag, but it is also evocative of the 1968 spirit.*⁹¹ (PATLOTCH 2014, 1968 année libre)

The opening statement of this passage mirrors similar statements in online discussions on free improvisation. But for our purpose, it gives us a first hint as to why music, and free improvisation in particular, have been embraced and viewed as well-suited mediums for politically driven music projects. Free improvisation proposes conditions of creation that are perceived as making it "easier" to express revolution musically, or even to pursue revolution in music itself.

Saladin, in his book *Esthétique de l'improvisation libre: Expérimentation musicale et expérimentation politique*, gives an account of the issues and concerns that structure the free improvisation process, paying particular attention to the way that the practice was shaped by the socio-historical context in which it was pioneered. He thus proposes a "politics" of improvisation, characterized by underlying democratic principles. For Saladin, experimentation is carried out on two fronts: musical and political. The practice's promise is also double: practitioners are offered a democratic space⁹² that will lead to musical emancipation.

The three ensembles that make up Saladin's corpus are among many whose approach to improvisation became increasingly politicized during the 1960s and 1970s. In the cases of *AMM*

⁹¹ « [...] la révolution est généralement plus facile à faire en musique par des musiciens que dans le monde par des révolutionnaires. Cette pochette peut prêter à sourire aujourd'hui mais le disque est enregistré un an après la mort du Che et six mois après l'assassinat de Luther King. Qu'il soit ici associé à Malcolm X (1965) ne surprendra personne, quant à Kennedy (1963) ça pourrait passer pour un gag, mais ça donne une idée aussi de l'esprit 68 »

⁹² We will be better equipped to explore the parameters of free improvisation's "safe space" once we have discussed the default conditions and semiotic uses of improvised music in chapters 3 and 4 of the third part of the thesis.

and *Musica Elettronica Viva*, this had a lot to do with creative ideals formulated by Cornelius Cardew and Frederic Rzewski, the creative minds behind those two ensembles. They were notably interested in finding ways to democratize the musical encounter. "During his time with [Musica Elettronica Viva], Rzewski's approach to music became increasingly political. He came to see improvisation as a way to break down the boundaries between musicians and non-musicians." (COX 2011 (2004), p.266) With *The Great Learning*, Cornelius Cardew sought to bring together formally trained musicians with amateur ones.⁹³ In cases such as these, it becomes important for an interpretation of the work to also articulate its political dimension, which makes up an important part of its meaning. In an article that discusses the relationship between the political act and the artistic act, Emanuel Vidal says that aesthetic properties of music are often themselves banal if we discount their relationship to the political dimension that gives them their meaning. To understand the properties of an artwork, it is necessary to understand the history of the creative act. (VIDAL 2012, *L'Acte politique à l'intérieur/extérieur de l'acte artistique: réflexions autour de la politique et de la musique d'Helmut Lachenmann*)

About social and political ideals, it should be noted that although they still animate the creative approaches of numerous free improvisers, there seems to have been a general trend to let go of these motivations in favor of a more overtly musical exploration. Certain "democratic" principles, for example, may not be applied if an alternative approach is thought to be more productive. Leading members of *Rabotnik*, a contemporary group of improvisers in Rio de Janeiro, embrace an approach that sees the improvisation process as more efficient if somebody is directing the operations.

*It was necessary to have someone in command for the project to work. They count on the collaborations with a more or less fixed set of musicians who play together, but affirm not believing in "band democracy": "It doesn't work. It's our band and everybody knows it."*⁹⁴ (SIQUEIRA 2013, p.68)

Yet for many, collective free improvisation held the promise of a truly communal,

⁹³ This work will be discussed in section c) of chapter 3 of the third part of the thesis.

⁹⁴ " [...] era necessário existir alguém comandando para o projeto funcionar. Contam com a participação de músicos praticamente fixos que tocam juntos, mas afirmam não acreditar em "democracia em banda": "Não funciona. A banda é nossa e a galera sabe disso", diz um deles.

ritualistic, even spiritual experience.⁹⁵ The real-time exchanges that characterize the free improvisation process are so rapid and instantaneous and they find acceptance so easily that improvisers, when discussing acts and deliberation, often evoke instinct and intuition, rather than choice and calculation. In an interview with Derek Bailey, Jerry Garcia says: "Sometimes it feels to me as though you don't have to really think about what's happening. Things just flow. It's kind of hard to report but it's a real thing." (BAILEY 1980, p.42) The perception of unrestrained, intuitive expression has led some musicians to describe free improvisation as a medium that may allow their genuine musical being to be brought out. Nachmanovitch's book *Free Play* explores this idea in depth. Because of its spontaneity, the author sees free improvisation as both a "spiritual and a psychological story" (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.9) What one expresses in free improvisation "comes from our deepest being". (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.10) He does not hesitate to link the practice to mysticism. By being faithful to the moment and present circumstances, by surrendering to them (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.21), by leaving tricks behind and taking risks (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.22), one may forget time, space and oneself. (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.52)

Other improvisers' practice drew inspiration directly from spiritual messages and religious texts. There are also frequent references to eastern spiritualities: Taoist texts are evoked by Nachmanovitch (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.135) and, more significantly, serve as the main inspiration for Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Learning*. Branding and marketing of free improvisation albums and projects have often made use of imagery drawing on spirituality or mysticism. Free jazz from the 1960s and 1970s in particular continues to be marketed as "spiritual" and "deep", as new compilations continue to be released that capitalize on this type of image, namely *Spiritual Jazz: Esoteric, Modal and Deep Jazz from the Underground 1968-1977* and *Liberation Music: Spiritual Jazz and the Art of Protest on Flying Dutchman Records 1969-1974*.⁹⁶ Yet in the pioneering generation of free improvisers, even musicians with less overtly spiritually-tinged discourses also highlight free improvisation as a practice of intuition. Bailey's book, in which he refuses to speculate on any properties of free improvisation, focuses on musician testimonies as well, on their practice. His attention to intuition and spirit in

⁹⁵ We will return to the subject of ritual in section e) of chapter 3 of the second part of the thesis.

⁹⁶ This last example also clearly alludes to the political concerns of the represented artists. It should be noted, however, that free improvisation, although it is present in this compilation, is not practiced by all of the reunited artists. Here, politics and spirituality are the main common threads.

improvisation suggests that he views the "intuited experience" of improvisation as the practice's essence.

The picture is somewhat different among contemporary improvisers. In many cases, artists see each other first as professional musicians whose mission is creative rather than political. Though they are willing to recognize that social, political or spiritual preoccupations probably shape their activity to some extent, these concerns are no longer generally considered as primary driving forces for their approach. Diego Brotas comments:

*I think that the three factors that you cite are influential more than motivational. These preoccupations are surely more unconscious than linked to a strictly elaborated plan. In many cases these concerns give a certain tone to musical performances. In other cases no.*⁹⁷ (BROTAS 2016, Interview with André Bourgeois)

Although projects are less explicitly oriented towards social, political or spiritual goals, improvisers do stress the fact that their whole being is involved in their improvisation activity and, thus, any such preoccupations are necessarily involved in some way. Henry Schroy says:

*Music exists before language: mental thought movements that define us through our linguistic mechanisms. So yes, the motivation of my practice is affected by all of life's preoccupations: emotional, personal, love-related, death, politics, philosophy, ideas about "otherness", ideas about mythology. Everything belongs to musical thought. Music is a great ocean in which all things blend and define one another.*⁹⁸ (SCHROY 2016)

Stévanche observes that free improvisers are often academics that are searching for a sublime form of art.⁹⁹ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.11) In such cases, free improvisation serves primarily creative and aesthetic purposes and is used as a medium for artists' enquiry into sound. The mission, then, is a primarily musical one. Nonetheless, we must remember that free improvisation finds proponents among musicians that pursue their activity with additional purposes as well,

⁹⁷ "Acredito que esses três fatores citados por você são influenciadores, mais do que motivadores. Essas preocupações certamente fazem parte mais de um inconsciente do que um plano estritamente elaborado. Em muitos casos essas preocupações que dão o tom de uma performance musical. Outras vezes não."

⁹⁸ "A música existe antes da linguagem, movimentos de pensamentos mentais que nós definimos através de nossos mecanismos linguísticos. Então sim, a motivação da minha prática é afetada por todas preocupações da vida, emocionais, pessoais, sobre o amor, a morte, a política, a filosofia, ideias do "além", ideias sob mitologia. Tudo cabe dentro do pensamento musical. A música é um grande oceano em que essas coisas todas se misturam e se informam."

⁹⁹ « Les musiciens sont souvent des académiques à la recherche d'une forme sublime en art. »

most notably, as we have seen, concerning social, political and spiritual ideals. The particular prevalence of ideals among the first few generations of free improvisers make it reasonable to believe that they had an important role in developing the practice's basic parameters¹⁰⁰ and shaping the underlying principles¹⁰¹ that unify improvisers and support their activity, giving it its coherence, until today. Yet, although the social, political and spiritual motivations of improvisers may have taken the back seat among many younger improvisers, such ideals and concerns still traverse their practice in an important, if discrete, way. Oftentimes, one only has to ask improvisers about these things and they will gladly elaborate on the subject. In the case of this research, this was particularly the case with Brazilian improvisers. Arthur Navarro explains:

*Jam sessions with members of Expurgação are acts of reunion, brotherhood, and are also spiritual and comical acts. [...] Jams sessions with Expurgação in full band formation in studios constitutes another sphere of my musical practice. I consider it to be an enquiry that goes beyond experimentation, musicality and rhythm, also carrying with it the connection with others there in that moment, and being at same time a spiritual quest through musical interaction and spontaneous musical creation.*¹⁰² (NAVARRO 2016)

Henry Schroy's prolific discography offers only scarce hints to suggest that he attributes spiritual value to his free improvisation practice (orixás belong to the African and Afro-Brazilian pantheon). However, when asked, he opens up on the subject.

*Aesthetically I prefer a movement in the direction of spiritual peace. Sometimes it is necessary to throw a "harsh noise" in there to unblock a lingering uncooperative structure. But my idea is improving my life, other people's lives. So a gesture, a movement that facilitates freedom of thought, that calms down anxiety, that promotes a vision that is more wide open and atemporal. A vision that is open to a future that is better, more ideal, for humanity.*¹⁰³ (SCHROY 2016)

¹⁰⁰ These will be discussed in chapter 3 of the third part.

¹⁰¹ These will be developed in chapter 5 of the third part.

¹⁰² "[...] as jams [realizadas junto aos membros da Expurgação são] atos de reunião, de irmandade, e também de experiência espiritual e lúdica. [...] As jams realizadas com a Expurgação em formação de banda nos estúdios é uma outra esfera da minha prática musical. Considero esta muito uma pesquisa que vai além da experimentação, musicalidade e ritmo, abarcando também a conexão com o outro ali naquele momento, sendo esta também uma busca espiritual através de uma interação musical, da criação de música espontânea."

¹⁰³ "Esteticamente eu prefiro um movimento na direção da paz espiritual. As vezes é necessário trazer um "harsh noise" para desbloquear alguma estrutura não-cooperativa ao redor. Mas minha ideia é melhorar minha vida, a vidas das pessoas. Então algum gesto, algum movimento, que facilite a liberdade de pensamento, que acalme as ansiedades, que providencie uma visão mais ampla e atemporal. Uma visão aberta á um futuro mais ideal para humanidade."

4. - PERFORMANCE AND SEMIOTICS

If the free improvisation practice exalts the emergent and processual aspects of music, then there must be something different in how audience members, who are allegedly likewise drawn to these qualities, construct meaning from improvised performances. The signification of performances is always (and not only in improvised performances) more complex than the simple transfer, from an artist to an audience member, of an aesthetic form that carries a fixed meaning. But the distribution of meaning to other, less fixed and conventionalized, aspects of the performance is exposed particularly clearly in free improvisation, where there is an expressed eagerness to reduce reliance on pre-texts or conventionalized formal idioms and promote the real-time quality, presence, and dynamic agency, even the social and political value of their works.

a) Pleading the Case for Semiotics in Performance Studies

Can semiotics - the study of signs and how they are used (Merriam-Webster 2015) - help us bring out and understand these features of performances? Scholars of performance theories such as Erika Fischer-Lichte and Edward Schieffelin have rejected semiotic approaches because "performativity is located at the creative, improvisatory edge of practice in the moment it is carried out" (SCHIEFFELIN 1998, *Problematizing Performance*, p.198) whereas, relatively, "texts are changeless and enduring". It is likely that this position comes from a European, purely verbal conception of semiotics. Fischer-Lichte, though she proposes a very compelling model to illustrate collective participative performance, presents semiotics as something that cannot account for the specific raw qualities and fleeting relations that, as she describes, are essential to how we experience them. I suspect - and it seems obvious when we read her work "The Transformative Power of Performance: a New Aesthetics" - that this judgment comes from a conception of the sign that is restricted to a stable, dyadic relation between sign (signifier) and object (signified), in the tradition of Saussure and Hjelmslev. Indeed, this would imply that the work, as a sign or group of signs, serves as a fixed intermediary (LATOURET 1994, *On Technical Mediation*) that aspires to a kind of non-contingent communication between participants. As we just mentioned, these are not the aspirations of improvisers and Fischer-Lichte knows it. Dyadic semiotic models of the Saussurean tradition fail to look beyond institutionalized formal codes and languages. As Todorov points out, Bakhtin reproaches Saussure with ignoring the fact that

besides the forms of a language there also exist the forms of combination linking these forms; he ignores discursive genres.¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵ (TODOROV 1981, p.90) If a semiotic model were to be applied to the study of free improvisation, it would thus need to account for signs, not only for their symbolic value, but also for the meaningful relations that they entertain in any given situation.¹⁰⁶ Saussure, in providing a model of signs that is neither sufficiently dynamic nor contingent, fails to account for how signs are always interpreted in a given situation and under particular circumstances that complete their meaning. The situation is integrated in the statement as an element indispensable to its semantic constitution.¹⁰⁷ (TODOROV 1981, p.191)) Saussure's model is inadequate for considering the emergent aspects of human activity in general, and indeed particularly inadequate for considering performances of free improvisation, since these make little to no prior commitments to pre-texts or any formal codes. Much of the organization of improvised works is negotiated in real time and the way the actions that constitute these very negotiations affect the participants is often more significant than the sound forms that are produced.

That there need to be negotiations at all is due to the fact that the interpretations of the different participants in collective improvisation are highly contingent. Music in general rarely employs signs that aspire to communicating information in an explicit propositional way. They are proposed as relatively vague (when compared to verbal language) aesthetic sound forms that must be interpreted by others. But different participants do not perceive the situation in the same way. Nonetheless, their collective participation in the event gives them, at the very least, the collateral experience of the ongoing performance as a common reference. Each participant must then interpret meaning from the sequences of actions in causal linearity and propose, through immediate actions, subsequent materials to be included in this sequence.

A semiotic consideration of free improvisation (and indeed of any human activity) must also be able to account for signs in action, for signs as they emerge in unique situations, for varying degrees of vagueness in signs, for the contingency of interpretation that characterizes any

¹⁰⁴ In all fairness, it should be pointed out that Saussure was specifically interested in language, which does not usually serve the same kinds of social and communicative purposes as music. Some questions regarding the purposes of music in general and of free improvisation in particular will be explored in chapter 3 of the third part of the thesis.

¹⁰⁵ « Saussure ignore le fait qu'en dehors des formes de la langue existent aussi les formes de combinaison de ces formes, c'est-à-dire qu'il ignore les genres discursifs ».

¹⁰⁶ We will elaborate on Bakhtin's thought later on, particularly as we discuss dialogism in section c) of the second chapter of the second part.

¹⁰⁷ « [...] La situation s'intègre à l'énoncé comme un élément indispensable à sa constitution sémantique. »

group activity, as well as for the raw sensorial kinds of experience that affect spectators in situations of real-time interactive collective musical encounters. A binary model of the Saussurean tradition lacks the capacity to account for these phenomena, all of which complete the meaning of sound forms as the participants of free improvisation performances appreciate them.

b) Peirce's Triadic Model

For those reasons, we will favor the semiotic model of C.S. Peirce, and those that followed it, where signification is established through a triadic relationship between sign, object and interpretant. His account is rather complicated at first, but we insist on presenting it early on, as it will be useful for discussing questions of meaning throughout this thesis. On the three parts of the sign (of which one is also called the sign), Peirce says: "I define a sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the latter is thereby mediately determined by the former."(PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 2.478) An immediate benefit of implementing this model is that the sign becomes infinitely more flexible. It concerns more than just a "text" and cannot be cast away so easily by performance theorists.

By articulating three inter-related parts - where the interpretant is added to the sign and the object of Saussure's model - Peirce's semiotic model is able to express the very personal and contingent nature of interpretation and signification. Here is how:

For the sake of simplicity, we can think of the sign as the signifier, for example, a written word, an utterance, smoke as a sign for fire etc. The object, on the other hand, is best thought of as whatever is signified, for example, the object to which the written or uttered word attaches, or the fire signified by the smoke. The interpretant, the most innovative and distinctive feature of Peirce's account, is best thought of as the understanding that we have of the sign/object relation. The importance of the interpretant for Peirce is that signification is not a simple dyadic relationship between sign and object: a sign signifies only in being interpreted. This makes the interpretant central to the content of the sign, in that, the meaning of a sign is manifest in the interpretation that it generates in sign users. (ATKIN 2006 (2010), Peirce's Theory of Signs)

The central role of the interpretant is key for describing how meaning circulates in collective improvised performances, where the encounter and real-time interactions of different participants, each with their own ways of interpreting the ongoing negotiations, leads to the creation of a single work. The Peircean sign is not a fixed intermediary that conveys an explicit

meaning; it allows - and even highlights - the contingency of interpretation between different participants.

c) Signs are not just Conventionalized Symbols

As can be seen in the examples given by the Stanford Encyclopedia in the citation above, the sign, as defined by Peirce, is not a denomination restricted to conventionalized symbols. According to his model, a sign is anything that summons the attention of an intelligent being. It is therefore capable of accounting for more types of meaning-generating phenomena and lends itself well to the study of objects and encounters whose most significant aspects lie beyond conventionalized symbolic forms and codes. Since many free improvisers and other contemporary performers make it one of their explicit goals to reject or deconstruct such formal conventions, semiotic models of the Saussurean tradition indeed prove to be useless. Since signification in highly improvised performances concerns qualities that are vague and relations that are fleeting, Peirce's triadic semiotic model, which is both flexible and dynamic, is a powerful tool for considering how these performances can become meaningful. Particularly useful in respect to this is the pragmatic nature of Peirce's model. It takes into consideration the context in which signs are produced and interpreted, highlights actions and habits. His doctrine of *pragmaticism*¹⁰⁸ delineates objects according to the practical effects that they may have. "Consider what effects that might conceivably have practical bearing you conceive the object of your conception to have. Then your conception of those effects is the **WHOLE** of your conception of the object."†1 (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 5.422 cross-ref)

Such a consideration may be applied to the interactions in free improvisation, where the effects of each contribution are observable in the form of the reactions of other participants (including audience members), the subsequent musical contributions of other musicians, and, down the line, the eventual habits that any participant may develop in order to eventually interpret and creatively integrate similar types of contributions. These actions and habits are significant as signs in their own right, but also as the effects of other objects, effects that complete our conception of these objects by giving them practical bearing. Peirce's model, by

¹⁰⁸ It was initially called "pragmatism", but changed to "pragmaticism" in order to avoid confusion with the conception of pragmatism that was being popularized by William James and others, both in the U.S. and in Europe.

extending the meaning of objects to the effects that they have, is thus adequately adapted for conceiving the interactions that characterize improvised performances as significant content, something for which a dyadic semiotic model cannot account.

d) Signs May Have Any Scope

It must be noted in addition that Peirce's sign can have any scope: signs constantly refer to each other, contain one another, overlap each other, and encompass any number of signs of all kinds. A sign could be a millisecond-long sound burst or a whole piece.¹⁰⁹ Either can be seen as a coherent, meaningful whole. A performance therefore contains many sound forms that may be interpreted as individual signs or be combined with other forms to make larger signs (a melody or beat, for example). We may perceive a sound and the action that produces it as a single sign, or a series of interactions may be seen as forming a kind of social dynamic that itself is interpreted as a sign.

And all the while, the performance as a whole, or the global experience the interpreter makes of it, may be interpreted as a single sign whose delineation may vary greatly according to what it encompasses and what it refers to. The performance's delineation, furthermore, may appear almost totally vague and is in any case always dynamic. Even the free improvisation practice as a whole may be referred to with a single sign, as we are doing repeatedly in this text, including in this very sentence with the phrase "free improvisation".¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ This is sometimes called "hypersign" in Peircean literature.

¹¹⁰ It is also possible to refer musically to the free improvisation practice as a whole, notably by other neighboring (or more distant) practices, by including musical materials (often clichés) that are likely to refer to free improvisation. To give an example in commercial popular music, this is the case of the overtly chaotic interplay of woodwind and brass instruments in the later segments of Radiohead's "Anthem". Listeners, many of whom have limited knowledge of free improvisation, are likely not to pay attention to the specifics of the interplay between the improvising horn players, but will appreciate this feature as a unified texture, a single reference to free improvisation. Their interpretation might be completed with stereotypes associated to this practice: it is chaotic, difficult to listen to, etc.... The more distant the referring artist is, the more likely that the inclusion of materials borrowed from free improvisation is to appear as merely a vague reference to the practice as a whole. Their meaning comes not so much from their actualization of rules familiar to veteran practitioners of free improvisation, but from connotations that characterize how people who are less familiar with the practice view it. A similar phenomenon can be observed when western pop music includes references to different genres of world music. The western audience, mostly unfamiliar with the subtleties of these foreign practices, is unlikely to appreciate these borrowed materials for the way their internal organization actualizes that tradition's codes, but will, as was no doubt intended by the song's composers and producers, understand these features for their exotic appeal.

e) Peirce's Categories : Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness

Of particular use for studying objects whose signification is fleeting, never fixed, but always liminal, are the three categories proposed in C.S. Peirce's semiotic model. Peirce's model extends the status of sign from symbols fixed by convention to anything that engages somebody's mind in any way. In doing so, he gives us the means to provide semiotic descriptions of performance appreciations that are focused on less fixed and more fleeting features, such as the quality and/or presence of its specific materiality, including very direct, very vague or very raw corporeal sensations.¹¹¹ The name given by Peirce to the phenomenological theory in which he exposes these categories is "phaneroscopy". A "phaneron" (from the greek "phanein": to appear) is anything that can appear before the mind, any phenomenon, whether it corresponds to something real or not¹¹² (EVERAERT-DESMEDT 1990, *Le processus interprétatif*, p.32):

[...] whether that phenomenon be something that outward experience forces upon our attention, or whether it be the wildest of dreams, or whether it be the most abstract and general of the conclusions of science. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 5.41)

The theory elaborated by Peirce takes all phenomena into account, and may, for example, account for the fact that a stone falls to the ground, just as well as the possible idea of a round square.¹¹³ (EVERAERT-DESMEDT 1990, p.32)

With its possible acknowledgement of agency and raw quality as meaningful constituents of signs, Peirce's semiotic model encourages dynamic readings, where the interpretation of any sign articulates three categories: firstness, secondness and thirdness. In an improvised performance, any musical sign or sound fragment is thus deemed significant not only for its reference to established codes (thirdness), but also for its raw quality (firstness), and its relation to other signs in various instants of an ongoing process (secondness). Meaning is dispersed in the indivisible articulation of three universal categories, elaborated by Peirce.

Firstness concerns general abstract qualities that underlie specific occurrences. They always have the potential of existing and, then, do exist in specific occurrences. We may think of

¹¹¹ One of Fischer-Lichte's principal objections about elaborating a semiotic conception of performances was precisely its inability to account for these kinds of performance features.

¹¹² " [...] by the *phaneron* I mean the collective total of all that is in any way or in any sense present to the mind, quite regardless of whether it corresponds to any real thing or not." (PEIRCE, CP 1.284)

¹¹³ « La théorie que Peirce élabore rend compte de tous les phénomènes, aussi bien, par exemple, du fait qu'une pierre tombe sur le sol, que l'idée possible d'un cercle carré. »

a general impression, color, sound frequency, or timbre. Peirce links firstness to emotional life. Firstness is "general" in the sense employed by Peirce, which will become clearer once we have discussed secondness. (DELEDALLE 1979, *Théorie et pratique du signe: introduction à la sémiotique de Charles S. Peirce*, p.208)¹¹⁴ It appears to consciousness as a "quality of feeling". (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 1.531)

Every sign has such qualities as its ground, and is thus rooted in phenomenological firstness.¹¹⁵ (RÉTHORÉ 2007, p.4) Yet "Firstness is a conception of being that is independent of anything else. For example, this would be the mode of being of a "redness" before anything in the universe was yet red, or of a general sensation of hurt, before one starts to wonder whether the sensation comes from a headache, a burn or some emotional pain. [...] We must be clear that in firstness, there is only ONENESS."¹¹⁶ (EVERAERT-DESMEDT 1990, p. 33-34) Peirce tries to imagine the idea of an absolute firstness in this passage of his *Collected Papers*:

It precedes all synthesis and all differentiation; it has no unity and no parts. It cannot be articulately thought: assert it, and it has already lost its characteristic innocence; for assertion always implies a denial of something else. Stop to think of it, and it has flown! What the world was to Adam on the day he opened his eyes to it, before he had drawn any distinctions, or had become conscious of his own existence -- that is first, present, immediate, fresh, new, initiative, original, spontaneous, free, vivid, conscious, and evanescent. Only, remember that every description of it must be false to it. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 1.357)

It becomes instantly obvious how a semiotic model that articulates this category can prove to be useful for the study of free improvisation. The properties described correspond not only to the formal features of music that improvisers wish to bring forward - innocence, newness, immediateness, freshness, presence, spontaneity, freedom, vividness, evanescence, etc. - but also to some of the underlying aesthetic and ideological concerns of improvisers, notably the desire to prevent that materials become too fixed, distinct or articulated. In an earlier passage of the same fragment of the *Collected Papers*, Peirce links outside reference and determination to loss of freedom and originality. This is, as we know, a concern that has animated free improvisers since

¹¹⁴ I wish to highlight the important contribution of the Perpignan-based IRSCE (*Institut de recherche en sémiotique, communication et éducation*) to the study of Peircean semiotics in France and abroad. It was founded in 1974 by a group of Perpignan scholars, including Joëlle Réthoré and Gérard Deledalle, both of whom are cited in this work. Until 2003, the IRSCE hosted a number of international colloquiums and one world congress (the fourth congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies in 1989).

¹¹⁵ « Nous dirons donc que tout signe est fondé sur une priméité phénoménologique. »

¹¹⁶ The original citation in Everaert-Desmedt's book is in French, but a translation by the author was found on the SignoSemio website: <http://www.signosemio.com/peirce/semiotics.asp> (consulted February 12, 2016)

the pioneering generation.

The idea of the absolutely first must be entirely separated from all conception of or reference to anything else; for what involves a second is itself a second to that second. The first must therefore be present and immediate, so as not to be second to a representation. It must be fresh and new, for if old it is second to its former state. It must be initiative, original, spontaneous, and free; otherwise it is second to a determining cause. It is also something vivid and conscious; so only it avoids being the object of some sensation. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP1.357)

These descriptions of an ideal firstness, however, and perhaps to the free improviser's dismay, must remain entirely hypothetical, even imaginary. The reason is that in any semiotic operation, Peirce's categories are indivisible. Any intelligent being's attempt to seize a raw quality obliges her to perceive or imagine it in a specific instant and according to certain habits of interpretation, thus necessarily calling into action the other two categories.

Secondness puts the general abstract qualities of firstness in relations that give them a concrete existence. We may think of facts, of sounds actualized at a particular moment in a performance. We can invoke this category when we retrace relations of causality within a process. Deledalle explains that secondness is "the category of existence, fact, the individualness. [...] Secondness is the relation of brutal force, action and reaction or, as Peirce says, "the double consciousness of effort and resistance." (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 8.266)" (DELEDALLE 1979, p.208) Secondness highlights the unique, unrepeatable aspect of signs, since these are intimately bound to the particular circumstances that make up the instant in which they are perceived. In this respect, the sign is reminiscent of Bakhtin/Todorov's "statement", as an unrepeatable whole, historically unique and individual.¹¹⁷ (TODOROV 1981, p.45).¹¹⁸ Bakhtin/Todorov opposes his idea of the statement to conceptions of language that do not take into account the signification of the situation of enunciation (conceptions which we, in turn, may compare to Saussurean dyadic semiotic models).

Bakhtin/Todorov, in order to help us imagine the context of enunciation in its minimal form, and how contextual features are able to signify without referring to a body of

¹¹⁷ « L'énoncé (l'oeuvre verbale) comme un tout non réitérable, historiquement unique et individuel. »

¹¹⁸ It should be noted that Peirce proposed many concepts similar to Bakhtin/Todorov's statement, starting the "replica", which is the "instance of application" of any "legisign" or convention. (CP 2.246) He later replaced it with the concept of "occurrence or utterance". It is the realm of secondness. "We find secondness in occurrence, because an occurrence is something whose existence consists in our knocking up against it." (CP 1.358) We make use of Bakhtin's "statement" and "situation of enunciation" because the reference is much better known in the literature.

conventionalized features, invite us to imagine a simple "Voilà!" or "Mm-yes!" In these examples, the purely verbal part means next to nothing, but situational evidence allows us to understand precisely what is meant. (TODOROV 1981, p.68) The situation of enunciation bears some theoretical resemblance with Peirce's category of secondness, which is very interesting when applied to the appreciation of improvised performances. We already made the case for the fundamental importance of actions and reactions in a collective and participative real-time process such as improvisation, driving forces behind the organization of these works' materials and the way that we draw meaning from them. For listeners interested in the agency of an improvised performance's participants and in the causal linearity of their actions, the performance acts may be perceived similarly to the "Voilà!" mentioned above: they indicate actions and reactions within the performance. Deledalle brings out that, according to Peirce, secondness would be nothing without firstness, existence would be nothing without quality. (DELEDALLE 1979, p.207) Seen from the angle of firstness, "quality without secondness is indeterminate, that is to say that another determination can still be attached to it."¹¹⁹ (DELEDALLE 1979, p.208)

In the case of thirdness, the relation is triadic and links abstract quality and concrete fact to general law. Thirdness is the category of convention, representation, idiomaticity and intellectual activity in general. This is also the level where deconstruction of these laws may be operated. Thus, when improvisers reject conventions or try to avoid explicit reference, thirdness is the category that they are attempting to undermine. "Thirdness belongs to the domain of rules and laws; however, a law can only be manifested through the occurrences of its application, that is, by secondness; and these occurrences themselves actualize qualities, and therefore, firstness."¹²⁰ (EVERAERT-DESMEDT 1990, p.35-36) Deledalle recalls that, according to Peirce, while secondness is a category of individuality, the category of thirdness, like firstness, is general. However, while firstness is the realm of possibility, thirdness is law. (DELEDALLE 1979, p.208) He writes that "in order for there to be thirdness, there must be a law or rule." (DELEDALLE 1979, p.209)

The rules and laws with which thirdness is concerned also include collective and individual habits, since they capacitate group and individual activity. Such habits are necessary

¹¹⁹ « La qualité sans la secondéité est indéterminée, c'est-à-dire qu'une autre détermination peut toujours y être attachée. »

¹²⁰ The original citation in Everaert-Desmedt's book is in French, but a translation by the author was found on the SignoSemio website: <http://www.signosemio.com/peirce/semiotics.asp> (consulted February 12, 2016)

for the processing of any sign, since, again, "a sign signifies only in being interpreted"(ATKIN 2006 (2010)) and interpretation is always guided by habits that the subject has developed from prior experiences.

f) All Three Categories Are Constantly Involved in Semiosis

The three categories are indivisible and always work together for any semiotic operation. Just as every sign must first be seized through its phenomenological firstness, it cannot dispense of thirdness because it must appeal in some way to the interpretative habits of those involved. Also, these qualities and laws need to be actualized in a specific situation of enunciation, and thus necessarily bear secondness. The semiotic operation simultaneously articulates the generality of law and abstract quality to the uniqueness of an utterance. Again, a comparison can be drawn with Bakhtin/Todorov's "statement" that also combines generality and singularity (although his model does not seem to distinguish abstract qualities as clearly as Peirce does with his first category). According to him, between the generality of the meaning of words as we find them in the dictionary, and the singularity of the acoustic event that occurs as the statement is uttered, a process unravels that precisely allows the connection of the two and that we call "enunciation".¹²¹ (TODOROV 1981, p.65)

Yet, if all three categories are always involved, all do not always carry the same weight. One of the sign's categories usually arouses the participant's intelligence more than the others. Changes in a performance can coax a listener's attention to shift its focus from one category of meaning to another. Many testimonies of experiences performing or listening to music testify to this. Here is one such statement by Gerry Garcia, interviewed by Derek Bailey:

Bailey - "You've talked about chaos obscuring other kinds of organization."

Garcia - "It's a matter of how many levels you can apprehend. I don't think there's really much limit to layers of visual information but with sounds there's diminishing returns. It has to get up to where it's almost totally blanket noise before you can hear a lot. In the Grateful Dead when we're playing very open with no structure, sometimes the sound level can speed a sensory overload of a kind which starts to become a physical experience rather than a musical one and that also has some kind of value. What's interesting to me is the accidental, the chaotic." (BAILEY 1980, p.42)

Here we begin with a kind of layering of recognizable musical materials, layers of identifiable

¹²¹ « Entre la généralité du sens des mots - tels qu'on les trouve dans le dictionnaire - celle des règles de grammaire, et la singularité de l'événement acoustique qui se produit lors de la profération d'un énoncé, s'aménage un processus qui permet justement la liaison des deux, et qu'on appelle *énonciation*. »

thirdness, presumably some kinds of somewhat codified rhythmic and melodic content. These are overloaded past the point of saturation and become a "chaotic", raw sensory experience which, because it is indistinct and cannot be comprehended intellectually through the application of established codes, approximates firstness more than thirdness. Secondness, as always, is established through the unique circumstances of the signs' concrete actualization. Again, all three categories are always summoned simultaneously, even if one of them can be privileged by any or all participants.

In an interview with Henri Jules Julien, clarinetist Xavier Charles describes a situation that could be described as an effort to ignore thirdness in order to focus his attention on firstness and secondness.

I listen to pitches, I listen to rhythm, I listen to people's energy. The things that come after - whatever is easier: the most basic elements of musical vocabulary - I remove them, I try not to listen to them. From here on, what am I left with? The morphology of sounds, their resonance, the way they are attacked, the way they are held, the way the sound's inner substance is present, what resonates, harmonics, some technical elements, some written elements, someone who is playing sound element in a rare way, why, what do I hear when he places these sound fragments from time to time, how, where does it come from, his way of listening?... I try to seize all of this. We now find ourselves in the borderlands, or rather, the strange edges that we never listen to.¹²²
(JULIEN 2008, p.43)

This effort corresponds to a commonly observable ideal among free improvisers, whereby the observable formal features of a performance should be appreciated less for their reference to established formal codes than for their quality, presence and agency.¹²³

We may consider a few other hypothetical generic examples where a category could be favored above the others. Let us imagine a loud, shrieking instrumental sound that may resemble a human cry. In this case, firstness is likely to be the dominant category, since the brutal quality of the sound may be what most arouses us. Secondness puts this quality in relation to a concrete situation; the actions that preceded the sound, as well as what it allows us to anticipate for

¹²² J'écoute les hauteurs, j'écoute le rythme, j'écoute l'énergie des gens. [L]es choses qui viennent de suite [-] ce qui est plus facile: les éléments du vocabulaire musical les plus basiques [-] j]e les retire, j'essaie de ne pas les écouter. À partir de là que me reste-t-il: la morphologie des sons, leur résonance, la manière dont ils sont attaqués, la manière dont ils sont entretenus, comment la matière à l'intérieur du son est présente, ce qui résonne, les harmoniques, les éléments parfois techniques, parfois d'écriture, quelqu'un qui joue les éléments sonores de manière assez rare, pourquoi, qu'est-ce que j'entends quand il place ses petits bouts de son de temps en temps, comment, d'où ça vient, son écoute à lui?... J'essaie de capter cela. On se retrouve à des frontières, ou plutôt à des bords bizarres qu'on n'écoute jamais.

¹²³ An entire section in the third party of the thesis will be devoted to the way that firstness and secondness are put in the forefront of the desired appreciation of performances of free improvisation.

following actions, and contribute to its meaning. These relations, as well as any momentary associations that are taken into account during the given singular semiotic operation, exemplify how the category of secondness completes signification. A particularly surprising relation could even overshadow the brutal quality of the sound if, for example, a contribution were perceived as the trace of an overly intrusive act committed by the one that produced it, as an interference that is potentially detrimental to the flow of ideas. The sound might then be perceived chiefly for its "obstacleness", and appreciated secondly for its raw qualities. Similarly, other signs may be perceived first for the support value that they provide to other signs and only then for their own immanent qualities. In this case, the secondness of the obstacle supersedes the feeling (firstness). The category of thirdness concerns associations to bodies of conventions or analogies achieved thanks to habits of interpretation. Does the "cry" remind us of something in the animal world? Does it evoke a human reaction like horror or distress? Such associations in consciousness might dominate the experience of some audience members upon hearing the shrieking instrumental blast.

Let us now imagine that a musician quotes a fragment of a widely known melody, such as a national anthem. In this case, the reference to a given piece or repertoire, an example of thirdness, is probably what most arouses the spectator's attention. The quote may even conjure political images. Perceived as a symbol, it may be heard as an explicit reference to a national identity or some kind of ceremony. Secondness again concerns the singular situation. The circumstances surrounding the moment the quote is played could greatly alter how it is perceived. For example, a fragment of the Canadian national anthem could be seen as patriotic, ironic or provocative, depending on the location of the venue, the political attitudes of the audience, and broader circumstances concerning current events. As for firstness, the instrumental timbres or the acoustics of the venue are always there and available to dominate the experience of a spectator that may be particularly interested in or sensitive to these kinds of things at that moment. Then again, the same timbres and acoustic elements could play a role in thirdness if the interpreter is relating them to past experiences or to internalized signs and habits that make sense to her. It is likely that the experience one has of the performance combines all of these aspects in some degree.

But even if one category can dominate the other two and be more enticing to a subject's perception, the other two categories always accompany it and are necessary for the sign to be

coherent. For example, by articulating all three categories, a Brazilian audience member could interpret one of her compatriot's out of tune and sulky rendition of a quote from their national anthem as a tribute to political turmoil in the federal government, especially if the performance was taking place in May or August of 2016.

In short, even if an artist has an approach that favors easily recognizable reference to a specific body of conventionalized formal sounds (certain modes, scales, claves, etc.), even if his ideal rests in the proper actualization of the particular laws that make up this tradition's thirdness, the spectator will always be able to focus her attention on the qualitative values of the performance or on the agency of its different features. Furthermore, only by retracing some articulation of the sign's three categories can it be coherent.

g) The Methodological Value of this Model

To conclude this chapter, it is worth reminding the readers of the methodological value of Peirce's semiotic model. By focusing on emergent aspects of performance and distancing themselves from certain inherited codes and devices, free improvisers invite us to appreciate performances for their more dynamic, less conventionalized elements. Formal features in particular are meant to arise in real time and be appreciated not so much for their actualization of stable pre-texts and codes, as for their raw quality, presence and agency. Much of the works' signification thus involves firstness and secondness, two categories that free improvisers privilege to a high degree, as they seek to limit recourse to conventions, rules and habits: the domains of thirdness. If improvisers often discuss total rupture with conventions as a kind of ideal, most acknowledge that this goal is unattainable. Indeed, it would, in Peircean terms, constitute a total abandonment of all thirdness. Yet the necessary articulation of all three categories is necessary for anything to be perceived, even in the rawest and vaguest of cases. Thirdness in free improvisation, therefore, must be retraced. The features that can be seen as sufficiently stable and general to sustain its practitioners' collective activity will be revealed as the parameters of free improvisation's idiomaticity. Thus, using Peirce's theory of categories, we will demonstrate how the particularity of free improvisation is expressed not by the abandonment of idiomaticity or thirdness, but by two shifts of focus in the practice of free improvisation. First, there is the exaltation of firstness and secondness as privileged categories in the production of

signification by the formal sound content of improvised works, since musicians profess to be committed to no conventionalized formal codes. Secondly, free improvisation demonstrates a kind of idiomatic shift, where whatever thirdness there is that sustains free improvisation as a collective practice must be retraced to other features that are more stable than its formal sound content. In the third part of this thesis, we will propose many areas of convergence where this shifted idiomaticity can be located, notably in commonly held values, attitudes, skills, rationales and performance devices, as well as shared venues, networks and infrastructure.

5. - FEATURES FROM WHICH FREE IMPROVISATION CANNOT BE SEPARATED

In the practice of free improvisation, the fulfillment of any creative ambitions, the enactment of any values, mindsets and acquired skills, involve first having selected and developed the basic practice parameters, materials and devices that function as the activity's most basic building blocks and default playground. Many of these parameters act as necessary constraints and as default conditions of creation, since they are inextricably linked either to the physical properties of sound, to creative activity in real linear time, to the collective involvement of different subjectivities in one process, or to the cognitive abilities of musically engaged human beings. The rules that apply to phenomena of sound and time in particular take effect whether or not they are eventually seized in semiosis. They act upstream from the mind's interpretative effort, but become significant (musically or otherwise) only once engaged by an interpretative being or community.

Some of these most basic rules and parameters may seem banal and obvious, which is probably why writers on improvisation have often overlooked discussing them as default characteristics of free improvisation; they are clearly often taken for granted and thus not always elaborated upon. Derek Bailey, in his book *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*, avoids pinpointing any such primary conditions, despite having expressed his belief that "[T]he main characteristics of improvisation could be discerned in all its appearances and roles. What could be said about improvisation in one area could be said about it in another." (BAILEY 1980, p.x) He nonetheless never attempts to identify or describe any basic unifying characteristics of improvisation, preferring to treat different improvisation idioms separately. In doing so, he mostly circumvents the topic of sound and gives little critical thought to what it implies to be creating and executing in real time or with the involvement of different interacting subjectivities. Yet the elements of sound, time and group creation are omnipresent in his book, serving as binding threads that are casually mentioned throughout its pages but never discussed from an ontological perspective.

These conditions should not be taken for granted, for the agreement to use them as the parameters of an activity is neither random nor without important consequences on the practice. Participants would have had to decide at some point (or over time), through a consensus among people wishing to pursue this activity together, that they were interested in organizing sound

forms, that they wanted to do so collectively and that the activity would be pursued in a real-time, live setting. These most basic parameters of free improvisation, chosen and developed for being most suitable for supporting improvisers' creative goals (maximization of real-time emergence in particular), are both their most stable positively determining elements and most immutable source of thirdness. It is all the more important to outline them because they impose possibilities and constraints on all of the other conditions of creation in free improvisation and on all of the "less basic and immutable", but nonetheless just as defining and important, aspects of the practice's idiomaticity.

a) Separating the Most Basic Parameters

When we say that the above-mentioned basic parameters - to which we will soon return - are the most basic and immutable features of free improvisation, we mean that they are the ones that are inseparable from any conception of free improvisation. Peirce once devised a model proposing three grades of separability of ideas. He claims to have made use of these grades of separability in his first attempts at devising and dealing with his categories; (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 1.353) they are what helped him to demonstrate their interdependence and justify their hierarchy.

Dissociation is the weakest degree of separation: it is one thing "imagined" without the other.¹²⁴ (RÉTHORÉ 2004 (Perpignan), *Séminaire de l'IRSCE*) It is "the consciousness of one thing, without the necessary simultaneous consciousness of the other." (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 1.549) It has to do with simple associations of ideas: some associations impose themselves through necessity, while others do not. (RÉTHORÉ 2004 (Paris), *Les observables en sémiotique*) A half note does not necessarily evoke a half rest or vice versa, and can therefore be dissociated from it; but a half note cannot be dissociated from rhythm, nor rhythm from time.

Prescission is the intermediate degree of separation of thought that allows us, not to imagine, but to *suppose* one idea without another. (RÉTHORÉ 2004 (Perpignan)) "[E]ven in cases where two conceptions cannot be separated in the imagination, we can often suppose one without the other, that is we can imagine data from which we should be led to believe in a state of things where one was separated from the other. Thus, we can suppose uncolored space, though we

¹²⁴ « La dissociation est le degré le plus faible de séparation: c'est l'un « imaginé » sans l'autre. »

cannot dissociate space from color." (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 1.353) Réthoré points out that this process involves some constraints and thus introduces hierarchies. (RÉTHORÉ 2004 (Paris)) Thus we can suppose two-dimensional space without three-dimensional space, but we cannot suppose three-dimensional space without two-dimensional space. I can prescind time from rhythm (as is manifest from the fact that I actually believe there is rhythmless time between events that I deem rhythmically significant); but I cannot prescind rhythm from time, because time is where rhythm extends.¹²⁵

Finally, *discrimination* or *distinction* is the strongest degree of separation. It is also the easiest to carry out. (RÉTHORÉ 2004 (Perpignan)) It draws distinction only in meaning. It concerns terms, notions, symbols and concepts, all ideas that we are quite used to separating. "Even when one element cannot even be supposed without another, they may oftentimes be distinguished from one another. Thus we can neither imagine nor suppose a taller without a shorter, yet we can distinguish the taller from the shorter." (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 1.353) We may also discriminate different volumes and pitches, even though the lower volume or pitch cannot be *imagined* or *supposed* (i.e. dissociated or prescinded) without the higher one. We may likewise distinguish time from rhythm and rhythm from time, but not a half note from rhythm, because a half note is an instance of rhythm. Returning to Peirce's categories, although they are indivisible and interdependent, they can be distinguished and eventually discussed and described independently, in different paragraphs, as we have done earlier. (Although in order to fully understand their scope and meaning, totally isolated explanations of each category may not be entirely sufficient.) (RÉTHORÉ 2004 (Paris))¹²⁶

Peirce's modes of separation of ideas, as a methodological tool, can help us reconsider the delineations that certain definitions and descriptions of free improvisation imply. Prescission in particular, as the mode of separation that institutes hierarchies, can help us identify the most basic

¹²⁵ Example inspired by the one given by Peirce in 1.549, that dealt with colors and space.

¹²⁶ Peirce described his application of these grades of separability to his categories in order to demonstrate their interdependence and justify their hierarchy. We quote this passage for those interested: « Now, the categories cannot be dissociated in imagination from each other, nor from other ideas. The category of first can be prescinded from second and third, and second can be prescinded from third. But second cannot be prescinded from first, nor third from second. The categories may, I believe, be prescinded from any other one conception, but they cannot be prescinded from some one and indeed many elements. You cannot suppose a first unless that first be something definite and more or less definitely supposed. Finally, though it is easy to distinguish the three categories from one another, it is extremely difficult accurately and sharply to distinguish each from other conceptions so as to hold it in its purity and yet in its full meaning. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 1.353)

parameters of free improvisation and distinguish them from elements that participate in its idiomaticity in a less durable or essential way. The modes of separation may help us understand why the practice relates the way that it does to concepts such as freedom, tradition and idiom. Negative definitions, such as the statement that free improvisation is "non-idiomatic", are particularly revealing in this sense since they reveal a will to separate; negative labels are put forward due to an inability to conceive new forms and concerns in the light of existing definitions and practices. From this deadlock ensues a sense of obligation to create a separate idea, or to express the negation of what is perceived as an outdated, non-applicable concept. Every negative descriptor thus signals a *controversy* in the sense elaborated by Latour and other proponents of Actor-Network Theory. That is to say that it can reveal to us something about the connections that make up a social activity. "[I]t's possible to render social connection traceable by following the work done to stabilize [...] controversies." (LATOUR 2007, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, p.16) In our case, the controversies made visible by negative terminology highlight moments in the elaboration of the free improvisation practice and associated discourse where artists felt the need of separating their concerns and activities from those of erudite and popular establishments. Indeed, many improvisers hesitate to identify to labels such as "erudite" or "popular". Rio de Janeiro-based musician Marcos Campello says: "It's difficult for me to phrase [what I do] in those terms. I simply call it "improvisation"."¹²⁷ (CAMPELLO 2016, *Interview with André Bourgeois*)¹²⁸

Let us again consider the ever-persistent tendency of describing free improvisation as a non-idiomatic practice. The sense of necessity that drives this separation comes from the fact that the applied conception of idiom does not appear to extend to the kinds of rules that underlie free improvisation practice, unify its practitioners, and make their activity coherent. For those who present free improvisation as a non-idiomatic practice, it is impossible *not* to separate the idea of idiomaticity from that of free improvisation. In contrast, one of the underlying ideas of this thesis is that collective activities cannot be dissociated from, that is imagined without, idiomaticity.

¹²⁷ "É difícil pra mim colocar nesses termos. Chamo simplesmente de improviso."

¹²⁸ Henry Schroy also hesitates to jump on either label as one that is particularly representative of his music. But he remains open to both, seeing as how his approach is dynamic and could easily embody typically erudite or popular principles at any moment. However, he seems to give value to these principles only if they bring something valuable to the encounter. Principles of togetherness and authenticity thus take precedence: "I consider myself an amateur. My various directions or studies follow my interests linked to that moment in my life. So I couldn't say exactly, but I think that I could adapt to "erudite" or "popular" situations depending on the people involved. For me it's always very personal. The question lingers as to whether I feel a real connection with the person. Do I have something honest to share? Do I feel that something valuable is coming out of this union?" (SCHROY 2016)

This also extends to collective free improvisation, an activity that is inseparable from the idea of group activity. This is why this thesis proposes a relocated idiomaticity of free improvisation - one concerning its underlying principles and codes of conduct - instead of claiming that the activity is non-idiomatic.

But the most helpful virtue of Peirce's modes of separation is not that it allows us to verify whether or not particular ideas and features can be separated from the practice of free improvisation or, consequently, what separations exist between this and other creative activities. Its usefulness has to do with the way that it may evaluate the *degree to which* these ideas are separable. According to what modes of separation are performed or may be performed to dissociate, prescind or distinguish certain features and parameters from free improvisation on the one hand and from other practices on the other, we may better understand the degree of separation between free improvisation and its antecedent and neighboring practices. We may also identify free improvisation's most basic and immutable parameters, which will be made manifest as few or none of Peirce's modes of separation of thought will successfully be performed on them. This should help us consider which of the features that delineate free improvisation and make up its idiomaticity are its most basic building blocks.

b) Sound, Ephemerality and Real-time Creation

Improvised music can neither be dissociated, prescinded nor distinguished from sound. To engage in musical activity is indeed to choose sound as the physical material that is to be formed and organized, that is to be the principal object of the creative process' manipulations. This, again, may seem perfectly evident, but must be discussed, since sound has its own particular ways of behaving, it implies particular sets of creative possibilities and constraints. Most notably, it vanishes instantly and needs to be renewed or replaced quickly and frequently. Pareyson, in his book *Teoria della formatività* (*Theory of Formativity* - work still not translated into English) claims that the physical material that each art form adopts serves as the principal criteria by which the practice distinguishes itself from other art forms. According to him, any other criteria - semantic and non-semantic, representative and non-representative, spatial and temporal - face

insurmountable difficulties.¹²⁹ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.59-60) Without rejecting other criteria with the same vehemence, we share his belief that a specific art form is inseparable (in the Peircean sense) from the physical substance that it forms. Sound, despite its fleetingness, is indeed material in its own right. Its fleetingness, in fact, is one of this material's most characteristic features and imposes very specific conditions of creation, as well as creative possibilities, on any activity that adopts it as a medium. Furthermore, we advance that any particular material provides its adoptive art form with many of its default creative conditions, conditions to which any practitioner is bound, unless they move on to pursue a different activity, i.e. a non-musical one.

Pareyson's theory of formativity highlights the physical manifestation of art as its most basic constitutive dimension. Exercises with Peirce's modes of thought separation support this claim, since these are some of the only aspects of music (and, by extension, freely improvised music) that cannot be separated from our conception of it in any way. For Pareyson, the physical manifestation is a necessary and constitutive aspect of art, and not something inessential and added after the fact: something that concerns only its delivery, because the work exists only as a physical and material object.¹³⁰ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.57) According to him, the specific relationship that art entertains with the material that it forms is what separates artistic activities from other human activities: while all human activity *is* formativity, art is a "pure" kind of formativity, one whose goal is formativity itself. Furthermore, what is formed in art is always, at its most basic level, a physical substance. "We do not form a work *from* a physical substance; we form the physical substance itself."¹³¹ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.64)

We, of course, see the artistic reality of a work as a kind of ecology whose meaning articulates far more than just its material core. Nonetheless, we will recognize the material core of the work as the center of the encounter that it constitutes: the musical event. Sound is the object and principle mediator of the musical activity that both forms it and is conditioned by it.¹³²

¹²⁹ « Chaque art se distingue des autres par la matière qu'il adopte (autres critères: sémantiques et asémantiques, représentatifs et non représentatifs, spatiaux et temporels, s'enlisent dans d'insurmontables difficultés) »

¹³⁰ « La manifestation physique est un aspect nécessaire et constitutif de l'art, et non pas quelque chose d'inessentiel et d'ajouté qui ne concernerait que la communication, car l'oeuvre n'existe que comme objet physique et matériel. »

¹³¹ « On ne forme pas l'oeuvre à partir de la matière - on forme la matière »

¹³² This becomes less clear in some genres such as pop music, where spectators are aroused and rallied by highly diversified media and discourse. Here, sound sometimes seems to take on a secondary role, as entertainers deliver a performance rich in visual effects, choreographies, image, etc. The core of the musical encounter seems to shift or be dispersed. In most cases, however, sound at least usually continues to be one of the main *pretexts* of the event. But what is important to note for our discussion is that, even in these situations, the sonic aspects of the performance will

Sound has its ways of filling space and time according to the physical laws of the space in which it is produced. It is radically ephemeral, barely outlasting the instant it is produced. It vanishes immediately, having (under normal circumstances) no visible manifestation and leaving no enduring trace. It must be renewed constantly in order to last. These constraints offer particular possibilities and resistances that condition the artist's formative intentions and strategies. Pareyson elaborates on this idea, while making both the artist and the material the subjects of many action verbs, thus giving agency to both:

*If [the artist] must highlight the material's exigencies not against or despite, but rather through its nature, then this nature must be known to him, and he must study it, scrutinize it and examine it in a way that can only be done by a interpretative effort. The artist lovingly studies his material, probes it into its depths, scrutinizes its behavior and reactions; interrogates in order to command it; interprets in order to tame it; obeys it in order to sway it; expands it so that it may reveal latent possibilities that are adapted to his intentions; rummages through it so that its natural potentialities may coincide with the work-in-development's exigencies; examines the ways that a long tradition has taught to treat it to make it sprout unprecedented and original approaches or to prolong them into new developments. And if the tradition that is carried by the material seems to compromise its ductility and render it cumbersome, slow and opaque, the artist seeks to find it a new virginity, all the more fertile for being yet unexplored.*¹³³ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954))

Sound, or any adopted material, also shapes the devices and infrastructure that are elaborated so that works may be produced, delivered and appreciated. In our case, sound has to be performed in order to be appreciated. It must reach its public's ears (and body). Since it echoes differently according to where it is played, spatial considerations need to be made. Sound can easily transgress the area designated for its appreciation; that is to say that if it is not properly contained within the space and time in which it is meant to be appreciated, it can easily be bothersome. This is notably the case when adjacent art venues are unable to prevent sound from

continue to be submitted to the constraints that sound, as a particular material, imposes on creation. This is also true for any other art form that makes use of sound, such as dance, cinema and theatre.

¹³³ Si [l'artiste] doit faire valoir ses exigences non pas contre ou malgré, mais à travers la nature de la matière, alors il faut que cette nature lui soit connue, et il doit l'étudier, la scruter et l'examiner comme seul un effort d'interprétation permet de le faire. L'artiste étudie amoureusement sa matière, la scrute jusqu'au fond, en épie le comportement et les réactions; l'interroge pour pouvoir la commander, l'interprète pour pouvoir la dompter, lui obéit pour pouvoir la plier; l'approfondit pour qu'elle révèle des possibilités latentes et adaptées à ses intentions; la fouille pour que ses potentialités naturelles puissent coïncider avec les exigences de l'oeuvre à faire; examine les manières dont une longue tradition a enseigné à la traiter pour en faire germer des manières inédites et originales, ou pour les prolonger dans de nouveaux développements. Et si la tradition dont la matière est chargée semble en compromettre la ductilité et la rendre pesante, lente et opaque, (l'artiste) cherche à lui trouver une nouvelle virginité, qui soit d'autant plus féconde qu'elle est plus inexplorée.

spilling over into each other, where they may be seen as interferences. These constraints affect how the spaces in which music happens are constructed, as well as the ways artists and engineers design the technological apparatus that helps diffuse sound.

On the particular constraints that each material opposes to the artist that adopts it, Pareyson says that they are:

*[...] all things that may impede the artist's labor, but must also reinforce it, and among which he must know how to orient himself throughout, by keeping or cropping, retrieving or renewing, so that the material is all the more active as the artist's activity is more intense.*¹³⁴ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.67)

Pareyson's choice of verbs in the quotes above is interesting because it again gives the material an active role in the process and depicts its constraints not so much as obstacles (or at least not only as obstacles), but rather as enablers. Besides, it is important to Pareyson, as it is to improvisers, that artists remain free. Hence the resistances of any given material must not be seen as unwanted constraints. The particular materiality of sound, rather than taking away some of the musicians' freedom to act, indeed supplies improvisers' practice with the bulk of the building blocks that musicians need to carry out musical activity at all. It also offers them creative possibilities that are unique and that may not be provided by other mediums. The ephemerality of sound, for example, presents particular creative opportunities. The artist must make up for sound materials' temporal limitations.

*The material resists more to suggest and evoke than to prevent and hamper, because as they become artistic material the formative intention transforms these resistances into fertile points of departure and joyous occasions. [...] To the material's resistance the formative intention confers a formal vocation, in such a way that makes them suggestive. Thus they prolong themselves in the artist's endeavour, stimulating and guiding it. [...] Just as the material resists the artist's labor, but does not impede it, the artist tames his material, and does not violate it. [...] Formative intention asserts its exigencies only through the material's resistances, and these assume a formal vocation only if they open themselves to them in order to define, welcome and stimulate them.*¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Toutes choses qui peuvent empêcher mais qui doivent aussi seconder le travail de l'artiste, et parmi lesquelles il doit savoir s'orienter au fur et à mesure en gardant ou en élaguant, en récupérant ou en renouvelant, si bien que la matière est d'autant plus active que l'activité même de l'artiste est plus intense.

¹³⁵ « [...] [L]a matière résiste plus pour suggérer et évoquer que pour empêcher et entraver, puisqu'en devenant matière d'art l'intention formative transforme ces résistances en points de départs féconds et en heureuses occasions. [...] [A]ux résistances de la matière l'intention formative confère une vocation formelle, de manière à les rendre suggestives et telles qu'elles se prolongent elles-mêmes dans le travail de l'artiste, et qu'elles le stimulent et le guident. [...] [T]out comme la matière résiste au travail de l'artiste, mais ne l'entrave pas, ainsi l'artiste dompte sa matière, ne la viole pas. [...] [L]'intention formative fait valoir ses exigences seulement à travers les résistances de la

(PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.62)

Of course, as all of this happens - and this happens the very instant a material is adopted by socialized beings - the material takes on new dimensions that must be considered in addition to its purely formal physical aspects. This is a limit beyond which Pareyson's theory of formaticity is of little use. Although he recognizes that materials, when they present themselves to artists, are already charged with "laws and energies" (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.67) that are its own, he fails to give a satisfactory account as to how the material actually carries these histories and makes them accessible to people. It is almost as if, according to his theory, trends and conventions are themselves aspects of works' material, exemplified by their histories of antecedents¹³⁶. When he describes the material work as being self-sufficient, he downplays, or even outright denies, its inter-textuality. However, Pareyson does acknowledge that, as laws and conventions increasingly govern the use of a material, artists begin seeing it less for its raw physical properties than for what he calls its "artistic properties". (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.67)

Ephemerality, as a basic property of sound, is an omnipresent parameter of music; it must be welcome and put to creative use by improvisers. It also imposes at least two further conditions that determine the creation of improvised works and the preservation of musical improvisation practices. First, it affects the way that the practice is preserved, and how works are made to last; sounds must be *renewed* and new sequences must be produced if the work is to be maintained. (Once the sound sequences end, the improvised musical performance also vanishes.) Second, since the maintenance of the performance involves sequences of newly articulated sounds, and since these articulations are necessarily interspaced through time, *rhythm* is one of the most basic default conditions of musical activity, derived directly from the ephemerality of sound.

Regarding the latter point, the fact that musical activity is necessarily rhythmic does not mean that musicians may not challenge and deconstruct established ideas about rhythm. Indeed, rhythm has always been a privileged front for improvisers' enquiries. Joe Morris, who prefers to use the term "pulse", enumerates several methods that improvisers may use when they approach rhythm or pulse in their activity: accenting the pulse, unaccented pulse, implied pulse, rubato to the pulse, collective rubato in relation to the implied pulse, phrase lengths (non-metric

matière, et celles-ci ne prennent une vocation formelle que si elles s'ouvrent à celles-ci pour les définir, les accueillir et les stimuler. »

¹³⁶ Pareyson discusses antecedents at length.

expressions of the pulse), no pulse, tempo/velocity (simply playing fast or slow as an intentional statement), energy, indefinite duration, clock time and (measured) silence. Morris reaches the same conclusion as we do with regard to rhythm being inseparable from the execution and appreciation of any artwork using sound as its medium. According to him, "in the culture of free music, any improvised statement is a statement about pulse, even those that do not attempt to show it." (MORRIS 2012, p.59)

The question of preservation - the fact that music cannot be preserved as easily as art objects that embrace a more physically enduring materiality - merits some more elaboration, since it helps to demonstrate why the only idiomaticity that can find enduring application in free improvisation is one that concerns its underlying unifying concerns and codes of conduct. Becker says that "some of the most important choices that affect an art work [...] are those which destroy or preserve it." (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.224) In musical improvisation, the work, or at least its particular materiality, does not survive the moment of its elaboration. Sound phenomena are ephemeral by nature and improvisers' fondness of real-time creation embraces this fleetingness. Ephemerality cannot be dissociated from music. It can be prescinded from it, with some difficulties, if we suppose that scores and recordings make music enduring, but most improvisers would certainly deny this idea. In an interview with Derek Bailey, organist Stephen Hicks expresses how an improvised work only gets worse when it is listened to after the performance that brought it forth.

-Occasionally you play and you think - yes, that was quite good - but most of the time... I think an improvisation should be played and then forgotten.

-It's appropriate or not and that's it?

-It's either good or bad but if you listen to an improvisation over and over again it just gets worse... You hear more fifths, more octaves, more things you would never want to do again.

-But it's of the nature of improvisation. I would have thought, that you don't listen to it over and over again. Without recording you couldn't, could you?

-No, you couldn't, and I don't think you should. It's something that should be heard, enjoyed or otherwise, and then completely forgotten. (BAILEY 1980, p.35)

While the production of a score or recording can be seen as a worthy attempt to create enduring sound forms, musical improvisation seems to resist such documentation. After all, improvisation "embraces, even celebrates, music's essentially ephemeral nature. For many of the people involved in it, one of the enduring attractions of improvisation is its momentary existence: the absence of residual document." (BAILEY 1980, p.35)

It is, of course, technically possible to record improvised performances. Yet, as Cannone points out:

*[...] [D]espite the illusion of transparency that it provides, a recording does not place us in the correct experiential relationship with improvisation. The recording indeed alters the presence of improvisation - namely the very fact of seizing it as it is created at the moment of the performance - as it creates a triple illusion of completeness, reversibility and repeatability, all things that are eminently absent from improvisation.*¹³⁷ (CANONNE 2012, p.111)

So how can the practice of free improvisation be preserved if the documentation of its works fails to capture its essential features? Some perspective should first be given, since, on the one hand, no work is everlasting or perceived as whole, especially not when left on its own. On the other hand, although improvisation vanishes immediately, it does not vanish completely.

Regarding the former point, Becker stresses that :

Nevertheless, works die. [...] To persist in the life of an art world, they must not only remain available by continuing to exist, they must also be easily accessible to potential audiences. [...] Self-conscious art worlds, then, organize to preserve some of the work done in them. Whatever that world's aesthetic ratifies as sufficiently important artistically or historically will be placed in the appropriate repositories and kept alive (or, at least, in suspended animation). (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.220-1)

Thus, unless the totality of this organization is preserved, any work deteriorates (or, viewed less pessimistically, it undergoes changes). Its mode of transformation and deterioration, as well as the strategies that are put in place to compensate for (or, maybe, to accelerate) these changes - all of this also belongs to a work's law of organization. The materiality of sound pushes this to the extreme; it dissolves instantaneously at every step of the process that nonetheless continues to elaborate it. Yet preservation also occurs in free improvisation, as is made evident by the fact that the practice has now had some longevity. Documents (recordings and transcriptions) remain available in some cases, but, for the reason raised by Cannone above, these can only be seen as testimonies that improvisation has happened, and not themselves as an enduring, suspended manifestation of improvisation. However, the dead works have left their trace as

¹³⁷ « Malgré l'illusion de transparence qu'il procure, l'enregistrement ne nous place pas dans la relation expérientielle correcte avec l'improvisation. L'enregistrement altère en effet la *présence* de l'improvisation - c'est à dire précisément le fait de la saisir comme créée dans le temps de sa performance - en créant une triple illusion de complétude, de réversibilité, et de répétabilité, toutes des choses éminemment absentes de l'improvisation. »

collateral experiences that were shared by its participants and that continue to shape trends, even enduring codes and idioms, especially concerning the real-time obedience of aesthetic and ethical values. The truest repositories of improvisation are its codes of conduct. The constraint of sound's ephemerality certainly motivates the fact that the enduring idiomaticity of free improvisation and the only possible repository of its enduring thirdness lies in the underlying rules and shared concerns that allow the practice to renew itself.

These rules - as well as the infrastructures, concerns and rationales that allow improvisation to be produced and appreciated - are also subject to change over time. Idioms are, after all, never completely fixed. But these changes operate only at the pace and to the extent that allows the practice to be continuously recognized by, at the very least, its main actors.

As for the sound materials of performances, their validity as a collectively accessible and useful object can last but an instant: the duration of an *entente*, which barely outlasts the ephemeral sound itself. The turnover and renewal is necessarily quick and ongoing, as are the situations where the emergence of new materials - one of the priorities of the inquisitive improviser - is necessarily triggered. Furthermore, the quick turnover of material imposes conditions of creation that not only favor, but require the constant interactive participation of participants. Interactivity, simultaneity and participativity - parameters inherent to collective improvisation - are championed by those who pursue the activity for ideals related to exchange, society, dynamicity or community. Sound, with its ephemeral nature and the constraints that come from it, lends itself well to these particular dynamics and creative ambitions.

The ephemerality of sound and the conditions it imposes have to do with the specific materiality of this medium. Although many devices exist that allow musicians to invent and distribute their works at moments other than the moment of execution, the properties of sound, because they are so strictly bound to the passage of time, are, despite any reliance on pre-texts and pre-engagements, subject to the unpredictable nature of it. For processes that, like improvisation, highlight and make profitable use of real-time occurrences, sound, a medium whose expansion and evanescence is intimately bound to the passage of time, comes off as an obvious field of exploration and operation.¹³⁸ For the receptive spectator each sound occurrence calls for another, a state of expectation that easily breeds sequences of events, tied to each other

¹³⁸ It remains easy to *suppose* (the trademark of *prescission*) real-time improvisation that does not concern sound, although a perfectly sound-free improvisation process is difficult to imagine.

in relationships of causal linearity. In short, sound, whose enduring existence relies on its constant renewal, lends itself well to real-time improvisation. In turn, sound, which cannot be imagined or supposed without time, which in its turn cannot be imagined or supposed without the unexpected, implies, by default, a degree of improvisation in all operations in which it is involved. As was defended in section d) of the first chapter of the thesis, improvisation is always present in sound operations, extending its scope to greater or smaller proportions of its features.

In the case of free improvisation, artists embrace this aspect of their chosen material. In order to celebrate it by exalting the present moment in which sound must be appreciated, improvisers have set up temporal conditions that have become inseparable from the concept of improvisation. Thus, improvisers insist that invention, execution and appreciation all happen simultaneously at the moment of the performance. The choice of relegating all of these operations to real-time operations is encouraged by the fleetingness of sound, but not a necessary consequence of it, as is made evident by the use of more or less elaborate pre-texts and pre-engagements in different musical activities. Indeed, many practices can be imagined or supposed without this simultaneity of invention, execution and appreciation. This is more difficult, perhaps even impossible, in the case of free improvisation, a practice that has made the real-time overlapping of these operations one of its basic rules and default conditions.¹³⁹

Just as choosing to work with essentially ephemeral sounds imposes creative constraints on their practice, choosing to organize these sounds at the time of performance does too. The most important consequence of choosing to organize sound in real-time is undoubtedly the fact that this process must then readily accept the linearity and non-reversibility of time. Much remains unexpected and, when the unexpected occurs, it becomes an integral and irrevocable part of the performance. *Facere* and *perficere* correspond.¹⁴⁰

Improvisation necessarily triggers the dynamic conception of artworks promoted by Pareyson, where invention and execution must be articulated simultaneously in the mind of the audience. For him, the artistic process can only be explained if we embrace the principle that execution and invention are simultaneous.

¹³⁹ Remember that real-time operations were, along with the practice's process-orientedness, its collective nature and its desire to maximize emergence, one of the tentative positively delineating features that we mentioned in the first chapter. Free improvisation as we know it can indeed hardly be imagined or supposed without these features.

¹⁴⁰ We again borrow this choice of words from Pareyson, for whom *facere* (to do) refers to the formative action and *perficere* designates the accomplishment of this action, when trials and attempts have produced a result.

Conceptions that fail to recognize them as such, that consider them as temporally successive or as independent one from the other, compromise the very possibility of trial or attempt, since these require that the individual rule of the work-still-being-elaborated neither precedes nor follows the formation of the work itself. (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.86)¹⁴¹

Invention is considered not only simultaneous to execution, but reducible to it; during the elaboration the doing itself implies the invention of the way of doing. The attempt, left to the hesitations of pure enquiry, itself engenders its fruitful results.¹⁴² (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.85)

In improvisation, none of the contributions that are attempted during a performance can be scattered or aborted. Open problems are given a single chance for elaboration, a single outcome. An interrupted idea still resounds for all to hear until it is foregone. Trials are definitive and "error" is always retained. This is a necessary condition of real-time improvisation, yet one that would be perfectly inadmissible for many artists in other artistic activities. Becker observes:

Since artists know that other art world participants make reputational inferences from their work, they try to control the work that becomes available for making such inferences. They destroy work they don't want considered, or label it "unfinished". (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.37)

French author Marguerite Yourcenar constantly burned her draft manuscripts, wanting to hide the details of her creative process from eventually interested readers and researchers.¹⁴³ In a somewhat parallel opposition to documentation, improvisers, whose practice is shaped by its openness to disturbances, unexpectedness and unwanted technical "errors", reject recording performances in some (or, in the case of some artists, in all) circumstances. Fumbling and squeaking makes sense when an improvised performance is understood as a swift live sequence of actions and reactions, but can be harder to accept and forgive in an enduring document when we begin to lose perspective of the conditions under which the performance was elaborated. Since recordings cannot capture these conditions, we are forced to try to imagine (or remember) what they were, with varying results. The same goes for a dynamic reading of Yourcenar, where

¹⁴¹ « Ces [...] conceptions ne parviennent pas à expliquer le processus artistique, puisque, ne partant pas du principe qu'exécution et invention sont simultanées, mais les considérant comme successives dans le temps ou les réduisant l'une à l'autre, elles compromettent la possibilité même de la tentative, qui exige, au contraire, que la règle individuelle de l'oeuvre à faire ne précède ni ne suive la formation de l'oeuvre elle-même. »

¹⁴² L'invention est considérée non seulement comme simultanée à l'exécution, mais réductible à celle-ci, comme si le faire lui-même impliquait de soi, au cours de la réalisation, l'invention de la manière de faire, et comme si la tentative, confiée aux hésitations de la pure recherche, engendrait elle-même ses heureux résultats.

¹⁴³ This anecdote about Yourcenar was told to me by her good friend, former roommate and curator of the Marguerite Yourcenar Museum, located in the author's former home on Mount Desert Island, Maine, U.S.A.

the process must be imagined by a reader who is acquainted enough with her work, her medium and (perhaps) her biography to make plausible projections.¹⁴⁴ The obvious difference is that in the case of Yourcenar, the imperfect process is meant to be hidden so that the result can be appreciated in its perfection¹⁴⁵, whereas in improvisation it is the imperfect process that is put forward; we could argue that there is, in this case, no perfect form.

Improvised performances leave no confusion about the fact that invention and execution coincide. That is because they also coincide with the moment of appreciation. The audience is brought to follow each action and reaction and, along with the musicians, wonders which contributions will be made and how they will lead each musical instant into the next. However, there is one important difference between free improvisation and the dynamic work described by Pareyson. Improvisation "succeeds" as long as the process is able to maintain itself and remain fertile and engaging, and while it does not need to pursue any aesthetic or scientific idea of determination or precision (it indeed often rejects such ideals). This makes a full application of Pareyson's theory of formativity impossible, because for him the formative process is successful only once it comes to a rest, having produced an accomplished "perfect" form. He says:

*From attempt to attempt, through a series of successes and failures, the enquiry proceeds towards discovery, unless, because of intrinsic weakness and shortcoming, the spirituality does not succeed in defining itself, remaining fluid, uncertain and chaotic, or because due to a lack of inventive spirit the formative vocation does not succeed in specifying itself and never exceeds the stage of attempt and enquiry. Because enquiry is deemed successful only when a spirituality has defined itself.*¹⁴⁶ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.50)

According to this definition of success, improvised performances would never be deemed successful. Improvisation's preferred stage, and the one where it is considered most successful and generates the most of its particular kind of meaning, is precisely the stage of enquiry that Pareyson claims should eventually be exceeded: the liminal state, the edge between that which is determined and that which is not, where fertility is found in "fluid, uncertain and

¹⁴⁴ Of course, we do not condemn implausible, uninformed or even completely playful or utterly ridiculous projections. Though these may not be motivated by science, nothing could or should prevent them from shaping a person's appreciation or enjoyment of an artwork. False projections regarding how works were made are, in any case, unavoidable.

¹⁴⁵ We mean perfect in the sense of *perficere*, as we explained it above.

¹⁴⁶ De tentative en tentative, à travers réussites et échecs, la recherche procède vers la découverte, à moins que, par faiblesse intrinsèque et pauvreté, la spiritualité ne parvienne pas à se définir et reste fluide, incertaine et chaotique, ou que par un défaut d'esprit inventif la vocation formelle ne parvienne pas à se préciser et reste au stade de tentative et de recherche. Car la recherche n'est couronnée de succès que lorsqu'une spiritualité se définit elle-même.

chaotic spiritualities". (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.50) This is the improvisers' playground. The longevity of their activity relies on their not over-determining things, settling them and putting them to rest. In free improvisation, attempts and process are not meant to achieve a work's finality; as a mostly process-oriented activity, the collective process itself, the encounter of multiple participants who join together in a single activity, is the finality.

c) Collective Creation, Projection, and Hybridity

Another condition from which the free improvisation process cannot be dissociated or prescinded is its collective nature. We again acknowledge the existence of solo free improvisation. However, since collective settings impose conditions of creation that are fundamentally different than those of solo improvisation, we are inclined to consider collective improvisation as a different process and indeed a separate activity. This section will indeed highlight that some of the conditions of creation from which the practice of collective improvisation cannot be dissociated or prescinded hardly apply to solo improvisation processes. The reader who has followed us this far should already be familiar with some of these conditions and will be inclined to agree with us that collective improvisation can be set apart as an activity in its own right. We notably already discussed the way that interaction of different subjectivities provides a nearly inexhaustible supply of possibilities, of fertile controversies, unexpected occurrences that occur, that must be dealt with, and that fuel the process. The encounter, participativity and discursive heterogeneity (STÉVANCE 2011, p.84) that characterize and thoroughly determine collective improvisation are far less imperative in solo improvisation, where any dialogical exchange occurs either with relatively less influential audience members or with actors that are too distant (in space or time) to participate in the real-time process' feedback loop. (FISCHER-LICHTE 2008 (2004))

In collective activities, the creative process also serves as an occasion for participants to meet each other and develop relationships through their collective activity. The productive, creative or constructive value of improvised collaboration has been defended by many authors, notably David Borgo (BORGO 2006), and Keith Sawyer (SAWYER 2008) both of whom have suggested that the application of collective improvisation methods to any human activity could

help it elevate its potential for innovation, "think outside the box" (SAWYER 2008, p.88) of their habits and previous experiences, and tap into aspects of knowledge that are distributed. (BORGO 2006, p.170) For Peirce, too, even science could not progress without collaboration, "without the aid of other minds". (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 2.220) An improvised performance consists of an encounter of different individuals that is meant to produce a single work. Stévanche points out that the improvised performance constitutes multiple sources in a single statement¹⁴⁷ and highlights the practice's discursive heterogeneity (STÉVANCHE 2011, p.84), thanks to which the dialogue is enriched with significations and intentions. Cannone writes:

*It is precisely for this reason that collective improvisation imposes itself to our reflection, because the music that is produced is the result of an interaction between many autonomous musical sources, which greatly enhances the unpredictable dimension of the situation as it obliges musicians to react on the spot to musical propositions that don't emanate from them.*¹⁴⁸
(CANONNE 2012, p.115)

Due to the collective, participative and interactive nature of its process, the task at hand for improvisers is more complex than a purely formative one. The process is driven by communicative structures where individuals are put into relation with others and confronted to them. The activity thus becomes doubly meaningful for participants who, in addition to the satisfaction of being involved in a formative process, can "appreciate the moment where sound material transforms an act into an act of existence and becomes significant for other individuals."¹⁴⁹ (SIEGER 2012, *La responsabilité du musicien improvisant*, p.147) Indeed, the instant of the encounter constitutes an occasion to discover oneself, to recognize oneself, to get to know oneself in the presence of others who, like us and at the same time as us inhabit the same world.¹⁵⁰ (ESCLAPEZ 2013, *Un ange passe...*, p.36) Musicians often allude to this aspect of group creation. Arthur Bull sees in it the source of the process' energy:

¹⁴⁷ « multiples sources énonciatives dans un énoncé »

¹⁴⁸ « C'est précisément à cet égard que la situation d'improvisation *collective* peut s'imposer à la réflexion puisque la musique alors produite est le résultat d'une interaction entre plusieurs sources musicales *autonomes*, ce qui accroît grandement la dimension imprévisible de la situation en obligeant les musiciens à réagir sur le vif à des propositions musicales qui n'émanent pas d'eux. »

¹⁴⁹ « L'improvisateur apprécie le moment où un acte se transforme par la matière sonore en un acte **d'existence** et se met à signifier pour d'autres individus. »

¹⁵⁰ [L'instant nous donne l'occasion de nous] connaître (et de nous *re-connaître*) face *aux autres que nous* qui habitent, également, et de façon simultanée, ce *même* monde.

You're on this continuum, this creative tension where on the one hand, be yourself, jump in, you can be transgressive. The other end other end of the spectrum is we're a group. This is a thing that we're doing together between us that's greater than either of us. The meter's kind going back and forth between the meters of that spectrum. That's where the energy comes from. (BULL 2015)

As we highlighted in the previous chapter, the interactions that characterize this encounter (highly charged in secondness) can be at least as meaningful for the spectator as the resulting sound forms. In Peircean terms, the shock provoked by alterity and interaction is an example of secondness. An enquiry into the improvisation activity of a group of people naturally leads to interest in these relationships. John Zorn was fascinated with what the musicians of his groups "had developed, which was a very particular way of relating to their instruments and to each other. And I was interested in those relationships." (BAILEY 1980, p.75) He insists on how fundamentally these relationships and the persons that they connect shape the outcome of performances.

The selection of people is very important. Everybody is vital. You take one person out and the chemistry is going to be different. It's like that with choosing people who are going to be docile, you need people with a sense of humour, you need people who are assholes, you need a wide variety to really get the piece going and picking musicians for the most part is not so much 'I need a violin and I need a cello and I need a keyboard and I need a guitar', it's more the people themselves that are important. (BAILEY 1980, p.77)

He highlights the importance of having participants with different personalities, as a way of keeping the negotiations eventful and never dull. This is how the motion of the process is maintained and kept fertile. An encounter of different subjectivities produces creative conditions where every step of the formative process demands immediate, potentially delicate negotiation operations. Zorn continues:

I basically create a small society and everybody finds their own position in that society. It really becomes like a psycho drama. People are given power and it's very interesting to see which people like to run away from it, who are very docile and just do what they are told, others try very hard to get more control and more power. So it's very much like the political arena in a certain kind of sense. (BAILEY 1980, p.78)

The formal sound materials of the performance are the site of ongoing negotiations, where

consensus and *entente* must be reestablished constantly.¹⁵¹ Instances of *entente*, as the renewed results of these negotiations, serve the basis and points of departure for collective exchanges. These conditions, where every instant is decisive and where artists are constantly obliged to confront other participants and find ways to react to their contributions, engage all participants' inventiveness and help maximize emergence.

As the improvised musical work is left open¹⁵² to the creative agency of all participants - starting with the performers but also including audience members -, new dynamics of interaction become constitutive of the work's internal rule.¹⁵³ Communicative structures (NANZ 2011, p.23) are set in motion that leave performances' outcome to be shaped by live interactions and feedback, conditions that should be embraced by the formative intentions of participating improvisers and the aesthetic interest of their spectators.

Since improvisers are more concerned with the upkeep of their ongoing process than by the production of a fixed object, the intentions of participants must be able to envision beyond the simple reception of the sounds they produce. This "projective intentionality" corresponds to what Marie-Noëlle Ryan also calls *visée pré-sentive*, which we can loosely translate to *presentative aim*. Elaborating on a dynamic conception of art creation that is inspired by Adorno and Pareyson, she says:

*The artistic experience's critical dimension does not lie first in the reception of works, but rather in the very heart of the creative process, considered as a succession of intentions and choices geared towards the work that must be produced. These choices can only be performed in relation to the projection of a potential reception by one or many imagined spectators, starting with the artist himself (who, throughout the creative process, continuously substitutes his point of view to an evaluative reception of the work in formation). This autocorrective projection defines what I call the work's "presentative aim", or its "projective intentionality", which amounts to the sensorial, emotional, or reflective effects that the work aspires to provoke in its audience.*¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Again, no formal content is explicitly prescribed by the idiomaticity of free improvisation. However, the code of conduct that improvisers follow does, as we have seen, prescribe the underlying concerns, attitudes, ethics and strategies that unify musicians in this practice and render their activity possible and coherent. The more enduring features of the practice, such as its underlying aesthetic and ethical principles, are also under constant review, but it takes much longer for any of these to be overturned, as these are actually codified and have endured for decades. We believe that the most basic features, discussed in this section and the previous one, cannot be overturned, since they are constitute the most basic conditions and building blocks for collective free improvisation.

¹⁵² We mean "open" in the sense used by Umberto Eco in the *Open work*.

¹⁵³ We mean "internal legality" in the sense meant by Adorno, notably in his *Aesthetic Theory*.

¹⁵⁴ « [...] [l]a dimension critique de l'expérience artistique n'est pas d'abord dans la réception des oeuvres, mais bien au coeur même du processus créatif, considéré comme une succession d'intentions et de choix en vue de l'oeuvre à faire, choix qui ne peuvent s'exercer qu'en rapport avec la projection d'une réception potentielle par un ou des spectateurs imaginés, au premier chef l'artiste lui-même (lequel substitue continuellement son regard, au cours du processus créatif, à une réception évaluative de l'oeuvre en formation). Cette projection autocorrective définit ce que

(RYAN 2014, *L'oeuvre d'art, au carrefour de l'intentionnalité artistique, entre projection et réception*, p.2)

Becker also talks about reception in this way. Drawing from G. H. Mead's ideas of response psychology, he says:

People gradually shape a line of action by taking into account not only their own impulses but also the imagined response of others to various actions they might undertake. It is not crucial that their assessments be correct. [...] This implies that artists create their work, at least in part, by anticipating how other people will respond, emotionally and cognitively, to what they do. That gives them the means to shape it further, by catering to already existing dispositions in the audience, or by trying to train the audience to something new. (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.200)

But Becker's account of the projection of a contribution's reception still does not go far enough for the needs of this research. The free improvisation practice highlights the fact that reception is not the end, but merely the point of departure for the subsequent moves of participants who have welcomed it. Further sequences of actions, whose number, kind and effect will only be known as participants propose them down the line, thus extend far beyond the simple reception of a single contribution. Ryan's model thus serves us better, since it accounts for the fact that participants react to one another in continuous sequences of actions, throughout the process. Since performers and listeners are all doubly involved as agency-bearing interpreters and, since, consequently, their subsequent actions are both integral parts of the work and points of departure for still more contributions, the "presentative aim" concerning each move must envision not only its immediate reception, but its longer lasting effects on the ongoing process: how will it best help maintain the processual feedback loop (FISCHER-LICHTE 2008 (2004)) in motion?

Ryan's account also exposes the contingency of interpretations between different participants as a guarantee of the process's dynamicity and inherent tendency to be continually readjusted. The uncertainties that surround upcoming contributions stem from the fact that the creative structure of free improvisation feeds off of the interaction of participants, each with their own habits of interpretation, aesthetic judgments, and intentions.

j'appelle la « visée présentative » de l'oeuvre, ou son « intentionnalité projective », à savoir les effets tant sensoriels, émotifs, réflexifs, ou autres, que l'oeuvre aspire à provoquer chez ses récepteurs. »

*The work thus constitutes a dynamic point of encounter between two intentionalities: a projective intentionality and a receptive intentionality. Why "dynamic"? Because, far from constituting a unique moment (a momentary and punctual encounter between a work and a receiver), the work is at the core of a continuous process and exchange between its presentative aim on the one hand and, on the other, the evaluative and interpretative experiences that it triggers.*¹⁵⁵ (RYAN 2014, p.2)

Thus the work, the present moment, serves as a kind of mediator or point of relay: it is both the result of formative operations and the point of departure for subsequent ones. And again, since participants all have their own interpretative habits and creative intentions, each new contribution that boosts the process is reflective of its emitter's genuine musical self, both as an interpretative being and as a formative one, and, further still, as a being distinguished by his own way of inserting himself in an improvising community. This idea is also present in Pareyson, who points out that the artist who willingly accepts a contribution as a point of departure for further formative processes receives this proposition with his own "spiritual reaction and artistic resonance". The immediate effect and eventual outcome of each accepted point of departure is thus inseparable not only from the adopted contribution, but also from the receiver's interpretation.

*[...] yet we cannot propose a point of departure to an artist if we do not suppose that he can accept it within its "artistic will", thus making of it a new formative process, and thus a new point of departure (spunto), original and unique. The point of departure is inseparable from the spiritual reaction and artistic resonance that it aroused at the moment when it is adopted [...].*¹⁵⁶ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.141)

For us, who are now used to Peirce's triadic semiotic model, this should already be evident.

Since improvisational activity implies that its participants be simultaneously committed to both formative and receptive activities, the musicians involved have both formative and interpretative intentions. Any participant "receiving" a contribution has his own projections of what the performance should demonstrate next, his own "formative direction" and his own

¹⁵⁵ « C'est ainsi que l'oeuvre constitue le point de rencontre dynamique entre deux intentionnalités, à savoir, une intentionnalité projective et une intentionnalité réceptive. Pourquoi « dynamique »? Parce que, loin de constituer un moment unique (celui de la rencontre momentanée et ponctuelle entre une oeuvre et un récepteur), l'oeuvre est au coeur d'un échange et d'un processus continuel entre sa visée présentative, d'une part, et, d'autre part, les expériences évaluatives et interprétatives auxquelles elle donne lieu. »

¹⁵⁶ « [...] on ne peut pas non plus proposer à un artiste un point de départ si l'on ne suppose pas qu'il l'accueille à l'intérieur de sa volonté artistique, en en faisant un nouveau processus de formation, et donc un nouveau point de départ (spunto), original et unique. Le point de départ est inséparable de la réaction spirituelle et la résonance artistique qu'il suscite au moment où il est adopté[...] »

expectations, which Pareyson likens to "taste".

*When a given [interpreting] spirituality takes its own formative direction, it is first the case that it demands and requires a specific way of forming, and more precisely the spirituality's way of forming, the way that it would adopt if it were itself capable of forming. Thus is created a kind of expectation that, strictly speaking, constitutes what we are accustomed of calling "taste".*¹⁵⁷
(PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.46)

The case of improvisers is special because, as they are receiving their collaborators' propositions, they *are* capable of formative operations, since every participant is at any moment involved in both creative and interpretative activities that necessarily co-occur and overlap in a way that makes both activities difficult to distinguish from one another. We can then say that each task is driven by "presentative aim", or rather, that projective intentionality characterizes both sides of any exchange. Besides, the dialogical nature of free improvisation calls for both projections. Bakhtin/Todorov writes:

*The speaker seeks to orient his discourse, as well as the horizon¹⁵⁸ that determines it, in relation to the horizon of others, of those that understand, and he enters in dialogical relationships with certain aspects of this second horizon.*¹⁵⁹ (TODOROV 1981, p.112)

More important for us yet is the fact that these points of view cannot be dissociated and that the sustenance of the improvisation process depends on the maintenance of a dialogical encounter between its participants, which in turn depends on there being contingencies that need to be negotiated.

In short, the elaboration of an improvised work is the result of complex interactions, where multiple, subjectivities are involved in multiple roles and overlapping operations, while each participant has his own personality, projective intentionality and expectations. Stévan,ce,

¹⁵⁷ Lorsqu'une spiritualité donnée prend une direction formative, il arrive, tout d'abord, qu'elle réclame et exige une manière déterminée de formée, et plus exactement sa manière de former, cette manière qu'elle adopterait elle-même si elle était capable de former. Il se crée ainsi une sorte d'attente, qui constitue à proprement parler ce qu'on a l'habitude de nommer "goût".

¹⁵⁸ We will return to this concept of horizon, which is the ensemble of constraints that socializes the collective activity and makes is possible.

¹⁵⁹ « Le locuteur cherche à orienter son discours, et jusqu'à l'horizon qui le détermine, par rapport à l'horizon d'autrui, de celui qui comprend, et il entre en relations dialogiques avec certains aspects de ce second horizon. »

elaborating on the way that *musique actuelle* can freely borrow, integrate and blend elements from different musical activities, presents it as a hybrid practice. As such, it constructs itself in its promiscuity with composite objects.¹⁶⁰ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.64) We can, of course, extend this idea to the composite "subjects" that are the different participants of an improvised performance, seeing as how they each have their personal capacities and that they are allowed to blend, complement each other and test each other. Clarinetist Anthony Pay, in an interview with Derek Bailey, even stresses that this encounter of personalities, as it supplies the process with renewed potential points of departure, not only helps sustain collective improvisation, it makes it easier than solo improvisation.

Of course, that is why group improvisation is much easier to do. Because then you can listen to what happens and you can try and contribute to what is going on, or you can try to destroy what's going on. Those are two goals that you can consider. (BAILEY 1980, p.68)

Free improvisation's potency as an activity that favors emergence indeed stems from the promiscuity through which disparate elements are allowed to challenge each other and require novel creative solutions.

*Composed of disparate elements, the hybrid is thus a superior force of subversion. Through the creation of an anomaly, it goes against the rules instituted by dominant musical discourse.*¹⁶¹ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.63)

Free improvisation's productive use of hybridity and dialogism has much to do with its capability of turning situations of encounter (that are necessarily contingent) into fortuitous creative points of departure. Indeed, the activity's longevity depends on the renewed interaction of participants demonstrating disparate habits and approaches to musicianship, particularly concerning treatment of formal features. We are used to seeing failure and misunderstanding as counterproductive to enquiry, and scientific enquiry in particular. Peirce stresses the importance of the precision of communication, saying that good language is of the essence of good thought and research. "Next would come the consideration of the increasing value of precision of thought

¹⁶⁰ « [l'actualisme] se construit dans sa promiscuité avec des objets composites. »

¹⁶¹ « Composé d'éléments disparates, l'hybride est donc une force supérieure de renversement. Par la création d'une anomalie, elle va à l'encontre des lois instituées par le discours musical dominant. »

as it advances." (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), p.2.220) Any deficiency in inter-individual communication, according to this perspective, would compromise the enquiry's advancement. We must remember that Peirce was likely thinking of scientific research and not artistic creation, where precision is not the most important priority and the consequences of misunderstanding are certainly not as compromising.

Again speaking from the perspective of scientific research, Alda Judith Alves-Mazzotti and Fernando Gewandsznajder, drawing on physicist and humanist John Ziman, write that scientific knowledge distinguishes itself from others due to the fact that its content is "consensual". That is to say that the scientist must take care in expressing himself in a non-ambiguous language in order to be universally understood.¹⁶² (ALVES-MAZZOTTI 1999, *O método nas ciências naturais e sociais: pesquisa quantitativa e qualitativa*, p.121) Science requires precision and must be expressed clearly in order for a dialogue to be established with other researchers in the area. But in collective music creation, musicians' propositions need not to be understood in this way. Music is incapable of this kind of explicit clarity and, in any case, does not aspire to this kind of communication. What matters is that the proposition may inspire further acts and carry the collective activity over into the next sequences, thus maintaining the movement of the process. This, too, has to do with consensus, as we have clearly stated as we explored the concept of *entente*. But consensus in free improvisation, contrary to in scientific enquiry, is affirmative of its contingency and thrives on it. Vitória-based Brazilian guitarist Arthur Navarro attempts to sum up how free improvisation simultaneously benefits from contingency *and* consensus.

*I imagine that it isn't necessary for musicians to have the same musical backgrounds in order for them to interact musically, since their distinct musical repertoires could result in an interesting mix due to their various musical influences. Yet, on the other hand, musicians with similar musical backgrounds - be it the music that he practices as a musician or even the one that he practices as a listener of other genres - these musicians, in my opinion are very likely to share affinities when they create music together.*¹⁶³ (NAVARRO 2016)

¹⁶² "[...] o conhecimento científico se distingue dos demais pelo fato de que seu conteúdo é "consensível". Isto quer dizer que o cientista deve ter a preocupação de se expressar em uma linguagem não ambígua para que possa ser universalmente compreendido."

¹⁶³ "Imagino não ser necessário que os músicos tenham o mesmo background musical para interagirem musicalmente, sendo a distinção de repertório musical entre eles algo que pode resultar numa mistura interessante através de suas variadas influências sonoras. Porém, de outro modo, os músicos com backgrounds musicais semelhantes, seja este repertório a música que ele exerce como músico, ou mesmo a que pratica como ouvinte de outros gêneros, estes músicos na minha opinião têm alta probabilidade de terem afinidades ao criarem música em conjunto."

His colleague Diego Brotas gives a similar response, but, perhaps more interestingly, points out that the question of background seems not to be raised much among improvisers. It seems that the degree to which the participants' backgrounds are similar or dissimilar is not the most decisive factor in determining whether or not an improvised performance will be successful.

*Honestly, this question of backgrounds is rarely taken into account when comes the time to participate in a show or a recording. I think that the most important is to have a connection, an affinity that passes through various instances. Certainly musical background can be a facilitator for a musical experience, but it isn't decisive for group performances. In this context [of the Expurgoção collective], we've hosted musicians with very different backgrounds and interests and they ended up rising to the challenge or contributing their experiences.*¹⁶⁴ (BROTAS 2016)

¹⁶⁴ "Na verdade essa questão do background não é levada muito em conta na hora de uma participação e um show ou em uma gravação. Acredito, que o mais importante é possuir uma conexão, uma afinidade que passa por diversas instâncias. Certamente o background musical pode ser um facilitador de uma experiência musical, mas não é determinante para uma performance em conjunto. Dentro deste contexto, já passaram músicos com background e interesses muito diversos, que acabam por se adequar ou adicionar suas experiências."

SECOND PART

***DECONSTRUCTING THE MYTH OF
FREE IMPROVISATION'S NON-IDIOMATICITY***

1. - A PRACTICE WITH POSITIVE CONSTRAINTS, YET FIRMLY ON THE EDGE OF DETERMINATION

At this point, it is important to mention that although many contemporary free improvisation projects continue to let their practice be inspired by social and political ideals such as the ones illustrated in chapter 4 of the first part, many others do not pursue these projects in the hope of staging some kind of utopian ideal. The ideal of breaking away from all traditions, in particular, finds no adherents among the musicians that were interviewed for this research. Through the acknowledgement that total rupture is impossible, they have reaffirmed their position as one that is "on the edge" of that which is emergent and that which has been inherited (and which may still be deconstructed). I will emphasize this change of discourse by relating it to statements from my own interviews, as well as testimonies from artists and critics documented in various publications.

There is, of course, no ex nihilo improvisation. Each improviser is traversed by his or her experience as a performer and as a sensitive, interpreting being. Todorov explains how for Bakhtin no member of a verbal community ever finds words of their language that are neutral, exempt of aspirations and evaluations of others, uninhabited by the voices of others.¹⁶⁵ (TODOROV 1981, p.77) Every tool, device and sound employed on stage can only be recognized and deemed significant or useful according to the interpreter's habits, which find analogies with past experiences involving similarly significant objects. Improvisers who are not pursuing an *ex nihilo*, freedom from aesthetic of free improvisation recognize this readily. Arthur Navarro explains his perspective:

I believe that the musician's background, his musical memory of other genres and other music traditions can emerge in improvisation, perhaps borrowed and executed rationally, or else it may arise in unconscious movements of restitution of themes and atmospheres that send back to other genres and other traditions. In this sense, I notice that every musician has a natural tendency, an internal pulsation that coaxes him into using musical paths that refer to various

¹⁶⁵ « Aucun membre de la communauté verbale ne trouve jamais des mots de la langue qui soient neutres, exempts des aspirations et des évaluations d'autrui, inhabités par la voix d'autrui. [...] »

"What we call a Thing is a cluster or habit of reactions." (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 4.157) This is true for all identities, since all identities are dynamic. "For every symbol is a living thing, in a very strict sense that is no mere figure of speech. The body of the symbol changes slowly, but its meaning inevitably grows, incorporates new elements and throws off old ones." (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 2.222) The recognition of things as coherent and meaningful entities is articulated by the interpreter's experiences and interpretative habits. This goes almost without saying and should appeal to common sense. We will, however, provide a few theoretical arguments drawing from Howard Becker, Mikhail Bakhtin (through Todorov) and C.S. Peirce. In parallel, we will retrace how the discourse and practice of free improvisation have adapted and shifted since the pioneering generation in order to better account for the fact that musicians, their tools and their concepts are all traversed by complex histories of lineage and agency.

a) Rejecting A Negative Concept of Freedom

Let us return to the discourse of pioneering free improvisers. The quest for new beginning and the undermining of hierarchies, if applied in the most extreme understanding we can make of them, require total rejection of any inherited tradition or organization. The corresponding discourse, one that prevails among some free improvisers despite having mostly been replaced by more tempered views, is that, ideally, *every* feature of the performance should originate entirely within the boundaries of the designated moment.

None of the improvisers with whom I have had the chance to talk deny that their collective activity is rendered possible thanks to some common understandings shared by its participants and interested observers. None believe in the actual possibility of an improvised performance whose every aspect is completely new. Still, the concept of the ideal, pure, free improvisation persists as an important element in improvisation discourse. We will, as most

¹⁶⁶ "Creio que o background do músico, a sua memória musical de outros gêneros e outras tradições musicais podem emergir no improviso, seja emprestadas e executadas racionalmente, ou também surgir em movimentos inconscientes de resgates de temas e climas que remetam a outros gêneros e outras tradições. Dessa maneira, percebo que cada músico tem uma tendência natural, uma pulsação interna que o impulsiona a passar por caminhos musicais que remetam a diversos gêneros e tradições."

musicians do, consider this ideal as an unattainable, yet perhaps necessary, utopia. A passage from Christine Esclapez's book *La musique comme parole des corps* can help explain this apparent contradiction in the utopia's character and illustrate its use for improvisers.

*For some, the utopia is madness, fantasy, idealization, the quest for a totalitarian purity. In this case, it leans towards uniformization or generalization. It is the waking dream of unrepentant dreamers in lack of well-being - imagination and construction of a linear and plane reality from which all irregularity and contrast is absent. From this blinding idealization, utopia is often the refusal of life itself. For others, utopia is necessary. It is projection into the future, voyage, salutary and subversive movement of reconsideration of the acquired and commonly shared values that must sometimes be renewed.*¹⁶⁷ (ESCLAPEZ 2007, p.25)

We will, therefore, grant agency to the utopian idea of a pure improvisation, as a structuring and motivating, if always distant, ideal example. For free improvisers who envision genuine real-time musical experiences that are unspoiled by the weight and determination of tradition, the epitome of *ex nihilo* improvisation, elusive as it is, exerts a strong creative influence. Knowingly unattainable or fantastic goals can motivate creative production just as well as attainable ones can. There is no reason for improvisers to take their eye off of their impossible goal, to stop reaching for it in favor of one that is known to be accessible. Utopias may shape their artistic approach so that it feels that they are moving always a little bit closer to it. The improviser is aware of - and not inconvenienced by - the unattainability of the ideal that drives her. She knows that collective activity requires some enduring, collectively accessible and recognizable elements. Nonetheless, the targeted utopia pushes her to pursue a kind of enquiry that deconstructs objects of convention and thus serves as a creative engine. Even if new objects of convention are put into use and new deconstructive cycles begin once again - an idea that this thesis will defend shortly - successfully deconstructed conventions and dichotomies are signs that the musicians' enquiry has yielded results and that the practice remains, as it generally strives to be, dynamic. For example, the customary roles of any given instrument may be subverted thanks to the development of newly applied extended techniques, a development commonly observed in

¹⁶⁷ Pour les uns, l'utopie est folie, fantasme, idéalisation, quête d'une pureté totalitaire. Dans ce cas, elle tend vers l'uniformisation ou la généralisation. Elle est le rêve éveillé de rêveurs impénitents en mal de bien-être - imagination et construction d'une réalité plane et linéaire où tout relief et contraste sont absents. Par cette idéalisation éblouissante, l'utopie est souvent refus de la vie elle-même. Pour d'autres, l'utopie est nécessaire. Elle est projection vers l'avenir, voyage, mouvement salutaire et subversif de remise en cause des valeurs acquises et communément partagées qu'il est quelquefois nécessaire de renouveler.

free improvised performances.

Because it has such agency in the free improvisation practice, it is important not to discard the *ex nihilo* ideal. Any demonstration of its theoretical impossibility is not intended to undermine its creative value.

Early accounts abound by musicians that express some of the ideals that animated them, as do descriptions of improvisation practices driven by these ideals. The first books on free improvisation and related practices were in many cases published by the musicians themselves: notably Derek Bailey (BAILEY 1980) and Anthony Braxton (BRAXTON 1985). Stévanche says about "*musique actuelle*"¹⁶⁸ (and it could be said more generally about all forms of music that make prominent use of free improvisation) that it has mostly been analyzed and described from the inside, by those that practice it and circulate it¹⁶⁹. (STÉVANCHE 2011, p.12) While musicians' accounts still represent a generous proportion of publications on improvisation, there is now a growing body of works by academics and critics, where new kinds of theoretical corpuses have been brought in to propose new leads for the conception of an ontology of free improvisation. The present work falls in this category of writings.

Early accounts often express the idea that free improvisation is incompatible with the concept of rules.¹⁷⁰ (NANZ 2011, p.14) We suspect that those who hesitate to refer to the habits and conventions of free improvisation as "rules" do so simply because they are not used to extending the notion of "rules" to features of this kind, they feel the need of separating these ideas. They are perhaps fixated on a conception of rules that prescribes certain acceptable *formal* treatments of sound. Indeed, free improvisation demonstrates no explicitly stated allegiance to any formal code. But it will be argued in this thesis that free improvisation, just as any human activity, especially as a collective human activity, has, and indeed needs, rules in order to function. Its rules are simply moved away from the sphere of its particular formal manipulations - none of which are directly prescribed by the idiomaticity of free improvisation - and onto underlying rules that influence them indirectly by governing the process that allows them to emerge.

¹⁶⁸ We mean here "*musique actuelle*" as it is understood in Quebec and other mostly francophone music communities in Canada: an approach to music that combines improvisation with avant-garde compositional strategies and instrumental technique borrowed for many genres. Our definition of free improvisation would include *musique actuelle* as a local variant of it, imbued with particular regional flavors and concerns.

¹⁶⁹ « [La musique actuelle] a surtout été analysée et décrite de l'intérieur par ceux qui la font et la diffusent »

¹⁷⁰ » Konstante Konzeptvorwürfe, Regeln oder gar eine Regelkannon sind mit ihr unvereinbar. «

Shaped by the ideal of a collective creative process that thrives outside of the rules and bounds of inherited codes and traditions, the concept of freedom that is expressed by improvisers is often a negative one.¹⁷¹ Freedom is understood as freedom *from* the constraints of scores and idioms. In order to allow the materials of the performance, along with the musical experience, to emerge in real-time at the moment of the performance, pre-written musical scores and pre-conceived plans should, according to this conception of freedom, be abandoned. Musicians should also, in the context of this perspective, be weary of expectations and exigencies associated with established traditions and genres. Those who strictly adhere to this ideology observe a more definitive avoidance of "licks" and other pre-acquired materials. Nanz points out how fear of unconsciously reproducing existing samples is the daily bread of free improvisation. "This fear, paradoxically, is meant to help secure the musicians' freedom. They will have to put up again and again with being questioned about the extent to which their acts are preconditioned."¹⁷² (NANZ 2011, p.14)

b) Individual Constraints as Rules

Improvisers also demonstrate a mistrust of techniques that, as long as they convey modes of operation that are associated with established practices, could shroud one's "genuine voice". They carry out a constant battle to remain as genuine as possible while still having to use modes of expression that are traversed by histories of usage. Stévançe mentions that the whole difficulty then lies in the internal combat that each "actualist"¹⁷³ performer carries out in order to avoid being dominated by that which could pass for automatisms in the moment of action, but also ahead of it: the musician avoids as much as possible the intervention of his will and his intention, and prevents himself from re-listening to an accomplished work when the live performance has been recorded.¹⁷⁴ (STÉVANÇE 2011, p.58)

The exaltation of the expressive individual is a recurring theme in improvisation

¹⁷¹ Nanz speaks of a "*Negativer Freiheitskonzept*", or negative concept of freedom (NANZ 2011, p.14)

¹⁷² » Die Angst vor dem unbewussten Reproduzieren bestehender Muster gehört zum täglichen Brot der Freien Improvisation, will sie sich denn, paradoxerweise, ihre "Freiheit" vergewissern. Sie muss es sich gefallen lassen, auch von außen her immer wieder auf die Voraussetzungslosigkeit ihres Tuns hin befragt zu werden. «

¹⁷³ This is the term that she uses to designate practitioners of *musique actuelle*.

¹⁷⁴ « Toute la difficulté repose alors sur le combat intérieur que chaque actualiste mène pour ne pas se laisser dominer par ce qui pourrait passer pour des automatismes au moment de l'acte, mais aussi en aval de celui-ci: le musicien évite le plus possible de faire intervenir sa volonté, son intention et s'empêche de relire l'oeuvre achevée lorsque la performance en direct a été enregistrée. »

discourse. Consideration of the individual constraints of the improviser has led Bailey and Nachmanovitch to reassess the place of rules in free improvisation. "Improvisation always has its rules, even if they aren't *a priori* rules: the practice follows sets of rules, after all, understood as the individual constraints and personal skills of its practitioners." "When faithful to our individuality, we are following an intricate design. This kind of freedom is the opposite of 'just anything'. We carry rules inherent to our organism." (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.26) "Diversity is its most consistent characteristic. [...] The characteristics of freely improvised music are established only by the sonic-musical identity of the persons playing it." (BAILEY 1980, p.83)

This exaltation of the genuine voice and the expressive being, put forward as the only acceptable set of rules for freely improvised music, nonetheless perpetuates a negative concept of freedom with regard to inherited skills and conventions. These features and devices, carried by the habits, will and intentions of musicians, are viewed as obstacles to the liberation of the inner expressive being. The genuine being should then be prompted to bypass the musician's awareness and given the reigns of the improvisatory action. It is impossible not to draw the similarity with *écriture automatique*, the approach that, with the publication of André Breton and Philippe Soupault's *Les Champs magnétiques* in 1919, contributed to the development of French literary surrealism. Stévanche dedicates the last chapter of her book *Musique actuelle* to this kinship.

Returning to the topic of the genuine expressive being, Nachmanovich says:

How does one learn improvisation? The only answer is to ask another question: What is stopping us? Spontaneous creation comes from our deepest being and is immaculately and originally ourselves. What we have to express is already with us, is us, so the work of creativity is not a matter of making the material come, but of unblocking the obstacles to its natural flow.
(NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.10)

Similar accounts put forward the idea that the musician's personal voice exists as a kind of authentic expressive being that is hidden behind all the materials of convention and that may be allowed to express itself freely if these idioms are stripped away. The creative being should then be kept genuine and allowed to flow freely. Nachmanovitch even claims: "Unless I surrender my identity, the instrument's identity, and the illusion of control, I can never become one with my own process, and the blocks will remain". (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.144) Freed from idiom-imposed restrictions, the improvised performance could then finally fulfill its purpose as a true musical expression of the participants' genuine voices, entwined in a collective,

participative and interactive process bound to the circumstances of a present moment and the personal constraints of its participants. Nachmanovitch's perspective is unrealistic to us. We believe that the "blocks" from which he would like to free himself are in fact the only means that musicians have *to* express their genuine musical self¹⁷⁵. They are indeed building blocks. The same goes for the musical instrument. Surely no improviser would say that it is necessary to eliminate it in order to let the musician's voice express itself. Rather, as is often stated by improvisers, the instrument enables the voice and is an inseparable part of it. In an interview with Henri Jules Julien, trombonist Thierry Madiot says:

Then everything welds together, conglomerates: I strive to make the trombone an almost natural extension of me, corporally integrated.¹⁷⁶ I do not feel it anymore; it is "my voice". Then I can say that I've become a full-fledged musician.¹⁷⁷ (JULIEN 2008, p.17)

The personal constraints of each musically expressive being do, as claim Nachmanovitch and Bailey, represent rules and characteristics of improvised performances. And these performances are indeed expressions of these individual voices as they interact in real-time. However, this thesis defends, in contrast to Nachmanovitch's view in particular, that the musical being of improvisers is not to be located somewhere *beneath* the techniques, concerns and materials that they have inherited and developed, nor must it be released *from* these devices and conditions. On a practical level, trying to produce something without being able to rely on a single trusted material, beacon or reference is a truly constraining, paralyzing - indeed not very *free* - creative situation in which to be. The expressive being is, on the contrary, made up of how it recognizes, relates to and enacts these inherited materials. This is semiotically proven: in its very definition, the sign can only be accessed and used if it can retrace to prior semioses, and is thus always socially charged¹⁷⁸. Only these past experiences can determine signification of any

¹⁷⁵ Section e) of the first chapter of the second part of the thesis will present alternative conceptions of freedom, where constraints coming from inherited materials and ideas should not be viewed only for the limits that they impose, but also for the actions that they enable.

¹⁷⁶ The body itself, like the instrument, imposes a set of constraints that no serious improviser could insist on wanting to do away with entirely. For these bodily constraints, although they are with their own limits, are the enabling means that is necessary to carry out the improvisation activity.

¹⁷⁷ « Puis tout se soude, s'agglomère: je travaille pour que le trombone soit une excroissance presque naturelle de moi, intégrée corporellement. Je ne le sens plus, c'est « ma voix ». Là je peux dire que je suis devenu un musicien à part entière. »

¹⁷⁸ Man being himself a sign, known by Peirce as a Man Sign (PEIRCE, CP 5.313-314), he is, like any sign, just as socially charged as the signs that make up his semiotic life.

kind. In a series of passages compiled by Deledalle, Peirce argues that personal existence is an illusion and that persons are but cells of the social organism. (DELEDALLE 1979, p.90) Deledalle comments:

*Indeed the individual is a simple social cell; as an individual, he is not the creator, judge and guardian of truth; it is the community of men, and more particularly of researchers, that fulfills this function.*¹⁷⁹ (DELEDALLE 1979, p.90)

For genuine expression is not one that is made without reference to shared codes and conventions; such an act could not be deemed significant by the improviser's collaborators or anyone else. Similarly, the success of their encounter is not due to the participants having somehow been able to free themselves from all conventions and found a way to interact genuinely. We affirm the contrary: musical beings are what they are; they are able to interact *because of* the habits that govern their understanding and behavior in situations of musical production. For what makes up the musical being of an improviser if not these very parameters?

According to Pareyson's conception, the artist's voice or expressive being, which he calls the artist's "spirituality", has everything to do with his working habits or "*façon de faire*". And so, in his view, there are works that express nothing and say nothing, but their style is immanently eloquent, because it is the very spirituality of the author. In this sense, art is expressive.¹⁸⁰ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.54)

It should be pointed out that this conception of the musically expressive being does not diminish the importance or restrict the freedom of the improviser's individuality: her individual skills, sensibilities and habits. These continue to act as some of the performance's most basic constraints. That which is expressed during a collective improvisation is still the trace of interactions between the "voices" or "genuine selves" of its participants. Their musical identities are still "tapped into", but they are expressed *by* and brought forth thanks to - not diluted by - the habits that they have acquired and developed. Stévançe's account of free improvisation puts the focus on the musician's creative act at the moment of the performance, but stresses that a certain level of competence, and therefore of preparation, is necessary in order to achieve such a capacity

¹⁷⁹ "Effectivement l'individu est une simple cellule sociale, [...] il n'est pas en tant qu'individu le créateur, le juge et le garant de la vérité; c'est la communauté des hommes et plus particulièrement des chercheurs qui joue ce rôle."

¹⁸⁰ Il y a des oeuvres qui n'expriment rien et ne disent rien, mais leur style est éminemment éloquent, puisqu'il est la spiritualité même de l'auteur. En ce sens, l'art est expressif.

of creation.¹⁸¹ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.53) Furthermore, according to many improvisers' testimonies, their genuine voice actually results in the choice selection of alternative techniques and devices that they have developed over time. Spinnet¹⁸² player Christoph Schiller comments:

*Like all musicians in my surroundings, I've also worked out my own repertoire of playing techniques and auxiliary instruments, that suit me: notably the E-bow, the cello bow, rulers that I like to strike, rocks, glasses, chopsticks, forks... The change from the keyboard to the spinet is part of this development. This repertoire develops slowly and transforms gradually, over many years. This proposes a nice counterpoint to the fleetingness of improvised music and creates a consistence, which allows the listener to recognize musicians according to their sound and to follow the slow transformation of this sound over the years.*¹⁸³ (SCHILLER 2011, p.82)

To dispose of such a repertoire does not necessarily mean that improvisers are any less inspired or any more crippled by obedience. Innovation or originality simply become questions not of whether or not a performer acts according to conventions and habits - they always do - but of which habits are being actualized, how these habits are being articulated, challenged, redrawn, even replaced in real time, and finally how all of this compares to the habits of other participants and spectators.

It is possible and, in free improvisation, standard practice to deconstruct materials that are perceived as being not genuine enough for musicians' expressive needs, that are seen as obstacles to the desired dynamic enquiry into sound, or that have simply become banal. The dynamicity of the activity, a cherished quality in improvisation, depends on there being renewed activities of deconstruction. We may even propose that, since the conditions of collective free improvisation are such that every performance act challenges the body of materials that it brings out, the process is inherently dynamic and deconstructive. This deconstruction is, however, always accomplished by the very relaying acts that, when they are recognized and cultivated, constitute new habits in individual or group activity. Burgeoning habits become necessary support for the

¹⁸¹ « [...] l'on n'oubliera pas non plus qu'un certain niveau de compétence, donc de préparation, est nécessaire pour parvenir à une telle capacité de création. »

¹⁸² The spinet is a kind of ancestor to the harpsichord.

¹⁸³ »Wie fast alle Musiker meines Umfelds habe auch ich mir ein eigenes Repertoire an Spieltechniken und Zusatzinstrumenten geschaffen, die mir gemäß sind: unter anderem den E-bow, den Cellobogen, ein Lineal, das gestrichen wird, Steine, Gläser, Essstäbchen, Gabeln... Auch der Wechsel vom Klavier zum Spinett ist Teil dieser Entwicklung. Dieses Repertoire entwickelt sich langsam und verändert sich allmählich, über Jahre hinweg: Das steht in einem hübschen Gegensatz zur Flüchtigkeit Improvisierter Musik und schafft eine Konsistenz, die es Zuhörern ermöglicht, Musiker an ihrem Sound wiederzuerkennen und die langsam Veränderungen über Jahre hinweg mitzuverfolgen.«

process' new orientations; they constitute new, often contingent, liminal sets of concerns and devices that may or may not be enduring, but contribute to the performance's rules and materials for at least a while. Gerry Garcia notes, in an interview with Bailey: "we're sort of collecting data without really knowing quite where it's leading or what it's about but we feel a certain custodian relationship to it." (BAILEY 1980, p.42-43) These understandings enable the collective process and are not seen as obstacles, at least not until they have lost their "edge".¹⁸⁴

We insist that, if there were a way to somehow simply eliminate the materials, rules, predispositions and habits that make up a musical being and shape its musical experiences, we would be left with nothing. No "original self" would be found underneath. Or rather, this kind of "clean slate"¹⁸⁵ would not have the means to express itself musically, since the musical being that expresses itself during collective, and therefore social, musical activities is shaped over time by the same musical experiences through which it is made manifest and that are the artist's means of expression. Sebastian Kiefer writes:

*In the feeling that one has that, after the currently resounding sound pattern SP(y) precisely SP(x) shouldn't follow, there are prior hearing and playing experiences at work: the sweat that was shed as preferences, reactions and play patterns were developed. Taken together, these mostly half-conscious or unconscious hoards of information and competences produce my concept of music. Such a concept is always a practice, in which we may include all possible ideals, dreams, ideas, insights, idiosyncrasies and so on. It is my concept of music but I have earned it through a work process geared towards a horizon of musical experiences, and therefore of practiced values.*¹⁸⁶ (KIEFER 2011, *Wer muss, darf, kann wissen, dass eine Improvisation improvisiert ist?*, p.43)

Every aspect of the improviser's agency is determined by the rules of habits that she has inherited and developed through significant musical (and non-musical) experiences. As Gerry Garcia explains in the same interview with Bailey: "It's not something we're creating exactly, in

¹⁸⁴ We mean "edge" here in the sense of something that has not yet been determined to the point of becoming banal. The concept will be explored more methodically in the next section.

¹⁸⁵ It is not one of the goals of this research to retrace anything in the nature of a genetic predisposition to music of the human species. There is no doubt a pre-cultural "clean slate" that provides default conditions for musical creation, basic rules that are deeply rooted in the genetics that govern the cognitive potential of humans. The ability to make music is, after all, a universally human one. Many works already explore these questions, notably by D.J. Levitin at McGill University.

¹⁸⁶ » Im *Gefühl* dafür, dass nach diesem jetzt erklungenem Klangmuster K(y) gerade nicht dieses K(x) folgen sollte, wirken frühere Hör- und Spielerfahrungen fort, der Schweiß beim Herausbilden von Präferenz-, Reaktions- und Spielmustern. Zusammen genommen ergeben diese meist halb- oder unbewussten Informations- und Kompetenzmengen *meinen Begriff von Musik*. Ein solcher Begriff ist immer eine *Praxis*, darin eingeschlossen alle möglichen Ideale, Träume, Ideen, Einsichten, Idiosynkrasien und so fort. Es ist mein Begriff von Musik, aber ich habe ihn gewonnen durch ein Abarbeiten an einem *Horizont* musikalischer Erfahrungen, also praktizierter Werte. «

a way it's creating us." (BAILEY 1980, p.42)

c) Congeniality of Habits as Conventions

Just as individual expression depends on individual habits, group activity depends on collective habits: *conventions*. We use the term in the sense expressed by Becker: "an artificial but agreed on (socially constructed) way of doing something."¹⁸⁷ (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.xiv) To suggest, as did Bailey and Nachmanovitch, that personal sensibilities, skills and constraints of its participants constitute the only rules of an improvised performance is in fact to refer positively to an individual body of conventions. Pareyson also stresses the importance of conventions in creative communities:

*Certainly a prior acceptance of all circumstances easily exposes the artist to the necessity of recourse to memory and convention, not so much to try out its formative possibilities as to find solutions for situations that are created during his operation; hence the ease with which improvisation becomes a collection of shared spaces, automatic associations, easily recognizable reminiscences, and formulas whose effects are assured and acceptable.*¹⁸⁸ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.101)

The importance of conventions thus becomes glaringly inescapable in the unfolding of collective processes. One of the reasons that free improvisation cannot be said to have no "rules" is because the success of any collective activity depends on the implementation of some sort of *device* familiar to all participants. Meyer used this idea of convention to "analyze the way composers and players used conventional patterns of melody, harmony, and rhythm to create emotional tension and release, and thus musical meaning." (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.xiv) The concept becomes all the more interesting in a musical practice that, like free improvisation, demonstrates no allegiance to any particular melodic, harmonic or rhythmic treatment. It means that other forms of habits must make up the practice's enduring body of conventions in order for it to be workable by (even accessible to) groups of participants. For "members of art worlds

¹⁸⁷ Becker borrows Leonard Meyer's formulation of the concept of convention (Emotion and Meaning in Music) and develops it for permitting and facilitating collective activity in art worlds. They make the activity possible.

¹⁸⁸ « Certes [une] acceptation préalable de toute circonstance expose [l'artiste] facilement à la nécessité de devoir recourir à la mémoire et à la convention, moins pour en essayer les possibilités formatives que pour résoudre les situations créées au cours de son opération; d'où la facilité avec laquelle l'improvisation devient une collection de lieux communs, d'associations automatiques, de réminiscences aisément reconnaissables, de formules à l'effet sûr et acceptable. »

coordinate their activities by which work is produced by referring to a body of conventional understandings embodied in common practice and in frequently used artifacts." (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.34)

Although improvisers are often reluctant to use the term "rules" to refer to the body of conventional understandings that supports their activity, they readily discuss some of the principles that must be respected by those participating in collective improvisation in order for their activity to be successful. Tena Palmer gives her perspective:

I don't really think in terms of rules or anything like that, but I guess listening is the most important thing. Before you open your mouth or blow, have your ears open and: awareness. But it's got to be simultaneous. Your own authenticity somehow. I think free music really suffers when people are thinking too much cerebrally and imposing ideas. Really making a plan and imposing it on an improvised session is really counter intuitive for me and it doesn't create the best music. For musicians, any musicians, actually, in any style, the best is to push the ego out of the way immediately, before you even approach the stand, make a conscious decision. (PALMER 2015)

Then, the code of conduct of any group of improvisers is bound to a repertoire of sensibilities, skills and constraints that enable their collaboration. Arthur Bull proposes the following, off the top of his head:

I think the basic rules for me are: listen, imagine, connect with the audience, feel the whole group. If you don't do those things.... also playing with feeling. There's this kind of common good that you're trying to submit to. It doesn't really work if somebody trudges in the middle of this. (BULL 2015)

These principles are either shared by its participants or at least amount to sufficient congeniality between them for the activity to be sustained. Since free improvisation demonstrates no explicit allegiance to detailed repertoires of formal materials and codes, it helps to imagine most of these enduring conventions as rallying their proponents on levels other than the formal level. In any case, in order for the work to be maintained, some types of convention and idiomaticity may - indeed, *must* - be uncovered or constructed (even spontaneously) on some level. In free improvisation, for example, there is a tendency to move away from codified formal properties and thrive instead on codified concerns and behaviors: an ensemble of unifying underlying principles. For example, by refusing codes that prescribe certain hierarchies in sound organization or instrumental roles, musicians have rallied around ensembles of codes of conduct that prescribe some ethical postures and performance devices that help musicians pursue their

deconstructive enquiry collectively. By refusing to make use of detailed scores, they have found common resonance in sets of skills and aesthetic guidelines that allow them to generate a performance without explicit formal guidelines. These are the new sets of features that, once they have deconstructed the codes that censored or hindered their creative enquiry, allow them to pursue their work freely. "Conventions make art possible in another sense. Because decisions can be made quickly, plans made simply by referring to a conventional way of doing things, artists can devote more time to actual work". (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.30) Because the creative concerns, ethical predispositions and performance strategies of free improvisation are characterized by enduring conventions, musicians who are total strangers can play together all night with almost no pre-planning, with a pre-text that specifies next to nothing about the performance's formal features other than the fact that they must be determined in real-time.

The agency of every musical contribution made at the time of performance depends on how well it will be noticed, deemed significant, thought useful, and be capable of triggering further actions.¹⁸⁹ The congeniality of habits that this kind of collective activity requires has been described by many and has taken many different names. Peirce uses the term "quasi-mind" for designating the shared mental space between socialized, historicized people.¹⁹⁰ (RÉTHORÉ 2007, p.2) In situations of communication, such congeniality can seem like the work of a mind that is not that of an absolutely singular individual, and for this reason Peirce calls it quasi-mind.¹⁹¹ (RÉTHORÉ 2007, p.2) Bakhtin/Todorov uses the word "horizon" to describe a group of constraints that are sufficiently recognizable by members of a collectivity for their group activity to be sustained.

Whatever belongs to the common horizon of participants - and this includes axiological

¹⁸⁹ We use the idea of agency in the sense proposed by Latour and other Actor-Network theorists; that is to designate "any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor". (LATOUR 2007, p.71) We may, then, give agency to any sound, sign or other element that triggers further operations. This idea can help us to understand how a work can mediate a collective process, since all communication happens through it and is subject to the constraints of its specific materiality. Some non-human elements of improvised performances will occasionally be presented as actors throughout this thesis. Non-human actors are different, though, in that they are not capable of any semiotic operations.

¹⁹⁰ "Admitting that connected Signs must have a Quasi-Mind, it may further be declared that there can be no isolated sign. Moreover, signs require at least two Quasi-Minds; a *Quasi-utterer* and a *Quasi-interpreter*; and although these two are at one (i.e. are one mind) in the sign itself, they must nevertheless be distinct. In the Sign they are, so to say, *welded*. Accordingly, it is not merely a fact of human Psychology, but a necessity of Logic, that every logical evolution of thought be dialogic." (PEIRCE, CP 4.551)

¹⁹¹ Cet esprit ne doit pas être entendu comme celui d'un individu absolument singulier, et pour ce motif est appelé Quasi-esprit par Peirce.

*judgment, ethical values and aesthetic concerns - needs not be made explicit (if these things were made explicit, it would indicate that they were contested).*¹⁹² (TODOROV 1981, p.74)

Recourse to a horizon of shared axiological elements is therefore particularly important in free improvisation, because very few performance features are made explicit ahead of show time. Congeniality, however, remains inescapably contingent due to the subjectivity involved in interpretive processes.¹⁹³ Still, group activities whose participants are well intentioned (which is usually the case in collective musical improvisation) tend to seek affinity and adopt ethical behaviors that allow participants to overcome contingency and even make constructive use of it. For despite being innately contingent, congeniality also serves as a necessary condition for group activity and for the execution of acts such as repetition and imitation. Pareyson devotes a section to this idea in his *Teoria della Formatività*. In it, he defends not only that recourse to shared antecedent materials does not signal a lack of originality, but also that the congeniality of a shared horizon is the backdrop that allows any original act to be interpreted. He says that "the type of originality that most characterizes congeniality is the one that not only does not exclude relationships to antecedent activities, but also knows how to capitalize on these relationships."¹⁹⁴ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.155)

The features that mediate collective action must not be perfectly determined or perceived in the same way by all of its participants. But they must at the very least be *observable* by more than one participant. Only once an object has entered the realm of perception can it begin its journey to the status of habit. When we perceive something as being useful (in our case, as something that can contribute to sustaining and enriching the collective improvisation process), it may, through series of analogous experiences and choices, pass into our discourse and actions, where it becomes a constituent part of our acts and habits. When strategies are adopted collectively, they become exemplary of this collectivity's horizon (Bakhtin/Todorov), or quasi-

¹⁹² « Faisant partie du jugement de l'horizon commun des interlocuteurs, le jugement de valeur, ou axiologique, n'a pas besoin d'être explicité (s'il l'était c'est qu'il serait devenu contestable). »

¹⁹³ Research experiments show that perceptions of improvisers do not correspond as much as the performers might like to. (SAWYER, 2008) In free improvisation, the agency of any given performance material, then, must not necessarily be perceived in very similar ways by all participants. But agency depends at least on the fact that these materials are perceived by multiple performers in *some* way and are able to trigger subsequent actions. This thesis will argue later on that the particular semiotics of music, or at least of how it is used in contemporary western cultures, is characterized by a flexibility that allows musicians to perceive a certain degree of agreement with their collaborators even in a situation marked by high levels of contingency.

¹⁹⁴ « Or, le type d'originalité qui non seulement n'exclut pas le rattachement à des activités préexistantes, mais au contraire sait en tirer profit et le cherche même pour s'en nourrir, est celui caractéristique de la "congénialité" ».

mind (Peirce). For choices both derive from and institute congeniality. Since they guarantee that different participants will have had collateral experiences, every act that is seized by the perception of different members of a collectivity establishes some degree and kind of congeniality between these members. This has two interesting consequences. First, it means that the conventions of any ongoing collective activity are dynamic and that they are readjusted with every new choice, enunciation or act. To this effect, Derek Bailey says of Steve Lacy's concept of "brotherhood of language":

With a successful improvising group the bulk of their material will be initially provided by the styles, techniques and habits of the musicians involved. This vocabulary will then be developed by the musicians individually, in work and research away from the group, and collectively, in performance. In a wider sense, Steve Lacy speaks of a brotherhood of language. Each player who comes along affects the common pool of language. When you hear a new player - and you make it your business to hear anyone who comes along who has something new - then you have to go back and rethink everything. (BAILEY 1980, p.106)

Second, it means that free improvisation, as it produces collectively accessible materials and collateral experiences, establishes common elements of congeniality and convention for the future. The performance, in many cases, does this so well that no discussion is necessary ahead of the performance. Tena Palmer comments:

My experience is that consensus is achieved just by playing enough times together. Maybe some discussion is necessary, if there is any structure to be discussed. In many cases there's much less said rather than more. There's rather little discussion until after the fact. (PALMER 2015)

d) From Formal to Non-formal Conventions

Free improvisation may commit to no formal code in particular. Yet some perspective must be given, since its formal materials may still be the object of consensuses and localized conventions. We must then account for the fact that while none of them represent any kind of pre-engagement to a general generic formal idiomaticity, certain conventions regarding formal materials may (indeed, must) solidify to some extent during the improvisation process, in the form of congenial habits. After all, the community is collectively familiar with histories of formal manipulations, which, in a kind of binding agency, become associated to other more stable

generic elements of the practice, including ideological things like aesthetic concerns, but also logistical things like venues and labels. However, formal conventions in free improvisation are to be viewed merely as momentary agreements and trends that maintain and renew the community's activity while at the same time they articulate the practice's true conventions: the underlying principles that unite its participants.

As common concerns, attitudes and strategies are actualized through formal manipulations, they necessarily also leave their mark on the performance materials that are their mode of expression, as well as, due to collateral experience, on the participants' habits concerning these formal manipulations. Pareyson explains:

The artistic operation is an exercise of pure formativity consisting of a double process: (1) the artist's humanity, having been placed under the banner of formativity, makes its formal vocation more precise and itself becomes a way of forming, or style. (2) The formative intention defines itself as it adopts its materials and as it transforms their resistances into provocations and suggestions. Yet there are not really two processes, but a single one, since the style invents itself only as it creates works, as it forms their materials, and we cannot form any materials without having a personal way of forming them, or style.¹⁹⁵ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.70)

Musicians' testimonies often echo the idea that they are being shaped by the works that they create, as we saw earlier in Jerry Garcia's interview with Derek Bailey: "In a way, it's creating us". The musical being of performers and the horizon of collectivities develop alongside the musical being of the materials they mobilize and decisions they make.

Just as we define the musical being of individuals and groups by their agency and the way they concretely participate in collective manipulations of music materials, we suggest that formal and non-formal features of free improvisation are traversed by the shared histories of these manipulations and the conventionalized aspects of the performance habits that support them. This also applies to the logistical aspects of the time and place of the performance and the way the performance is presented to the audience. Sebastian Kiefer writes:

Even when a verbal program doesn't accompany it, a performance has its being, will and

¹⁹⁵ « L'opération artistique en tant qu'exercice de formativité pure consiste en un double processus: (1) l'humanité et la spiritualité de l'artiste, s'étant placées sous le signe de la formativité, précisent leur vocation formelle et se font elles-mêmes manière de former, c'est-à-dire style. (2) L'intention formative se définit en adoptant sa matière et en transformant les résistances en stimulations et suggestions. Pourtant il n'y a pas deux processus, mais un seul, car le style s'invente seulement en faisant les oeuvres, en formant la matière, et on ne peut pas former la matière sans une manière personnelle de former ou style. »

*hearing horizon pre-determined - already by the fact that we are dealing with a performance and not traffic noise, a therapy session or random fragments from a tape machine. Openly or covertly, many other determining factors of what a particular music wants to be are at play: if, for example, an improvised performance is intentionally presented not as "improvisation", but as "untitled" or "music", then a given position in the field of art is already taken.*¹⁹⁶ (KIEFER 2011)

Indeed, the genre label that is chosen to present a performance - be it even a voluntary lack of label - sets the stage for the generic expectations of the audience. Drawing on Simon Frith, Felipe Trotta explains:

*Genres implement an affective, aesthetic and social environment in which networks of communication and exchange of symbols may operate. According to Simon Frith, it is genres that determine the way that music forms are appropriated to construct meaning and value, that determine various types of judgments, that determine different persons' ability of commenting. It is through genres that we experience music and musical relations, that we unite aesthetics and ethics.*¹⁹⁷ (FRITH 1996, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, p.95) (TROTTA 2008, *Gêneros musicais e sonoridade: construindo uma ferramenta de análise*, pp.1-2)

This perspective highlights the binding agency that connects a performance's formal materials to its genre context and the habits of its participants, thus giving them at least some kind of conventional meaning. At first glance, this idea may seem irreconcilable with our previous stance according to which we accept free improvisation's claim to having no explicit commitment to any particular formal idiom. Yet, precisely, *formal* materials, even if they become the center of some forms of consensus, are not at the heart of the idiomaticity of free improvisation, nor are they the aspects of it that involve its aesthetic commitments.¹⁹⁸ This practice has other types of pre-engagements. The rules that govern genre, after all, always concern both its formal and its non-formal aspects. Elaborating on Franco Fabbri, Trotta writes:

¹⁹⁶ »Auch wenn sie von keinerlei verbalem Programm begleitet ist, ist eine konzertante Aufführung in ihrem Sein, Wollen und Hörhorizont vordeterminiert - schon durch die Tatsache, dass es sich um ein Aufführung handelt und nicht um Straßenlärm, eine Therapiesitzung oder zufällige Reste einer Bandmaschine. Offen oder verdeckt sind weitere Determinanten dessen, was eine Musik sein will, im Spiel: wird zum Beispiel eine Improvisation absichtlich nicht als »Improvisation« sondern als »Ohne Titel« oder als »Musik« angekündigt, ist bereits eine Position im Feld der Kunst bezogen.«

¹⁹⁷ "Os gêneros instauram um ambiente afetivo, estético e social no qual as redes de comunicação e compartilhamento de símbolos irão operar. De acordo com Simon Frith, são os gêneros que determinam "como as formas musicais são apropriadas para construir sentido e valor, que determinam os vários tipos de julgamento, que determinam a competência das diferentes pessoas de fazer comentários. É através dos gêneros que nós experimentamos a música e as relações musicais, que nós unimos o estético e o ético".

¹⁹⁸ Later on, we will explain the conventional tenure of free improvisation's formal materials in terms of localized trends and *entente*.

*Such rules are composed of technical-formal determinants (melody, harmony, arrangement, etc.), as well as semiotic, behavioral, social, ideological, economic and legal determinants. They are directly linked to a certain "musical community".*¹⁹⁹ (TROTТА 2008, p.2)

Free improvisation poses an interesting case because, while it is true of most genres that "it is always - or, at least, almost always - sound that determines the initial symbolic apparatus for the establishment of rules and musical identification"²⁰⁰ (TROTТА 2008, p.2), free improvisers overtly refuse to commit to any particular technical and formal determinants. They sometimes go as far as to make it one of their principles to undermine and subvert any perceived formal commitment. Free improvisation's relationship to formal materials is one of perpetual deconstruction. The practice's enduring generic commitments thus mostly concern its non-formal aspects: most notably the practice's unifying underlying principles (its values, attitudes, strategies, rationales, etc.).

One might object that free improvisation, like any music genre, demonstrates some recognizable sonic and rhythmical features.²⁰¹ This certainly is true. Trotta writes that:

*[...] a certain music "sounds" like it belongs to a certain musical genre because the listener(s) was/were able to identify anaphones*²⁰² *between elements of that piece and elements from other pieces that were previously classified in an anterior socially shared musical and affective baggage.*²⁰³ (TROTТА 2008, p.5)

There is, indeed, in many cases, a recognizable "free improvisation sound". Improvised performances from the practice's pioneering generation often came across as loud, unchained and busy; they tended to demonstrate high amounts of energy, raw sonorities, chaotic textures, extended instrumental techniques; use of a steady pulse was exceptional. With regard to

¹⁹⁹ "Tais regras seriam compostas de determinantes técnico-formais (melodia, harmonia, arranjo, etc.), semióticos, comportamentais, sociais, ideológicos, econômicos e jurídicos, e estariam diretamente relacionadas a uma determinada "comunidade musical".

²⁰⁰ "É sempre – ou, pelo menos, quase sempre – o som que determina o aparato simbólico inicial de estabelecimento das regras e das identificações musicais."

²⁰¹ Trotta proposes rhythm and sonority as two elements that may serve for the initial classification of musical genres. (TROTТА 2008, p.3)

²⁰² Anaphones belong to Philip Tagg's typology of signs in music. He provides this description: "Anaphone is a neologism analogous to 'analogy'. However, instead of meaning 'imitation of existing models.... in the formation words', anaphone means the use of existing models in the formation of (musical) sounds. (TAGG 1992, p.3)

²⁰³ " [...] uma determinada música "soa" como pertencente a um certo gênero musical porque o(s) ouvinte(s) foi(ram) capaz(es) de identificar anafonias entre os elementos desta música e elementos de outras músicas previamente classificados numa bagagem musical e afetiva anterior, socialmente compartilhada."

orchestration, it was typical to see some unusual instrument combinations, or at least some modified instruments or props that would allow instruments to be played differently. All of these features allowed musicians to make analogies between different performances and situate them within the genre's bigger picture.

Our response is that these features become part of improvised performances (and our preconceptions about free improvisation) accidentally, not essentially. They are formal trends, but these may be overturned in an instant.²⁰⁴ In fact, they are overturned all the time. Free improvisation may be gentle (BULL 2015) as much as it may be raw; it may exploit all kinds of beats (SCHROY 2016) as easily as it can remain out of time; it can exploit a totally "conventional" instrumentation. Sometimes, it is impossible to tell that it is being improvised at all! In short, the formal features of free improvisation do not represent any kind of hard pre-engagement on the improviser's behalf, who, to the contrary, is committed to principles such as the exaltation of the emergence of new materials and the deconstruction of old ones. Similarly, an audience member who is in tune with these principles will cherish moments of the performance where they are actualized, for example moments where forms emerge that are perceived as new, or at least - since no material is ever completely new - where materials are used in a novel way. These more deeply rooted conventional commitments to non-formal underlying principles deny to formal features the chance of themselves becoming enduring and generically essential conventions.

Yet these different aspects exist in a binding agency and any imagined perception of the practice's underlying features still must be read through the performance's observable sound content. The way that this content represents the underlying features, if it is to be collectively coherent, has to be done through collectively recognizable formal manipulations. Though free improvisation does not prescribe any particular way that this had to be done, some loose formal conventions - what we call *entente* - must be achieved, even in a short-lived very localized way, in order to let the participants recognize how it is that they actualize the underlying features that brought them together. "Anaphones", if they are to represent free improvisation's more enduring

²⁰⁴ It could be argued that any technical or formal determinant in any genre always represents a trend and may be overturned. This is certainly true (although in some extreme subversive cases it may estrange a performance from the genre that would ordinarily otherwise claim it). However, we see a fundamental difference of attitude between, on the one hand, musicians of most genres who try to abide to generic technical and formal determinants that are necessary for a performance to be identifiable as belonging to the given practice, and, on the other hand, practices like free improvisation that, in a contrary movement, try not to abide to any formal pre-engagements and, when they are able to, deconstruct those that are too formally determining.

idiomatic commitments must, then, be interpreted not only for their perceived correspondence to formal trends, but also for the binding agency that links these trends to the practice's underlying principles that they are actualizing.

We must, then resort to the following conclusion: although none of the formal convention that are momentarily developed in the practice of free improvisation can be said to be constitutive of the practice's enduring idiomaticity, the activity of free improvisation still needs these formal trends or agreements in order to be momentarily coherent and generically identifiable.

This does not mean that improvisers' efforts to deconstruct conventions are vain. Simply, it means that wherever formal conventions have been deconstructed, new agreements must relay what has been deconstructed and step in to support collective action. Usually, these new agreements are the ones that allowed deconstruction to take place. As groups of improvisers pursue their negotiations and establish new relations between materials and habits, they construct the means to deconstruct those that are no longer needed or desired.

The same process that, it is professed, opposes rules regarding formal determination, as it guarantees to provide a group with collateral experiences and elaborates its collective horizon, is bound to institute this very type of rules. Free improvisation is particular in how the formal rules that it institutes are usually very localized, both geographically and temporally. They find their prime application in the brief moment and specific context of their elaboration, as a momentary agreement or horizon, or *entente*. They act as conventions in the sense that they support collective activity, but they are short-lasting and extend only to the activity of the participants that are involved in this short instant. Obviously, any *entente* lives on as collateral experience, in the memory of these participants. They may give way to trends that influence how performance situations are treated on a scale that is larger than the immediate performance context of the *entente*. For the more essentially and enduringly committing aspects of free improvisation - those that make up the base of the practice's idiomaticity and gauge of its success - we again invite the reader to look at the practice's unifying underlying principles.

e) Alternative Discourses on Freedom

The idea of necessary recourse to conventions may disenchant improvisers who are driven by the idea of *freedom* from these conventions. Alternative conceptions of freedom, however,

may be proposed if the underlying attitudes, concerns, ethics and devices of free improvisation cease to be viewed as obstacles to the process, but are considered instead as *capacitators*. Stévançe points out that improvisers' musical creation could not be executed without that which has been recorded in their memory by previous works and acts; their spontaneity as a musician is nurtured by these things.²⁰⁵ (STÉVANÇE 2011, p.58)

Since no human activity can be pursued freely without codes and habits, and since the process is characterized by complex interconnectedness, some have challenged the concept of freedom in free improvisation. Matthias Kaul writes:

*It's ridiculous; we are not free. We are deep in an incredible amount of very subtle connections, and we must not see this as a catch-22 situation, but rather as a privilege. We must free ourselves from these affirmations of freedom and instead develop a fine sense for these relations in which we act, learn to measure their weight, understand to how to play with the balance of the energy currents that link everything together.*²⁰⁶ (KAUL 2011, *Haben Sie aufgehört? ...oder: Die Grenze der Freiheit*, p.53)

Yet we believe that the concept of *freedom* in free improvisation can be relativized or conceived differently. Alternative conceptions of freedom can be heard in the discourse of many improvisers, particularly younger ones, for whom the epitome of freedom does not amount to an idealistic liberation from all inherited codes and habits. We will explore some of these different nuanced perspectives of freedom, bringing out two of them in particular, that may be considered alongside the pioneering conception. We say "alongside" because we do not claim that "freedom *from*" perspectives need to be replaced by other conceptions of freedom. The desire to liberate oneself from the undesired constraints of inherited codes and understandings, as we have seen, is a legitimate one and represents a powerful creative motivation for improvisers and other contemporary artists. Simply, it cannot be pursued too stubbornly, since the final reaches of this tendency, the final form of its ideal of freedom, would be an unattainable and meaningless kind of nothingness. This is not the tendency that the practices of actual contemporary improvisers

²⁰⁵ « Leur création musicale ne saurait s'écrire sans ce qui s'est enregistré dans leur mémoire par des oeuvres, des gestes précédents; leur spontanéité de musicien s'en nourrit. »

²⁰⁶ »Es ist lächerlich, wir sind nicht frei. Wir stecken tief in unglaublich vielen, sehr subtilen Zusammenhängen, und darin ist kein Dilemma zu sehen, sondern ein Privileg. Wir müssen uns frei machen von den Behauptungen der Freiheit und stattdessen ein feines Gespür entwickeln für die Zusammenhänge, in denen wir agieren, ihre Gewichtungen ermessen lernen, mit den Balancen der Energieströme, die alles miteinander verbinden, zu spielen verstehen.«

concretely demonstrate. Free improvisation is an exaltation of emergence and deconstruction, an emancipation of sound forms and musical relations in the present moment. The concept of freedom in free improvisation should be (and, in the discourse of contemporary practitioners, often is) expressed in a complex way that, all at once, articulates its dismantling, structuring, and capacitating tendencies, movements that are at first glance seemingly contradictory. We will see how these different emancipative movements are nonetheless reconcilable, notably by thinking of free improvisation in terms of deconstruction. (STÉVANCE 2011) But more importantly, it is neither possible nor necessary to give an unproblematic, paradox-free account of how improvisers conceive freedom. The idea of freedom seems to have gotten more complex over time and is the object of many ongoing discussions in the world of improvisation. Yet, although it has come to mean far more than an idealistic liberation from all of the constraints of tradition, it has not ceased to represent one of the most fundamental values for improvisers. Freedom, in all its forms and contradictions, is presented as the common thread of Henri Jules Julien's collection of interviews with improvising participants in the *Musique Action* festival in Nancy, France. He comments:

*As for me, during these interviews, I intimately perceived the freedom that drives these artists: patient, harassing, deafly nurtured, dryly defended. I had never encountered it in this form before. I finally understood that it was to get closer to it that I was extending my microphone. Freedom, as problematic as it is to define, is without a doubt the fundamental value at the core of this strange organism that is Musique Action.*²⁰⁷ (JULIEN 2008, p.11)

We would like to propose a few alternative conceptions of freedom that keep with the spirit of discussing free improvisation in positive terms. The first is the freedom granted *by* the underlying strategies and ethical codes that allow improvisers to optimize emergence wherever former explicit guidelines have been deconstructed. This is notably the case on the level of formal sound features, since explicit guidelines that target them directly are now far less numerous (there is often only one guideline, as we have seen). But it is not enough to reject codes that are perceived as too constraining. Freedom to maneuver in this new playground (stripped from many of its props) is guaranteed only *by* the devices that remain and that allow improvisers'

²⁰⁷ « Pour ma part, au cours de ces entretiens, j'ai intimement perçu la liberté patiente, harassante, sourdement entretenue, sèchement défendue, qui anime [les artistes]. Je ne l'avais jamais ainsi rencontrée auparavant. J'ai finalement compris que c'est pour l'approcher que j'avançais mon micro. La liberté, aussi problématique soit-elle à définir, est sans doute la fondamentale valeur au coeur de cet étrange organisme qu'est Musique Action. »

actions to appear coherent to its different participants. The underlying rules are intended to allow the musicians to freely express their musical being. This kind of freedom is thus ontologically bound to the freedom *from* codes and conventions that is a creative driving force for improvisers. It is the flip side of the same coin, the capacitor of the musicians' deconstructive efforts.

A second alternative way of conceiving freedom in improvisation is to highlight the freedom *to* jump from one tradition to another or back and forth between one convention and another. This conception of freedom is not, like the one we just described, ontologically bound to the freedom *from* the constraints of traditions. Rather, it is a kind of alternative or complement to it and represents a change of attitude among free improvisers who are disillusioned about *ex nihilo* type perspectives and the fact that a total break from inherited music traditions is impossible.

As we said earlier, recent generations of improvisers are not as explicitly concerned with rupture. They are more permissive (NANZ 2011, p.14) when it comes to claiming use of different traditions. While it can still be aesthetically pertinent for a group of improvisers to make an active effort to avoid inherited codes and constraints, there now exist alternative attitudes and approaches with regard to this. Arthur Bull comments:

I think there's probably different conventions that people have. I'm playing with a lot of different people these days and there are different points of view. I tend to play with people who have a rule about there being no rules. They don't talk about the music before they play. It never comes up. We just don't talk before the set. But some people like to organize it much more than that. (BULL 2015)

Contemporary players seem to be more comfortable with the idea that, no matter what, every material is traversed by histories and analogous treatments can always be retraced. Since there can be no absolutely virgin materials and since freedom from established codes is always relative, why should tradition be viewed with mistrust? Some of these improvisers may perceive the exploration, by earlier improvisers, of the extreme reaches of indeterminacy with a grain of cynicism, since it embodies an illusory ideal that is strongly politically and ideologically driven. On a more practical level, maximal rejection of tradition imposes conditions of creation that may be seen as too constraining, especially for musicians who are concerned with freedom. These improvisers advocate freedom to move freely between various inherited traditions and welcome the chance to do so spontaneously at the time of performance. Marcos Campello shares his thoughts:

*I use a lot of Brazilian music in my improvisations. I think that it's possible to borrow anything, as long as you know what you want to do with it. If there is anything to be avoided, well, this depends on the aesthetic proposition of each musician, but I think that every [musician] has thought about this question.*²⁰⁸ (CAMPELLO 2016)

Freedom thus becomes a question of personal approach. Contemporary musicians thus seem to develop their own concept of freedom. If one chooses to freely borrow from inherited traditions, what guarantees the freedom of these improvisers is the fact that the relationship that they entertain with the traditions from which they borrow is one of total unaccountability. They may flirt with these codes and materials as they wish, but may also deform, enhance, glorify, ridicule or abandon them at any moment. They are not liable to any of their usual exigencies. *Unaccountability* is the foundation of freedom for these improvisers.

Inherited codes are thus no longer seen as a trap that robs an improvised performance of its essence and authenticity. Again, whereas pioneering improvisers tended to consciously and methodically construct devices and performance parameters that would help them free themselves *from* undesired codes and techniques, a more recent trend is for improvisers to develop mindsets and strategies that will allow them *to* freely incorporate and elaborate any sound or action that may come up at the time of performance, even if these materials clearly evoke inherited traditions. Nanz indicates that there has been a kind of "freedom from freedom" since the 1960s.²⁰⁹ (NANZ 2011, p.14)

What "freedom *to*" improvisers did was effectively deconstruct the dichotomy opposing tradition and emergence. Emergence in music can happen alongside the actualization of inherited habit, and indeed, as we discussed earlier, depends on underlying common understandings in order to be collectively accessible and coherent; hence the epistemological necessity of empowering the "freedom *from*" ideal with the capacitors of a "freedom *by*" perspective. Only then can free improvisers achieve the coherent yet dynamic kind of plurivocity²¹⁰ that is characteristic of their work.

²⁰⁸ Uso muito da música brasileira no improviso. Acho que dá pra tomar qualquer coisa emprestada, desde que se saiba o que se quer fazer. Coisas a se evitar depende da proposta estética de cada um, mas acho que todo mundo já passou por essa questão.

²⁰⁹ "[Es hat] seit 1960, eine Befreiung von der Freiheit eingesetzt."

²¹⁰ Francis Jacques says of plurivocity that it carries out the "systematic dispersion of the subject of the enunciation on two poles in a situation of verbal interaction." (ARMENGAUD, 1989, La pragmatique du dialogue référentiel de Francis Jacques)

The relativization of the ideas of tradition and emergence constitutes perhaps the most significant example of deconstruction in the history of free improvisation. The question is no longer whether or not conventions and habits are called into the interpretive and creative processes, but *how*. "Freedom *to*" improvisers are more aware and assertive of the different ways and degrees to which their performance acts may refer to recognized codes and traditions. There are many ways in which such cases of appropriation by improvisers may give new meaning to referenced materials: forms of meaning that are not exploited or intended in the genres to which these materials are traditionally associated. Thus, free improvisers who embrace this perspective may freely exploit forms, codes or performance strategies with which audience members make certain associations, for example, punk music or country and western, all of which have made recognizable appearances in John Zorn performances, to name just one example..

Within these genres, the quality of a performance is usually measured by the degree to which performers successfully actualize the rules of internal organization prescribed by them. This no longer has to be the case in free improvisation, where an appropriated reference to these genres becomes meaningful in itself, since the referenced feature is now actualized in a context whose rules also allow it to be absent or be supplanted by something, anything, else. The audience members feel that the reference was intentional; they can speculate on the motives of the decision to include it. Was that Dixieland clarinet riff intended as an homage? As an honest proposition? Was it ironic? Was it just for fun? Was it intended as a challenge for the enunciator's collaborators? Was it deliberately vague? In any case, in free improvisation, the enunciator is usually given the benefit of the doubt; it is easier for her collaborators to build on her propositions if they are deemed relevant and successful.

To assert generic materials of established genres in the context of a free improvisation also puts these features under new light, since it isolates them from some of the rules of their usual generic context. It highlights their properties as it puts them forward, in front of a "foreign" backdrop, a larger, perhaps infinitely vast, field of potential alternative solutions. It gives these referenced materials new meaning and agency as it puts them in new relations with other generic references that were not previously so easily juxtaposable. The same tactic can, of course, be extended to repertoires, styles, and other recognizable sound materials, since musicians can propose materials that have the effect of quoting easily recognizable songs, sound or styles of well-known performers. In all of these cases, the referenced genre, piece, sound or style is thrown

into a new network of relations, and thus given new agency and meaning.

Strategies of hybridation are common among improvisers that lean towards this kind of conception of freedom. This is notably the case in *musique actuelle*, as reports Stévançe:

*The musician of musique actuelle abandons herself, letting herself be carried by a yet stronger energy and entering a state of receptivity to that which surrounds her. It is the being understood in its totality, the individual centered on itself and, at the same time, on others. Hybridation enables this complex compositional process that is carried out by the coherent alignment of all present and joyfully interacting perceptions. In the discourse of these musicians, all points of view are admissible: an idea is emitted by one, to which the other will reply, either to develop it, contradict it, or lead it elsewhere.*²¹¹ (STÉVANÇE 2011, p.65)

By feeding off of emerging (and therefore manifest) propositions made by their collaborators, musicians affirm their determination, treating the contributions as stepping-stones that enable them to freely elaborate the next sequences. For some musicians, greater familiarity with their collaborators allows them to respond more easily to their contributions, thus increasing the mutual perception of freedom. Joëlle Léandre says: "The more you play with the same musicians, the more, no doubt, you can allow yourself to be free, open. Our score is the individual in front of us; our score is us."²¹² (STÉVANÇE 2011, p.42) This is a good example of a "freedom to" conception of freedom in improvisation.

The newer generation of free improvisers, it could be argued, is the freest of all. They more readily acknowledge and admit their lack of freedom and are less concerned or contrived by it. They realize that all creation, even the most playful, decentralized and experimental, implies order making (associations), that each tentative avoidance (to avoid negotiation is to remain silent, which is also meaning generating) of order will generate new order, that there is no way to break this loop. To escape convention entirely may now be seen a concern of the past, currently viewed as a hopeless quest, a pipe dream. The constraints that are built into the people, materials and principles at play are not something to be wished away. Rather than wanting to reject them as some early free improvisers had hoped to do, it is more constructive for musicians to harness

²¹¹ "[L]'actualiste s'abandonne, se laisse porter par une énergie plus forte encore pour ainsi se placer dans un état de réceptivité à ce qui l'entoure. C'est l'être conçu dans sa totalité, l'individu centré sur lui-même et tout à la fois sur les autres. L'hybridation permet ce processus compositionnel complexe qui s'effectue par la mise en cohérence de toutes les perceptions présentes et interagissant joyeusement. Dans le discours actualiste, tous les points de vue sont admissibles: une idée est émise par l'un à laquelle l'autre répondra pour la poursuivre la contredire ou la mener ailleurs."

²¹² « Plus tu joues avec les mêmes musiciens et plus, sans doute, tu peux te permettre d'être encore plus libre, ouvert. Notre partition, c'est l'individu en face de nous; notre partition c'est nous. »

these resistances so that they may help them realize their creative or formative intentions. The emancipation and expression of self will not, as early free improvisers thought, come about by disarming all forms of resistance; for it is precisely through the negotiations of the tension between resistance and intention that works bear the marks of the artists involved.

f) Some Problems that are Solved: Habits in Improvisation, Relationship to Antecedents, Relationship to Context

By expanding their idea of freedom, as many have, beyond negative conceptions that idealize the liberation *from* the exigencies of inherited traditions, improvisers and thinkers may overcome some of the philosophical and practical problems that plagued early improvisers. This includes paradoxes that a more diversified conception of freedom can help put to rest, such as its relationship to tradition and materials. These issues are less problematic today. Saxophonist Evan Parker famously said that the apparent philosophical paradoxes or contradictions of improvisation don't concern him anymore; he is free to consider the more hands-on aspects of his practice. "My concerns are to a large extent concerned with control, firstly of the instrument then of my imagination. If there is any processing power left over I can concern myself with what might be called the narrative." (SMITH 2013)

One issue that becomes less problematic is the place of habits in improvisation. An *ex nihilo* ideal of improvisation cannot account for how the process is carried out by persons whose activity is necessarily governed by habits. Already with Bailey and Nachmanovitch, the individual voices of improvisers were highlighted as providing sets of rules for the outcomes of improvised performances. But these voices were still seen as a kind of genuine self that could only be released if inherited habits were rejected, whereas we believe these are precisely the habits that constitute the expressive musical being. Only decades after the publication of Bailey's book have improvisers been less apprehensive about the "preconditionlessness"²¹³ of their acts. (NANZ 2011, p.14) As opposed to free improvisation pioneers who may have regretted unintentional reproductions or statements that were too reminiscent of established formal idioms, many younger players tend to more readily welcome, accommodate, and develop these "intrusions", as long as they impose no commitment.

²¹³ » Voraussetzungslosigkeit ihres Tuns. «

Tena Palmer, who is not a pioneer of the practice, but is certainly a veteran of it, expresses a kind of intermediate position.

*Tena Palmer: Sometimes I feel self-conscious because I go too melodic on some days, you know. It's too clearly, like, almost jazz improv or something. Whereas I may be doing [*Tena makes what might be described by some as a "frightful screech"] and it's still a solo; free music lets me explore this.*

André Bourgeois: So do you try to avoid something that is too melodic, something from a specific tradition?

TP: (hesitation) I just try to be responsive to the moment. I try not to oppress what's going on between a group of people. It's just in that delicate balance between being completely in the moment and just following what your impetus is. That's easy for me. I can be overpowering, so I try not to be. In a session recently I was exploring some Indian vocal techniques, for which I've had lessons. (PALMER 2015)

Henry Schroy highlights how habits of memory apply to everything that traverses the performance and that they can either warn us not to over-develop an idea or else serve as a common ground for participants. The musician thus has different options.

For me anything goes. Genre is a category and sound comes before any category. Our nervous system invents the rest. And our memory of everything that we've ever felt, all the songs, beats and musical deliria that were ever performed, all of this informs our reaction in the moment. It can serve as a kind of "censorship", ie., we try to avoid repeating something that we already know, or as a common language. The most important is the sensibility of the mind: is my current contribution jiving with the whole?²¹⁴ (SCHROY 2016)

If, then, every object, idea, space and device involved in the process is traversed by histories that determine its agency and, in the case of human participants, approach to creation and interpretation, then the question that imposes itself to the artist is simply how these histories are to be exploited.

In a similar vein, there is the problem of a work's relationship to its antecedents. The question is problematic in a conception of free improvisation that sees it as a practice (and tradition) that demands rupture from all that is inherited, and that glorifies the present to the point

²¹⁴ Pra mim vale tudo. Gênero é categoria, o som vem antes de qualquer categoria. Nosso sistema nervoso inventa o resto. E nossas memórias de tudo que já sentimos, todas as canções, batucadas e delírios musicais instrumentados, tudo isso informa nossa reação do momento. Pode tanto servir como uma "censura", ie., vamos tentar evitar repetição de algo que já conhecemos, ou como uma linguagem comum. O importante é a sensibilidade da cabeça, o que estou trazendo no momento está batendo com o todo?

of wanting to forget the broader cultural processes that shape it and frame our understanding of it. But it is not problematic if we admit that any understanding of a work, even one that is created spontaneously, includes a consideration of its context as a kind of fabric that unites different works in a continuity of style, school and tradition. "Only then", says Pareyson, "can we truly 'read' and 'judge' the work, because, on the one hand, to read means to execute and to execute means delivering the work and allowing it to come to life as it wants to be, and on the other hand, to judge means to compare the work as it appears to what it wanted to be."²¹⁵ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954)) It becomes all the more important, then, to maintain a dynamic conception of the work and allow the concerns and actions that underlie the performances' (admittedly non-committed and emergent) formal content to help us retrace the axes that have helped unify and carry the free improvisation tradition over the years and that have allowed it to find adherents throughout the world. For, still according to Pareyson, particular works are inscribed in a continuity that joins them throughout time. A dynamic conception opens up the way to consider the work of art as emerging from a "historical humus".²¹⁶ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.72)

Besides, in improvisation many of the attempts (successful or aborted) and antecedents to the materials that we appreciate are themselves part of the very same performance to which they belong. Furthermore, they help complete the meaning of everything that follows them in the causal linearity of the sequences from which they first emerged.

Performances of any kind, including improvised ones, generate meaning by how they relate to, resemble or are compared to previous performances or even phenomena that exist outside of the realm of musical performance (a certain social dynamic or a certain sound quality, for example.) They generate meaning through intertextuality.²¹⁷ Meaning is also drawn from the relationships that are traced between the core of the performance and other agents that make up the greater ecologies (PIEKUT 2014, *Actor-Networks in Music History: Clarifications and*

²¹⁵ [L'oeuvre conclut processus, tout en incluant le] tissu qui unit les différentes oeuvres dans une continuité de style, d'école et de tradition. C'est seulement alors que l'on peut véritablement « lire » et « juger » l'oeuvre, parce que, d'un côté, lire signifie exécuter et exécuter signifie rendre et faire vivre l'oeuvre comme elle-même le veut, et de l'autre, juger signifie comparer l'oeuvre telle qu'elle est avec ce qu'elle-même voulait être.

²¹⁶ « [Une conception dynamique] inscrit en même temps les oeuvres particulières dans une continuité qui les raccorde à travers le temps. (...) La conception dynamique (...) ouvre la voie pour considérer l'oeuvre d'art comme émergeant d'un humus historique. »

²¹⁷ Intertextuality and dialogism will be discussed in greater detail in section c) of the second chapter of the second part of the thesis.

Critiques) Vecchione²¹⁸ (VECCHIONE 1992) and networks (LATOURE 2007) in which the performance inscribes itself. Pareyson mentions a few case examples of such elements, that he describes as being exterior to the direct materiality of the work, but that nonetheless participate in our reading of it: respect for celebrity, fascination with antiquity, participation in the cult of classics... (PAREYSON 2007 (1954)) Although the case examples are certainly different in the case of free improvisation, the principle holds.

In free improvisation scenes too, audience expectations are never blank. No spectator could ever execute a kind of *ex nihilo* reading of the performance. In addition to being themselves musical beings traversed by their own musical and non-musical experiences, spectators go to a show expecting certain performance outcomes. Their judgment of any musical event always weighs the perceived outcome against the expectations that set them up for their reading. Who has never come out of a show thinking: "I did not expect to hear what I heard tonight"? Even if there are generally no specific works for them to expect and be familiar with in performances of free improvisation, the public's expectations can, as we have seen, be roused by any of the event's situational parameters and circumstantial details: venue, artist, event concept, publicity, branding, etc. For the same reasons that were mentioned in the previous paragraphs, this is a problem for performers who hold a purist *ex nihilo* perception of free improvisation and who may prefer their audience to abandon their expectations before the performance.

Many enduring, recognizable, stable, conventionalized ideas, places, habits and expectations support the execution and appreciation of improvised performances. Some may think, then, that everything in improvisation is prepared, after all. As I said previously, in the early stages of my research, I personally had to find arguments to respond to professors who told me that they did not believe in improvisation, that everything was already learned in advance. For one who claims that free improvisation must necessarily unfold *ex nihilo* in the purest sense of the term, this critique of disbelief can be legitimately directed to all of the ideological and practical problems mentioned earlier in this section. But it is important to stress that, despite there being many things pre-planned or learned in advance in free improvisation, these enduring conditions of creation function as necessary capacitors that enable the spontaneous

²¹⁸ Vecchione develops the key notion of "*écoréalité*", by which he means that the formation of a work is determined in the midst of a given anthropological and cultural ecosystem. The musicologist must then retrace how the anthropological environment leaves certain traces in musical works, and perhaps even redraw past ecorealities by using observable hints from works that are their concrete products. (VECCHIONE 1992, p.288)

improvisation activity. They have been designed to stimulate the emergence of new forms and relations in real-time, so that the performance may freely flirt with materials that are beyond the edge of the horizon of what the group knows.

To conclude this topic, contemporary improvisers' conception of freedom is often broadened and nuanced. Their activity, not nearly as dogmatic as that of the pioneers of their practice, is free to embrace new creative directions. They may exploit the freedom granted *by* the underlying strategies and ethical codes that are known to them and their collaborators, as well as the freedom *to* explore and utilize materials and ideas borrowed from any inherited tradition. The "freedom *from*" perspective lives on, in a relativized form, as an admittedly illusory utopia: an unreachable creative target that nonetheless nourishes improvisers' sense of playful enquiry and taste for deconstruction. Free improvisers, even the ones least inconvenienced by freely borrowing pre-existing materials, are drawn to this utopia like a kind of frontier that promises new materials, that offers fertile ground for their enquiry. For this reason, a preferred playground for many improvisers is the ground between the known and the unknown: what Steve Lacy refers to as the "edge".

g) The Edge

In *Art Worlds*, Howard Becker writes:

Every artwork creates a world in some respects unique, a combination of vast amounts of conventional materials with some that are innovative. Without the first, it becomes unintelligible; without the second, it becomes boring. (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.63)

If we choose to believe Becker, we can only deduce from this passage that an artwork, in order to be both intelligible and interesting, must offer a balanced mix of conventional materials and innovative ones. It must be on the edge of the known and the unknown, the old and the new. It is easy to see that free improvisers make a strong case for newness while, in many cases (especially among the pioneering generation), advocating a near total rejection of conventions. If their practice actually puts this perspective into action, then we should be confronted with a practice that offers plenty of newness for it to be "interesting", but that lacks the shared references that render it "intelligible". This raises two problems. First, while it is true that free

improvisation remains unintelligible for the public at large, there exist numerous passionate fans for whom the activity does make sense. This common understanding must be supported by some kind of convention; otherwise no participant would deem the activity significant in any way. Second, new materials can only be perceived as "interesting" if they emerge among other "duller" materials that will make them seem to stand out as something "new". An artist's proposition will delight and fascinate those who are able to measure the degree of its novelty, by seeing how it relates to the performer's performance habits, the practice's localized trends or the performance's current momentum.²¹⁹ Newness is always relative and can be gauged only according to one's understanding of the conventions and trends that support the activity at the moment of its emergence. Newness is thus never totally outside of conventions, but merely stretched the edges of them.

As a practice driven by emergence, an overwhelming majority of free improvisation's practitioners is invested into an enquiry into sound that focuses on newness. Most improvisers are concerned with the elaboration of new sounds, new sound relationships or new ensemble dynamics. They wish to push back the limit of consensus that makes up the horizons that they share with their collaborators. Improvisers exhibit this process publicly; their tentative enquiry into unknown reaches of sound organization is made observable in real-time to their audience members.

Before we continue, we should stress that, just as the features of free improvisation are distributed on two main levels (observable and underlying), shifts in consensus and horizons are carried out on two separate fronts, with very different transformation paces. The underlying concerns, attitudes, ethics and devices that make up the core of free improvisation may change and adapt to some degree and meet localized needs of some of its practitioners. If they deviate too much, however, they risk abandoning some of the identifying traits of free improvisation and being considered as outsiders to the practice. The story is different on the observable level, where manipulations of formal sound features undergo lightning fast transformations. Here, free improvisation does not explicitly dictate any particular treatment, other than the fact that the materials should be organized in real time. Horizons concerning formal features, shaped by localized collateral experiences and congenialities, are free to shift at any pace, in response to

²¹⁹ Note that this amounts to articulating the quality of a material's firstness to the other two categories that complete its meaning.

momentary needs. The life expectancy of a horizon is determined by the time frame in which the features that constitute it continue to act as conventions. In free improvisation, a certain configuration of a horizon may last only an instant, the duration of an "*entente*". This division guarantees that the practice can remain both enduringly coherent and profoundly dynamic.

The reason this distinction of pace has to be made is because the kinds of transient, fleeting, undetermined features that will be discussed in this section belong to the "upper", observable level of performance aspects. These elements are the ones most relevant to the ideas that will be discussed in this section, notably "*entente*", the "edge" and the cycles of emergence and deconstruction. Again, however, it is the underlying principles and parameters that allow the observable aspects of improvised performances to be as emergent and evanescent as they are. Devised to maximize emergence, these principles bring the process to the outer limits of consensus, where participants are in constant proximity to - and may freely overflow into - the unknown. The desire to push the line of consensus is not a trait unique to free improvisation: to do so successfully is indeed the mark of a successful artist, for which Pareyson gives the following description:

*The artist [...] if he is a true artist, rather than following a preformed sense of taste, innovates and even creates the tastes of his contemporaries - that is: he awakens them to the consciousness of the spirit of their time, and even to the realization of its indistinct and potential formative exigencies. That is why the artist always surpasses the taste of his time, and why we can say that art creates its own public.*²²⁰ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.48)

Free improvisation is an interesting case, however, because of the way that its enquiries challenge the horizon and overstep conventions constantly and in real-time. This is because, for many of its practitioners, the ideal sphere of action, and main focus of their activity, is the immediate vicinity of the furthest line of consensus. As the title of this section suggests, we shall refer to this preferred playground as the "edge", an expression that we borrow from Steve Lacy, as quoted in Bailey's book. "For me that's where the music always has to be - on the edge - in between the known and the unknown and you have to keep pushing it towards the unknown

²²⁰ « l'artiste, [...] s'il est un véritable artiste, au lieu de suivre un goût déjà formé, innove et même crée le goût de ses contemporains - c'est-à-dire éveille à la conscience et même à la réalisation de l'exigence formative indistincte et potentielle de l'esprit de l'époque. Voilà pourquoi l'artiste dépasse toujours le goût de son époque, et pourquoi l'on peut dire que l'art se crée lui-même son public. »

otherwise you die." (BAILEY 1980, p.54)

The edge exists only as the outline of the shared horizon of any given group. It is therefore bound to group constraints and can be said to delineate the repertoire of shared consensus of groups of any size - from a duet to an entire scene - and for any period of time - from a fleeting instant to a whole generation. It is pushed a little and redrawn with every performance act, every new sound, and every new usage of a recognized sound or act. As such, it is the dynamic place of action that welcomes emergence. It also serves as the ongoing front of improvisers' enquiry and deconstructive tactics.

Since every act helps redraw, and renew established conventions in real-time, free improvisation is always in a liminal state: a state of tension between past and new consensus. Past solutions make the activity intelligible, while new ones make it interesting and fresh. We could say that artistic value is located at the intersection of these two facets of the performance: on the edge.

Along with newly achieved consensus regarding useful and collectively recognizable materials, improvisers develop collateral - if not common - habits. The process indeed guarantees that all participants involved have had collateral experiences with objects that are accessible to all. We mean here experience in both senses of the word: *Erlebnis* (an event in the life of an individual) and *Erfahrung* (the sum of such events that accumulate throughout an individual's lifetime). Associations that are made during the musical experience become constitutive of new or shifted significations. As they settle through repeated usage, they can be said to constitute new elements of the group's horizon. Actions undertaken or observed by different participants over time thus gain meaning whenever they have been able to trigger subsequent actions. The solutions that "work" at solving controversies between the old and the new enter the repertoire of significant and useful performance strategies. The meaning of these musical materials and strategies can be described according to Peirce's concept of pragmatic meaning, where the meaning of a sign is equal to the totality of the practical effects that it has. In an improvised performance, they refer to past experiences with similar materials and strategies: did they "work"? What effects were they able to produce?²²¹ They are put to use and can integrate individual and collective performance practice habits, common sense and the general rationale

²²¹ It should already be noted that improvisers consider materials useful and meaningful if they "work", but they rarely have the time to think about why it worked.

surrounding the activity. Becker gives a good description of this.

Artists usually develop their own innovative materials over a period of time, creating a body of convention peculiar to their own work. (Groups of artists frequently collaborate in the development of innovations so that schools and artistic sects develop characteristic conventions as well.) [...] The artist may be learning them in the same way, in the course of the production of a work or body of work [...] So each work, and each artist's body of work, invites us into a world defined in part by the use of materials hitherto unknown and therefore not at first completely understandable. [...] The new materials then become conventional in the technical sense used above, being mutually understood by the parties involved so that they can assume that everyone involved knows and will use them in interpreting and responding to the works in question. (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.64)

Conventions such as these allow group activity to be sustained. However, in the case of a practice that, like free improvisation, is driven by an enquiry into newness, there is a limit to the degree to which the conventionalization of materials or strategies is desirable. Indeed, in a dynamic activity like free improvisation, unless conventions are given a new twist, this limit is traversed rather quickly. This is one of the ways in which free improvisation distinguishes itself: it tolerates a lesser degree of fixation, especially concerning the formal materials that its practitioners employ. Ideally, they can pursue their activity without their propositions ever achieving a degree of conventionalization that would resemble a code or language. Stévanche writes that the production of *musique actuelle* improvisers is "not yet language, not yet writing, nor even speech."²²² (STÉVANCHE 2011, p.73)

Consensus, then, may only be prolonged up until the point where materials or strategies begin to take a distinct, fixed shape, at which point they might already appear to be old and uninteresting. The activity must, then, be kept dynamic. The observable, formal elements of free improvisation in particular must precede and resist determination: they must remain in a liminal state, before things truly permeate the horizon. In this sense, the edge always precedes rules, codes and language. In the history of their development, edges are antecedent to horizons. In this sense, improvisation institutes rules: it is didactically and developmentally antecedent to composition.²²³²²⁴ (NANZ 2011, p.18) This is one of the reasons that free improvisation is so

²²² « Au-delà de la distinction entre écriture et oralité, les actualistes amorcent une autre marque qui n'est pas encore langage, pas encore écriture ni même parole ».

²²³ » Improvisation ist dann eine didaktische oder entwicklungsgeschichtliche Vorstufe zur Komposition. «

often labeled as a non-idiomatic approach.

Yet even when materials and strategies have permeated the practice to the point of being perceived as "too conventionalized", even when it begins to look like a formal pre-engagement, improvisers may find a way back to the edge. For free improvisation disposes of particular conditions of creation²²⁵ and many devices²²⁶ that allow its practitioners to always deconstruct a convention that has become crippled and dull. Since horizons on the observable level are continuously challenged by deconstruction and expanded by new compromises, congenialities and conventions, playgrounds that offered once edgy modes of expression have come to lose their edge. When a horizon expands, its edge is obviously displaced as well. Improvisers must then explore other frontiers in order to go back to the edge. Becker's text also accounts for this situation. He describes these artists as "rebels" and says the following about them:

The game of solidifying technical standards and rebelling against them goes on endlessly. To shift from art to craft and back is not carried out by individuals acting independently; such shifts are successful only insofar as they involve enough people to take over an established art world to create a new one. (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.298)

Yet even for this rebel approach, any excursion into novelty must begin at the edge of that which is already conventionalized.²²⁷ This is because "musicians can only play what they know to play. But they can learn on the spot and collective improvisation often allows this." (MORRIS 2012, p.8) Luckily, since free improvisation's conditions of creation are tuned to maximize emergence, it is equipped with devices that allow it to flirt with materials that are unknown, or rather that are exterior to a group's horizon. The practice is designed to naturally drift towards the edge, which is just as well, because this is the playground in which it really thrives.

In his book *Étude sur l'improvisation musicale: Le témoin de l'instant* (ROUSSELOT 2012), Mathias Rousselot speaks of alternating cycles of emergence (*cycles d'émergence*) and maintenance (*cycles de maintenance*). The latter are meant to preserve while the former are meant to perturb. We would like to propose an alternative vision, where cycles of emergence are

²²⁴ This idea resembles the one that Huizinga develops in *Homo Ludens*: that play is older than culture and is necessary in the advent of culture. We will explore Huizinga's concept of play in the final section of this second part of the thesis.

²²⁵ These will be discussed in chapter 3 of the third part of the thesis.

²²⁶ These will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5 of the third section of the thesis.

²²⁷ A spontaneous and short-lived accord - what we call "*entente*" - suffices for this.

preceded and followed not by cycles of maintenance, but by cycles of deconstruction. After all, when it comes to the observable materials and relationships that make up the content of improvised performances, everything is always meant to be dynamic. No doubt, these elements endure as collectively accessible materials and ideas for a given time and to a certain degree of determination, but maintenance is not a formulated concern of a process-oriented practice like free improvisation. When it comes to improvised performances, maintenance serves a temporary role; it is fleeting. This is because, according to the practice's unifying underlying principles, observable formal content is immediately deconstructed. Improvisers mainly practice deferral of determination²²⁸, not maintenance of it. On the edge, improvisers keep delaying the completion of the establishment of fixed signs. They favor signs that are still being negotiated. Their preferred playground is a terrain of negotiation. Their preferred materials are not pre-defined, but rather are still in the *process* of being defined. This process, rather than its result, is often their preferred focus. Free improvisers celebrate the intransitiveness of their performances' content.²²⁹

Instead of maintenance, we see the *deconstructive* movement as one that better defines the activity of free improvisation, its creative goals and, ironically, its endurance. For it is by simultaneously allowing materials to emerge and deconstructing them that the performance is able to maintain its momentum and the practice its creative relevance. Flowing alongside it, but also pulling at it, is a complementary movement: one of emergence and order making. These cycles, which we see as simultaneous, determine each other and maintain each other's momentum. For if we are to speak of maintenance in improvised performances, it should be maintenance of the process, not maintenance of the materials.

The process, as long as it remains on the edge, may be sustained indefinitely. Since materials may continue to emerge and be deconstructed, musicians' enquiry may be sustained. To oscillate between the accomplished and the still-being-accomplished is to be at the point of encounter of two texts: "the given text and reactive text that is still being created."²³⁰ (TODOROV 1981, p.40) This is how Bakhtine/Todorov describes the method of human scientific enquiry in general. Improvisation, as it favors the fertile liminality of the edge, benefits from these exact work parameters and is in this sense well suited for enquiry: participants are constantly reacting

²²⁸ This important idea will be developed in chapter 4 of the third part of the thesis. Deferral of determination creates vagueness, which is a strategy in group exchanges.

²²⁹ Notably by having a sometimes harsh dismissive attitude towards recordings.

²³⁰ « C'est la rencontre de deux textes: du texte déjà donné et du texte réactif en voie de création ».

to given texts and text fragments as they create new ones. Yet improvisers' enquiry aspires to no complete determination, exactitude, absolute truth, but rather wishes to ensure that their process remains fertile and their practice remains relevant. After all, the fronts on which improvisers pursue their enquiry - horizons of collectively useful, meaningful and pertinent materials - keep moving according to the changing habits of the expressive beings involved. The edge, which is also in constant movement, may guarantee a potentially endless potential for cycles of emergence and deconstruction, as long as nothing else interrupts the process.²³¹ Bakhtine/Todorov writes:

*The object of the social sciences is the expressive speaking being. This being never coincides with itself, which is why it is inexhaustible in its meaning and signification. [...] In the social sciences, exactitude consists in overcoming the foreignness of others without assimilating it to oneself.*²³² (TODOROV 1981, p.41)

Before moving on, a brief discussion feels necessary so that we may, from the perspective of the "edge", revisit the concept of *pre-text*. Indeed, in accepting that the edge - and not some blank slate - is the optimal playground and laboratory for improvisers, there is room to be more accepting of pre-texts. Being constantly on the edge of that which is determined and that which may still be determined, improvisers are well positioned to use the former to support the latter. This includes affirmative use of some types of scores - graphic scores, fragments, open scores - as long as these texts are able to help bring improvisers over the edge. Steve Lacy, evoking the image of an artist who is on the edge and ready to leap into the unknown, says:

If through that leap you find something then it has a value which I don't think can be found in any other way. I place a higher value on that than on what you can prepare. But I am also hooked into what you can prepare, especially in the way that it can take you to the edge. What I write is to take you to the edge safely so that you can go on out there and find this other stuff. (BAILEY 1980, p.58)

In a similar tone, John Zorn says:

²³¹ The process must obviously eventually take breaks, since musicians get tired, reach a state of satisfaction and, eventually, die.

²³² « L'objet des sciences humaines, c'est l'être expressif et parlant. Cet être ne coïncide jamais avec lui-même, c'est pourquoi il est inépuisable dans son sens et dans sa signification. [...] Dans les sciences humaines, l'exactitude consiste à surmonter l'étrangeté d'autrui sans l'assimiler totalement à soi. »

What I was really fascinated with was finding a way to harness these improvisers' talents in a compositional framework without actually hindering what they did best - which is improvising.
(BAILEY 1980)

Here, we see how pre-texts may serve as kinds of diving boards: as points of departure that are fertile in their own right. That most improvisers make use of such frameworks to stimulate their activity should suffice to demonstrate that their desire to remain edgy, interesting and relevant outweighs their desire to reject scores entirely. We may even soundly challenge the idea that free improvisation must be carried out without scores. The potency of the enquiry itself is a more characteristic desire among improvisers, even if this potency may come from the use of score fragments that are meant to bring musicians to the edge and beyond.

Yet even without the use of any kind of score, free improvisation stands on the edge of a vast hoard of familiar materials. However, if improvisers make no commitment to any particular formal code, if they strive never to let their materials attain any high degree of determination, and if they keep deconstructing all that emerges, how are any familiar materials brought into the interpretation processes of participants? The following sections will address this question and elaborate a corresponding model for free improvisation's mode of enquiry: one that is dynamic, deconstructive and playful.

2. - DYNAMIC, INTERDISCURSIVE, CONTINGENT, YET ENGAGING AND FAR-REACHING ENCOUNTERS

Since free improvisation is a process-oriented activity, and since momentary causal relations bear so much of its meaning, it is especially important to consider improvised performances dynamically. Any account of the role of idiomaticity in the free improvisation practice must be coherent with the fact that these performances generate meaning by maintaining, subverting and redrawing sets of meaningful relationships with antecedents, circumstances of actualization, and audience expectations. A number of aesthetic theories contemporary to the development of free improvisation do in fact encourage dynamic conceptions of art works; a look at these quickly reveals that they often express some of the same preoccupations that are voiced by free improvisers. The practice is thus in many respects ideologically coherent with thought development of its time; the underlying codes that govern it share similarities with those underlying other twentieth-century activities and boast typical traits of what we could call modern idiomaticities. The main example that will be treated here is Pareyson's theory of Formativity. It should be stressed again that the dynamicity of creative processes, and particularly of real-time collective ones, is of necessary interest for researching free improvisation, since it helps explain how improvised performances can be both emergent and coherent/meaningful at the same time. Actor-Network Theory, as an approach to social theory whose best-known proponent is Bruno Latour, also acknowledges the dynamic nature of its research objects by locating meaning in action and transformation. It discourages analyses of objects proceeding in a top-down manner, using ready-made categories, and therefore does not discriminate between, for example, a strictly social action and an aesthetic statement. By enabling us to use careful description to map out mediations that used to be the objects of different fields of study, it proposes an interesting way to overcome the divide between social, aesthetic, semiotic and technical descriptions of improvised works. In my paper *Retracing Fleeting Sounds*, I gave a detailed account of the potential of Actor-Network Theory readings in the field of improvisation studies.

a) Inherited Materials and Beyond

As we have seen, a quick reflection suffices to realize that no articulated sound or actualized musical figure can escape association: each sound mediates the action of countless human, material, technical and semiotic actors. On the other hand, it is clear that freer forms of improvisation get rid of certain forms of mediation upon which other approaches to music rely heavily: sets of preplanned musical materials, scores, audiences already familiar with the specific musical materials they are about to hear. Yet, despite their wildest inventive efforts, despite operating on the edge of conventions and pushing constantly towards the unknown, improvisers are bound to continue making extensive use of inherited materials of all kinds. Stévançe points out that:

*[...] through improvisation, the musician imagines, discovers, creates, expresses and carries out transformation. In the new musical process that he allows to be brought forth, he calls up new laws that derive from, but also transgress on, the ones that he invents. Indeed, innovative as it may be, the musical work has no less recourse to elements of the traditional vocabulary (knowledge of instrumental techniques, musical styles, musical language and notation - because we do compose the work) and to modes of production, distribution and reception.*²³³ (STÉVANÇE 2011, p.57-58)

Inherited and familiar materials and ideas, as well as the habits that govern them, are what give performers their power to act - their agency - and enable them as creative and interpretative beings. Otherwise, the individual would be paralyzed and unable to conceive of any way of acting creatively, unable even to identify situations where he could be brought to act creatively and recognize these situations as fertile points of departure.²³⁴ Furthermore, what enables group activity in a collective process such as free improvisation is continuous recourse to a body of common understandings, shared attitudes and commonly accessible devices. Without these, the group is unable to perform any task together. Stévançe indicates that the musician, even as she freely improvises without abiding to precise aesthetic rules, continues to respect a certain

²³³ « Par l'improvisation, l'actualiste imagine, découvre, crée, exprime et effectue de la transformation. Dans le processus musical nouveau qu'il fait surgir, il appelle à des nouvelles lois transgressant celles sur lesquelles, mais aussi à partir desquelles, il invente. En effet, aussi innovante qu'elle soit, l'oeuvre musicale actualiste n'en utilise pas moins certains éléments du vocabulaire traditionnel (technicité instrumentale, connaissance de styles musicaux, du langage musical et de la notation - puisqu'on la compose) et des modalités de production, de diffusion et de réception. »

²³⁴ Pareyson develops the concept of "spunti" as fertile points of departures at every instant in the creative process. We will make extensive use of this concept in section c) of chapter 2 in the third part of the thesis. (PAREYSON 2007 (1954))

language and a certain frame, be it merely a time frame, which guides the development of musical material. Still according to Stévançe, "non-idiomatic" improvisation, like any other musical activity, also produces its sets of conventions and does not eliminate languages acquired by the musician, nor does it erase her experiences with her collaborators (with whom she most likely has had the opportunity to perform in the past), feelings and emotions.²³⁵ (STÉVANÇE 2011, p.58) We would like to stress the qualifier "precise" aesthetic rules, because, although free improvisation is indeed subject to many rules and bound to its own kinds of conditions of creation, some of these rules are left purposely vague.²³⁶ They are especially far less precise or explicit - even almost non-existent - when it comes to the requirements concerning formal treatment of sound materials.

Just as every act of interpretation of an act is traversed by the involved participants' histories and experiences as creative and interpretative beings, every sound and performance material, too, carries with it, and constantly refers to, its past evaluations. Bakhtin/Todorov points out that:

*[...] the artist receives no word in a linguistically virgin form. Each word has already been inseminated by the practical situations and poetic contexts that it has encountered. This is why the poet's work, just like the work of any artist, can only accomplish so many transvaluations, so many shifts of intonation, perceived by himself and by his audience on the backdrop of older evaluations and older intonations.*²³⁷ (TODOROV 1981, p.77-78)

This again reminds us that there is no *ex nihilo* improvisation. Bassist Joëlle Léandre, in an interview with Stévançe, expresses that, as an improviser, "one chooses, but one invents nothing, or very little. To create is also to recreate."²³⁸ Stévançe completes this observation by affirming that "musique actuelle"²³⁹ works with the unexpectedness of elements that are ordered, existing and available in the musician's memory (be it simply by her mastery of an instrumental

²³⁵ « La musicienne, même en improvisant librement sans souscrire à des règles esthétiques précises, continue de respecter un certain langage et un certain cadre, ne serait-ce que temporel, qui guide le déroulement sonore. L'improvisation non idiomatique forge elle aussi ses propres conventions et n'élimine pas nécessairement les langages acquis par le musicien, ou ses expériences avec ses partenaires (avec qui il a sans doute eu l'occasion de jouer par le passé), sentiments et émotions. »

²³⁶ The idea of the strategic use of vagueness will be explored thoroughly in section b) of the third chapter of the third part of the thesis.

²³⁷ « L'artiste ne reçoit aucun mot sous une forme linguistiquement vierge. Ce mot est déjà fécondé par les situations pratiques et les contextes poétiques dans lesquels il l'a rencontré. [...] C'est pourquoi l'oeuvre du poète, comme celle de tout artiste, ne peut accomplir que quelques transvaluations, quelques déplacements d'intonations, perçus par lui-même et par son auditoire sur le fond des anciennes évaluations, des anciennes intonations. »

²³⁸ « On choisit, mais on n'invente rien, ou si peu. » « Créer, c'est aussi recréer, refaire différemment. »

²³⁹ We again extend her observations to free improvised music in a broader sense.

technique and her past experiences), rather than with the absolutely new.²⁴⁰ (TODOROV 1981, p.57) Even in a practice that provides no explicit prescription with regard to formal idioms, references to these inherited bodies of codes are made constantly.

From this point of view, an emancipated improviser is one who does not dwell on the fact that none of her contributions are entirely new. She instead knows how to retrace parts of the lineage of her performance materials, its *dialogism*, in the terms of Peirce and Bakhtin/Todorov. She then knows how to *deconstruct* (in the sense of Derrida) some of these relationships in real time and expose some of the materials' hidden potential by giving them new kinds of agency, new life. The concepts of dialogism and deconstruction as operating forces in improvisation were both described in Sophie Stévanç's book *Musique actuelle*. The next few sections will draw on her observations, as well as those of Bakhtin/Todorov and Derrida themselves. These ideas, as implicit operating forces in the practices of contemporary improvisers, as means by which musicians are able to bring their activity beyond that which is known, once again demonstrate free improvisation's intimate lineage to broader concerns of its time. But of more central importance to this research, the considerations developed in the next pages will continue to provide solid argumentation against myths that persist in shaping how some view free improvisation, most notably that it is totally emergent and fundamentally non-idiomatic. Furthermore, the ideas of dialogism and deconstruction in particular open up the discussion on how idioms are treated and integrated in the practice of free improvisation.

b) Dynamic Conception: A Work and its Process

Bakhtin/Todorov denounces two conceptual tendencies that he sees as reductive: the fetishization of the work of art as a thing, and limiting the study of art works to the psyche of either the creator or the reader. (TODOROV 1981, p.185) He is one of many figures of the twentieth century to call for a complexification of the conception of art works. Bakhtin/Todorov points out that the problem at hand would be quickly resolved if we managed, in a poetic work, to find an element as it simultaneously articulates its "signification" and its physical presence as a

²⁴⁰ « la musique actuelle travaille ainsi sur l'inattendu des éléments agencés, existants et disponibles dans la mémoire du musicien (ne serait-ce que par la maîtrise d'une technique instrumentale et sur ses expériences passées), plutôt que sur l'inédit. »

discursive object. This element should mediate between the depth and generality of meaning²⁴¹ on the one hand, and the singularity of the statement on the other. This mediation would then give us the possibility of continually passing from the periphery of the work to the core of its internal signification, from the external form to the internal ideological meaning.²⁴² (TODOROV 1981, p.64) The work's meaning articulates more than its manifest material qualities as an aesthetic object or its spiritual qualities as an aesthetic idea. Thus, different models have been proposed that put these aspects of works and performances in relation with elements that appear external to the "work itself" but that nonetheless contribute to our readings of these works. We already highlighted "ecological" (WISNIK 1989) (VECCHIONE 1992) (PIEKUT 2014) or "network" (LATOUR 1994) models of art works. Bakhtin/Todorov says of any statement that it is the product of an implementation, of which the linguistic material is but one ingredient; the other is all that the fact of enunciation brings to the verbal production, for example its unique historical, social and cultural context. This is also implied by Peirce's semiotic model. The decisive role of the enunciation's context in the determination of a statement's global meaning, and the fact that this context is, by definition, unique (be it simply with respect to time), allow us to oppose elements of language to instances of discourse, or statements, as that which is repeatable to that which is unique.²⁴³ (TODOROV 1981, p.44)

These kinds of conceptions become very interesting in the case of improvised performances, where the exaltation of the sound's overtly "ephemeral" material qualities has often taken the blame for the lack of formal study on improvised works. A dynamic conception of ontology, one that views all associations as movements, not as durable states or even as ephemeral states of things, becomes useful and necessary. Dynamic, "ecological", dialogical, or even plurivocal conceptions can also account for how interpretation of the emergent formal

²⁴¹ It should be reminded that Peirce's conception of generality includes not only rules and established conventions, but also abstract qualities that precede and outlive any specific actualization of it. His triadic model thus articulated two general categories.

²⁴² « Le problème posé serait résolu si l'on parvenait à trouver, dans l'oeuvre poétique, un élément tel qu'il participe simultanément de la présence chosique du discours et de sa signification; qu'il soit la médiation entre la profondeur et la généralité du sens et la singularité du son énoncé. Cette médiation créera la possibilité d'un passage continu de la périphérie de l'oeuvre au noyau de sa signification interne, de la forme extérieure au sens intérieur idéologique. »

²⁴³ « celui-ci est le produit d'une mise en oeuvre, dont la matière linguistique n'est qu'un des ingrédients; l'autre est tout ce qu'apporte à une production verbale le fait de son énonciation, c'est à dire aussi un contexte historique, social, culturel, etc., unique. Le rôle décisif du contexte de l'énonciation dans la détermination du sens global de l'énoncé, et le fait que ce contexte soit, par définition, unique (ne serait-ce que sur le plan temporel) permettent d'opposer les unités de la langue aux instances du discours, c'est-à-dire aux énoncés, comme ce qui est *réitérable* à ce qui est *unique*. »

materials of improvised performances is not limited to their simple material qualities and presence. The coherent understanding of these materials depends on associations with antecedents, with localized circumstantial elements, as well as an understanding of the conditions and habits that led to their articulation. By demystifying free improvisation as a form of expression that emerges "entirely" in the present - something that few improvisers uphold anyways - these conceptions open the door for us to begin retracing what really constitutes our understanding of improvised performances.

"Nearly all music exists in intertextual relation to compositional conventions and works. (...) It also exists in relation to sound structures in the social natural worlds outside of the music (sudden falling movement, tense climbing, gently stroked keys, volume and energy levels) and in relation to its past association with social situations, from its social patterns of employment." (DENORA 2000, Music in Everyday Life, p.13)

Moreover, the role of these intertextual relations is not to "enhance" the experience of music by adding something to the core formal aspects of performances. Rather, they are necessary for seizing the performance at all, as a meaningful object or event.²⁴⁴ This is, as debates Piekut, both its strength and weakness.

"Musical sound makes many differences in the world, but it is also a weak entity that requires entanglements; or, perhaps more accurately, music is a strong entity precisely because of the many entanglements that it is necessarily caught up within. Whatever music might be, it clearly relies on many things that are not music, and therefore we should conceive of it as a set of relations among distinct materials and events that have been translated to work together." (PIEKUT 2014, p.2)

Luigi Pareyson and Bakhtin/Todorov both proposed models that defend the dynamic nature of works of art by highlighting how the relations of which they are made are in a constant state of transformation throughout the process. Bakhtin/Todorov claims that the relationships between A and B are in a state of permanent transformation and formation; they continue to

²⁴⁴ Because dialogism is a necessary feature with all works, we cannot distinguish strictly dialogical works from strictly non-dialogical ones. Rather, works are more or less dialogical depending on the degree of importance and meaning that is given to the dynamic relationships that exist between the work's core and its process, antecedents, circumstances of actualization, as well as with the more peripheral elements of its "ecology". However, the inclusion of improvised elements, especially if they are explicitly presented as such, draws the audience's attention to the process and serves as an invitation to consider the performance for its dialogical value: for the dynamicity of its process and the agency and inter-discursivity of its participants.

change even in the process of communication itself.²⁴⁵ (TODOROV 1981, p.88) Each reading retraces significant relations between the core elements of the statement and its context of articulation, which is never seized twice the same way, but always contributes to the work's meaning. "The situation enters the statement as a necessary constituent of its semantic structure."²⁴⁶ (TODOROV 1981, p.67)

Both writers recognize both the inherited (general) and emergent (unique) aspects of works. Their dynamic conceptions promote the work's double status as a unique, non-repeatable statement and as an object bound to its conditions of articulation and determined by lineage to its antecedents. For Pareyson, the result cannot be separated from the process that leads to its accomplishment. A dynamic conception of the work of art is necessary. On a larger scale, such a conception places particular works in a continuity that connects them through time. A dynamic conception thus opens the way for considering the work of art as emerging from a historical fabric.²⁴⁷ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.72) In his book *Teoria della Formatività*, he first equates a work's materiality to its spirituality, both being aspects of the "form" that is produced, since each one of the artist's creative acts - the adoption of the material, the interpretation of it, every manipulation of it - has shaped the material object and left its mark on it. This conception, however, requires that those who contemplate a work of art do so by simultaneously appreciating the creative acts that brought it into existence, which he describes as the individual rules of the work. The central concept to Pareyson's theory is that there is an "inseparable union of production and invention - to form is to *make* while at the same time inventing the *way of making*". (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.85)

We should immediately point out a resemblance to Bakhtin/Todorov's "translinguistics", a discipline that studies statements not only for what individual content they present, but also for the laws that govern them. (TODOROV 1981, p.47) Of course, what is *produced* in improvised performances is essentially sound forms and sound form combinations. But in addition, in the same creative moment, what is *invented* is the individual way of making this particular work. These creative acts must be appreciated together. "This indivisible unity only has meaning if the

²⁴⁵ « En réalité, les relations entre A et B sont en état de transformation et de formation permanentes, elles continuent à se modifier dans le processus même de la communication ».

²⁴⁶ « [...] la situation entre dans l'énoncé comme un constituant nécessaire de sa structure sémantique ».

²⁴⁷ « Le résultat [...] est indivisible du processus qui en est le commencement et impose une conception dynamique de l'oeuvre, mais inscrit en même temps les oeuvres particulières dans une continuité qui les raccorde à travers le temps. [...] La conception dynamique (...) ouvre la voie pour considérer l'oeuvre d'art comme émergeant d'un humus historique. »

work is seen as the result of a process in which the various elements are in a state of tension and non-alignment, yet are seeking the way to their unity."²⁴⁸ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.71) "Art is a *facere* that is also *perficere* and the work reveals its own irreplaceable perfection only to the ones who know how to seize it in the process in which it coincides with itself."²⁴⁹ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.25).

This indivisible unity of object and process is interesting for us because it is implicit and inseparable from the way that improvised works are produced and appreciated. An important proportion of the performance materials of improvised works is determined at the time of their delivery, and, no less, is the result of real-time interactions in a collective process. The unity that is 'preached' by Pareyson and that is inherent to how we appreciate improvised performances is a further reminder of the process-oriented nature of free improvisation. Pareyson stresses the particular significance of creative acts and how our understanding of them contributes to our experience of an artwork. Improvised performances are a prime example of a work that represents the union of product and process since they coincide (CANONNE 2012). The "formed materials" are only made available for observation at the same moment as the actions and reactions that constitute the process that produces them; they are always appreciated at the moment when the process that yields them is yet unfolding.²⁵⁰ Perhaps more importantly, Pareyson's conception of the work of art highlights the significance of the actions and reactions that animate the creative process. Even if for little else, the sound combinations produced during an improvised performance find meaning at least as products of these interactions.

But for Bakhtin/Todorov, as for Pareyson, works demonstrate both completed or given (дoннoе - transliteration: *donnoe*), as well as emerging or newly created (сoздoннoе - transliteration: *sozdannoe*) features. (TODOROV 1981, p.80) Pareyson presents these aspects as types of statuses that works have at different steps of the process - the perfect completed work (*oeuvre formée*) vs. the work whose involvement in its formative process is still underway (*oeuvre formante*) (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.90). Bakhtine/Todorov, on the other hand, presents these as complementary aspects that are simultaneously embodied by any work, at any

²⁴⁸ « [Cette] unité indivisible n'a de sens que si elle est vue comme le résultat d'un processus dans lequel les divers éléments sont en tension entre eux et à la recherche de leur propre unité. »

²⁴⁹ « L'art est un *facere* qui est *perficere* et l'oeuvre ne dévoile sa propre perfection irremplaçable qu'à celui qui sait la saisir dans le processus par lequel elle coïncide avec elle-même. »

²⁵⁰ Even recordings document every step of the process, the trials, successes and failures that led to its completion.

moment when we appreciate it. The statement is thus never the simple reflection or expression of something that existed before it, given and ready. It always creates something that never existed before, that is absolutely new and that cannot be repeated.²⁵¹ With regard to this, we will retain Bakhtin/Todorov's account and eventually expand on it using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic model, which, because it proposes an indivisible articulation of different aspects of the sign, provides solid semiotic arguments in favor of the necessarily dynamic and contingent nature of works, *as well as* the inherent necessity for any interpretation to call upon habits that articulate inherited aspects of signs in works. This is true, even for works that seem highly emergent.

One odd particularity with Pareyson's account is that a work can only be appreciated as complete or be considered perfect once the process has come to a conclusion, at which point it finally becomes an *oeuvre formée*. As long as the process is still underway, musicians and audience members are thus still dealing with what Pareyson refers to as *oeuvre formante*. One consequence of this facet of Pareyson's theory is that improvised works, that can, by ontological necessity, only be appreciated as the process continues to be underway, can never exist as *oeuvres formées*. They are, from Pareyson's perspective, devoid of many of the properties that only "perfect" works have; most notably an overall form. Although Pareyson does discuss improvised works, he never proposes a model that accounts for the simultaneity of creative and interpretative processes, which is an inherent condition for the appreciation of improvised performances. His theory seems to imply that any interpretation of a work must come after, once the work is complete and the entire process can be taken into account, with hindsight. In this case, the audience member has relatively little agency in the creative process, except in the sense that the artist orients her creative acts according to how she projects that her work will be received. Bakhtin/Todorov's model proposes some additional nuances that suit our argument somewhat better, since it provides a better account of how a work is read as a meaningful event, even before it has been completed.

²⁵¹ « Le donné [danneo] et le créé [sozdanneo] dans l'énoncé verbal. L'énoncé n'est jamais le simple reflet ou l'expression de quelque chose d'existant avant lui, donné et tout prêt. Il crée toujours quelque chose qui n'a jamais été auparavant, qui est absolument nouveau et qui est non réitérable. »

c) Dialogism

Bakhtin/Todorov proposes a model where the reading of a work is seen as an encounter in which the reader and the writer are both active participants. He asserts that "the author (or the speaker) has his inalienable rights on the discourse, but the listener also has his rights, as do those whose voices echo through the words found by the author (because there exist no words that belong to no one)."²⁵² (TODOROV 1981, p.83)

"Translinguistics", also frequently referred to as dialogism, is Bakhtin/Todorov's new discipline, meant to study statements, rather than fixed, transcendent words and verbal entities. Statements, unlike the language that is the object of traditional linguistics, must be seized in relation to their situation of articulation, the process that produced it, and their antecedents, all of which are linked to the statement through dynamic "dialogical" relationships. "Each statement also relates to anterior statements, thus giving way to intertextual (or dialogical) relations."²⁵³ (TODOROV 1981, p.77)²⁵⁴

We mentioned "ecologies" before, where the work is made up of, not only its formal core, but the network of meaning-inducing relationships that link this core to other agents and features not typically considered as being "musical" and that, nonetheless, through their participation in musical events, help make up our appreciation of them. It is important to stress the relationships in these ecologies, for they, and not the agents themselves, are the bits of the model that generate meaning. Bakhtin stresses this contrast by preferring the term "intertext" to the term "metatext",

²⁵² « L'auteur (le locuteur) a ses droits inaliénables sur le discours, mais l'auditeur a aussi ses droits, et en ont aussi ceux dont les voix résonnent dans le mots trouvés par l'auteur (puisqu'il n'existe pas de mots qui ne soient à personne.) »

²⁵³ « Tout énoncé se rapporte aussi à des énoncés antérieurs, donnant ainsi lieu à des relations intertextuelles (ou dialogiques) »

²⁵⁴ An interesting thing worth noting about dialogism is that Bakhtin's descriptions often make it sound like he is talking about musical performances, or at least live events, notably, as we have seen, with his conception of the reading as an encounter, both unique and ephemeral. Even Bakhtin's terminology calls up unmistakably musical imagery. Stévanche points out that Bakhtin's linguistic and literary conception draws resemblances with musical vocabulary, notably for demonstrating how a single statement can be made through the encounter of multiple sources of enunciation. (STÉVANCE 2011, p.84) For example, Bakhtin uses the word "tone" to describe the type of rapport that exists between different participants, since this type of relationship can be deduced beyond what is explicitly said in the text. (TODOROV 1981, p.83) This concept of "tone" is very palpable in collective improvisation, where the sound content is the result of live interactions and where the audience may speculate on the types of musical relationships, even personal relationships, that exist between different performers. The term is all the more appropriate in this context too, since the "tone" is mainly inferred from sound forms. To give another example, Bakhtin describes highly dialogical works as "polyphonic" (as opposed to "homophonic", another musical term), and flaunts the complexity and depth of such works, such as the novels of Dostoyevsky. (TODOROV 1981, p.27) When one is more concerned with musical processes, as we now are, it is easy to forget that Bakhtin is describing literary phenomena. Although these concepts are meant to be applicable to social human activity in general and literary phenomena in particular, musical encounters lend themselves well to them.

which he chooses because the statement that describes another statement enters in a dialogical relationship with it.²⁵⁵ (TODOROV 1981, p.40) Moreover, these elements participate in it actively, as actors. The idea presents itself like a kind of forerunner to Actor-Network Theory, the approach to research described at length by Bruno Latour in *Reassembling the Social*.²⁵⁶ In these accounts, the performance is seen as an *encounter*, where meaning is drawn from sets of momentary significant relationships that Bakhtin/Todorov qualifies as "dialogical". In Actor-Network Theory, meaning is also generated by actions and relationships rather than by "facts" and objects. (PIEKUT 2014, p.10)

By describing agencies based not on how actors "are", but rather on how they are made to act²⁵⁷, we turn our interest away from universals or "matters of fact" and towards what Latour calls "matters of concern", a set of plural and contingent ontologies. (LATOUR 1994)

The encounter that is the performance or statement, in Bakhtin/Todorov as in Latour, thus takes a social dimension; the statement is the point of contact for different actors. Stévanche, drawing from Bakhtin, points out that we are dealing with universes that, without undergoing a total fusion, combine themselves into the unity of a single given event. (STÉVANCHE 2011, p.85)

For Bakhtin/Todorov, the artwork only truly becomes an artwork when it is involved in the process of interaction that takes place between the creator and the receiver; it is like an essential moment in the event that constitutes this interaction.²⁵⁸ (TODOROV 1981, p.187) However, the encounter as described by Bakhtin, who is primarily interested in literary works, is not usually localized to a single place and time; significant relationships that make up the encounter depend on mediation, most notably performed by the work, but calling into play participants from different times and places. The dialogical encounter manifests itself more palpably in the case of improvised performances, since many of the actors involved in the encounter participate at the same "present" moment. These temporal conditions open up new possibilities for interaction and feedback. Stévanche applies Bakhtin's principles directly to real-

²⁵⁵ « l'énoncé qui décrit un autre énoncé entre avec lui dans une relation dialogique. »

²⁵⁶ Actor-Network Theory will be discussed in greater detail in the following section

²⁵⁷ We should note an interesting similarity with Peirce's idea of *pragmatic meaning*, which, as we stated, he describes as the sum of the practical effects that are triggered by a concept.

²⁵⁸ « [...] L'oeuvre d'art [...] ne devient véritablement oeuvre d'art que dans le processus d'interaction qui a lieu entre le créateur et le récepteur, elle est comme un moment essentiel dans l'événement que constitue cette interaction. »

time events in her descriptions of *musique actuelle* performances, pointing out the activity's collective nature, where independent consciences interact freely. "We see here the idea of a generalized interdiscursiveness that draws on the principle of "dialogism" in order to describe this dynamic relationship that takes place between the discourses of a speaker and those of others, as they are all engaged in a common conversational project."²⁵⁹ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.82) Stévanche even points out that dialogism, as a mode of encounter on which the improvisation process thrives, allows musicians to achieve some of their more socially and politically tinged goals. Indeed, dialogism triggers a collective dynamic that takes shape around (1) the abolition of roles, (2) fellowship and the aesthetic need of others, (3) rejection of the distinction between amateur and professional statuses among participants.²⁶⁰ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.85) It should also be recalled that the kind of feedback that is brought forth by this type of real-time encounter guarantees the emergence of new sound combinations and relationships between all kinds of actors involved.

But even in the literary context that inspired Bakhtin/Todorov's model, the interpretation of a work constitutes a dynamic encounter that generates something that is both new and greater than its parts. Just as with the dynamic conceptions discussed earlier, any dialogical interpretation has emergent facets. Conversely, the encounter that constitutes an improvised performance constantly engages with statements that precede the moment of its delivery, that are more enduringly engrained in the social fabric. *Dialogism operates both in enduring and emergent ways*. According to Bakhtin/Todorov, sociality has a double origin: firstly, a statement is addressed to someone (which means that there is at least this micro-society made up of two people); secondly, the speaker is, himself, always already a social being.²⁶¹ (TODOROV 1981, p.69)²⁶²

²⁵⁹ « La musique actuelle est une activité collective où des consciences indépendantes interagissent. On retrouve ici l'idée d'une interdiscursivité généralisée relevant du principe bakhtinien, le « dialogisme », pour décrire cette relation dynamique qui s'effectue entre le discours d'un locuteur et ceux d'autrui, alors engagés dans un même projet conversationnel. »

²⁶⁰ « En effet, le dialogisme déclenche une dynamique collective qui prend forme autour de :

1-l'abolition de rôles [...]

2-convivialité / besoin esthétique d'autrui

3-abandon des distinctions entre les statuts professionnel et amateur. »

²⁶¹ « La socialité a une double origine: premièrement, l'énoncé est adressé à quelqu'un (ce qui veut dire qu'il y a au moins cette micro-société que forment deux personnes, le locuteur et le destinataire); deuxièmement, le locuteur lui-même est toujours déjà un être social. »

²⁶² We would like to recall our earlier discussion, in section d) of the first chapter of this section, where we explored the concepts of "horizons" and "quasi-minds", as expressions of the sociality of habits. Peirce also suggests that even

d) Actor-Networks and Contingency

Actor-Network Theory takes this idea further, highlighting the sociality, not only of humans, but of all kinds of agents that participate in a process and stimulate further actions. It is an approach to social analysis whose key methodological features can be summed up in a few points: rejecting the ready-made, recognizing the agency of objects, and generating empirical data from controversies and the contingency of ontologies. The method enlarges the definition of agency-bearing participants to include non-human actors, thus giving things an active role in groupings and dynamics. In the case of musical analysis, the method would insist that we give a realistic description of the associations that link musical materials to human actors and other agencies that musicologists have traditionally considered as "separate" or "nonmusical". The ANT researcher must see these different kinds of actors as being able to affect each other directly; "things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on". (LATOUR 1994, p.72) This perspective also helps simplify the way we understand both human participants and other agency-bearing participants as being traversed by their past relations and experiences, and how these histories affect their respective agency. One difference that we must point out, however, is that objects do not have the capacity to interpret signs, a capacity that according to Peirce only humans (beings endowed with a mind) possess. Their agency and the meaningful relations it entertains thus depend on how they are interpreted by human participants and observers.

"Every time a new group is alluded to, the fabrication mechanism necessary to keep it alive will be made visible and thus traceable." (LATOUR 1994, p.31) If, as Latour explains, the upkeep of groups depends on the constant mobilization of new means, ANT analysis should be able to account for what mechanisms improvised music mobilizes to compensate for the fact that it makes no use of scores or explicitly preplanned musical materials. Even more interesting and promising, it may allow us to retrace the actors that are constantly mobilized in improvised music to fill in for the constant sudden departure of some of its ephemeral musical materials, which ANT analysts would document as movements and translations. Improvisation offers many instances to observe this relay of agencies, these shifts, as they unfold in real time.

individual thought takes a social, dialectical format: "a judgment is something that ripens in the mind, and [...] there is a vernacular phrase which betrays the nature of the ripe judgment, the phrase "I say to myself, says I". [...] even in solitary mediation every judgment is an effort to press home [...] some truth. It is a genuine assertion, just as the vernacular phrase represents it; and solitary dialectic is still of the nature of the dialogue". (PEIRCE, CP 5.547)

New associations must constantly be made in order to ensure the ongoing existence of any grouping, which as Latour explains is "not a building in need of restoration, but a movement in need of continuation" (LATOUR 1994, p.37) This notion of "movement", which lends a provisional quality to all groupings (and not just ones whose overt ephemera is generally acknowledged, as is the case with improvised music), may further contribute to the demystification of improvisation, a practice that, as we have seen, is preoccupied with the continuation of its movement as a means of staying on the "edge". (Conversely, it is concerned with staying on the "edge" as a means of continuing its movement). Traditional musicologists who cannot easily account for the fleeting, non-stable qualities of the traces left behind by improvised forms of music often keep them out of their analyses. But precisely these aspects of improvisation guarantee that new mechanisms constantly *need* to be mobilized in order for the group to continue to exist. Even more importantly, improvised performances provide a great opportunity to observe how these new associations are called upon in real time! Since its upcoming sound content is always shrouded in uncertainty, and since sound is a particularly fleeting medium, the mobilization of new sound materials must be done quickly and constantly. Only then can the work be kept in motion. Because of the dynamic nature of sound actualization (or should we say 'movement'?) and the real-time properties of improvised creation, contributions vanish the moment they have been made. Shifts are made visible (audible) and retraceable at every moment.

Actor-Network Theory therefore brings us one step further than dynamic conceptions and dialogism: it allows us not only to affirm improvised performances' intertextuality and agency, but also to envision retracing it and, through careful description, identifying how improvised performances make use of inherited materials, how they are affected by them and how they subvert them.

Actor-Network Theory and free improvisation share another important conceptual affinity: they are both affirmative of the contingency and uncertainty of phenomena. Actor-Network, says Latour, is a term made to underline the uncertainty of the origin of the action. Ontology, as understood by Actor-Network theorists, is contingent.

Qualities do not float independently in some abstract aesthetic space; they are contingent upon all of the actors that practice, perform, inscribe, and localize them in concrete ways. [...] [O]ntology [...], therefore, is compound and contingent." (PIEKUT 2014, p.10)

In order to explain ontological contingency on the actor's level, Latour highlights the difference between intermediaries and mediators. While intermediaries "transport meaning or force without transformation", mediators "transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or the element they are supposed to carry". (LATOUR 1994, p.39) The bearers of contingency, therefore, are mediators. For improvisers who favor total spontaneity in their work, it has always been natural to invest in more contingent mediators and to attempt to do away with actors that may want to work as intermediaries: scores, labels, ritualized codes and practices (though all of these agencies too are mediated to some degree). Since the actors of improvisation already see themselves as mediators prone to contingency, following them and understanding them as such should come with little resistance to the ANT analyst, whose job is to do exactly this. The theory's definition of actor, it should be recalled, extends to everything that exerts an effect on other actors, including audience members, props, and even signs.

Traditional methods of musicology are likely to be unconvincing in their descriptions of chance operations in music. Though twentieth-century discourse has treated them as a structured compositional device, Actor-Network Theory, as a methodology that thrives on the contingency of mediations, would account for chance as the product of many contingent mediations working together. Actors are still responsible for the outcome, but:

[the action takes place] through a chain of translations that disperse, mediate and circulate agency. Agency is not concentrated on a single entity (...). It is leaky, enacted by collectives, individuals, and materials. (PIEKUT 2014, p.8)

Let us now consider *risk* as an expression of contingency in networks whose actors, according to the agencies described using ANT methodology, all have *active* roles. Improvisation, it is often said, favors chance and indeterminacy. But with the acknowledgement that all actors involved have an active role, it seems impertinent to believe that unexpected developments in collective improvisation "simply occurred" by chance. Improvisation, more so than mere chance, involves work, action, mediation, all of which are articulated by contingency. Piekut, in a passage highlighting the difference between indeterminacy and improvisation, begins by quoting urban studies scholar David Brown:

Risk repositions a vital informant of twentieth-century forms and expressions, chance, from a structuring device, or operation, to an unanticipated variable or stimulus. (PIEKUT 2013, p.156)

For Piekut, indeterminacy relates to structure and mechanism, while improvisation relates to stimulus and vitalism. He continues and insists that uncertainty or risk can allow advantageous developments:

In a risky world, good and bad surprises do not simply occur; they are produced through the improvisations of numerous actors, each enmeshed in networks of weaker or stronger associations that exaggerate or attenuate the consequences of these improvisations. [...] Evolution occurs in the gap between cause and consequence, where uncertainty is transformed into risk, then opportunity, then advantage. (PIEKUT 2013, p.157)

Drawing links between improvisation and human activity in general, he boldly asks:

If it is true, are there theoretical opportunities to be seized by taking improvisation – not chance – as not exactly nature's manner of operation, but rather, as the world's manner of emergence? (PIEKUT 2013, p.156)

Of course, in settings of collective real-time creation, when all actors (human and nonhuman) are improvising and taking risks, the continuation of the system's existence depends on a kind of trust between actors. Though it is doubtful that all participants share a single creative intention (or even that they are all participating intentionally), actors have faith in the actions of their "co-workers" and in the successful continuation of the task at hand. "Trust in the face of contingency is a key component of any expert system", writes DeNora. "The literature on risk and risk culture has documented how faith, as a foundation of trust in expert systems, is constituted from a 'pragmatic element'". (DENORA 2000, p.10) In the case of collective improvisation, the artist, for example, will have faith that her colleagues, her and her colleagues' equipment, their cues and body movements, their repertoire of shared musical materials and practices, will know how to respond in the face of contingency. Free improvisation makes productive use of this, using contingency as one of the principal engines that help maintain the process' momentum and trigger the emergence of new materials and relationships.²⁶³

²⁶³ Chapter 2 of the second part of the thesis (particularly section b)) will give greater substance to the idea that improvisation makes constructive use of contingency.

e) Plurivocity: Generality, Idiomaticity, Horizon and Entente

Let us now give a closer look to the far-reaching, sometimes "extra-artistic" dialogical relations that contribute to the meaning of improvised performances. In many cases, they are the ones that socialize participants: they make up the rules and habits that allow them to first recognize statements as significant, that institute congeniality, and then perhaps know how to give a coherent follow-up to the contribution in question.

*Art is also immanently social: the extra-artistic social milieu, when it acts on it from the outside, finds within it an immediate internal resonance. What we see is no longer two foreign elements acting on one-another: a social formation is acting on another social formation.*²⁶⁴
(TODOROV 1981, p.184)

The encounter articulates both the emergent sociality that characterizes the particular live co-presence of participants, and the underlying enduring sociality that gives generality to their statements. Bakhtin/Todorov explains that this intersection of the singular and the general, called "social evaluation", is an "*actualité historique*" (historical presentness) that gives meaning to concrete forms in present situations.²⁶⁵ (TODOROV 1981, p.184-5)

In a conception of free improvisation that acknowledges the necessity of referring to a kind of idiomaticity - even one that shuns the necessity of aligning itself to any formal codes - the substance of this shifted idiomaticity can be defined as any generality to which performers may have recourse during their encounter. Again, this may include codes of conduct, shared concerns and attitudes, performance parameters, and so on. However, free improvisation, by its explicit renunciation of any allegiance to specific formal idiomaticities, allows us to realize something important: although the range of appropriate repertoires of action in free improvisation is certainly wide at any given moment, certain ethical values and aesthetic concerns - such as respect, maintenance of balance, distribution of agency, and concern for coherence and pertinence - make it so that not any statement likely to be of general recognition is appropriate at any moment on in any encounter.

We prefer to give a definition of the "horizon" that places it, like the statement, at the

²⁶⁴ « L'art est lui aussi social de façon immanente: le milieu social extra-artistique lorsqu'il agit sur lui de l'extérieur, y rencontre une résonance interne immédiate. Ce ne sont point alors deux éléments étrangers qui agissent l'un sur l'autre: une formation sociale agit sur une autre formation sociale. »

²⁶⁵ . « Nous appelons évaluation sociale cette actualité historique qui unit la présence singulière de l'énoncé avec la généralité et la plénitude de son sens, qui incarne le sens dans une situation individuelle et concrète et qui donne à la présence phonique du discours - ici et maintenant - une signification. »

intersection of the relatively enduring generality of the practice's idiomaticity on one axis, and, on the other, the circumstantial parameters unique to the encounter. It is a repertoire of *momentarily* appropriate performance actions, a bank of potential statements that, should they be actualized at that moment, would achieve some degree of general recognition.

The horizon as a repertoire of temporarily appropriate action allows a narrower maneuvering space than the one allowed by the practice's idiomaticity. No doubt the most important difference between both fields lies in the formal sound content that can be produced. Whereas free improvisation's idiomaticity leaves the practice theoretically open to any formal sound content, the conditions of the encounter, the "*actualité historique*" of each moment, make it so that the repertoire of potentially pertinent performance acts - the horizon - is narrowed down to those actions that are ethically and aesthetically viable. The horizon does, admittedly, remain quite open in free improvisation, where the conditions of performance tend to oppose few formal limitations on what constitutes a "valid" or "significant" contribution. Furthermore, practitioners of free improvisation are encouraged to develop attitudes and skills precisely meant to allow them to remain open and ready, a predisposition to see almost any of their collaborators' formal contributions as fertile points of departure for their next move.

These formal contributions exist in networks of relations of causal linearity to the other sound forms of the performance that just preceded them (as well as to antecedent performances). Even though free improvisation imposes no formal idiomatic constraints to its practitioners, the immediate (and farther reaching) formal vicinity of every musical statement does impose such constraints and contributes to delineating²⁶⁶ the group's momentary horizon. Concerning every aspect of the improvised performance, but especially its formal content, the collateral experiences that participants share in real time establish short-lived generality that serves their immediate creative/communicative needs. Since we are interested in a collective process where creation and communication are not clearly distinguishable, each statement that is produced (out of the repertoire of potential actions that is the horizon) and that achieves generality represents a kind of understanding. I prefer the French word "*entente*", because, as we have seen earlier, in its

²⁶⁶ This "delineation" should not be viewed negatively, as a limiting factor. Rather, the horizon acts positively, as an enabler. It is also a necessary condition for the production of meaning; only because it links generality of rules to the uniqueness of the immanent concrete experience can the horizon be significant. For Bakhtin, the horizon is what enables a dynamic conception of art works. He states that this exigency of seizing language not only in the produced forms, but also through productive forces, finds its correlate, on the side of the receiver, in the insistence with which the notion of horizon is used (TODOROV 1981, p.36)

figurative sense, it refers simultaneously to the ideas of "understanding", "agreement", "good relation" and "complicity". Thus, we call "*entente*" any statement that, because it proposes a unique collateral experience and refers to elements of the group's horizon, achieves or establishes generality in a collective process. Because it commits to no formal idiomaticity, free improvisation depends on *entente* for its formal materials to achieve generality, even for a moment. *Entente* is the means by which the *formal* materials of free improvisation are deemed significant.

The momentary conventional value of *entente* is key in the case of free improvisation, because the rules of free improvisation reject the achievement of any fixed and enduring generality, at least when it comes to formal sound content. The performance materials of free improvisation, especially its formal sound content, must remain dynamic and liminal: on edge. This is another reason for us to insist on the dynamic nature of the horizons that provide performers with these materials that set the stage for (and are shaped by) cases of *entente*. The influence of horizons can stretch over any duration and any scope of applicability.

*[...] This common horizon on which the statement supports itself can broaden itself in space and time: the "innuendo" can exist for a single family, a whole nation, a social class, for the length of a day, for years and for entire periods.*²⁶⁷ (TODOROV 1981, p.65)

This is easy to observe in the case of free improvisation, because of the fact that the general applicability of formal sound materials can vary greatly. It may be limited to a single case of *entente*, shared by only two people at a very localized moment of a jam session. Conversely, it may develop into a farther-reaching trend that spreads to various improvisation scenes. Improvisation purists would insist on the first example and favor a quick turnover of collectively significant performance materials.

Before moving on, it is worth recapitulating and summarizing some of the terms that have been introduced or developed in the last sections, since some of the differentiations may be fine.

Generality refers to aspects of things that may underlie different occurrences and yet remain themselves despite their diversity of manifestations. According to Peirce, this concerns two aspects of signs: quality (or firstness) and rules of any type (or thirdness). In the latter case,

²⁶⁷ « [...] Cet horizon commun sur lequel s'appuie l'énoncé peut s'élargir et dans l'espace et dans le temps: le « sous-entendu » peut exister au niveau de la famille, de la nation, de la classe sociale, des jours, des années et des époques entières. »

generality may be likened to conventions. Idiomaticity and *entente* are, therefore, kinds of generality.

Idiomaticity consists of relatively enduring examples of generality (but only those whose generality is supported by thirdness). In free improvisation, it concerns any codes that help support the group's collective activity and make it coherent.

For us, the *horizon* is a momentary repertoire of potential performance acts that could be actualized and deemed appropriate, given various constraints specific to the performance situation. They respond to ambient generality in its various forms and propose contributions that could extend (or subvert) this generality into the future. Participating musicians and audience members will likely deem these contributions pertinent if these people have the capabilities and sensitivities that the momentary horizon prescribes. In short, they are repertoires of things that could "work". Finally, *entente* is a kind of collective and spontaneous take on the Bakhtinian *statement*, in the sense that it articulates the generality of a group's common understandings and the uniqueness of its concrete execution. But an *entente*, because it is achieved by a group that shares real-time collateral experiences, may also establish new and short-lived generality. In free improvisation, *entente* is achieved when participants reach a spontaneous understanding concerning the identification and function of an emergent performance element, in such a way that the contribution that is at the center of this *entente* may act as a mediator for ongoing creative and communicative operations.

3. - AN ONGOING DECONSTRUCTIVE, YET PLAYFUL ENQUIRY

a) Free Improvisation and Deconstruction

Sophie Stévançe describes *musique actuelle*, its method and attitude, as a deconstructive approach in the Derridean sense. We would like to acknowledge this perspective and extend it to free improvisation practices in general. By considering improvisers' approaches and their relationship to tradition in terms of deconstruction, rather than as a clear break or a total rejection, we may overcome some of the apparent paradoxes of free improvisation, such as how it manages to be at once both stable and dynamic, how it can reject determination of materials and habits while continuing to need to be actualized precisely through the determination of sound materials, and how it can sustain a tradition that precisely advocates rupture from tradition as one of its core principles.

Deconstruction, as a concern implicit to free improvisation practices, is one of the great contributions of Stévançe's book *Musique actuelle*. By bringing out some of her observations, we hope to first point out how this account is most apt at describing improvisers' activity. Of special interest is the way that a deconstructive perception of improvising methods allows us to consider them without estranging them from their lineage to contemporary and historically antecedent thought and practices. Conducting a deconstructive approach is, in itself, culturally and ideologically consistent with broader preoccupations in twentieth century western thought. We will use Stévançe's observations as a point of departure to discuss how deconstruction both transforms and institutes performance habits.

b) Relationship to Tradition and Establishment: Différance and Deconstruction

Stévançe, drawing on Becker, discusses the deviant aspect of the decision to pursue a career making improvised music. For her, deviance is more than just a motivation that drives improvisers or a mode or status to which they have been confined because of the establishment's failure to fully include them.

Deviance is the law of musique actuelle, not a "pathology" that has been attached to it, nor even a sign of an art system's failings or of a questionable selflessness that, under the guise of inspired creation, persists in feeding crude and incompetent productions. Quite to the contrary, it is the

system itself that engenders its deviances and pushes them to its margins. Musique actuelle is, to some extent, a pure product of this marginalization and permanently struggles to continue to exist by and for itself, peacefully deconstructing (while at the same time refusing to give the other cheek) contemporary musical rules inherited from a long tradition, in order to affirm its distinction and work as it may."²⁶⁸ (TODOROV 1981, p.192)

Thus, movements like *musique actuelle* and other improvised music practices have deviance at the very center of their method. As a creative practice concerned with innovation, free improvisation is politically charged; it targets inherited codes and traditions and it undermines hierarchies. As such, it is still consistent with the discourse of free improvisers from its earliest days until now. We discussed earlier the way in which the approaches of some improvisers have been coupled with ideological concerns of social and political nature. Concerns such as the desire of a new beginning or the dismantling of hierarchies are indeed inherently political. Deconstructive processes allow these goals to be reached.²⁶⁹ Stévanche reminds us that Derridean deconstruction is the subversion of "formal hierarchical oppositions that are inherent to all cultural institutions that let them appear in their works."²⁷⁰ (STÉVANCHE 2011, p.79) In the case of *musique actuelle*, which is generally also the case for free improvisation at large, "deconstruction takes aim, most notably, at the elitist side of music creation, but also at its industrial and entertaining sides." (STÉVANCHE 2011, p.42) These practices wish to "leave behind them traditional theoretical and musical conventions, or even those of music industries. Musicians must, therefore, deconstruct prefabricated designs in music."²⁷¹ (STÉVANCHE 2011, p.44) In free improvisation, this shedding of conventions, as we have seen, is ideologically linked to artists' yearning for more freedom.

²⁶⁸ « [...] La déviance est la loi de la musique actuelle, non une « pathologie » qui lui serait attachée en propre, ni même un signe d'un dysfonctionnement du système de l'art ou celui d'une abnégation douteuse faisant avaler, sous le couvert de la création inspirée, grossièretés et incompétences. Bien au contraire, c'est le système lui-même qui engendre ses déviances et les rejette dans ses marges. La musique actuelle est, en quelque part, un pur produit de cette marginalisation et lutte en permanence pour exister par et pour elle-même, déconstruisant pacifiquement (tout en refusant de tendre l'autre joue) les lois musicales contemporaines issues d'une longue tradition pour affirmer sa distinction et faire son oeuvre. »

²⁶⁹ Or at least reached to a point, since deconstruction does not raze all hierarchies to the ground, but rather replaces them with new types of hierarchies.

²⁷⁰ « On retiendra que la déconstruction derridienne est un *renversement* des oppositions hiérarchiques formelles inhérentes à toute institution culturelle qui les fait apparaître dans ses oeuvres. »

²⁷¹ « [...] L'actualisme consiste précisément à laisser derrière lui les conventions théoriques et musicales de la tradition, ou même des musiques industrielles. [...] Il va donc s'agir pour eux de déconstruire les schémas musicaux préfabriqués. »

Musique actuelle *tends to set aside compositional systems of which the entire western tradition is impregnated, and, in order to keep all of its freedom to create, gives itself the task of upholding a marginal attitude as it carries out perpetual investigation, interrogation, indignation, a resistance and disobedience with regard to norms.*²⁷² (STÉVANCE 2011, p.47)

Deconstruction indeed gives musicians the means to operate beyond or outside of establishment-imposed constraints, since each deconstructive act is a reaction against cultural institutions and the principles that it opposes.

Before we go any further with the way deconstruction operates within free improvisation, we must take a more detailed look at how the strategy works in general, and especially how it articulates the concept of *différance*, another central concept by Derrida. Deconstruction breaks down rules and dichotomies that are so implicitly engrained into practice that they appear entirely natural and impose themselves as such to cultured practitioners and observers. (STÉVANCE 2011, p.43) Deconstruction thereby brings forth some of an activity's features, devices, behaviors (and so on) that previously were not themselves recognized or attributed any meaning. These features become *différents*²⁷³. "*Différance* appears once a system's oppositions have been identified and the reading of the text has been engaged further"²⁷⁴. (STÉVANCE 2011) The uncovered features are seen as something other than that which surrounds them or that to which they were until now subordinated. These aspects of deconstructed objects and ideas become observable and meaningful in themselves so that they may stop being only implicit and semiotically transparent mediators for the conventionalized, symbolically meaningful, codes and forms that they support.

Musicians thus uncover and draw their (and their audience's) attention to aspects of sounds and sound combinations that had previously been taken for granted, having served as black boxes (LATOIR 1994, p.36) to deliver that towards which everyone's (or almost everyone's) attention was focused. Citing Derrida's *Politiques de l'amitié*, Stévanche writes:

Deconstruction is thus a "quest for that which is left over or still resists in the concept", for that which has been "forgotten, repressed, misconceived or never thought of in the "old" concept and in all of its history and that would still subsist", and that tends to destabilize positions of sovereignty, or commodity, on the basis of which theoretical discourse has always been

²⁷² « La musique actuelle tend à écarteler les systèmes compositionnels dont toute la tradition occidentale est porteuse et se fait un devoir, pour conserver toute liberté de créer, de soutenir une attitude en marge par une investigation, une interrogation, une indignation, une résistance et une désobéissance perpétuelles face aux normes. »

²⁷³ This is a play of *différence* and *différer*, or, in English, with *differ* and *defer*, since meaning keeps getting pushed back to new pairs of oppositions.

²⁷⁴ « La *différance* apparaît une fois les oppositions d'un système identifiées et la lecture du texte engagée plus loin. »

conceived".²⁷⁵ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.45)

Thus deconstruction, for improvisers, serves their double mission of defying establishments and innovating on their own terms. Sté Vance continues:

"For musicians of musique actuelle, it is necessary to outdo the apparent unity of music from the classical traditional tradition by submitting it to all that it includes, by breaking conventions in order to then, building up from these exclusions, establish new paths for creation, "unpredictable" ones that may allow them to "create again"."²⁷⁶ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.61)

c) Reduce, Renew, Recycle

But although conventions may be broken, nothing is ever truly destroyed in deconstruction.

[...] deconstruction in music, as in all the activities where deconstruction is applied, is never, let us recall it, destructive: it is the watchful gaze cast on the structures of domination that operate in music and society at large, in order to invent that which does not exist or affirm that which has been silenced by dominant musical thought in strokes of conceptual oppositions and their consequences. Musicians of musique actuelle explore these existing oppositions by exposing the deceit perpetrated by written music. The understructure then appears: order, purity, form, balance, unity or stability, features to which the musicians oppose disorder, mixture, imperfection, incoherence and uncertainties: order against improvisation, written against oral, purity of sound against raw noise."²⁷⁷ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.51)

Thus deconstructive methods do not undermine oppositions with the goal of eroding them into nothingness. Improvisers actively seek to reduce the influence of established conventions when these are seen as impediments. But deconstructed oppositions cannot be discarded entirely,

²⁷⁵ « La déconstruction est donc une « quête de ce qui reste ou résiste encore dans le concept », de ce qui a été « oublié, refoulé, méconnu ou impensé dans le « vieux » concept et dans toute son histoire [et qui] veillerait encore », et qui tend à déstabiliser les positions souveraines, ou de convenance, à partir desquelles s'est toujours pensé le discours théorique. »

²⁷⁶ « Pour les actualistes, il faut dépasser l'unité apparente de la musique de tradition classique en la soumettant à ce qu'elle exclut, en brisant les conventions pour pouvoir construire à partir de ces exclusions de nouvelles voies de création, cette fois « imprévisibles » afin d'« inventer encore ». »

²⁷⁷ « [...] la déconstruction en musique, comme dans l'ensemble des domaines où la déconstruction est appliquée, n'est jamais, rappelons-le, destructrice: c'est un regard porté sur les structures de domination à l'oeuvre dans la musique, la société plus généralement, pour inventer ce qui n'est pas ou affirmer ce qui a été étouffé par la pensée musicale dominante à coups d'oppositions conceptuelles et leurs conséquences. Les actualistes explorent ces oppositions en vigueur en démontant l'artefact de la musique écrite. Apparaît l'ossature: l'ordre, la pureté, la forme, les équilibres, l'unité ou la stabilité, auxquels ils répondent par le désordre, le mélange, l'imperfection, l'incohérence et les incertitudes; l'ordre contre l'improvisation, l'écrit contre l'oral, la pureté du son contre le bruitisme. »

since, as we have discussed under the light of dialogism and dynamic conceptions of works of art, the involved performers, their devices and habits, are all traversed by the memory of these oppositions and have themselves been determined by them. Even the deconstruction act itself, as well as the ensemble of relationships that is established as a result, are determined by the networks of relationships and oppositions that preceded, and led to, the deconstructive act. New creative acts recycle the newly exposed aspects of deconstructed rapports. For deconstruction is not rewriting, but is the writing of a new text. (STÉVANCE 2011, p.48) We are also left with new sets of habits and new relations. Although the original source is now gone, at least in its previous configurations and the sets of relations in which it was involved, it is survived by new sets of meaningful relations. For Derrida, says Stévançe, there is no more original source. (STÉVANCE 2011, p.42) Freed from oppositions and contexts that have been deconstructed, new sets of relations and oppositions become visible; ideas and meanings shift.

Stévançe describes how, in the context of improvised music, deconstruction may be operated either on the broader scale of performances' cultural context of actualization, or within individual performances.

*The strategy of deconstruction acts intrinsically (it allows musicians to locate the systems of oppositions and the controversies represented within works in order to bring them further, even engendering new ones) and extrinsically (by allowing musicians to target cultural hierarchies imposed by society and understand the rejection and dismissal of sub-cultures or counter-cultures towards its peripheries). Musique actuelle, as a current, shares precisely these concerns.*²⁷⁸
(STÉVANCE 2011, p.45)

Both fronts, intrinsic and extrinsic, are, as we have seen, areas of interest for improvisers who make them the laboratory of their creative enquiry, where they seek to prompt either momentary emergence of new forms, or more lasting innovation. Both fronts, therefore, are open to shifts in the ideas and relations that deliver their meaning.

Considering first the sets of relations that animate the organization of individual improvised performances, since the tendency towards subversion, the desire to reduce the pressure of constraints and the taste for emergence are often great, and since the live performance

²⁷⁸ « La stratégie de déconstruction agit donc de manière intrinsèque (elle permet de repérer les systèmes d'oppositions et les apories représentés au sein des oeuvres pour les mener plus loin, jusqu'à en engendrer des nouvelles) et extrinsèque (en permettant de cibler les hiérarchies culturelles imposées par la société et de comprendre le rejet et le renvoi des sous-cultures ou contre-cultures dans ses périphéries). Le courant de la musique actuelle partage précisément ces visées. »

offers continuously renewed opportunities for deconstruction - indeed each performance act challenges constraints and institutes new relations - these sets of relations are, by default, of very brief and localized significance. The performance is in a constant state of renewal, its meaning continuously deferred.

To give an example of this type of shift operating on a broader extrinsic level, let us return to the idea of freedom as discussed in the previous chapter. The way it is viewed and articulated in free improvisation practices has undergone shifts according to changes in the way it is put in relation with tradition. Tradition, understood as an obstacle, as a capacitor or as a repertoire to be explored and used at will, can thus frame different conceptions of freedom. Deconstruction allows us to shift between these conceptions, even to reconcile them in ways that at first seemed paradoxical.

It is also worth mentioning the dichotomy that opposes pre-planned and emergent forms, since, as we have already defended repeatedly, an account of free improvisation that presents it as fully emergent is untenable. Deconstruction of this particular opposition, the results of which can be observed in more contemporary free improvisation practices, was therefore an essential step for free improvisation to come to terms with some of the philosophical problems that animated the discourse of improvisation pioneers. Until the mid-twentieth century, western erudite music had been so completely dominated by score-based musical works that the idea of musical forms being determined in real time could only be put into practice once the supremacy of pre-planned musical forms had been undermined. Following a series of twentieth century innovations that helped deconstruct the dichotomies that excluded emergent forms from being considered legitimate in performance situations (sound vs. noise, order vs. chaos, expected vs. unexpected, etc.), improvisation pioneers then glorified emergent forms and sought to grant them a kind of exclusive legitimacy. Although they probably hadn't set out to institute a new hierarchy of sound, they essentially did this by preaching a capsized version of the previous opposition. But since musicians involved in free improvisation pursue deconstructive methods, it was only natural that they would revisit the dichotomy opposing pre-planned and emergent forms. The movements that carry the torch of free improvisation pioneers thus tend to recognize and assume both the pre-planned and emergent values of their performance materials. But an even better sign that this opposition has been successfully deconstructed is that the two kinds of treatments that it kept apart are now acknowledged as happening simultaneously. It is even difficult for participants and

(especially) audience members to identify that which may have been created on the spot from that which has been specified by score fragments, guidelines and performance practice habits and trends. These statuses have penetrated each other. Any pre-planned guidelines stipulate an openness to emergence and are formulated under the assumption and acknowledgement that the resulting performance, and each of its materials, will be both planned and emergent.

d) Making the Most of Anomalies

It matters little in collective artistic creation that the exchanges be marked by misunderstandings and misconceptions about others, their intentions, and the relations that they entertain with them. Exchanges are, one way or another, always marred by some degree of contingency. Besides, we have already suggested repeatedly that chances of emergence increase in situations where participants' encounters put them at odds with each other and anomalies are left to be dealt with. We also said that contingency and conflict are necessary in free improvisation in order to fuel the process with fertile anomalies. We seem to be in an interesting paradox where improvisers require both recognition and misconception, both agreement and contingency. We may, however, disentangle this situation by exploring once again the same two *fronts* that were described in the first chapter of the third part: the unifying underlying principles that support the collective activity of improvisers - its code of conduct, idiomaticity and most lasting thirdness - on the one hand; and, on the other, those aspects of the improvised performance that are left to real time emergence and organization and that are not directly prescribed by any explicit pre-text or pre-engagement. These include its formal sound materials and the nature of the interactions between its participants (elements that, in Peircean terms, best represent the work's firstness and secondness, eventually moving towards a localized thirdness as groups give them significance). It must be reminded that the underlying principles of free improvisation have been selected, developed and established precisely in order to allow the determination of these latter aspects of free improvisation to be left more or less entirely up to the dynamic and fortuitous circumstances of the present moment. Their activity is designed to strive in uncertain conditions; the skills that they develop demonstrate their true virtue and appeal when ongoing happenings compel them to engage with the present moment and with each other. Then,

returning to our question, we may propose that the free improvisation practice is organized in such a way that, while agreement and recognition govern its unifying underlying principles, the activity that is supported by these principles allows participants to make constructive use of contingency and misconception, both anomalies that require and, better yet, *enable* the real time determination of other aspects of improvisation, such as the formal sound content and action sequences that are unique to each performance.

Becker writes that changes "attack, ideologically and organizationally, the standard activities of that art world at that time. He continues saying that "fundamental changes [require] people to do what none of them know how to do". (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.304) If we consider this on the "front" of free improvisation's underlying unifying concerns, values, attitudes and methods of free improvisation, it seems difficult to envision upsetting such fundamental aspects in any drastic way without jeopardizing the identity or coherence of the activity. These principles, being its more stable idiomaticity, could only suffer slight, gradual changes in how they are integrated within the practice. Otherwise, a rogue artist may risk being considered *hors-jeu*: as an outsider to the activity. Then again, artists sometimes are intent on proposing this radical challenge to their collaborators.

When we consider Becker's observation within the context of the sound organization and group dynamics of free improvisation, the story is entirely different. These aspects are meant to be deconstructed, renewed and redrawn perpetually and never attain any lasting durable fixation. Upsetting anomalies are, then, desirable. Even anomalies signaling fundamental changes in the treatment of sound organization or group dynamics (new ensemble combinations or extended techniques, for example) could be seen as welcome challenges as long as the musicians are willing to "go there". This is all the more likely if the deviation appeals to the participants' spirit of enquiry.

Thus, despite having a code of conduct that encourages inclusion and respect of all participants, the challenge imposed by anomalies and the potential fruitfulness of the negotiations that ensue can motivate improvisers to throw curveballs at each other. Speaking of such curveballs, Tena Palmer says:

*Oh yeah! That's all completely valid! My tendency is maybe... I was going to say MORE to throw a curveball than to integrate, but it's probably 50/50. I have no qualms about it because it's coming from a very strong flow of music. [...]
I'm thinking of these situations where people don't know what to do with these curveballs - I've*

been in situations where some participants were maybe not as skilled at free improv and it's really tough. It's like they're not listening. And you lose your connection to the moment because you get interrupted and disturbed. I try to be the best musician that I can. Try to interact with it if it's possible to make some music. (PALMER 2015)

By relating the ability to accept these curveballs to the skills expected of a good improviser, Palmer effectively reserves a place for it within the free improvisation practice's code of conduct. Derek Bailey calls these curveballs *mutual subversion*.²⁷⁹ In an interview with him, Hugh Davies discussed the way his group, the Music Improvisation Company, made use of this strategy to push on the limits of its members' shared horizon.

Had my action been on a verbal level, it could have been interpreted by an observer as being rather cruel, but it was more in the nature of teasing and at the same time intended to create a mutually stimulating musical tension. This is only possible when improvising musicians know each other well enough for a common language to have come into being, and a mutual trust in each other permits one to push against the limitations of that language and the relationships on which it is based. (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.305)

In a practice like free improvisation, whose live enquiry into sound and group dynamics is playful and has open-ended creative goals rather than fixed scientific ones, contingency and conflict are important driving forces. Musicians may be driven by intentions, but the objectives or ideals are vague, especially with regard to their eventual formal properties. Improvisers set up the conditions of their process in such a way that they constantly stumble upon unexpected materials that may launch their activity in an interesting new direction. In the best cases, the results are more interesting than anything that the given situation could have left to expectations. But in all cases, the results can at least serve as a point of departure for subsequent contributions and exchanges, thus helping to keep the process moving. The durability of the process and, on a longer scale, the enduring relevance of the practice as a deconstructive activity, depend on improvisation's continued success in triggering the emergence of new significant relationships, sound combinations and interactive dynamics. Materials should settle only as much (and for as long) as is necessary for them to serve as relay points: as points of departure for renewed sequences of sounds and actions.

Anomalies also reveal the bounds of a group's horizon, since any observable controversy

²⁷⁹ Special attention will be given to this idea in section d) of the second chapter of the thesis' third part.

indicates that these bounds have been challenged or overstepped.²⁸⁰ The interactions and real-time dialogism that constitute the collective creative process of free improvisation create situations of encounter, where real disparities between individual habits, interpretations and intentions are made manifest in the form of observable controversies. Each contribution during improvised performances seeks to propose a solution to whatever controversy²⁸¹ or tension is palpable at that given moment, while at the same time it necessarily institutes new observable gaps that then require subsequent attention. But perhaps "solution" and "controversy" are not the most appropriate words, for the emergent anomalies, aside from being a natural and necessary condition of collective activity, are not something that improvisers tend to want to try to overcome or diminish. They are their real-time inspiration. The last thing that improvisers want is for their activity to be put to rest and drained of its fortuitousness, impetuousness and serendipity. In fact improvisers may seek to widen the gap, as Anthony Pay and Hugh Davies' testimonies made evident in the previous sections.

The key, then, appears to be the execution of cycles that perform both deconstructive *and* order-making processes. The two tendencies must continuously pull at each other in order for the process to be maintained and the practice to remain interesting and pertinent. These apparent antagonists support each other in improvisation. "Music is conceived according to a dialogical principle unifying antagonistic terms (order/disorder) capable of maintaining duality in unity."²⁸² (SIEGER 2012, p.151)

Since "the incompatibility of our local universes is inevitable" (ESCLAPEZ 2013, p.46), contingency cannot be separated from the idea of a collective process. Every contribution, if even only a little, necessarily spills over the body of habits that each member of the group may have or that all members may share. Each new contribution, by necessity, is thus the site of some controversy between participants: precisely the controversies that trigger subsequent contributions. Eternal contingency means potentially eternal creative points of departure. For those who know how to benefit from it, a collective format for free improvisation serves as an

²⁸⁰ The use of the term "controversy" again hints to Latour, who calls for descriptions of social phenomena that respect the definitions and orders established by the actors themselves. Thus "to regain some sense of order, the best solution is to trace connections between the controversies themselves rather than try to decide how to settle any given controversy". (LATOUR 2007, p.23) In our case, controversies make phenomena observable not only to spectators or analysts, but also to the musicians themselves.

²⁸¹ For our purposes, it is possible to define "controversy" as an observable case of contingency.

²⁸² « Musique conçue selon principe *dialogique* unissant des termes antagonistes (ordre/désordre) permettant de maintenir la dualité dans l'unité. »

engine tirelessly triggering emergence. Thus, in theory, the collective format of free improvisation provides participants with an inexhaustible yield of material, as long as the participants are not themselves otherwise exhausted or incapable of seizing the opportunities that are presented to them by these conditions.

Deconstruction and order-making, the two movements that continuously animate the improvisation practice, indeed require controversies. But these operations also cannot be pulled off without conventions. As was argued previously in our discussion on the semiotics of free improvisation, in order to be able to seize these opportunities or even to be able to deem them significant and worthy of development, participants need them to be, at the very least, accessible to the interpretation of those involved. Thus, while contingency and misunderstanding cannot be separated from the idea of collective work, neither can convention and understanding.²⁸³ Only through the observance of some kind of convention are musicians able to be conscious of - and contribute to - the ongoing process. "Being self-conscious about the process, [...] [trained] artists can predict accurately because the artistic process is so conventionalized." (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.203)

Ornette Coleman, like John Zorn, highlights the importance of an ensemble's personnel and the relationships that characterize their interactions on the outcome of the performance. While he grants total freedom to the musicians of his group, he trusts that the liberties that they choose to explore will not come into conflict with the ensemble's common objectives. At the very least, the group shares ethical preoccupations that, at the time of performance, find an aesthetic expression.

The musicians have complete freedom, and so, of course, our final results depend entirely on the musicianship, emotional make-up and taste of the individual member. Ours is at all times a group effort and it is only because we have the rapport we do that our music takes on the shape that it does. A strong personality with a star-complex would take away from the effectiveness of our group, no matter how brilliantly he played. (COLEMAN 2011 (1959), p.254)

Indeed, the effectiveness of the group, even one whose operations are designed to pursue deconstructive goals, requires basic conventions: devices that enable these operations to be undertaken. At least the most basic of these will have to be understood by other participants, such as audience members, who are involved in the process in a less active way, but must nonetheless

²⁸³ We again use convention, a typical idea of thirdness, to designate any understanding that supports and enables the collective activity of a group.

make sense of what is happening.

Conventions known to all well-socialized members of a society make possible some of the most basic and important forms of cooperation characteristic of an art world. Most important, they allow people who have little or no formal acquaintance with or training in the art to participate as audience members. [...] Knowledge of these conventions defines the outer perimeter of an art world, indicating potential audience members, of whom no special knowledge can be expected. (BECKER 2008 (1983). p.46)

Here, Becker proposes a way of delineating the collectivity at large. Members of the free improvisation community can be described as the totality of people who are familiar to some degree with its devices and principles. But degrees vary and the notion of belonging (or not) to a community necessarily becomes a blurry affair. Becker implies that knowledge of the most basic conventions allows people to participate in the most basic ways and "defines the outer edge of an art world". But again, since the kind of knowledge and participation may vary, even this outer edge cannot be traced clearly.

In the case of free improvisation, it is interesting to evoke once again the case of artists that, often driven by social ideals, try to propose an approach to improvisation that is completely inclusive and open to the participation of all people. They promise an approach to improvisation that does away with the idea of the community's outer edge. In order to do this, they propose conditions of creation where, in addition to committing to no formal pre-engagements, there are allegedly no requirements concerning technical proficiency or familiarity with specific creative devices. The idea is that there are then no obstacles preventing absolutely anybody from participating. A famous example of this is Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Learning*, a piece that "grew out of Cardew's desires to bring together a large group of untrained or "non-specialist" people as performers". (KENNEDY 1994, p.5)

However, in order for the collective activity to be made possible, the participants not only had to abide certain aesthetic and ethical principles²⁸⁴, but they were supported by detailed guidelines and graphic representations. "[It] is a comprehensive and exhaustive working through of material, though in this case the material is not so much graphic as it is social, presenting the

²⁸⁴ Most of *The Great Learning* was written with the *Scratch Orchestra* in mind, an orchestra whose guiding principles were clearly written out by Cardew, almost in the form of commandments, in *A Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution*. Additionally, the work is based on one of the four classic Confucian books, the text of which was then modified to reflect the composer's Maoist and Marxist-Leninist beliefs at the time. The performers were likely aware of these preoccupations.

performers with tangible musical materials and situations that allow for and encourage the development of more democratic performance situations." (KENNEDY 1994, p.6) These instructions are more elaborate than those usually required by "specialist" improvisers. We are indeed left to doubt whether the experiment would have been possible had the guidelines been any less detailed. If we pursue the reasoning that has been presented thus far in this thesis, we should be inclined to believe that, in collective operations, the abolition of some conventions must be accompanied by the institution of others. Maria Fantinato Géo De Siqueira, in her dissertation on contemporary improvisation and experimental music scenes in Rio de Janeiro (SIQUEIRA 2013) begins with a personal anecdote that supports this idea and poses the first problem of her research. In short, a group of friends, none of whom has any musical formation or experience, decides to form an improvisation ensemble, only to realize in the first minutes of their first experimentations that they are almost completely incapable of producing anything without setting out from a given text or drifting to those rudimentary skills that *are* familiar to them.²⁸⁵

Yet if we consider emergence and dynamicity as they are brought about by free improvisation's deconstructive operations, it also becomes apparent that some of the practice's strength comes from the fact that some of its conditions of creation, notably its collective nature, promote discord. Otherwise, you can never truly reach plurivocity. To summarize: free improvisation requires both controversy and collaboration. This apparent paradox is easily explained when we retrace the way that each of the two opposing movements is allocated mostly to a different set of the practice's aspects. On the one hand, formal materials and group dynamics are purposely submitted to discord and anomalies in order to stimulate innovation and novelty. All the while, underlying principles and conditions act as conventions that help trigger these anomalies and support musicians' real-time treatment of them.

But how do improvisers interpret and treat these controversies? We must give closer consideration to the conditions that allow improvisers to overcome highly contingent materials in order to pursue their collective activity. Much of this has to do with the particular purposes that humans give to music and the particular semiotic treatment that they make of it.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Siqueira mentions reading passages from a book and instinctively seizing the pandeiro: the only instrument present that she had toyed around with.

²⁸⁶ This will be tackled in chapter 4 of the 3rd part.

e) Consequences for Dynamicity and Enduring Relevance

The consequences and advantages of having a practice driven by cycles of deconstruction and emergence are, in many ways, conveniently consistent in many ways with the concerns of the practice of free improvisation. Stévanne illustrated how deconstruction strategies allow improvisers to maintain an attitude of defiance towards institutions and how it allows them to move beyond inherited conventions.

We may suppose that deconstruction provides a means for improvisers to pursue all kinds of creative ideals, such as maximizing real-time emergence of new sound combinations and actualizing shifting social dynamics. This idea is not without difficulties, however, since the meaning of whatever ideals it is that they have targeted (such as freedom) have their meaning shifted as the deconstructive activity is pursued. Whatever goal-oriented enquiry they have undertaken may, then, never come to any satisfactory halt or completion. Deconstruction's safer promise is its guarantee to keep the improvisation activity in motion by supplying it endlessly with new oppositions and relations to deconstruct. Oppositions that have been left behind are replaced by new sets of significant relations and there is always a new landscape left over that may in turn be deconstructed afterwards. Free improvisers, as they employ deconstruction strategies, therefore thankfully do not drift towards nothingness. Meaning is thus constantly deferred and always dynamic. Although some improvisers may not recognize that the emergent aspects of their practice arise from new associations traced between inherited elements, the dynamicity of their activity is deeply acknowledged by musicians and engrained in the concerns and devices that make up their practice.

Furthermore, the fact that deconstructive strategies always institute new networks of significant relations that may undergo subsequent deconstruction - this fact guarantees that free improvisation, as long as its motion is maintained, remains inherently dynamic. The "edge": their lab, liminary playground and preferred area of action, continues to open itself to musicians despite their ongoing determination and deconstruction of forms and significant relations. The fertility of this liminary space is enhanced by the collective nature of deconstructive strategies in free improvisation, which necessarily entail contingency as the group collectively tackles newly instituted forms and relations. However, the collectiveness of the process is precisely what provides the different participants with instantaneous collateral experiences and congeniality. Improvisers, as long as their activity is kept in motion, will never run out of new things to

deconstruct; they are turned towards the future. A particular instant of a performance, constructed over a buildup of a few minutes, can be perturbed and interrupted, should a new contribution be imposing and convincing enough to do so. If it truly succeeds it will have not only interrupted the previous instant of cohesion, but also have served as the point of departure for the next developments. Along with this guarantee of enduring dynamicity and newness comes the hope that the practice is equipped to remain indefinitely relevant from a creative point of view.

f) - Playful Enquiry

Bailey affirms that there is "a natural correspondence between improvisation and empiricism." Most musicians, after all, learn to improvise by accident, or by a series of observed accidents, by trial and error. (BAILEY 1980, p.8) Improvisation itself is playful enquiry.

Improvisers tend to give higher importance to the enquiry value of their process than to the mass appeal of their performances. Alain Brunet confides in Sophie Stévance, saying that improvisation is "research music [...] and is not easily accessible, it is not a product for the masses." (STÉVANCE 2011, p.12) This inquisitive spirit gives free improvisation the allure of an erudite music practice. It is animated by the simple necessity of its development through discovery of sound.²⁸⁷ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.17) To place enquiry ahead of mass appeal and embrace a kind of voluntary marginalization can, however, isolate a practice, making it seem pretentious. Bailey condemns:

To play in a manner that excludes the larger audience or, worse, to prefer to play before a small audience, is taken as an indication that the music is pretentious, elitist, uncommunicative, self-absorbed and probably many other disgusting things too. (BAILEY 1980, p.47)

Ironically, Bailey's own music could hardly be less suited for mass appeal.²⁸⁸ In short, my

²⁸⁷ « [Elle] est mue par la seule nécessité de son développement par la découverte sonore. »

²⁸⁸ This is also the case for some of the music experiments that most wanted to be inclusive, including Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Learning*. Cardew himself found it hard to consolidate his spirit of enquiry with his desire to appeal to the masses, a desire that was linked to socialist ideology. "[He] continually struggled with the contradiction between his devotion to the 'struggle of the working class', and his life-long work in the avant-garde. Hans Eisler, a composer Cardew greatly admired, once said: 'I have always striven to write music that serves Socialism. This was often a difficult and contradictory exercise, but the only worthy one for artists of our time.'"" (KENNEDY 1994, p.8)

position on this point can be summarized in three points. First, the public at large is unfamiliar with the principles of free improvisation and thus lacks the listening habits that are necessary to understand it. Second, free improvisation nonetheless disposes of conditions and devices²⁸⁹ that make it possible for the newly initiated to quickly feel that improvised performances demonstrate cohesion and are meaningful. Finally, contemporary music worlds unfortunately do not offer many occasions for the public at large to make even an initial contact with free improvisation. Initiatives exist, however. Festivals dedicated to improvisation, like the *Festival international de musique actuelle de Victoriaville (FIMAV)*, have gained a lot of attention due to their sheer size. They offer many opportunities for members of the community to discover local, national and international improvisers. The *FIMAV* also sets up sound installations (7 of them in the 2016 edition) that remain open to the public. In Marseille (France), there exists the *GRIM*, or *Groupe de recherche et d'improvisation musicales* (Music Improvisation and Research Group), a center that hosts concerts, events, festivals, recording and workshops. They have a library of works (books and recordings) for those interested in studying improvisation. Some of their workshops are open to absolutely anyone interested in improvising. Arthur Navarro describes a similar series of workshops offered by the *Expurgação* collective in Vitória.

*We are currently renovating our studio space so that in October we may begin a new series of Open Workshops, where ten musical events will take place that will be open to the public and financed by a national cultural organization. Each event will have two local bands and one from outside of the state of Espírito Santo. [...] This type of social action brings us a lot of satisfaction because it generates a circulation of people in the streets and at the events, with the possibility of interacting in a different type of environment, relaxed, and with the opportunity of a musical or cinematographic experience.*²⁹⁰ (NAVARRO 2016)

This kind of hands-on experience is important. As says Bailey: "It secures the total involvement of the performer. Better than any other means it provides the possibility for the

²⁸⁹ The most important of these devices is its semiotic flexibility, which will be discussed in chapter 4 of the third section of the thesis.

²⁹⁰ "Estamos realizando a reforma do espaço estúdio para que em outubro iniciemos a nova temporada de edições do Ensaio Aberto, onde acontecerão dez eventos musicais abertos ao público realizados com financiamento de um órgão nacional de cultura. Cada evento terá duas bandas locais e uma de fora do estado do ES. [...] Esse tipo de atuação junto a sociedade é muito satisfatório pois gera uma circulação de pessoas nas ruas e nos eventos, com a proposta de interação num ambiente diferente, descontraído, tranquilo, e com a oportunidade de uma experiência musical ou cinematográfica."

player to completely identify with the music." (BAILEY 1980, p.17) No doubt, one of the keys in making an enquiry-driven, process-oriented practice accessible to the public at large is by turning the public's attention to the process and enquiry, by letting them become acquainted with the underlying principles that drive it. These should not take too long to learn. However, one difficulty lies in the fact that for the listener, the actualization of these underlying principles is not directly observable and must be extrapolated from observable hints, through the sound content and visible performance actions. Only by articulating these aspects can the performance truly be interpreted and appreciated for its enquiry value.

Back to the point of view of the improvisers, it is clear from their discourse that they are generally enlivened by the pleasure of discovery that the activity brings them. In the case of Rio de Janeiro-based group *Rabotnik*, it was improvisation that transformed the group's activity, changing it from a repertoire-oriented show that was growing old and dull into a more inspired live collective exploration. "The show, in the meantime, basically became a space where the group could, in collective practice, explore new possibilities that each member had been investigating."²⁹¹ (SIQUEIRA 2013, p.68) Still in Rio, the group Duplexx also embraced free improvisation in 2011, as a "new phase" and as a means of experimenting. Both groups were drawn to free improvisation as a tool for experimentation and enquiry, a tendency that is one of the main points of interest in Maria Fantinato Géo De Siqueira's study of the Rio de Janeiro free improvisation music scene. (SIQUEIRA 2013) In short, improvisers are not "in it for the money". Logistically, their activity depends on the generosity of many friends, colleagues and supporters, driven by passion and solidarity. Performances rarely rack up a lot of money. There does, however, exist public financing in all three countries at study: Canada, France and Brazil. It is worth mentioning that in Canada, funding by the Canada Council for the Arts is granted "not for the value of the new artistic productions, but according to a cultural policy that is geared towards the support of innovation." (STÉVANCE 2011, p.116) The projects are peer-reviewed by rotating panels of jurors. Thus, the State finances artistic development but does not control it.²⁹² (STÉVANCE 2011, p.115) This system, with the involvement of peers and the focus on development, highlights the fact that enquiry, which, we agree, is an important constituent of the free improvisation practice, is also highly valued by the Canada Council of the Arts.

²⁹¹ « O show torna-se, portanto, basicamente um espaço onde exploram novas possibilidades que estão investigando individualmente na prática em conjunto. »

²⁹² « [...] Si l'État soutient financièrement le développement artistique, il ne le contrôle pas ».

Oriented towards process and driven by dynamicity, emergence and deconstruction, improvisers are thus concerned with renewing the motion of their activity and the relevance of their practice. These concerns differ from those of activities that are geared towards the determination of a specific object or truth. The enquiry in free improvisation is of a different nature. Its goal is not to reach "systematic nomenclature" (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 3.453) (3.453), "ideal philosophical terminology" (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 2.221), nor, as Peirce writes, to identify a "rational principle [...] that will be perfectly determinative as to what terms and notations shall be used, and in what senses, and which at the same time possesses the requisite power to influence all right-feeling and thoughtful men." (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 2.221) These are not the aspirations of enquiry as it is pursued in free improvisation, nor are they the gauges by which to evaluate its success. Improvisers' enquiry has open-ended creative goals rather than specific scientific ones. The attitude with which it is pursued mixes seriousness and playfulness²⁹³. Improvisers improvise because they enjoy it. Arthur Bull says:

I like this kind of music. It's one of the kinds of music that I like. I enjoy going out to listen to it. I feel involved and I wonder what these musicians are gonna do. I find that enjoyable from an audience point of view. I listen to this kind of music because I like it. It's not some abstract kind of quest or something. Some people like country and western music. This is the kind of music I like.
(BULL 2015)

This marks an important contrast with the types of *enquiry* that are advocated by science or verbal communication. In *Homo Ludens*, a book written in 1944 but that has aged remarkably well, Johan Huizinga, proposes another model of enquiry and cultural development, whose driving force is "play". The model is of particular use for us, since the elements of play instantly recognizable in free improvisation. As a voluntary activity, play "is free, is in fact freedom". (HUIZINGA 1944, p.7-8) Then, it "is not 'ordinary' or 'real'. It is rather a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition of its own". People who are at play are nonetheless totally absorbed in their activity (HUIZINGA 1944, p.13), which can be undertaken in great seriousness. (HUIZINGA 1944, p.8) Play is conducted in a delineated, designated time and space, a kind of playground. "Play begins, and then at a certain moment it is 'over'." (HUIZINGA 1944, p.9) This designated sphere of action has its own rules that "determine what 'holds' in the

²⁹³ For convenience, we separate the ideas of seriousness and playfulness for now, but we will see in a moment that play is, in fact, also serious.

temporary world circumscribed by play." (HUIZINGA 1944, p.11) Play is also order-making (HUIZINGA 1944, p.10) and, in this sense, is instrumental in the emergence of culture. It "has a tendency to be beautiful", which helps explain the aesthetic appeal of free improvisation, should we consider it as play. Huizinga points out:

The words we use to denote the elements of play belong for the most part to aesthetics, terms with which we try to describe the effects of beauty: tension, poise, balance, contrast, variation, solution, resolution, etc. (HUIZINGA 1944, p.10)

Improvisers certainly are committed to the advancement of their practice.²⁹⁴ Saxophonist Daunik Lazro comments:

*I see orchestras as teams of highly competent researchers, more and more specialized, even - it's more and more meticulous and delicate, more and more profound - , to survey, to do together, to bring out things that were buried.*²⁹⁵ (JULIEN 2008, p.72)

But more fundamentally, the type of enquiry that animates their practice serves itself; their method, driven by freedom of exploration and spontaneous action, is connected to no specific higher interest than that of being able to partake in this musical experience and sustain this activity.²⁹⁶

The process itself is, oftentimes, the finality of improvisers' activity (SALADIN 2014, p.162): free, playful (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.43), exploratory process as its own finality/reward. With goals that are so fundamentally different from the objects of scientific enquiry, it ensues that the nature of enquiry as improvisers pursue it should demonstrate some particularities as well. We have already discussed the enquiry of free improvisation as one that is dynamic and deconstructive, one that, rather than seeking to complete the determination of its

²⁹⁴ A comparison may be drawn with the "displacement of hierarchically binary oppositions" (DERRIDA 1967) advocated by Derrida, which is certainly playful in the sense described by Huizinga. His concept of play will be elaborated upon shortly.

²⁹⁵ « Je vois les orchestres comme des équipes de chercheurs très compétents, de plus en plus spécialistes même - c'est de plus en plus minutieux et délicat, de plus en plus profond - , pour arpenter, pour faire ensemble, pour rapporter des choses enfouies. »

²⁹⁶ Of course, as we have seen, the experience may be linked to some ideals that are not strictly musical: notably social, political or spiritual ones. As we have seen, the enquiry may also be focused on sound qualities. Stévançe points out that musicians are often academics that are seeking a sublime form of art. « Les musiciens sont souvent des académiques à la recherche d'une forme sublime en art. » (STÉVANÇE, p.11) This is surely the second most important object of improvisers' enquiry, after the exaltation of the process and experience.

object, seeks to defer it and perpetually renew the liminality of this object. This section will be devoted to another aspect of improvisers' method that must not be forgotten: playfulness.

Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* describes the "playful" aspect of human enquiry in a way that is especially compelling when considering process-oriented free improvisation. This often quoted work is interesting for us as it suggests an equivalence of play and freedom of action and proposes play as a means for searching for and producing meaning. His account provides support for the idea that methods of creation based on play, such as improvisation, can create order out of the unexpected, rather than through methodical planning.²⁹⁷ Here, the word "play" has a somewhat broad meaning. Huizinga's reflections can provide support for the idea that methods of creation based on free play, such as improvisation, can create order out of the unexpected. To bring this idea further, the improvised work, as a real-time, decentralized, self-organizing, order-creating process, but also as the result of this process, is both the means by which the emergence-deconstruction tension is negotiated and the form with which it is expressed.

Huizinga is not the only thinker to have brought out the virtues of play as an engine for creation and discovery. Others have flirted with the idea of a more playful kind of enquiry as an attractive alternate model to the rigid approach of modern man described by Horkheimer as "*Instrumentelle Vernunft*". Marcuse, in *One-dimensional Man*, sees a return to play as worthwhile in order to create, in the face of ever-present constraints on lifestyle and culture, a free space for activity according to one's own rules. "The free play of thought and imagination assumes a rational and directing function in the realization of a pacified existence of man and nature." (MARCUSE 1964, *One-dimensional Man*, p.239)

"Pacification of existence" does not suggest an accumulation of power but rather the opposite. Peace and power, freedom and power, Eros and power may well be contraries! I shall presently try to show that the reconstruction of the material base of society with a view to pacification may involve a qualitative as well as quantitative reduction of power, in order to create the space and time for the development of productivity under self-determined incentives. (MARCUSE 1964, p.240)

He links what one could call a free-play-space to identity construction, emancipation of

²⁹⁷ There are actually a number of important books that use musical improvisation to demonstrate the virtues of playful, collective, improvised methods of creation as opposed to methodical planning. We recommend *Group Genius* by Keith Sawyer (SAWYER 2008) and the more exhaustive *Sync of Swarm* by David Borgo (BORGO 2006).

self from external exigencies.

Thus introjection implies the existence of an inner dimension distinguished from and even antagonistic to the external exigencies - an individual consciousness and an individual unconscious apart from public opinion and behavior. The idea of "inner freedom" here has its reality: it designates the private space in which man may become and remain "himself." Today this private space has been invaded and whittled down by technological reality. (MARCUSE 1964, p.12)

He opposes desired free forms of discussion and discourse to forms of language that he implies to be authoritarian.

[...] Marxist into the Stalinist and post-Stalinist language. These requirements, as interpreted by the leadership which controls the apparatus, define what is right and wrong, true and false. They leave no time and no space for a discussion which would project disruptive alternatives. This language no longer lends itself to "discourse" at all. (MARCUSE 1964, p.104)

Could free improvisation be the kind of free-play space advocated by Marcuse? The parallel seems unavoidable; improvisers too organize their playground (along with its conditions of creation) in a way that is meant to favor freedom, unrestrained and uncensored expression, self-determination, a maximization of "discussion", reduction of power (which we discussed earlier as the subversion of hierarchies) in favor of "Eros" and creation.²⁹⁸ These ideas are so generalized in free improvisation that they can be said to be at the core of the aesthetics and principles of free improvising communities.

For improvisers, there is something undeniably pleasurable about the kind of playful enquiry that they pursue. This notably has to do with the thrill of being exposed to the risk of the unknown. Play, risk and the unknown: the relationship runs deep. It is difficult not to point out that in French, the expression for putting something at risk or jeopardizing something is "*mettre en jeu*", literally "put at play". What is "*mis en jeu* / put at play" in any activity is whatever

²⁹⁸ Nachmanovitch dedicates an entire chapter to the idea of "Eros and Creation". It is, despite its esoteric tone, perhaps even because of it, worth quoting here, as it evokes the idea of musical play in a more sensual light. "Music (and I mean here the music of music, the music of poetry, the music of creative living) plays in the mind in a place where sensuality and sexuality: Eros - the divine principle of desire and love - surges from our deepest evolutionary roots: the urge to create, to generate new life, to regenerate the species. "Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the outward bound or circumference of Energy. Energy is Eternal Delight." This delight is the fountain of strength and generativity released when we free ourselves from the judging specter and expand that outer circumference." (NACHMANOVICH 1991, p.163-4) (The quote is from William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*).

elements of it are not pre-planned and are left vulnerable to unforeseen real-time disturbances. In other words, what is "*mis en jeu* / put at play" is whatever aspect of an activity that is left to be improvised.

Play is indeed serious business, as Huizinga reminds us repeatedly in *Homo Ludens*. Another testimony to this effect comes from Argentinian author Julio Cortázar, who, just one year before his death, wrote:

*For me, literature is a form of play. But I've always added that there are two forms of play: football, for example, which is basically a game, and then games that are very profound and serious. When children play, though they're amusing themselves, they take it very seriously. It's important. It's just as serious for them now as love will be ten years from now. I remember when I was little and my parents used to say, "Okay, you've played enough, come take a bath now." I found that completely idiotic, because, for me, the bath was a silly matter. It had no importance whatsoever, while playing with my friends was something serious. Literature is like that—it's a game, but it's a game one can put one's life into. One can do everything for that game. (CORTÁZAR 1984, *The Art of Fiction* no. 83)*

Indeed, testimonies from various artists often describe the social moment and space²⁹⁹ where collective musical improvisation takes place as a kind of playground: what could be called a *safe space*³⁰⁰ for pursuing this kind of playful enquiry. It is a playground, be it with extended musical techniques or unpredictable layering of sound, social and communicative scenarios and dynamics, discovery and affirmation of self, even spiritual exercises in meditation and selflessness. Free improvisation, as a platform binding individual interpretive processes and collective creative processes, can, thanks to its particular conditions of creation, offer an efficient and safe platform for these experiments. Trial and error, free of any specific obligations and practiced in a "safe" context, indeed promises unexpected discoveries and the emergence of new forms and dynamics.

Huizinga describes play as a real-time self-organizing dynamic: features that belong to free improvisation's core conditions of creation. The activity is not oriented towards a specific result, but rather the player lets the result gradually unfold in real time, through the steps of the order making process. Though the group's activity does produce a sound object and a visible

²⁹⁹ Bakhtin/Todorov writes that "the time and space where a certain enunciation is produced are not purely physical categories, but constitute a historical time and a social space." (TODOROV, p.65)

³⁰⁰ More will be said about this idea of safe space in section d) of chapter 3 of the third part. We will notably elaborate on the devices and conditions that allow free improvisation to be perceived as favorable for playful enquiry.

performance, the product itself is rarely the musicians' principal aim. Their objective is more closely linked to the real time concerns that come up at every moment of the ongoing process: finding practical solutions to tensions and controversies that, we must insist, require action constantly until the performance is done. The musicians, at this given time and place, participate in a non-predetermined, real-time, voluntary, order-making activity. We have here all the conditions for "play" as described by Huizinga. Though this concept could be extended to any compositional process, the real time aspect of improvisation makes it particularly exploitable for us. With no specific result in mind, the musicians are concerned with moving forward one step at a time towards an unknown goal, in a kind of tentative, explorative movement that may also be linked to Peirce's "enquiry", to the "caresse" brought forward by Emmanuel Levinas (and evoked by Esclapez in her paper *Un ange passe...*)³⁰¹, or to Pareyson's descriptions of *tentative*, or *attempt*.³⁰²

Processes of enquiry that proceed with specific calculations and planned procedures certainly have enormous value in the realization of specific goal-orientated tasks. However, a strong case can be made for risky, disorderly, yet self-organizing play as a tool for discovery, experimentation, generation of unexpected materials and experiences in situations where a single result or goal has not been made explicit beforehand. While play is bound to real linear time, its openness to feedback, risk, the unexpected and, in the case of free improvisation, the dynamic involvement of different subjects gives improvisers a sense of non-linearity. Rimouski (Canada) bassist Éric Normand says the following about the preferred process of his orchestra, the GGRIL: "For the past seven years, we've been nurturing a reflection on collective creation. We work a lot

³⁰¹ The caress's research constitutes [the reading's] essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This "not knowing", this fundamental disorder is essential. It is like a game with something that is fleeting, and a game absolutely without any project or plan, not with what could become ours or us, but with something else, always other, always inaccessible, always to come. (LEVINAS, Emmanuel cited by OUAKNIN, Marc-Alain, 1994, p.17-18)
Translation from the original French: « Cette recherche de la caresse en constitue l'essence par le fait que la caresse ne sait pas ce qu'elle cherche. Ce « ne pas savoir », ce désordonné fondamental est l'essentiel. Elle est comme un jeu avec quelque chose qui se dérobe, et un jeu absolument sans projet ni plan, non pas avec ce qui peut devenir nôtre et nous, mais avec quelque chose d'autre, toujours autre, toujours inaccessible, toujours à venir. La caresse est l'attente de cet avenir pur. Elle est faite de cet accroissement de faim, de promesses toujours plus riches ouvrant des perspectives nouvelles sur l'insaisissable... »

³⁰² From attempt to attempt, through successes and failures, research proceeds towards discovery. (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.50)

Translated from the French edition: « De tentative en tentative, à travers réussites et échecs, la recherche procède vers la découverte. »

on our approach to play; we dislike linearity.³⁰³(TOUPIN 2014)

Huizinga's text also highlights the formative importance of play as a liminal state, famously saying that "play is older than culture" and culture emerges in the form of play. We would like to recall the "edge", as discussed previously, that is precisely the preferred playground of improvisers. In most cases of genre consolidation, improvisation both precedes and defines conventionalized performance practice. Play in, as says Huizinga, order-making.

We may think here of play as being useful in collective activities that propose few established conventions. Though there are many, I will cite two such situations in music that, largely through the use of improvisation, favor self-organization. First, creative encounters involving artists from different cultural backgrounds. Second, and on a broader scope, we may think of the formative phases of artistic movements, where a relative scarcity of rooted practices and codes is less apt to support specific pre-determined results. In both of these situations, participants may resort to explorative, decentralized, process-orientated perspectives of creation. Improvisation, as we have seen, offers a situation of liminality where materials and habits emerge. This situation calls for play as a mode of order making. If materials and habits are not deconstructed, as free improvisers tend to do, then they can settle as sets of rules for new musical practices.

Discussing the formative periods of codes and practices that support specific artistic movements, Derek Bailey writes that there is

[...] scarcely a single field in music that has remained unaffected by improvisation, scarcely a single musical technique or form of composition that did not originate in improvisatory practice or was not essentially influenced by it. The whole history of the development of music is accompanied by manifestations of the drive to improvise. (BAILEY 1980, p.ix)

The paradox of improvisation rests in the fact that the materials it engenders are the very same that it will soon - perhaps immediately - deconstruct. This is because free improvisation wishes to stay on the edge, in a liminal state, and play forever. It institutes collateral experience through *entente*, makes beneficial use of the conventions that *entente* represents, but does not commit to any of them. The only true commitments of improvisers are to the defining features of the practice: its unifying underlying principles.

³⁰³ « Ça fait sept ans que nous avons une réflexion sur la création collective. Nous travaillons beaucoup en jeu et la linéarité ne nous plaît pas. »

THIRD PART

***RETRACING FREE IMPROVISATION'S
SHIFTED IDIOMATICITY***

1. - A SEMIOTIC ACCOUNT OF FREE IMPROVISATION'S IDIOMATIC SHIFT

a) A Double Shift of Idiomaticity

We have already exposed in chapter 3 of the first part that free improvisation, along with its tendency to undermine dependence on formal codes, is inclined to draw the attention of its public to the emergent and evanescent aspects of sound: its raw quality, presence and agency. In doing so, improvisers achieve the first of two major shifts that will be expanded upon in the current chapter and that characterize free improvisation's true coming into its own as an artistic practice. In Peircean terms, free improvisers' treatment of the observable formal aspects of their practice is defined by an abdication of the category of thirdness (the category of convention and idiomaticity) and an exaltation of the categories of firstness and secondness. Thirdness, of course, has not been done away with entirely, since any semiotic operation without thirdness would be rendered impossible. Rather, we suggest that the bulk of it has been relegated to aspects of the free improvisation practice that underlie and govern the way it treats its formal sound content. Thirdness thus mainly prescribes treatment of formal sound materials indirectly, directly governing instead the concerns, habits, attitudes and rationales that allow the activity of real-time collective music production to happen and make sense. This relocation of thirdness, to which we will often refer as "idiomatic shift", is the second major shift that will be developed in this chapter. Both operations are deconstructive in that they "interrogate the discipline, through its origins, about its forgotten aspects, or those that have been intentionally muted."³⁰⁴ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.43)

Free improvisation's great contribution is to bring out the spontaneous, unexpected aspects of collective music creation: those that are unique to the situation in which they emerge, whose effect is in their raw, liminal value and their momentary (and potential) agency. To achieve this, formal sound codes, a former stronghold of thirdness, are deconstructed. The preference goes to an alternative idiomatic base, one that is made of the unifying principles that govern the activity. It entails no formal pre-engagements, but rather enables groups of musicians to determine performance content (and above all formal sound content³⁰⁵) in real-time, based on

³⁰⁴ « On interroge la « discipline à travers ses origines dans ses aspects oubliés ou volontairement tus. »

³⁰⁵ We consider "content" to be everything that constitutes the experience that one has of a performance, and especially the momentary relationships that relate its various aspects and make up the particular configurations of this experience. We wish to remind the reader that Peirce's semiotic model accounts for all kinds of experiences,

the momentary circumstances of their mutual interaction and collective playful enquiry. For these process-related aspects (strong carriers of secondness), along with the quality (firstness) and presence (secondness) of the performance's sound content, are the features that are the most at play in most improvisers' creative approach. They should therefore, during the performance, be the features that most arouse listeners who are interested in this creative approach and wish to seize the work dynamically, as intended by the artists. This new focus comes at the expense of thirdness, which formal idioms no longer serve.

This sets improvised music apart from most western music from the centuries leading up to modern times, where the successful actualization of given pre-texts and creative obedience to formal pre-engagements, all invested with thirdness, were often the main site of the artists' and audience's interest. Of course, any given work, fragment or effect in a musical performance articulates all three of Peirce's universal categories. The particularity of free improvisation is its articulation of these categories, therefore, has nothing to do with which one(s) it mobilizes and which one(s) it does not. Rather, the difference lies in the weight that is given to each. Thus, any musical act or sound fragment may invest a particular category with the responsibility of first arousing the spectator's attention. The other two categories' may then be left with the task of supporting the favored category, ideally without distracting too much attention from it (unless the desired effect is the production of signs that overtly arouse two, or all three categories equally). For example, traditional western works that are meant to be appreciated mainly for their reference to (and internal organization of) formal musical codes are best delivered by mediums (signs) whose qualities (firstness) and circumstances of actualisation (secondness) help optimize the audience members' appreciation of this organization by not overly distracting their attention. Musicians and producers have always known this and have sought to produce optimal conditions for the appreciation of works. In western erudite music, this often meant creating conditions that favored the best possible rendition of existing scores. Almost everything is planned in accordance to the projected rendition and is put to the service of the score as an external reference brimming with symbolic meaning.³⁰⁶ We may also consider how the duty of concert hall architects for

including those that are vague, raw, sensorial, spiritual, or that seem to transcend the materiality of that which is being experienced: in our case, a musical performance.

³⁰⁶ This does not mean that these traditions were unconcerned with aspects of musical performance that are more closely associable to firstness and secondness. The history of western music demonstrates that sound quality (the domain of firstness), for example, has been an enduring concern for music makers; otherwise, a symphony orchestra would not boast fifteen to forty different instruments, each with its distinct timbre.

centuries has been to optimize the conditions under which performances would be actualized (the domain of secondness) and sound would fill the acoustic space. However, the fact that they have traditionally been concerned with limiting the intrusion of outside sounds and distractions can also be seen a testimony to the tradition's devotion to the pre-text and distaste, even apprehension, of the unforeseen.

As we said before, in the case of free improvisation, the pre-text is often limited to the single guideline that the work must emerge from the real-time interactions of its participants. The unexpected is not apprehended, but rather sought after and generally cherished and craved by improvisers, viewed as a condition capable of stimulating emergence and creativity, at least as long as they are able to receive the unexpected as a fertile point of departure for further developments. In short, the attention given to features that we can retrace to the categories of firstness and secondness is in line with improvisers' creative and ideological priorities, notably the promotion of emergent and evanescent features as meaningful content.

b) Underlying Thirdness Supports, Enables and Gives Coherence

Yet in order for the works and activities of improvisers to be understood as coherent wholes, for each part and contribution to be understood as belonging to the ongoing process, certain underlying principles must give coherence to emergent materials. They must provide the thirdness that is inseparable from any semiotic operation

The underlying principles that unite improvisers in their common activity, these often unspoken codes of conduct, the cores of the activity's idiomaticity, is what invests its production with the bulk of their thirdness. These codes constitute an agreement that is largely sufficient to support the activity of collective improvisation despite its very scarce recourse to pre-texts and without the need of any formal pre-engagements. As Becker points out: "If artists agree on what sort of work is good and ought to be done, available materials will probably be limited to what is needed to do that kind of work." (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.74) That is to say that while the formal sound properties of improvised performances are emergent and evanescent, the coherence of their agency depends on the way that they relate to these underlying and relatively enduring principles, as well as on the way they relate to each other according to these principles. Thirdness

kicks in when these sounds are put in relation with the creative, aesthetic and ethical concerns (or any other preoccupations) that serve as the practice's core principles and, likely, constitute the musicians' motivations for pursuing free improvisation in the first place. The practice's conditions of creation were, after all, gradually developed in order to best explore its particular concerns. Thirdness is thus responsible for enabling participants to produce sound sequences and performance acts that actualize these values and mindsets, behaviors and habits, skills and devices, as well as to understand them as such. Knowledge of these rules is inseparable from any engaged appreciation of the performance. As such, this ensemble of principles fulfills a similar supportive and prescriptive function as other kinds of pre-texts, such as scores, tonal systems and any other technical device.³⁰⁷

"Music uses many technical devices sufficiently well-known to all well-socialized members of a society to be usable resources for artists. Composers can, for instance, take for granted that audiences will understand and respond, as expected, to a minor key as "sad" or to certain rhythm patterns as "Latin American"." (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.45)

In free improvisation, contributions may instead be understood as signs of "compromise", "synergy", "surrender", "invitation", "teasing", "risk taking", "docility", but also behaviors more typically associated to music, such as "consonance", "dissonance", "counter-point".³⁰⁸ All of these considerations are made in reference to the practice's underlying idiomaticity. Indeed, aesthetic concerns have the same stabilizing effect as more formal or technical conventions.

A coherent and defensible aesthetic helps to stabilize values and thus to regularize practice. [...] An aesthetic, providing a basis on which people can evaluate things in a reliable and dependable way, makes regular patterns of cooperation possible. [...] The aesthetic created by aestheticians provides a theoretical rationale for the selections of collectors. From this point of view, aesthetic value arises from the consensus of the participants in an art world. (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.134)

³⁰⁷ It should be pointed out that this kind of codification of values and principles exists in all practices, but it is particularly significant in the case of free improvisation. First, since it is meant to replace score-derivative codes completely. Second, because it is designed not to prevent the unexpected from happening (as is usually the case), but in order to maximize emergence and favor the unexpected. These strategies are also meant to help pursue the deconstruction of any new dichotomies that improvisers may notice.

³⁰⁸ These last three terms hint at the way that participants or materials behave with each other. As such, they have, throughout their use in musical practice and musicological discourse, always conferred to sound content some overtly social behaviors.

Any manifestation of thirdness, should it be recognized and put to collective use, requires that the interpreters be initiated to a shared code. A participant that fails to seize a sign for its reference to this code is left offside, out of the game.

To recapitulate: so far, we have proposed an articulation of the aspects of free improvised music inspired by Peirce's phenomenological categories. This model affirms that all three categories are necessarily engaged in any act of perception or interpretation. And so, we were brought to affirm that free improvisation's particularity could not be expressed in absolute terms such as its rejection of conventions. This would have implied the rejection of an entire category (thirdness), which is an impossible feat. Rather, free improvisation's particularities can be expressed in relative terms: in terms of redistribution. Peirce's theory of categories allows us to retrace a double shift involving the ways the aspects of free improvisation are distributed along these categories. The formal sound features' non-commitment to any particular idiom or thirdness means that the treatment of these formal features involves a shift of focus to the other two phenomenological categories. Meanwhile the core of the practice's idiomaticity is shifted to other, non-formal types of codes and must be located primarily in aspects that underlie its formal sound features. A coherent discourse, aesthetics, ethical code and rationale makes up the underlying principles of the practice, and translates into a body of concerns, values, attitudes, skills, parameters, strategies and habits that supply more of the thirdness that allows and completes our understanding of improvised performances.

Since free improvisation is a deconstructive approach, the stable elements of the free improvisation practice are generally the ones that allow its practitioners to collectively pursue their deconstructive activities: the elements of the code of conduct act as capacitors. Most of the unspoken conventions and unifying conditions of free improvisation are chosen, designed and maintained for how they enable participants (performers or spectators) to pursue their activity and fulfill their creative objectives. They are what allows spectators to engage with performance content according to the intentions of performers and the areas of focus that they mean to bring to the forefront of the event, namely, in many cases, its raw qualities, presence and agency of sounds, all aspects best represented by the categories of firstness and secondness.

c) Two Levels: Emergent Formal Aspects and Enduring Underlying Principles

There is, in free improvisation, a stronger tendency than in most music practices to maintain a division between, on the one side, its emergent formal aspects whose appeal relies primarily on how they represent the categories of firstness and secondness, and on the other, its enduring underlying principles that supply the interpretation of the performance with most of its thirdness. Indeed this distinction of aspects and categories is not as clear in many other music practices, where musicians commit to both formal and non-formal codes, and where works, although they must be actualized in order to be appreciated, are often understood as stable artifacts (scores and recordings) that transcend particular situations of enunciation. Although perspectives among improvisers do vary, there is a tendency to affirm the inseparability of a work's formal content from the rules and habits that support it and the "present" moment that delivers it. The work then demonstrates the properties of Peirce's ideal, perfect sign, which is one in which (and by which) all three categories are equally represented. Christoph Schiller expresses this idea in his terms, highlighting the importance of finding some degree of congeniality in all three aspects:

*In an ensemble context, the material, playing stance and aesthetic imagination must stand the test, that is: find resonance.*³⁰⁹ (SCHILLER 2011, p.83)

In free improvisation, it becomes possible to imagine two mostly distinct levels along which the effects of performances are carried out. We can understand the underlying principles of the practice - its enduring conditions and parameters, the center of its idiomaticity and main source of its thirdness - as a relatively stable "lower" level that supports activity on the "higher" level, where we find the emergent and evanescent, mainly formal aspects of performance. On this higher level, emergent performance materials are subject to lightning-fast turnover, rarely committing to any enduring applicability beyond its immediate momentary use. Since improvisation tends to value the live process more than the references to stable rules, the level carrying fleeting formal features and changing group dynamics will generally be at the core of the participants' experience, at the center of the work's "ecology", to once again borrow the expression used by Vecchione (VECCHIONE 1992) and Piekut (PIEKUT 2014, p.24).

³⁰⁹ »Im Ensemblekontext müssen sich Material, Spielhaltung und ästhetische Vorstellungen bewähren, nämlich resonieren.«

In practice, a division of performance aspects on two levels allows free improvisation to maintain a stable and coherent practice (a routine, even), while at the same time continuing to produce largely spontaneous and evanescent performances. Cannone notes:

*[T]hese music practices are most often perfectly regulated and not really "unexpected" from the perspective of concerned musicians who know very well that they are going to improvise at a certain time and place and for a certain duration. In other words, even free improvisation, understood as a kind of ex tempore creation, can also take on the aspect of a routine and have nothing to do with a kind of Impromptu "improvisation. In practice, of course (and fortunately), these two facets of improvisation are not irreconcilable.*³¹⁰ (CANONNE 2012, p.114)

In short, our division of performance aspects in free improvisation associates the emergence of formal features and changing group relations to the categories of firstness and secondness, while reserving the category of thirdness primarily for the practice's underlying principles. The division is best expressed in terms of a *tendency*, since it is neither essential nor absolute. Indeed, a few nuances must be made. First of all, the underlying principles that support the collective activity of improvisers are neither clearly delineated nor eternal. We have already seen how perspectives can vary over time (and from one participant to another) with regard to certain key concepts, such as freedom and tradition. "Systems change and accommodate to artists just as artists change and accommodate to systems. Furthermore, artists can secede from the contemporary system and create a new one." (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.95) The underlying principles that unify improvisers did not preexist the practice, as a coherent whole that could be borrowed from and applied to their creative needs. They were elaborated over time, according to momentary needs, oftentimes by practitioners of activities that preceded free improvisation. This is true for the materials of any practice. It is worth quoting Becker, as he provides a good explanation for the way this works.

Artists usually develop their own innovative materials over a period of time, creating a body of convention peculiar to their own work. (Groups of artists frequently collaborate in the development of innovations so that schools and artistic sects develop characteristic conventions as well.) [...] The artist may be learning them in the same way, in the course of the production of a work or body of work [...] So each work, and each artist's body of work, invites us into a world

³¹⁰ « [...] ces pratiques artistiques sont, le plus souvent parfaitement cadrées, et pas vraiment « imprévues » pour les musiciens concernés, qui savent très bien qu'ils vont devoir improviser tel jour, à telle heure, pendant telle durée. Autrement dit, l'improvisation (même parfaitement libre), comme création *ex tempore*, peut-également être on ne peut plus routinière et ne rien avoir à faire avec l'improvisation « impromptue ». En pratique, bien sûr (et fort heureusement), ces deux facettes de l'improvisation ne sont pas inconciliables. »

defined in part by the use of materials hitherto unknown and therefore not at first completely understandable. [...] The new materials then become conventional in the technical sense used above, being mutually understood by the parties involved so that they can assume that everyone involved knows and will use them in interpreting and responding to the works in question. This involves fewer people than the more general cases previously discussed. (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.64)

This turnover of conventions operates at paces that are drastically different on each of the two levels that make up our model of free improvisation's idiomaticity.

A second nuance must be made regarding formal features. They cannot avoid conventionalization entirely. Technical exigencies, although less codified, do exist in improvisation scenes. A basic level (and, often, a very high level) of technical mastery is expected of free improvisers. Although the required level may vary greatly according to the technical exigencies of the situation, it must be at least enough for the musician to be free to express herself.^{311 312} (STÉVANCE 2011, p.64) In a practice of deconstruction, especially, if certain dichotomies are meant to be shifted and certain roles are meant to be deconstructed, then the participants must have some prior knowledge of these dichotomies and roles. Even the most spontaneous burst of sound must succeed in appealing to various participants in one instant. It is true that improvisers submit to no explicitly stated formal exigencies and that the formal features of improvised performances can only serve as direct capacitors in their immediate situation of articulation. They do, however, still form conventions in the sense that we have been using the term, inspired by Becker, and that extends to anything that allows and supports collective action. Their conventional agency is simply very short-lived and of limited scope, but, as an example of thirdness, is of crucial importance for the coherence of improvised performances. These momentarily established formal conventions, are what we refer to as *entente*³¹³.

³¹¹ « Pour autant, la musique actuelle impose à ses instrumentistes un niveau technique minimum, sinon suffisant pour être assez libre de s'exprimer. »

³¹² It is worth noting that this passage in Stévanche's book *Musique Actuelle* exemplifies the "freedom by" conception that was discussed in chapter 1 of the second part of this thesis.

³¹³ *Entente* will be discussed at length in chapter 5 of the present part.

d) Firstness and Secondness in the Forefront

Firstness - Every Sound is New; No Sound is Pure

Réthoré points out that "signs, notably verbal ones, have a purely qualitative tonal dimension that wants to be interpreted either as an accompaniment to the meaning (the statement, the gesture, etc.), or as the carrier of the bulk of the expressed meaning (at the expense, in this case, of the explicit content of the apparently intended sign)."³¹⁴ (RÉTHORÉ 2007, p.4) Of course, the application of this idea is a bit different in music where both kinds of meaning involve the tonal dimension. However, we may easily circumvent this apparent problem by applying the idea to the qualitative dimension of sound on the one hand, and the organization of sounds as codified signs on the other. In other words, either general³¹⁵ category can be put forward as the most meaningful: the raw quality sounds' firstness, or the conventionalized reference (to musical codes) of their thirdness.

But we must further consider the category of thirdness as it applies to the codification of sounds in free improvisation. While there exist conventionalized codes and elaborate systems (thirdness) that govern the tonal aspects of many musical practices, improvisers choose to keep a certain distance from these conventions in order to propose rawer, less tame and less fixed sound shapes. They thus draw attention to the essentially qualitative dimension of their acts. Indeed, improvisers make sound quality one of the main fronts of their enquiry into music.

*Musicians of musique actuelle seek to create timbre; they welcome it in all of its diversity, in a moment where events of sound emission and interception will be provoked, concerning both natural and artificial noises.*³¹⁶ (STÉVANCE 2011)

Their approach, however, is different from that of concrete musicians such as Schaeffer and Henry. While concrete musicians sought to highlight the quality and presence of sound by recording and isolating it, separating it from its context of production, and subsequently

³¹⁴ Il y a, dans les signes, notamment verbaux, une dimension tonale, purement qualitative, qui demande à être saisie par l'interprète soit comme accompagnement du sens (de l'énoncé, du geste, etc.), soit comme porteuse de l'essentiel du sens exprimé (au détriment, dans ce cas, du contenu explicite du signe apparemment intenté).

³¹⁵ According to Peirce's model, firstness and thirdness represent generality, whereas the unique aspects of a sign are represented by its secondness.

³¹⁶ « Les actualistes cherchent à créer le timbre, à l'accueillir dans toute sa diversité dans un temps autour duquel seront provoqués des événements d'émissions et d'interceptions des sons, bruits naturels ou artificiels. »

submitting it to technical manipulations, the original sound material of improvisation cannot be separated from its context of enunciation. Improvisers' enquiry into sound quality necessarily involves enquiry into ways of producing or generating these sounds in real time, be it through extended or alternative instrumental techniques or, more recently, through the use of electronic technologies. Indeed, many improvisers nurture the ideal of finding or creating sounds that are totally new and original, that have never been accounted for by any code or convention, and escape performance practice and habits. This ideal, at least, is shared with concrete musicians, despite the fact that the methods and relationship to time are completely different.³¹⁷

Improvisers who pursue this ideal, to the same kind of dismay as those advocating an improvisation where every aspect is determined at the moment of the performance, will have to accept it as an unattainable target.³¹⁸ For this ideal suffers a double setback, both of which are consequences of the indivisibility of the three categories. On the one hand, since the signification of every uttered sound is completed with elements from the unique circumstances of its situation of enunciation (TODOROV 1981) (PEIRCE 1931 (1966)) every sound is new. On the other hand, abstract qualities cannot stand alone as pure significant entities. Just as is the case with the individuals that perceive them, the involvement of sound in a performance always articulates a network of meaningful relationships. Sounds are, in this sense, socialized. Furthermore, again just like human participants, they are traversed with past actualizations and resulting habits (thirdness).

But the improvisation process's conditions of creation are such that they highlight the dynamic nature of its sound materials. It goes against the ethics and rationale of free improvisation to repeat a particular sound form to the point of investing it with a conventionalized abstract symbolic meaning that can be separated from its original object or effect. To ensure that their treatment of performance materials remains dynamic, improvisers, as they determine the content of their works in real time, strive to avoid settling this determination through excessive repetition. Again, their favored playground is the liminal edge, where abstract qualities are actualized in a concrete situation, but not fixed to the point of becoming enduring habits or abstract symbols. As far as formal sound content is concerned, improvisers apprehend

³¹⁷ Another crucial difference is the attitude towards recording. While recordings are an integral and essential part of concrete music, free improvisers often dismiss recordings as inadequate and incomplete documentations of the performance, because they lack its most important dimension: real time.

³¹⁸ This does not, however, mean that it cannot orientate their activity and fuel their efforts of deconstruction.

being slaves to their habits. Behind every act, some vagueness is always sought.³¹⁹

Despite these setbacks, sound quality remains one of free improvisation's preferred terrains of enquiry and richest areas of innovation, due in part to conditions of creation that favor the emergence and evanescence of sound forms, while resisting any permanent kind of fixity.

Secondness - Actions and Reactions, the Present Instant, and the Point of Contact

Understanding secondness as the category of relation, existence, action and reaction, is useful in explaining how group configurations imply very different modes of signification. This is because sounds now correspond to sequences of actions and reactions in causal linearity, as well as to networks of agency. German tubist Carl Ludwig Hübsch writes:

*Music arises thanks to the binding agency with which the musician acts. She supports herself on the necessary contact between actors and their surroundings, namely with collaborators, the play-space and the listeners. In their binding actions, meaning arises that is available for interpretation; what would otherwise be a loose, arbitrary juxtaposition.*³²⁰ (HÜBSCH 2011)

Real-time interplay adds a dimension to improvised performances, since it leaves the work open to different possibilities of action and reaction that effectively become performance content. In an interview with Henri Jules Julien, Jérôme Noetinger says:

*In a project with eleven musicians, due to the sheer number and electronic device of each, it can easily be an all-out war within ten seconds. But we can also play a kind of non-play, a retreat, an absence, be engaged to others, not let them down, not be in opposition, but in complementarity.*³²¹ (JULIEN 2008)

Secondness is of particular significance in free improvisation because it is the category of brute immediate effect, before cognition sets in and establishes relations between fact and law.

³¹⁹ Vagueness as a parameter favoring emergence will be discussed at length in chapter 3 of the current section.

³²⁰ »[...] die Musik, entsteht durch die Verbindlichkeit, mit der die Musikerin agiert. Diese fußt auf dem unbedingten Kontakt der Handelnden mit sich selbst und ihrem Umfeld, also den Mitspielern, dem Raum und den Zuhörenden. In ihren Verbindlichen Spiel entsteht Bedeutung, die gelesen werden will; andernfalls ein loses, beliebiges Nebeneinander.«

³²¹ « Dans un projet, à onze musiciens, du fait du nombre et du dispositif électronique de chacun, ça peut être la guerre en dix secondes. Mais on peut aussi jouer le non-jeu, le retrait, jouer l'absence, être dans l'engagement aux autres, ne pas les laisser tomber, n'être pas simplement en opposition mais dans une complémentarité. »

The present moment is the instant of the process that most comes up in improvisers' testimonies, that is the greatest focus of their attention and, no doubt, the one whose agency is the most representative of the immediate impact of secondness. Improvisers even speak of a kind of interaction that is so spontaneous that it can hardly be described as coming from "choices". Christian Kaden reports what improvisers have told him:

*What they play emerges spontaneously in them - so they say -, without any choice alternatives; it arises; rational development of options and all related calculations would destroy the magic of improvisation.*³²² (KADEN 2011, p.63)

What they describe, then, is an immediate flow of creativity: one whose movement may be maintained (almost) without the mind needing to resort to any fixed common understanding about the materials being developed.³²³ In such cases, participants react almost without knowing how to react, but the reaction feels like a natural response to whatever prompted it. Indeed, since the process is live, the reaction *is* a natural response to whatever prompted it.³²⁴ For the audience, one of the appeals of free improvisation is the sensation that one has a kind of immediate image of the artists' imagination, as it reacts to unique, real-time emergent situations. We repeat here Arthur Bull's statement that was already quoted in the thesis's introduction :

But there's also this part that's about imagination, you know. You're actually trying to imagine what's gonna happen next in the music. People who really like the music like it because there's this sense of immediacy like this sound happens and then what's the next sound that's gonna happen? Boom, it happens and you're very close to the musician's sound imagination. It's alive this music! (BULL 2015)

Without referring to any detailed formal code or explicitly stated common understanding, the event sequence is clearly felt by all participants who are collaterally involved in the present moment. Tena Palmer, discussing a performance situation where the flow of creativity of a

³²² Was sie spielten, entstehe spontan in ihnen - so wurde gesagt -, ohne Wahlalternativen; es ergebe sich; rationale Optionsbildung und deren Kalkulation müsten den Zauber von Improvisation nichtig werden lassen.

³²³ We are approaching here the utopian ideal of impulsive, intuitive creation without reference to any kind of thirdness. We maintain that this is impossible. Simply, even if the habits at play barely concern the performance's formal features directly, they must at least govern the strategies and predispositions that allow improvisers to pursue this activity so swiftly and confidently.

³²⁴ Acceptance of the suchness of whatever happens in a performance is one of the unifying values of free improvisation. We will elaborate on this point in chapter 4 of the third part of the thesis.

particular moment brought about an intense sense of cohesion to the entire group of participants (including spectators), observes:

It sounds contradictory that it was very clear but at the same time not detailed, but I guess I'm speaking about that communication and language of feeling in response to the moment. There are many times when there's absolutely no detail, but it's very clearly understood. Communicating with your colleagues what you're on about at that moment. It's that being in the flow of creativity, of spirit, however you choose to recognize this process. When I'm doing free music, I try to be, 80% of the time, completely in that. If you're talking about a moment, you can't pre-compose a moment. So then you've only got immediate improvisation to express the moment.
(PALMER 2015)

In free improvisation, the sound content is the main observable trace of its participants' actions and reactions. Before these materials are submitted to the participants' analysis, they exist as "acts of reaction". (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 4.157) These prime examples of secondness are, due to the inseparability of the three categories, necessarily processed by thirdness; the acts of reaction are, after all, performed and witnessed by beings of habit. Nonetheless, the shift that invests more importance in secondness is notable. When we say that free improvisation puts secondness in the forefront of the performance experience, we mean just this: any thirdness involved supports, legitimizes and leaves a lot of room to the impact of secondness.³²⁵

The way that people experience the performance is heavily influenced by the way that different performance acts trigger and follow each other, the way they relate to one another in interactive sequences of causal linearity. More importantly, free improvisation leaves a lot of room for participants to be affected by the immediate shock of actions in the present moment; it also gives them the possibility and means to react without first completing the analysis of everything that prompts them to do so.

It also helps to understand the situation of encounter that is at hand in terms of secondness. It relates the concrete actuality and factuality of the encounter, the instant where the generality (of firstness and thirdness) is actualized in a unique network of relations: the unique, unrepeatable, emergent and evanescent present moment.

³²⁵ We should recall what was said in note 71: that since aspects that relate to all categories are interpreted by the mind, we are always dealing with thirdness to some degree. Thirdness is thus applied to examples of all categories (including of thirdness itself). By accounting for more of the ways in which the different categories are involved with one another, we obtain an analysis that is more complete and precise.

The possible is necessarily general; and no amount of general specification can reduce a general class of possibilities to an individual case. It is only actuality, the force of existence, which bursts the fluidity of the general and produces a discrete unit. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 4.172)

In short, this is the moment that free improvisers most champion. Elaborating on Bakhtin's concept of *hybridity*, Stévanche indicates that the unique conditions of enunciation, instead of the formal characteristics of a performance, take precedence in *musique actuelle* creation, according to its practitioners. (STÉVANCHE 2011, p.82)

In an earlier passage, she states that the objective is to set out for an encounter with the instant itself.³²⁶ (STÉVANCHE 2011, p.34) Indeed, secondness is the only point of contact where the relationships that characterize an instant are offered to the participants "in the flow of things". It is not an "aspect" of the performance, but the rule of its concrete manifestation. Looking beyond Peirce, "it is also inconceivable for Bakhtin to isolate the "contact" as an aspect among others: the entire statement is contact."³²⁷ (TODOROV 1981, p.87)

This encounter, heavily animated by interaction and feedback, demonstrates an unmistakably social dimension.

In improvisation, sonic structures are proposed, negotiated and ushered into existence, and we can understand these too as social structures: as intimate and (relatively) immediate collective social interactions in which creative power is expressed through collective organization and decision-making in forms that both players and listeners can directly take part in. [...] Improvisation may be seen, not as representations, but as manifestations of a collective cognitive process, a situated collective process of working out, organizing and shaping difference, power and material, which cannot be located either within the individual or in "society," but resides in their interaction. (TODOROV 1981, p.87)

Since the meaning of sounds in collective improvisation is heavily charged with the perception of the actions and interactions associated to them, it is not surprising that free improvisation has been hopefully envisioned as a medium potentially capable of enacting musical expressions of social utopias, or simply for bringing music back to its ritual function.

At least for the duration of the music, different kinds of society with different concepts of power and democracy can be discussed, negotiated, heard and experienced. And not as ideas, but as material practices and processes that, both as players and listeners, we can actually inhabit,

³²⁶ « L'objectif est partir à la rencontre de l'instant. »

³²⁷ « [...] il est inconcevable pour Bakhtine d'isoler le « contact » comme un facteur parmi d'autres: l'énoncé entier est contact »

experience and directly participate in. (SCOTT 2014, p.8)

In short, as we have repeated since the beginning of this thesis, improvisers mean for the materials of their performances to appear as emergent and evanescent. The properties that are most valued - pureness, newness, immediateness, freshness, presence, action, spontaneity, freedom, vividness, contact, feedback - are the ones best exemplifying the two first categories of Peirce's theory of categories, which are modes of being of signs. Meaning in improvised performances is largely shifted to quality and presence, process and agency. This shift is historically relevant because it responds to many broader contemporary ideals and aesthetic preoccupations, as we described in chapter 4 of the first part of this thesis: breach from codes, the toppling of hierarchies, exploration of the social aspects of music, etc.

e) Idiomatic Shift as Relocalized Thirdness

It has been defended since the beginning of this thesis that free improvisation, though its participants and proponents have often advocated for it a rupture with codes, though they have described it as a non-idiomatic practice, cannot be pursued as a collective activity without referring to some shared body of conventions and common understandings. To reject them entirely would paralyze the participants, or at least render them unable to act in ways that are deemed coherent or significant by their collaborators. As we have seen, in Peircian terms, it would equate eliminating the category of thirdness altogether, which makes any sign inaccessible to perception and interpretation. But in order for a feature to trigger semiosis (every noticeable feature must do so), it must be recognizable, and therefore refer to some kind of thirdness. In free improvisation, formal pre-texts no longer explicitly determine a performance's outcome ahead of time; improvisers want the formal properties to emerge alongside the musical experience, at the time of performance. However, codification *does* govern the devices and strategies employed by improvisers so that this emergence in real-time may be facilitated. Enduring creative concerns, more or less common to free improvisers, support their collective activity. Free improvisation thus does not do away with idiomaticity altogether, but rather shifts it to underlying aesthetic concerns, ethical codes of conduct, values, attitudes and so on, that support the real-time collective music making, favor the emergence of sound materials, and help maintain the ongoing

process. As representatives of a process-oriented practice, improvisers want to create instances where the process can be set in motion. (FISCHER-LICHTE 2008 (2004), p.40, SCOTT 2014, p.8) The devices that allow and sustain this are the true core elements of free improvisation's shifted idiomaticity. This does not mean that improvisers all have the same sets of skills and habits; we indeed appreciate musicians for their individual musical being. Also, the contingency of interpretations and personal ways of acting can favor the improvisation process by introducing fertile anomalies. Nonetheless, by choosing to integrate an already existing music practice, certain mindsets must be adopted, while others may have to be set aside. These shared understandings, devices and perspectives make up the collective's horizon (in Bakhtin's terms) and carry much of its shared and prevailing thirdness.

In Peirce's model, idiomaticity is represented by the *legisign*³²⁸. Interpreting something as a legisign amounts to recognizing the rules (thirdness) that arbitrarily govern whatever phenomenon, for whatever reason, and going back however long. One can be familiar with particular sets of legisigns or not, just like one can have different levels of proficiency in interpreting them. If the interpreter is less versed in the given code, and does not manage to fully understand the conventional meaning of the legisign, the sign may still engage her as a sign of actual existence. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 2.252) The sign then at least bears the agency of secondness. An interpreter may also have even less understanding of the code at hand. He is then bound to perceive signs as very vague qualitative possibilities, hardly bearing any concrete agency and certainly no signification. This may be the desired effect in some performance circumstances.

Legisigns, in the form of sounds that relate to explicitly communicable pre-texts and pre-engagements, could put too much focus on abstract formal codes and thereby draw attention away from the raw quality and agency of performances.

Formal legisigns of this kind may, of course, be used, as they necessarily impose themselves by way of the performers' interpretation and performance practice habits. Indeed improvisers constantly and intentionally use formal arguments, notably by quoting known songs or, especially, by making overt use of techniques or materials that can be easily identifiable as

³²⁸ "A *legisign* is a law that is a Sign. This law is usually established by men. Every conventional sign is a legisign [but not conversely]. It is not a single object, but a general type which, it has been agreed, shall be significant." (PEIRCE, 1931 (1966), CP 2.246)

representative of other musical practices. However, many make a conscious effort to minimize easily identifiable examples of formal arguments. Furthermore, as we know, the idiomaticity of free improvisation makes no explicit prescriptions in terms of formal codes. Formal codes as stable conventions and sources of thirdness are mostly undermined. Any legisigns, then, can only concern those codes that *do* make up free improvisation's idiomaticity, namely the unifying underlying principles of the practice. They constitute clearly interpretable behaviors that correspond to improvisers' code of conduct.³²⁹ Although skilled improvisers may interpret these easily, their actualization, since it articulates far more than just sound materials, can take many complex forms and may never be interpreted as legisigns by less experienced participants.

When they enact the underlying principles that unify their practice, well-versed improvisers show that they master sets of legisigns that enable them to operate without committing to any particular *formal* legisigns. Formal legisigns are meant to be deconstructed. But deconstruction also necessitates the institution of devices and shared understandings that allow it to operate successfully or simply be recognized. According to Stévanche, the practice is submitted to conditions that require an elevated degree of aesthetic conformism in order for the actual singularity of a musical personality to be able to reveal itself.³³⁰ (STÉVANCE 2011) In addition to requiring conventions in order to operate, a deconstructive approach to improvisation also contributes to the construction of, and increased familiarity with, new materials and mindsets that may serve as new or transitory conventions. Each of these has its own scope, level of acceptance, stability and durability. In improvisation, they may form spontaneously and serve collective purposes only for an instant. These momentary conventions, short-lived clusters of thirdness, are what we refer to as *entente*.

³²⁹ The shift of idiomaticity that we are describing indeed has many implications on the way that we evaluate the performances that make use of these new codes. A detailed account of what the shift implies for our evaluation of success, virtuosity, tension and error will be made in chapter 6 of the third part of this thesis.

³³⁰ « L'improvisation ne s'improvise donc pas: elle est soumise à des conditions qui exigent un degré élevé de conformisme esthétique pour que puisse se révéler toute la singularité d'une personnalité musicale. »

2. - ENTENTE AS MOMENTARY FORMAL IDIOMATICITY

a) *Localized Formal Idiomatilities*

Some additional observations must be made regarding conventionalization of formal content in free improvisation. Formal sound content makes up the most important share of a performance's observable and collectively accessible signs. Yet improvisers consistently point out that formal sound elements are not the only meaningful aspects of their performances, nor are they even their most important aspects. We quoted Ornette Coleman in the first chapter of this thesis saying that the essence of free improvisation lies in the way it is experienced. Bailey, commenting on the approach of his former group Joseph Holbrooke, says:

Playing freely soon had the effect, as it always does, of producing a set of characteristics unique to that particular grouping of musicians and of producing an identity only a small proportion of which was established by the technical, purely musical constituents. (BAILEY 1980, p.89)

His colleague Tom Oxley says:

The actual technical details weren't for me the most rewarding part. It was the involvement in something that was challenging. Although the results, of course, were how we judged each stage. Sometimes there were disappointments, sometimes it was good. But the whole thing, the two of three year process, that was the important thing to me. (BAILEY 1980, p.89)

Indeed, what is established between the participants of an improvised performance or, in the longer time frame of an enduring improvisation scene, encompasses far more than formal sound content: what is in fact established is the way in which these forms are interpreted and produced by a group, as well as the way that the encounter/event is experienced. Much of this has to do with the unifying underlying concerns of the practice.

Nonetheless, the material aspects of improvisation cannot exclude conventionalization entirely. Coherent collective manipulations of emergent performance materials imply the necessity for them (and not only the principles that underlie them) to carry some degree of conventionalization or thirdness, at least enough so that these materials may mediate the group's activity and prompt further significant contributions. It is doubtful that this can be achieved simply by referring to unifying underlying sets of principles, since these principles cannot be observed directly during the performance. We will, on the one hand, continue to defend the idea

that the bulk of free improvisation's more enduring conventions does indeed lie in its principles and code of conduct and, furthermore, that these conventions prescribe formal manipulations only indirectly, by prescribing the mindsets, values, and eventually the habits and strategies that enable groups of improvisers as they produce sequences of emergent and evanescent sound content. However, we will also look into the way that the formal content itself also necessarily bears the marks of conventionalization, be it in ways that are sometimes very vague, or in ways that are very concrete but short-lived. Furthermore, the habits that this formal conventionalization produces, emergent and fleeting as they may be in some cases, are themselves necessary in order to interpret the performance and to be able to recognize its materials as being retraceable to the more established conventions that govern the underlying unifying principles of free improvisation.

Conventionalized uses of formal materials in free improvisation are of particularly fleeting applicability. In some cases they may materialize into trends that then impose divisions between different local improvisation scenes. Thus, the short history of free improvisation has given way to a number of "schools", each with particular localized preoccupations and approaches that other improvisers sometimes perceive as too constraining or authoritarian. According to some musicians, there are schools that commit to too much, prescribe too much, and expect sets of skills that are too specific. Tena Palmer comments:

You must know of the British "school", those dudes, and they're all dudes! I'll tell you as a woman, it gets... ah! It's usually me and a bunch of guys, but it helps with the balance if there is another woman. [...] Then there's the black American tradition: the Art ensemble (of Chicago). I have trouble with that: with traditions, because I'm not really following one school or another. I'm rather aware of the Dutch school and the British school, there's the Afro-American scene that was very politically Afro-American and then in Canada the CCMC is sort of the rear guard. It's all nice, but I think every person should bring all of what they have. [...] I do believe that there is development in free music. First of all the arrival of electronica is huge! It's kind of a paradox isn't it? Tradition and free music. I feel uncomfortable with it. I recognize it right away when I'm in a scene with people who are from a particular style and it's a bit restrictive because I'm starting to check my expressions... will they fit with this? (PALMER 2015)

"Schools" probably form naturally according to the aesthetic and ethical preoccupations of local musician communities; they thus serve the purposes of local interests and enquiries. They may prove helpful in this sense. However, they do leave the playground less open, since the

participants' volition³³¹ has found an orientation that does not find resonance with all free improvisers. This kind of specialized volition may also develop on a much smaller scale, even within a single performance, thus necessarily excluding the participants that do not connect with it. This will be clearer after the next section, once we will have explored the concept of "*entente*" to greater length.

b) Entente - A Contingent but Coherent Understanding

The singular executions that make up the formal content of improvised performance represent series of momentary understandings or short-lived conventions: what I call *entente*. I propose this concept of *entente* (the French word at once encompasses "understanding" and "agreement"... it also somewhat more distantly evokes "hearing") as a kind of emergent and temporary convention, a momentary stylistic agreement that caters to the momentary needs of the improvising group. It is characterized by a momentarily perceived³³² sense of cohesion and is mediated by collectively observable and accessible performance materials.³³³

Since musicians have different approaches and histories, congeniality over a shared material presence is never complete and "*entente*" is certainly always contingent, as are the ways in which improvisers respond to it actively. However, according to the degree of congeniality that it involves, it serves the purpose of convention and gives coherence to group actions, allowing improvisers to proceed collectively. *Entente* fills in in the absence of a more standardized idiomaticity. In our case, it plays an important part in filling in for free improvisation's lack of allegiance to any formal idiomaticity. For this reason, when we speak of *entente*, we mostly mean the way it applies to formal materials, making them collectively recognizable and useful.

During a performance, every event offers participants concrete real-time collateral experiences that, because they are perceived as instituting cohesion, serve as sufficiently common

³³¹ Peirce discusses volition extensively. For reasons that we will soon review, he links it to the category of thirdness.

³³² We say perceived, because any such encounter in free improvisation remains highly contingent. See section 4 of the third part of this thesis for a discussion on the way the semiotic flexibility of free improvisation facilitates collaborative work by creating for its participants the illusion of cohesion.

³³³ *Entente* naturally concerns much more than just the formal sound properties of a particular moment. The meaning of any musical instant articulates complex agencies and histories. *Entente*, then, is itself an ecology of sorts, in the sense described in the first section of this thesis. We must, however, insist again on the particular role of formal sound properties as the principle observable materials of these ecologies, and their centerpieces.

grounds for supporting the continuation of the activity.³³⁴ Thus a seemingly elusive sound form, serving as the common ground (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 1.556, 1.559) for the collateral experience of emerging signs, may sustain instantaneous collective activity without any strong commitment to any particular formal idiom. This is indeed a desirable situation for musicians intent on letting the formal content of their performances be appreciated not for their successful actualization of given formal codes, but rather for their quality, presence, agency and the effects that they prompt (or of which they are the result). Again, firstness and secondness are brought to the forefront. And since we are dealing with emergent and evanescent formal materials, the turnover of sound forms that are collectively recognizable and invested with convention is often as quick as the succession of instants to which they are bound. Their agency and conventionality is short lived, and so formal features themselves are largely kept out of free improvisation's long-term idiomaticity. But short-term institution of formal idioms is a necessary measure and consequence of collective activity; *entente* is inescapably determined in real time according to the collateral experiences of the performance's participants. *Entente* thus serves the group's momentary collective formal needs. The way *entente* outlives a single performance determines the way it may live on as a trend. It finds resonance in further performances and farther removed actors. Some of the more enduring trends in the formal manipulations of free improvisation include the use of "noise", drones and extended techniques.

Cases of *entente* present all of the conditions necessary to qualify as conventions (in the sense proposed by Meyer and employed by Becker) and as signs accessible to a semiotic community (following Peirce' theory). Nothing prevents us from extending Meyer's idea of convention - as "an artificial but agreed on (socially constructed) way of doing something" that supports collective activity and enables its actors - to a short-lived, even a very short-lived consensus such as *entente*. No convention is eternal anyways. "Conventions represent the continuing adjustment of the cooperating parties to the changing conditions in which they practise; as conditions change, they change." (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.59) This turnover phenomenon, when observed in the context of the treatment of formal features in improvised performances, is so rapid that it can easily be observed in real time, even during a single performance, as some materials replace others as the main support of the group's activity.

More problematic than the extreme localization and fleetingness of formal conventions in

³³⁴ As we know, the activity is in reality supported by a shared repertoire of unifying principles.

free improvisation is the question of their initial adoption when the practice relies on no formal codes to prescribe them. Left to form, develop recognition and find usage without reference to an established formal code, the question of how these conventions are adopted for the first time is tricky. Becker writes that:

[it] is difficult [to construct a new art form] precisely because the questions that can ordinarily be answered by referring to the imagined responses of others in the cooperative network cannot be answered that way. No cooperative network exists yet. [...] The lack of conventions manifests itself as a gross inability to make editorial choices or to judge the results of choices made. If you do not know whether a particular choice was good or « worked », you cannot decide whether to change it the next time. (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.209)

As we know, the collective activity of improvisers, although it is not governed by any commitment to formal codes, is supported by well-established underlying principles. The behavior of a musician's collaborators is thus unlikely to surprise her completely! However, sound being the principal mediating actor in collective improvisation, the musicians must make use of emergent formal materials in order to achieve *entente*. Since the free improvisation practice provides no other formal code that may validate these materials and make them "work", improvisers rely on momentary collateral experience and, perhaps, analogy to collateral past actions and experiences, in order to achieve *entente*, that is: to momentarily conventionalize formal materials and allow them to mediate collective activity for a moment. Collateral experience is precisely the key to alleviate the above-mentioned problem raised by Becker. The participants are all in the presence of each other. Thus, every sound and performance act is accessible to all of them and translates into collateral experiences: simultaneous references to commonly accessible objects that can support further collective action.

There is often a moment of hesitant waiting at the beginning of free improvisation performances, as the participants wonder who will act first. Once the first sound has been emitted, however, all members share that much concrete collateral experience to which they may provide immediate, and thus linearly causal and relevant, reactions. We already discussed in section d) of the first chapter of the current part of the thesis that this causal linearity alone, regardless of the qualitative nature of the contributions, is enough to make an effective demonstration of secondness. After all, the meaning of *entente*, according to the principle of the inseparability of Peirce's categories, must always be achieved by articulating a performance's

observable qualitative aspects with its situation of realization (secondness) and the principles and creative goals of the practice (thirdness).

In semiotic terms, *entente*, as a short-term formal convention, can also be understood as a sign that is shared by a community and that supports its exchanges. Réthoré, drawing on Peirce, indicates that the "prime example of a sign is a thought, apprehensible by another thought that develops it and is exchangeable within a community of persons in their various mutual commerce."^{335 336} (RÉTHORÉ 2008, p.3)

In order for emerging sound forms to be exchangeable in a community of improvisers, the musicians must have, however contingent, a shared idea of these forms' pertinence to the ongoing process. *Entente* is this shared idea. In the practice of free improvisation, it matters not that all participants understand a musical event in the same way. *Entente* has the same kind of degree of determination as do the formal sound materials of free improvisation: it is liminal, not fixed, but on the edge. It is loose, flexible and vague.³³⁷ Since *entente* concerns these musical materials directly³³⁸ and since, in other words, the determination of a sign depends on the determination of the interpretation that is made of it, we can safely say that the liminality, the contingency and vagueness, but also the flexibility and cohesion that surround the musical materials of free improvisation are a direct expression of the type of *entente* that free improvisers may achieve. *Entente* is meant to be kept dynamic. Yet, for a time, it settles the controversies that characterize the encounter of different subjectivities who must find an imperfect consensus in order to surmount inevitable gaps of interpretation and performance practice³³⁹ that are made observable in the form of controversies during the performance.

It is important to contextualize all of this and note that no consensus, in any group activity, is ever perfectly rigid. Complementary emergent conventions - instances of *entente* -

³³⁵ « Le signe par excellence est une pensée, saisissable en une autre pensée qui la développe et qui est échangeable dans la communauté des hommes dans toute la variété de leur commerce mutuel. »

³³⁶ We should note that this exchange is accomplished despite inevitable contingency and gaps between individual interpretations. Indeed, these gaps, in free improvisation, may be particularly wide without impairing the fluidity of the process. This is due to various parameters of the practice, perhaps most notably the vagueness and consequent flexibility of most formal signs employed in this particular setting. This will be explored in greater detail in chapters 3 and 4 of the third part of this thesis.

³³⁷ Vagueness will be discussed at length in chapter 4 of this part of the thesis.

³³⁸ *Entente* can actually be described as the way that collectivities understand these materials *together*.

³³⁹ Even improvisers who are very familiar with each other's performance habits must deal with the uncertainties and controversies that are brought about by the necessarily unpredictable nature of the emergence of materials in real-time collective processes. This would hold true even between musicians with identical performance habits, since no person reacts in exactly the same way to the same situation.

must fill in for any aspect for which codes have made no provision. Becker writes:

Though standardized, conventions are seldom rigid and unchanging. [...] they leave much to be resolved by reference to customary modes of interpretation on the one hand and by negotiation on the other. (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.31)

The particularity of free improvisation is that these two modes of resolution are kept separate and concern different aspects of the practice: the bulk of its "reference to customary modes of interpretation" concerns only the practice's underlying principles, while its observable aspects (quality, presence and agency) are left to be resolved by real-time negotiation, of which *entente* is the key driving element since it settles and triggers it all at once.³⁴⁰

c) Entente as a Point of Departure and Point of Relay

To propose an explanation for the way that *entente* resolves real-time negotiations, I would like to borrow the concept of point of departure as elaborated by Pareyson.³⁴¹ Emergent forms and actions in improvisation, once an *entente* has been achieved regarding its usefulness for the collective task (this happens very quickly), remain available to serve as points of departure for further collective actions. These forms, observable by all participants, nonetheless require that improvisers know how to make some use of them that will be coherent for all involved (or at least that will be capable of integrating the process without compromising to it.)

Pareyson insists on the inertness and nonchalance of *spunti* or points of departure. They simply rest there and remain accessible, silently suggestive. The inert resistance, however, takes nothing away from a material's agency; Pareyson states that these resistances "suggest and evoke rather than prevent and impede, because, as it becomes artistic material, formative intention transforms these resistances into fertile points of departure". (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.62) This effectively makes the concept of the *spunto* more easily applicable to formal and observable aspects of performances, rather than implicit underlying principles. It is possible to imagine cases where relatively enduring underlying rules or principles would serve as triggers or points of

³⁴⁰ We will discuss the way that *entente* launches and relaunched cycles of negotiation in section d) of the present chapter.

³⁴¹ He uses the Italian word *spunto* (plural: *spunti*), which has been kept in the French translation. This is because the word *spunto* evokes not only the idea of departure or beginning, but also that of occasion or inspirational motive. The object in question suggests that some action should be undertaken.

departure for sequences of collective creative actions; but these initiatives can only be carried out through the manipulations of observable materials that offer the same opportunities. For Pareyson, inspiration cannot be dissociated from the material manipulations that are its only way of being. Furthermore, enduring principles and ideals lack the emergent qualities that are necessary for a point of departure to be understood as an actual beginning, a sudden inspiration or serendipitous occasion. Finally, in a group situation, any point of departure that is meant to be inclusive must be made present and accessible to all. Only observable aspects will do.

A special kind of recognition or semiosis is needed in order for improvisers to feel inspired by an emergent form and to see it as an occasion and fertile point of departure for further acts. Just like any sign, it has to be seized in articulation with its situation of elaboration (secondness) as well as in the light of the rules that support the group's collective activity (thirdness). Emergent as it is, it can only be fertile as a point of departure if it can be deemed useful according to the habits and predispositions of the participants. Creative activity indeed involves being in a constant state of anticipation and, drawing from one's personal horizon (which Pareyson, for whom all human experience is a kind of formativity, calls "formative intentionality"), knowing how to welcome emergent forms as points of departure for further actions.

*The point of departure must answer to a state of expectation; otherwise, even if it were to come, it would not be noticed. [...] It is nothing without the artist's activity. [...] The true artist is the one who always finds spunti around her. [...] Because in order for it to be fertile and to succeed in attracting that which can fulfill it, this expectation must be so attentive, tense, welcoming and vigilant that it reveals an activity in perpetual exercise, an intense and scurrying zeal, ready to provoke the coming of a point of departure at every occasion.*³⁴² (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), pp.95-6)

The artist thus forms as she contemplates, constructs as she listens, converting any form, event or accident into points of departure (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.96) that will carry the activity into its next phase.

³⁴² Le point de départ doit répondre à une attente; autrement, même en admettant qu'il vienne, il ne serait pas remarqué. [...] N'est rien sans l'activité de l'artiste. [...] Le véritable artiste est celui qui trouve toujours des spunti autour de soi [...] Car pour qu'elle soit féconde et réussisse à attirer ce qui peut la combler, cette attente doit être si attentive, si tendue, si vigilante, qu'elle révèle une activité en perpétuel exercice, un zèle intense, et empressé, prêt à provoquer l'avènement d'un point de départ à chaque occasion. Or s'il y a bien une attente qui est aussi active et productive et qui, dès que ce qu'elle attendait arrive, s'apprête immédiatement à la reconnaître, c'est l'intentionnalité formative, que l'artiste a imprimée à son expérience toute entière.

In group configurations, collective points of departure must be found. *Entente* serves this purpose, providing the participants with the momentary support to collectively recognize the use of given materials. *Entente* is the point of departure for further tentative negotiations. But it is also the result of these negotiations whenever an instance of it is seen as bringing coherence and cohesion to the process. Viewed from this angle, it seems more appropriate to describe *entente* not as a mere point of departure, but as a point of relay that re-launches new *entente*-negotiation cycles. Each action and response provides the materials necessary to institute collateral experience, which, as a common reference, supports the achievement of further instances of *entente*. Improvisers, however, do not wish to settle the process in a kind of ideal state of "total" *entente* or complete determination; this would bring the process to a stop, whereas, as we know, improvisers wish to nurture and maintain it. They wish to remain on the edge of order-making and deconstruction in order to preserve the momentum of their performance and the pertinence of their practice. They have chosen their medium - sound - wisely, then, since it can only provide very contingent instances of *entente*: ones that always contain a share of lingering controversy to be negotiated. With every new cycle, the journey is redrawn. Becker writes that "[e]ach consciously sought solution alters the problem somewhat, if only by altering the range of possible solutions to problems of that kind." (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.303) Every instance of *entente* has effects that are carried out in further cycles.³⁴³ Because of its particular conditions of creation, the improvised performance is left wide open to constant feedback.³⁴⁴ Fischer-Lichte speaks of a

³⁴³ Although free improvisation does develop in linear time, it must be pointed out that *entente*-negotiation cycles do not necessarily follow each other in a neat order: one leading to the next. There can be many simultaneous fronts of negotiation in the improvisation process, concerning different aspects and ideas. A loose *entente* on one of these fronts can have effects on the negotiations of another. For example, as musicians decide to coalesce around an ostinato proposed by the guitarist, this sudden common movement can be accompanied by a gathering around a certain range, even if this range was, until this triggering event, being negotiated on a different front. Yet even this description does not do justice to what really happens during improvised performances, because although there can be many different elements in a performance that act as simultaneous focus points for the group, it is never really clear whether or not these elements are really "different" or separate from one another. Distinction is never easy and cohesion is never complete, yet some distinctions and some degree of cohesion may always be perceived. The intertwining of different fronts of negotiation is both complex and highly contingent. Furthermore, since improvisers value impulsive actions and reactions, it is difficult even for them to explain which aspect of a performance has motivated them to act in a certain way. But these doubts are not detrimental to the practice of free improvisation. The default parameters of creation of free improvisation (collective real-time manipulations of sound forms), as well as the particular semiotics of music, provide key conditions and devices that allow improvisers to achieve their discursive needs despite - or even thanks to - the lack of neatness and precision of their medium. These conditions will be examined closely in the next two chapters.

³⁴⁴ Again, no process can be completely shut off from emergence; each one demonstrates some degree of openness to feedback. Otherwise, the process would be unable to deal with situations unpredictability. We like to remind that the

feedback loop. (FISCHER-LICHTE 2008 (2004))

Feedback is a necessary condition *and* consequence of real-time collective operations. Since it is instrumental in guaranteeing emergence in every *entente*-negotiation cycle, it is a condition well suited for this particular objective. Yet since it also forces improvisers to leave their comfort zone and deal with emergent (and therefore to some degree novel or unfamiliar) materials and situations, feedback helps improvisers with another one of the purposes of their enquiry: to deconstruct their habits. Again, this does not mean that practitioners wish to erase all that they know; this is not what deconstruction wishes to achieve, as we have seen. Any strategy that has been employed in order to subvert one habit, itself a concrete episode of the participants' histories and an instance of *entente*, becomes in its turn a budding habit.³⁴⁵ *Entente*-negotiation loops, open to feedback, uncertainty and emergence, thus guarantee that improvisers' habit repertoires remain fluid and dynamic.

Since we have been discussing semiotics a fair bit, it is worth considering this question of *entente*-negotiation loops in semiotic terms. Once they have been elaborated upon by subsequent contributions, the common grounds (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 3.621) that give way to *entente* (usually observable and collectively accessible materials) become the objects of potentially endless sequences of signs. Those familiar with Peirce's model should recognize that this is where the triadic version of the sign is supplanted by its hexadic version. In other words, says Réthoré, "real semiosis is a logical sequence of determinations that, initiated by the *dynamic object*'s determination of the *immediate object*, enable the representation of the sign, which in turn determines a *dynamic interpretant*, which finally may determine a *final interpretant*. The succession is, we must insist, logical and not necessarily chronological."³⁴⁶ (RÉTHORÉ 2007, p.5) Thus the common ground, as a pretext (not pre-text) for *entente*, serves as a collectively accessible *dynamic object* that will determine each of the participants' semiotic processes. The

particularity of free improvisation is, first, that it submits a relatively much higher range of its materials to unpredictability and, second, that it effectively seeks to maximize, rather than limit, the role of emergence and uncertainty

³⁴⁵ Should this solution find repeated usage, it will become a well-instituted habit. Free improvisers tend to want to refresh their habit repertoire. Though improvisers obviously make creative uses of repetition, too much repetition could make an improviser seem stagnant and not open enough to the dynamicity and potential for emergence of *entente*-negotiation cycles.

³⁴⁶ « Le signe n'est plus alors pris dans sa version triadique mais dans sa version hexadique, autrement dit la sémiologie réelle est une suite logique de déterminations qui, partie de la détermination de l'objet immédiat par l'objet dynamique, permet la représentation du signe, lequel détermine un interprétant immédiat, qui détermine éventuellement un interprétant dynamique, lequel détermine éventuellement un interprétant final. Insistons, il s'agit là d'une succession logique, pas chronologique. »

entente itself may be seen as a second object, the immediate object, to which, Réthoré explains, corresponds the cultural and linguistic space to which the sign belongs.³⁴⁷ (RÉTHORÉ 2007, p.5) *Entente* thus belongs to what we have been referring to as the horizon. It both refers to it and institutes it. Réthoré continues by saying that "such a space, especially in contemporary communicative platforms, is nearly always plural and multiform and that this complexity must be taken into account by semiotic theory as it is by communications theory."³⁴⁸ (RÉTHORÉ 2007, p.5) Seen from this perspective, *entente* and any longer lasting horizon should be analyzed as more than just an agreement concerning observable materials; *entente* is more than just a consensus based on shared formal understandings. Indeed, we have renewably highlighted that free improvisation is oriented towards process more than it is towards formal objects, and that it is supported by an ensemble of unifying underlying principles.

This is where a semiotic conception in the Peircian tradition can come in handy: it defends an interpretation that articulates the formal firstness of common grounds with their concrete situational secondness and the laws and habits that make up their thirdness. A semiotic analysis based on the Peircian model hopes not to describe how certain signs refer to certain objects, but rather how participants interpret and engage with each other and with performance materials in a given, unique situation, and according to which rules. This model thus agrees with improvisers' affirmation that the essence of their activities does not lie simply in the sound forms that they produce. However, it stipulates that there exists a necessary relationship that binds these observable forms to the essence of the improvisation experience, one that is renewed through feedback loops³⁴⁹ with every new performance act that achieves *entente*. Peirce's model thus obliges (and allows) us to account for formal properties in our semiotic analysis of the experience of improvised performances, as an inseparable component of it. This is where we may find the principal musicological interest of the concept of *entente*: it serves as the principal device through

³⁴⁷ « Au second objet, l'objet immédiat (également appelé objet de représentation, Oi), correspond l'espace culturel et linguistique duquel relève le signe. »

³⁴⁸ « Il va de soi aujourd'hui qu'un tel espace est presque toujours pluriel et multiforme et que cette complexité doit être prise en charge par la théorie sémiotique comme elle l'est par les théories de la communication. »

³⁴⁹ It could seem odd to apply a semiotic model to a concept such as Fischer-Lichte's feedback loops, knowing that she expressly opposed semiotic descriptions of improvised performance and, precisely, proposed her feedback loop model as an alternative to semiotics. But we do think that the true inconsistency between her theory and semiotics was essentially a problem with the unflexibility of binary semiotic models (almost certainly the types of models that Fischer-Lichte was evoking). A triadic model of semiotics, however, is consistent with her account of performances. We notably think that her idea of the feedback loop carries out in a similar way to the way that sequences of semioses allow for potentially endless new dynamic sequences of signs to be produced.

which a momentary association of sound forms is seen as exemplifying, for a group of collaborators in a particular situation, more enduring unifying principles.

d) Retracing Entente Through Methodology

When musicians reach a tacit agreement or common understanding regarding how they should engage the momentary configurations of an ongoing performance, there are many ways that they may make the coherence of their activity observable. Indeed the possibilities are infinite and it is certainly silly to try to enumerate them all. Nonetheless a few general, common examples can help illustrate what we mean. At first, they may seem obvious to the point of banality.

As a disclaimer, we should say that our claim is not to explain all that makes up the richness of a performance. Indeed, descriptions of improvisation are doomed to oversimplify it because there is always so much more to the performances than what can be accounted for in descriptions. But by describing how *entente*, as a momentary formal rule (thirdness), articulates formal features (firstness), situational relationships (secondness) and enduring principles (thirdness), we hope to give a new perspective to our understanding of the moments of cohesion that occur throughout improvisation. At the very least, such a dynamic conception should help to solve the problematic opposition of form vs. content. This was indeed one of Pareyson's claims when he proposed his own dynamic conception of the artwork (discussed in chapter 2 of the second part) that articulates both material object and the process that produced it. Peirce's model adds the thirdness of rule to the firstness of form and the secondness of process. The artwork is, all at once and in indivisible unity: a) a form, b) the accomplishment (and ongoing development) of a process, and c) the expression of the laws that governed that process. The coherence of an artwork depends on its articulation of these aspects, just as the coherence of a sign depends on its articulation of the three universal categories.³⁵⁰

³⁵⁰ We should note that, while Peirce's model is clearly divided into three well-defined categories, each with a specific function in semiosis, Pareyson's model is much less methodical. In most passages, he merely insists that the meaning of an artwork resides in the indivisible unity of all of its aspects. He did, nonetheless, propose interesting ways of broadening the conception of art works and his theory mostly stands strong even today. For us, this comparison is a reminder of what a visionary Peirce was for having proposed, several decades earlier, a much better detailed model with a far larger potential of applicability.

Returning now to *entente*: it is worth discussing how this link can be established, since the fact that it is achieved by having more than one person engaged with a common ground gives it some complexity. How is it that a single form or situation can be deemed significant, negotiated and put to common use despite contingency of interpretations? Obviously, participants run the risk of not noticing the same features of the ongoing performance, of not sharing the same intentions as their collaborators regarding the outcomes of ongoing processes, of not perceiving the contributions of their collaborators as they were meant to be perceived, or even of not deeming these contributions as significant materials at all. In order to bring out different possibilities for how this essential contact can be made, understood and developed upon, we will apply to them the typology of situations of communication proposed by Jean-Marie Klinkenberg in *Précis général de sémiotique*, who himself expended on Eco's typology. An interesting element of it is that it treats *intention* as a type-defining aspect of communication situations, both on the emitting side and the receiving side. Messages can be emitted voluntarily or involuntarily, and then be perceived consciously or unconsciously. Finally, the receiver can judge whether or not the perceived message was intentionally emitted or not. This gives eight theoretical possibilities, which we will review, sometimes paraphrasing Klinkenberg's descriptions, and for which we will provide hypothetical examples that could (and do) take place in improvised performances.

The first case plays out as to what we usually consider as "normal" communication. I voluntarily emit signs, which are received consciously and considered to have been intentionally emitted. (KLINKENBERG 2000, p.70) Since improvisers in a group are usually participating with good will in this collective activity and are carefully listening to each other with an open and receptive mind, we can hope that most contributions that are picked up by collaborators and that successfully lead to further developments fall into this category. However, we wish to add that, according to the triadic model that we are following, the sign is not simply "received" but rather interpreted. The exchange is contingent.

The second example is that of *simulation*: the simulator voluntarily produces signs that the receiver consciously perceives as having been produced involuntarily. (KLINKENBERG 2000, p.71) An example of this could be a saxophonist or clarinetist whose voluntary "squeak" is perceived as a technical accident.

Cases three and four involve signs that are produced voluntarily, but received subliminally.

These two cases are difficult to differentiate because, since the listener receives the message subliminally, it is difficult to attribute to him the possibility of having or not having noticed the intention of the emitter. (KLINKENBERG 2000, p.71) Improvised performances are dense in material and reactions are immediate. It is a widely held belief among improvisers that their reactions can take place without them having "fully" interpreted the actions that prompted them. Furthermore, while the attention of a musician may be focused on a particular layer of a performance's sound material, the other layers, as constitutive elements of the "whole", likely contribute to the participant's interpretation of the event, even subliminally.

Cases five and six involve signs that are emitted involuntarily, but that are correctly interpreted by the receiver. The difference is that in one case, the involuntary act is thought to have been voluntary, while in the other, it is correctly interpreted as having been involuntary. (KLINKENBERG 2000, p.72) We can imagine the "squeak" from our second example, only this time it truly was an accident, but has been deemed significant and/or useful by other participants who treat it as content and may elaborate on it with their subsequent propositions.

Cases seven and eight are more problematic. They are involuntarily emitted and subliminally received. In case seven, the receiver could, after the fact, suspect that the emitter has produced a sign of some significance. In the final situation, according to Klinkenberg, we are outside of any semiotic situation, since none of the actors ever have any awareness of there being any exchange. (KLINKENBERG 2000, p.73) However, Peirce's model may nonetheless be able to account for this situation if the sign in question, despite not being consciously processed, pushes the receiver to react: react unconsciously, yes, but nonetheless according to certain reactive habits and within the uniqueness of the situation at hand. Some of these reactions may even become observable during the performance. It should be recalled that for Peirce, a sign's pragmatic meaning is measured by its effects.

This typology is drawn on statuses linked to consciousness and intentionality; it is not based on the internal characteristics of an envisioned code, but on considerations of a pragmatic nature. (KLINKENBERG 2000, p.72) Klinkenberg suggests that it can be useful to reflect on questions such as the distinctions between fiction and lies. For us, it is interesting because it proposes different types of cases of *entente* (while accounting for contingency) and allows us to account for situations where improvisers are involved and brought to react without being

perfectly conscious of why or how.³⁵¹ One could suppose that the first type of exchange, where all communication is voluntary, offers the best conditions for creative condition. Indeed, since we know that musicians are animated by some unifying underlying intentions, and since we know that they generally have some shared collateral experience with the types of performance materials that are being used (be it merely due to the previous operations within the ongoing performance itself), there is reason to believe that good-willed participants will try to maintain their exchange by using the same signs. However, as we know, these exchanges are also characterized by an inevitable degree of contingency. Contributions have unintended effects on receivers, or at least effects that are different from those intended. Despite their best efforts, unintentionality is an inevitable part of the picture, one that can be imagined in the form of a gap between the ways different participants experience and elaborate the ongoing process. This is interesting for us because this gap is what makes ongoing negotiations necessary; it is actually favorable to emergence and thus to the maintenance of the process' momentum.³⁵²

It is also important to stress that each actor in our case simultaneously occupies both emitting and receiving functions. Thus, moving beyond the typology of situations of communication listed above, if we wish to explore the pragmatic meaning of any case situation of *entente*, it is important to describe the practical effects that it triggers within actors that have received it. For, although participants may be engaged with the same performance materials, thus achieving *entente*, they never respond to the situation in the same way. Their momentary intentions, particularly the way they are prompted to react to the current situation of the ongoing process, diverge. *Entente* mobilizes different voices that may, through different playful intentions, join together in different types of formal adjacency. A given performance situation is indeed a single (collectively accessible) whole that is both the result of and the point of departure for multiple distinct individual outputs.

The practical effects of any occurrence of *entente* on the unfolding process can include infinite configurations of interplay among its participants. In the following sub-sections, we will discuss some of the more obvious possibilities.

³⁵¹ Improvisers indeed often speak in terms of impulse and spontaneous unpremeditated action. Unfortunately, it is difficult to directly observe whether or not all participants are consciously engaged in a case of *entente*.

³⁵² There will be more on contingency as a device favorable to emergence in chapter 4 of the third part.

i) Similarity

The most common example of cohesion begins by the mutual recognition of similarity between the participants' voices. Performers then agree to simultaneously develop similar qualitative grounds and treat a certain feature as a terrain for playful interaction. Although most aspects of improvised performances (especially its non-formal aspects) are difficult to quantify, the exploited property or feature that becomes the main focus of a group's momentary formal operations can often be measured in quantitative terms, according to an appropriate dichotomic axis. For example, *entente* may be anchored in a fragment that is deemed interesting for its degree of busyness (frantic or sparse), its volume (loud or soft), the shapes of its tones (flat or bending), the degree to which it approximates a regular beat (regular or irregular), the degree to which it approximates a certain identifiable inherited stylistic effect (clearly identifiable actualization or seemingly totally emergent form), the degree of attack (legato or staccato, marcato, glissando *etc.*), and any other number of dichotomies concerning timbre, tonality, harmonic density, and so on. Although in many cases the dichotomy is based on concrete degrees of intensity (pitch, volume, frequency, or harmonic density, for example), in many other cases it is best expressed as a degree of proximity to an inherited standard (such as key, mode, meter, style, or timbre). In the case of what we described as a "free *from*" perspective of free improvisation, the participants will always try to demonstrate the lowest degree of proximity to any such inherited standard. However, the point of *entente* for those who are closer to a "freedom *to*" perspective may have any degree of proximity to any inherited standard, as long as a terrain is identified that can support ongoing collective activity. Gravitating towards similarity often constitutes a "go to" recursive strategy for improvisers that want to reestablish common ground in a clear, explicit way. In one performance at *Audio Rebel* in Rio de Janeiro, a guest saxophonist of a rather amateur level offered few other possibilities to the other participants. Their main performance strategy very quickly turned to establishing various phases of "similar" material.

ii) Complementarity

Of course, engaging with a performance situation by proposing material and acts similar to those of one's partners is but one possible configuration of *entente*. Complementarity is when *entente* articulates contrasting forms of acts. The result may demonstrate coherence and cohesion

just as successfully as cases of *entente* that unite participants around similarity. Obviously, the idea of an *entente* based on complementarity of contrasting contributions provides countless possibilities of agency. We should also note that free improvisers tend to strive to remain open to the "suchness" of any imminent performance situation or combination. They may read complementarity in situations that are considered to be utterly confused and incoherent by a common listener.

iii) Mutual Subversion

The inability to articulate dissimilar contributions in a coherent way may signify the failure of having achieved any form of *entente*. Alternatively, it could be the result of an intentional controversy, where musicians challenge and tease each other intentionally by making contributions that precisely will not be easy to react to. Hugh Davies (of the Music Improvisation Company), in an interview with Derek Bailey, discusses this kind of breach as a potentially intentional one, where the goal is to "create a mutually stimulating musical tension". (BAILEY 1980, p.95) He goes on to say that certain conditions and skills (he cites mutual trust and common language) must be engaged in order for this "mutual subversion"³⁵³ to be successful. Since this effectively represents recourse to established common understandings (thirdness), then it is safe to say that these "conflicts" concerning manipulations of performance materials do not exactly constitute failures to reach *entente*. Firstly, because they are intentional. Secondly, because they actualize the more enduring and deeply engrained cousin of *entente*: underlying and unifying principles shared by the members of the group. Davies precisely states that these apparent breaches of cooperation require collaborators to know each other very well.

Finally, it is important to note, however, that the momentary preoccupations of improvisers do not usually concern a single isolated quality. Several aspects of sound are always at play, and while members of the group may be engaged with one of these aspects in a way that promotes similar operations within the group, another aspect may demonstrate *entente* according to contrasting complementarity or be the terrain of mutual subversion. A group may be performing at similar volumes, for example, while stacking an impressively contrasting variety of timbres. Meanwhile, some aspects (harmonic density, for example) may be present only as by-

³⁵³ The term is proposed by Bailey, not by Davies.

products of the ongoing activity, are not involved in the performers' intentional operations, and are not in themselves points of *entente*. These are examples of the eighth situation of communication mentioned above. Needless to say that the potential combinations and narrative possibilities in group improvisation are endless. We hope to have nonetheless illustrated some ways in which aspects of improvised performances may be retraced, some perspectives that allow us to make meaningful descriptions of works whose formal nature is emergent and evanescent, as well as some of the idiomatic principles according to which the success or failure of improvised works may be assessed.

3. - SEMIOTIC TREATMENT OF MUSIC

a) What we Aspire to do with Music

Just as sound has its way of filling space and time according to the physical laws of the place in which it is produced, sound has its way of filling the human ear and mind. The way it is perceived is in part due to basic human cognitive skills, and in part due to cultural conditioning.

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In the previous chapter, we discussed the fact that the communicative purposes of music in free improvisation are not the same as those in scientific communities or any community that aspires to achieve precise, explicit communication. The present chapter will explore the specific dialogical needs of free improvisers and link these to the degree of semiotic determination of its materials. Special attention will be given to vagueness, both as an inherent condition of the materials of free improvisation and as a strategy that is instrumental in the execution of improvisers' playful, deconstructive enquiry.

This enquiry concerns quality, presence and agency of sounds as they are elaborated in real-time by a collectivity of participants according to a set of underlying principles. We are far removed from the purposes of semiotic uses of verbal language. Esclapez draws our attention to Jacques Fontanille's account of the way that music's meaning tends to pass through affects and percepts rather than values or preconceived concepts. She writes:

*If we represent discourse not only as the implementation of a system, as the product of a combination strategy, but also, and especially, as a field of perceptive and sensory presence, then the predications and representations that it proposes are no longer purely formal articulations, but masses that are perceived, sensed, that are endowed with qualities and degrees of presence for the discourse's personal center.*³⁵⁵ (ESCLAPEZ 2013, p.48)

³⁵⁴ The goal of this thesis is not to elaborate which elements of musical perception are inherent and which are acquired. This is a complex question, one that is being addressed by many researches in cognition of music who have produced interesting results in the last decades! I would like to mention the recent study "Music Induces Universal Emotion-related Psychophysiological responses: comparing Canadian listeners to Congolese Pygmies" by Hauke Egermann, Nathalie Fernando, Lorraine Chuen and Stephen McAdams. It confirms the role of cultural background in the appreciation of music, but also provides evidence for cross-cultural consistent physiological responses to music. (EGERMANN, 2015)

³⁵⁵ « Si nous nous représentons le discours non seulement comme la mise en oeuvre d'un système, comme le produit d'une combinatoire, mais aussi, et surtout, comme un champ de présence perceptif et sensible, alors les prédications et les représentations qu'il propose ne sont plus des pures articulations formelles, mais des grandeurs perçues, senties, dotées de qualités et degrés de *présence* pour le centre personnel du discours. »

Every sign, in free improvisation or in any human activity, is founded on a phenomenological firstness that can be called a quality of feeling. This is where, in verbal language, vague innuendos and undertones insert themselves (RÉTHORÉ 2007, p.4) and help complete the meaning of a statement. In free improvisation, however, vague phenomenological firstness is meant to generate the lion's share of each contribution's meaning.

Improvised performances thus have different semiotic requirements. Since they let interpreters make of it what they may, precision or explicitness are rarely issues of concern for those involved. We will argue shortly that vagueness is what allows multiple participants to collectively interact with materials and other signs despite not having the same experience of them; musical content is rarely meant to explicitly share information or prescribed meaning in the same way that verbal language does.

It would be possible to invest any sign with extra-musical³⁵⁶ symbolic meaning.³⁵⁷³⁵⁸ Again, this is not the purpose of music as humans use it.³⁵⁹ Derek Bailey quotes Ernst Fischer, pointing out that music seems more apt to "produce a uniform and deliberate effect", "stimulate a collective action". (BAILEY 1980) In this sense, it's meaning is pragmatic in the Peircean sense that has already been discussed and that recognizes meaning in the agency and effects of things.³⁶⁰ Music, and more particularly free improvisation, is less about understanding and more about living and experiencing.³⁶¹ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.83)

³⁵⁶ Formal codes in music, as we have seen, depend in large part on intra-musical symbolic meaning. Recognizable chords, rhythmic patterns and even the notes of the well-tempered clavier are all arbitrarily conventionalized signs, even if they are to an important degree motivated by simple mathematics and physics: for example, the most consonant intervals in western music correspond to the simplest ratios of the natural harmonic series.

³⁵⁷ We again use "symbolic" in the Peircean sense: signification marked by arbitrary conventionalization, not resemblance.

³⁵⁸ We could invest musical materials with this kind of *aboutness* and, for example, determine that a particular three-note combination can be a symbolic reference to a dolphin.³⁵⁸ This is rarely done with non-verbal sounds or sound combinations, to which we rarely assign explicit extra-musical meaning or attempted univocality. The reasons this is not done could have to do with a lack of efficiency and economy marked by human limitations in distinguishing a sufficiently large amount of non-verbal sound sequences. There are, in the western tonal system, only twelve notes... and although a restructuring could account for several more, it is unclear whether or not humans could distinguish them well enough to serve extra-musical symbolic reference with economy. In other words: we may be naturally too tone-deaf.

³⁵⁹ There are actually many cases where musical fragments do refer to extra-musical objects in a symbolic way. One of the most widespread symbolic legisigns with extra-musical reference is the slow and low chromatic trill that was popularized by the film *Jaws*. It means "shark" or "ominous threat". Similarly a quote of the opening measures of Edvard Grieg's *Morning* theme from Peer Gynt can signify "sunset" for whoever is familiar with this work or has grown up watching Looney Tunes, where the excerpt was often used in connection with dawn.

³⁶⁰ It is interesting to note the similarity with Actor-Network Theory, that finds meaningfulness in actions, relations and translations.

³⁶¹ « [...] Il s'agit moins de comprendre que d'entendre et de vivre. »

If we consider the processual aspect of free improvisation, the meaningfulness of a sign (sound material or other) can largely be retraced to its usefulness. Improvisers' approval of contributions within a performance is often expressed by a simple "it works". It works as what, exactly? The way that a particular kind of material is deemed useful in a particular situation, the particular observable use that is made of it, can help us identify the purposes and ends of an activity. Becker says:

To speak of usefulness implies the existence of someone whose purposes define the ends for which the objects or activities will be useful. Those purposes arise in some world of collective action in which they are characteristic, part of the definition of what kind of world it is.
(BECKER 2008 (1983), p.274)

Right away, we should note that improvisers tend to leave their practice open to all kinds of materials and performance actions; they seem to be able to attribute usefulness to nearly anything. This should serve as a reminder that free improvisation commits to the exigencies of no formal code; its idiomaticity lies elsewhere. Free improvisers are not intent on discriminating implicitly useful materials from implicitly non-useful ones, good ones from bad ones. Their usefulness is measured according to dialogical needs that are linked to the practice's true idiomaticity: its unifying underlying concerns. Thus, in the context of a process-oriented activity, content "works", or is useful to free improvisation whenever it helps to maintain the process' movement. Then, it is all the more useful if it helps to give the process some of its desired qualities, such as inclusiveness, cohesion, the smoothness of encounter and the fluidity of the exchange. Yet the reason certain propositions "work" goes yet far deeper than this and is backed by complex histories and habits that could be investigated eternally. Réthoré asks if we must, and indeed if we can, settle the endless enquiry that could be carried out into all that makes up the intentionality of a sign. (RÉTHORÉ 2008, p.246) She sees a possible solution to the dilemma in Ricoeur, who highlights the terminable character of the enquiry into an action's author (when, for example, we name him), whereas an enquiry into his motives is endless; the chain of motivations loses itself into the mist of unfathomable internal and external influences.³⁶² (RÉTHORÉ 2008,

³⁶² « Alors, faut-il, et même peut-on, trancher ? Peut-être [Ricoeur] trouve-t-il une solution à ce dilemme en mettant en évidence le caractère terminable de la recherche de l'auteur d'une action (en le nommant, par exemple), tandis que la recherche de ses motifs est « interminable, la chaîne des motivations se perdant dans le brouillard des influences internes et externes insondables » (RICOEUR 1990, p.117). »

p.246)

This passage reaffirms the inevitable contingency and endless depth of signs, as well as the practical necessity of settling our investigation into them. In free improvisation, settlement occurs almost instantaneously in the form of *entente*. The semiotic treatment and designated purposes of music make it such that it is not necessary to go very deep into the investigation of signs in collective improvisation. *Entente*, as a momentary convention, asserts its contingency and allows improvisers to pursue their activity despite (and even thanks to) it. With regard to the ongoing collective process, it serves not as a kind of "*référant ultime*" (RICOEUR 1990, p.47), but as a point of contact, an apparent point of cohesion, where something "works" well enough to re-launch the activity into subsequent cycles.

b) Vagueness and Semiotic Flexibility

During each performance, free improvisers embark on a common project knowing very well that different participants are traversed by different past experiences, that they will consider the ongoing process differently, that they will make their own individual choices. The performance allows each person to freely interpret it independently from their collaborators' perception. Yet none of these contingencies impede the process, and indeed, as we have suggested, they are actually necessary conditions for the production of improvised works. The formal sound materials of these performances too, as they are made to emerge in real-time without any explicit commitment to formal codes, can only have vague symbolic signification.³⁶³ The purpose of this section is to argue that vagueness is purposefully maintained and is necessary for the kind of unplanned rapid exchanges that constitute the collective improvised performance.

We have said repeatedly that all communication is contingent to some degree. In this sense, it is also vague to a degree. Peirce writes:

No communication of one person to another can be entirely definite, i.e., non-vague. [...] wherever degree or any other possibility of continuous variation subsists, absolute precision is impossible. Much else must be vague, because no man's interpretation of words is based on

³⁶³ Our discussion of vagueness mainly concerns what we described as the upper level of the practice's aspects: formal and event-related aspects, those that are left to real-time determination. Indeed, any aspect that serves as a convention is, by definition, non-vague to some important degree.

exactly the same experience as any other man's. Even in our most intellectual conceptions, the more we strive to be precise, the more unattainable precision seems. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 5.506)

Free improvisation's relation to vagueness - and its distinction from other practices in how it relates to vagueness - must be expressed in relative rather than absolute terms. It is thus similar to the relationship that the practice entertains with emergence and the unpredictable, namely that vagueness is more present and welcome in free improvisation. What does distinguish free improvisation from many other musical practices or human activities is the fact that practitioners tend to want to maximize vagueness (or at least maintain a certain degree of it) rather than eliminate it or limit its effect.³⁶⁴

Vagueness poses philosophical challenges and is undesirable for people whose research or enquiry is driven by a precise goal, notably a scientific one. Its advantages in an open-ended activity such as free improvisation, however, are numerous. First, it allows musicians to feel that they are in control of their activity despite the fact that they operate in highly contingent situations. Second, it helps bring cohesion, or at least a sense of cohesion, to the collective activity. Then, by keeping their medium vague, improvisers preserve the flexibility that is needed for their activity to be adaptable to emergent anomalies and contingencies; vagueness allows them to welcome the unexpected. Finally, it also lets improvisers remain on the *edge*: their preferred playground, where materials are kept in a state of liminal determination. Indeed the edge can be defined as a state of being where materials are purposely kept vague.

The vagueness that characterizes the materials of improvised performances is certainly motivated in part by the particular materiality of sound and the conditions of creation that it implies. Since it evaporates instantly, a single sound event does not give participants much time to negotiate a common signification or use for it.³⁶⁵ On the other hand, since this ephemerality of sound imposes constant renewal, it encourages repetition and, eventually, the institution of habits. In group dynamics, the constant necessity for a sound to be renewed also speeds up the exchanges, and at practically no material cost, thus making it perhaps the most efficient medium for dialogue. Humans' default means of communication is, after all, verbal. However, the rapid

³⁶⁴ Music in general is always vague in its capacity to external reference (Nattiez), but most practices are very non-vague about the internal references that they make to certain formal codes.

³⁶⁵ Again, music does not usually aspire to this kind of explicit meaning anyways.

turnover also offers many opportunities for subversion and enduring determination may be difficult to achieve. Sound-based signs, therefore, are necessarily vague to some degree. But more importantly, a sound allows its users to be quite vague if this is beneficial to their activity, as is the case in free improvisation.

Yet vagueness in sound treatment is above all defined not by the physical constraints that it offers, but by the purposes that socialized beings have given to sounds and musical materials. The dialogical needs of musicians are, as we have seen, not the same as those of verbal language users or scientific communities. Their enquiry is playful and open.

They do not know what order they want their performance to establish, since order is meant to be determined according to real-time circumstances. The outcome being unpredictable, they may only have certain vague desires. Oriented towards process, they at least have the desire to successfully entertain a dynamic of collectivity, participativity and interactivity for a given time, and to let vagueness and uncertainty breed *entente*. Peirce defends both these points, writing that desire is always vague and that vagueness brings about compromise.

[...] desire is always more or less variable, or vague. [...] Accordingly, a compromise is struck; and since all the desires concerned are somewhat vague, the result is that the objects actually will cluster about certain middling qualities, some being removed this way, some that way, and at greater and greater removes fewer and fewer objects will be so determined. Thus, clustering distributions will characterize purposive classes. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 1.206-7)

But, contrary to the subjects evoked by Peirce, improvisers' goal is not to reach greater precision or determination, but rather to fuel their process: a process whose deconstructive playful enquiry is not meant to settle and come to a stop. *Entente* is temporary and, itself, as we have seen, contingent and vague. Of course, the process establishes order in the form of real-time collateral experiences and *entente* that serve as common references to all participants. Yet their purpose is not to increase the determinacy of the group's (or the practice's) formal repertoire, but rather to re-launch the process into its next phase of playful, deconstructive enquiry. As long as the ensemble is still animated by the desire to maintain the movement of their activity, sequences of vague compromises can be prolonged indefinitely. As long as the participants continue to view the continuation of the collective process with good intentions (what Peirce calls *commind*), the exchange may overcome or make constructive use of any anomalies and controversies.

Still with regard to the dialogical (and creative) needs of improvisers, it should be

reminded that, aesthetically, free improvisers' enquiry tends to be geared towards quality, presence and agency, not towards explicit communication or "aboutness", nor even towards successful actualization of any formal pre-engagement. Since the practice makes no commitment to any formal idioms, the materials can only be vague. Yet this vagueness is consistent with the preferences of improvisers, who typically favor sound materials for what is perceived to be their raw qualities, their lack of semantic depth, their lack of thirdness, their "suchness".³⁶⁶ In fact, one of the ideal sound forms of free improvisation bears great resemblance to Peirce's description of a "pure monad", which is a kind of hypothetical (if theoretically impossible) pure firstness.³⁶⁷

Peirce explains that vague signs allow their users to keep the upper hand in the exchange, by pushing back, perhaps indefinitely, the task of "completing the determination". (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 5.505) He gives the example of an almanac that, by withholding information, manages to keep its position of power: the benefit of the doubt. "'This month', says the almanac-oracle, 'a great event is to happen.' 'What event?' 'Oh, we shall see. The almanac doesn't tell that.'" (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 5.505) The adjourned completion of the statement's determination indeed makes it impossible for anybody else to soundly contradict it. Peirce even says that "[t]he *vague* might be defined as that to which the principle of contradiction does not apply." (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 5.505) 5.505 Vague statements thus avoid certain difficulties, since nobody supposes the principle of contradiction to apply to them. Réthoré summarizes:

*Any sign is vague that is at once indeterminate and undefined, yet interpreted as possible. The sign in question reserves its determination to another ulterior sign and allows the enunciator to not delegate to the interpreter the right to complete the process in his place.*³⁶⁸ (RÉTHORÉ 2007, p.10)

By remaining vague - that is, by making musical propositions whose motive is not clearly

³⁶⁶ Of course, as we have seen, thirdness is simply relocated to the underlying properties that give coherence to improvisers' activity.

³⁶⁷ Indeed, he often links vagueness to the category of firstness, as in the following excerpt: "[...] it is a suchness **sui generis**. Imagine me to make and in a slumberous condition to have a vague, unobjectified, still less unsubjectified, sense of redness, or of salt taste, or of an ache, or of grief or joy, or of a prolonged musical note. That would be, as nearly as possible, a purely monadic state of feeling. Now in order to convert that psychological or logical conception into a metaphysical one, we must think of a metaphysical monad as a pure nature, or quality, in itself without parts or features, and without embodiment. Such is a pure monad. The meanings of names of "secondary" qualities are as good approximations to examples of monads as can be given." PEIRCE, C. S. (1931 (1966)).

³⁶⁸ « Je ne voudrais pas donner à croire que seuls les signes non verbaux sont vagues : est vague tout signe qui est à la fois indéterminé et indéfini, et interprété comme possible. Ce signe réserve sa détermination à un autre signe ultérieur, et permet à l'énonciateur de ne pas déléguer à l'interprète le droit d'achever le processus à sa place. »

identifiable - improvisers are able to keep the upper hand and appear to be in control of the situation without first having to negotiate their signification with other interpreters who, inevitably, have a different take on things. Many, if not most contingencies, go entirely unnoticed by the participants.

Though a fair degree of legitimate understanding is certainly achieved between musicians (they are, after all, usually more than a little familiar with one another's performance habits), it is unnecessary to verify exactly how or to what degree they understand each other. It is certainly not important or desirable that they reach any kind of complete agreement; as we have seen, the potency and fertility of *entente* depends on its contingency, on the controversies that contingency triggers, and, finally, on the way that these *ententes* and controversies stimulate further sequences of action. It is, however, desirable that musicians feel that they understand each other enough so that they may pursue the collective process together. Naturally, much of this trust and faith comes from the unifying underlying principles of the practice that provide it with a code of conduct that prescribes, notably, some attitudes that are desirable in collaborative activities. But *entente*, as a spontaneous and short-lived formal convention, also provides musicians with a sense of cohesion.

In most cases, cohesion is more perceived than real. Since it is inevitably highly contingent, it may be more appropriate to call it a perception of cohesion or an illusion of cohesion. The ongoing performance may allow all participants to pursue their own very personal momentary desires, even if these desires are neither shared with their collaborators nor even known by them. Vagueness is what allows each participant to collectively access and produce a single work, while each pursues it according to his or her own approach and momentary needs. Different activities appear as a single collective activity. This simultaneity of contingent experiences is mediated by a work that remains vague. Vagueness relieves participants from the need of finding true instances of cohesion.

In the case of observable controversies, vagueness helps to make encounters smoother. Participants rarely feel inconvenienced by the controversies that inevitably come up to reveal potentially profound misunderstandings and disputes between collaborators. The reorganization that is required after controversies can, according to Becker, play out in two different ways. He distinguishes *drifts* from *changes*, the former not requiring "any troublesome reorganization of their cooperative activities. No one is inconvenienced because someone else insists on doing things differently." (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.304) Vagueness makes it such that improvisers may

proceed feeling relatively little necessity for a complete overhaul of the developing work. They remain open to their collaborators' contributions and, thanks to the vagueness of their propositions, are free to make of them what they will and provide their own continuation. Despite operating in consistently highly contingent circumstances, the musicians are able to go with the flow while remaining impressively non-inconvenienced. The encounter remains smooth, allowing participants to drift together or towards one another, conscious of their progress, but rarely of any upheaval. Only the biggest anomalies (which are sometimes welcome, to be sure) will demand true change, in the sense of the acquisition of a skill that lies beyond a participant's convenience.

c) A Flexible, Highly Adaptable System: A Safe Zone

One advantage of having conditions that ease encounters and allow participants to easily overcome controversies and contingency³⁶⁹ is that the system becomes highly adaptable. Arthur Bull says the following:

People who aren't familiar with free improv are sometimes puzzled by how easily we can play a show together without rehearsing. Especially other musicians who are like "when's the rehearsal?"

In fact what you're doing is based on what you've been doing for a long time. People who do this kind of music tend to base what they do on a lot of experience. They're very in tune to listening and adapting. This is fundamental to the music. It seems to be part of the DNA of improvisation that you can do that (form collaboration easily without rehearsal). It doesn't always work by the way. Quite often it does. (BULL 2015)

The conditions of free improvisation and skills of its practitioners make it such that emergence is easily welcomed and integrated beneficially. One practical consequence is that collaborations become simpler, participants are more easily interchangeable, and participants who understand the practice's basic principles can be integrated without difficulty.

[...] art worlds treat the integrated professionals who participate in them, and their works, as interchangeable, as though their distinctive differences and unique abilities nevertheless allowed them to be substituted for one another without harm. (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.231)

³⁶⁹ Most instances of contingency aren't even noticed as such.

Certainly, most situations of free improvisation are not quite as easy to integrate as what is envisioned by the aspirations of the improvisers who are driven by a political or social ideal of inclusion.³⁷⁰ However, the logistical ease with which collaborations are done involving improvisers that have never met each other³⁷¹ testifies to the practice's adaptability. It also testifies to what Becker calls the semiautonomous nature of the art world. "Once the people who participate in the production of the work can be interchanged without regard for their local origins, the world has become semiautonomous." (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.332)

The adaptability of the system, the smoothness of encounters and the perception of cohesion despite contingency - all conditions that can be summarized as free improvisation's *semiotic flexibility* - are enabled by the practice's use of vagueness: signs that are indeterminate, undefined, but have the potential of being interpreted. Collective operations involving objects invested with little or no symbolic meaning require this leeway. This again represents a semiotic purpose that is different from that of verbal language in general. On inter-personal communication, Peirce writes:

*[...] honest people, when not joking, intend to make the meaning of their words determinate, so that there shall be no **latitude** of interpretation at all. That is to say, the character of their meaning consists in the implications and non-implications of their words; and they intend to fix what is implied and what is not implied. They believe that they succeed in doing so, and if their chat is about the theory of numbers, perhaps they may. But the further their topics are from such precise, or "abstract," subjects, the less possibility there is of such precision of speech. In so far as the implication is not determinate, it is usually left vague. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 5.447)*

The measure of success for free improvisers does not depend on their ability to diminish latitude of interpretation. Rather, latitude is a necessary condition for their collective activity to proceed smoothly and swiftly. This does not mean that improvisers want to bring determination down to zero. Again, their preferred zone of action is the edge, where materials are determined enough to serve as loose conventions, but vague enough for them to be open to a variety of interpretations and subsequent developments. We may recall here Peirce's description of the border-line between affirmation and negation.

³⁷⁰ Arthur Bull's testimony above attests to the fact that skills and experience enable improvisers.

³⁷¹ International collaborations happen all the time and there is, in many cases, no expressed need to rehearse or discuss the performance beforehand.

This gives us an indirect and vague conception of an intermediary between affirmation and denial in general, and consequently of an intermediate, or nascent state, between determination and indetermination. There must be a similar intermediacy between generality and vagueness. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 5.450)

In one passage that is worth quoting at length, both for its pertinence to our discussion and for its elegant imagery, Peirce portrays vagueness as the nascent state of a long process of fixation, order making, code building and habit creation. The passage also situates every step in relation to his three categories. As we consider his account, it is worth keeping in mind that, in the case of free improvisation, there is, in addition to this order-making habit-instituting process, a second movement: a subversive deconstructive one. By pulling at each other and even setting the stage for one another, these apparently contradictory movements allow the practice to remain on the edge and the process to be maintained.

Our conceptions of the first stages of the development, before time yet existed, must be as vague and figurative as the expressions of the first chapter of Genesis. Out of the womb of indeterminacy we must say that there would have come something, by the principle of Firstness, which we may call a flash. Then by the principle of habit there would have been a second flash. [...] Then there would have come other successions ever more and more closely connected, the habits and the tendency to take them ever strengthening themselves, until the events would have been bound together into something like a continuous flow. [...] Different flashes might start different streams, between which there should be no relations of contemporaneity or succession. So one stream might branch into two, or two might coalesce. But the further result of habit would inevitably be to separate utterly those that were long separated, and to make those which presented frequent common points coalesce into perfect union. Those that were completely separated would be so many different worlds which would know nothing of one another; so that the effect would be just what we actually observe.

But Secondness is of two types. Consequently besides flashes genuinely second to others, so as to come after them, there will be pairs of flashes, or, since time is now supposed to be developed, we had better say pairs of states, which are reciprocally second, each member of the pair to the other. This is the first germ of spatial extension. These states will undergo changes; and habits will be formed of passing from certain states to certain others, and of not passing from certain states to certain others. [...] Some of these states will chance to take habits of persistency, and will get to be less and less liable to disappear; while those that fail to take such habits will fall out of existence. Thus, substances will get to be permanent. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 1.412-4)

Certainly habits in free improvisation are formed in this way too. Yet permanence is contrary to the goals of improvisers who pursue an indefinitely deconstructive journey and who wish to highlight those aspects of their practice that are better retraced to the first two categories:

raw qualities, presence and agency. The streams described by Peirce, in our case, do not separate and coalesce clearly; rather, we can imagine them forming an intricate, convoluted delta where sequences of flashes institute only momentary conventions. The journey towards any symbolic thirdness - or, at least, symbolic thirdness governing formal sound properties - is purposely aborted and subverted. Improvisers may then remain on the edge, the only playground that allows them to pursue their activity indefinitely.

This playground, thanks to the flexibility of their activity, provides improvisers with a kind of safe zone. This is due both to the conditions imposed by the practice's basic parameters on the one hand (those imposed by the materiality of sound, the linearity of real-time creation and the simultaneous, participative and interactive nature of the encounter), and to the dialogical purposes and semiotic treatment of music by socialized humans on the other.

With regard to the materiality of sound, we already pointed out its efficiency: it can be delivered rapidly and at practically no material cost.³⁷² Musicians can thus proceed to a relatively great number of concrete experiences with their material, since trials and experimentations are carried out at little expense of time and of material or financial resources. But more importantly, sound is a material that poses little to no physical threat to practitioners. Trial and error, the roots of experimentation, can be practiced almost completely without risk of waste. "Error can enter at any time and fertilize the performance with fresh info" (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.104) Unlike culinary experiments, for example, where there are countless ways of ruining the product to the point of rendering it improper (or even dangerous) for consumption, the consequences of failed experiments in music are almost totally harmless. The risks of failure in architecture can become issues of public security, while in music, because of its particular materiality and semiotic flexibility, there is always room for debate on whether something really was failure or not. Musicians themselves risk little more than tendinitis or a throat injury.³⁷³ Since a sound can carry beyond the space in which it is meant to be appreciated, some people may be inconvenienced by it, but certainly not put in danger. In the case of audience members, it can be seen as a positive thing in free improvisation if they are inconvenienced to some degree. The practice, after all, seeks to deconstruct the codes that make up common listening habits. The typical audience

³⁷² "No *additional* material cost" is surely a better way to phrase this; most musicians will point out the significant financial investment that music equipment such as instruments and amplification entails.

³⁷³ Any musician who has suffered from these will resent my downplaying these ailments, which are, in the professional situation of musicians, highly incapacitating and thoroughly dreaded affairs. The point is that these eventualities are of little threat to the public.

member, who, as a fan of free improvisation, shares and practices some of its principles, tends to want to be destabilized, too.

Naturally, whether or not a spectator is inconvenienced by music content or not has as much, if not more, to do with her habits as a socialized being than with the sounds' particular materiality.³⁷⁴ Each person has a comfort zone when it comes to listening to or performing music. Sound, as a safe and efficient material, allows people to easily challenge these comfort zones while still remaining in a safe zone: a zone that is safe both physically and semiotically.³⁷⁵ Enquiry into sound and deconstruction of the codes that govern its treatment and interpretation can also be pursued efficiently and safely, notably because of strategies involving vagueness, as we have seen. Here too, failure is of little consequence on the ability for the collective activity to go on. One may feel that they have failed, but signs in music offer such vagueness and latitude that failure often goes unnoticed and the sense of cohesion is not lost so easily. Music in general and free improvisation in particular provide more latitude for participants to act, react and interact in various ways without causing anyone to feel attacked ideologically or organizationally. Misunderstandings, if they are even perceived, are relatively far less daunting or paralyzing. If a contribution truly cannot be used collectively, it can simply be ignored and no harm is done as the group moves on to further creation cycles. Free improvisation is therefore, as posit many improvisers driven by social and political ideals, inclusive and adaptable.³⁷⁶

Before continuing our discussion on the conditions that the particular semiotics of music bring to free improvisation, it is worth diverting our discussion for one moment and see how improvisers also use vagueness as a genre-definition strategy that allows them not to disclose more information than they want to about what it is that they do.

Let us first consider once again the kinds of negative definitions that are often given of

³⁷⁴ It remains difficult to consider these conditions separately, however, since, as we have seen in our discussion on semiotics, interpretation necessarily articulates these categories together.

³⁷⁵ Any idea of semiotic safety must, naturally, echo the semiotic purposes of the activity at hand. In any form of scientific enquiry, it would amount to sign usage that guarantees a clear and precise exchange. In the case of free improvisation, semiotic safety amounts to sign usage that guarantees that the system is well adapted for the kind of playful deconstructive collective enquiry that its practitioners pursue. This kind of safety necessitates vagueness and flexibility.

³⁷⁶ .Or at least, it is inclusive and adaptable.. to a point! As we have seen, it remains necessary to abide the practice's underlying principles and have a minimum of proficiency in order to successfully integrate improvisation activity. There is, for every situation of group improvisation, a threshold of minimum know-how that must be reached. For those who do reach it, the conditions of creation of free improvisation constitute a playground that is efficient and safe.

free improvisation: that it is a kind of anti-genre, that it is non-idiomatic. To define a practice in negative terms is effectively to give a vague definition of it. Peirce gives the following example:

To affirm of anything that it is a horse is to yield to it every essential character of a horse; to deny of anything that it is a horse is vaguely to refuse to it some one or more of those essential characters of the horse. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 5.450)

Richard Scott discusses improvisers' application of such strategies at length. He links the tactics as ways of ensuring that the practice avoids being "invaded or captured", of guaranteeing that improvisers keep the upper hand with regards to the meaning and signification of their art. His account is perfectly consistent with Peirce's description of vagueness as a strategy.

I have described both the non-idiom and the negative definition in general as largely defensive tactics. The improvising musician differentiates the territory and then refuses to name or locate it on the basis of the idea that, as long as it cannot be described, it cannot be invaded or captured. An absence – a not-here, not-now or not-yet – is positioned, which allows us to obscure the content of the activity from further investigation. Because it does not succumb to the noun, negation protects this new space, either by refusing to identify it or by refusing the very possibility of its identification. [...] It is another attempt on the part of musicians themselves to retain control over the meaning and interpretation of their music by refusing all public discursive abstraction of it. (SCOTT 2014, p.6-7)

4. - ENDURING UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

We have already exposed that in free improvisation, the observable sound materials and succeeding action-sequences, perhaps appreciated above all for their quality and agency, are nonetheless also recognized for the way that they refer to sets of underlying codes of conduct, enduring discourses and unifying concerns. Unless such principles are articulated in different participants' interpretation of the performance, differences in how the agency of observable formal features is understood can prevent any consensus from happening and thus jeopardize the practice's coherence. The activity is socialized and supported by its codes of conduct. Becker writes that "[e]very pattern of availability reflects the workings of some kind of social organization and becomes part of the pattern of constraints and possibilities that shapes the art produced." (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.92)

It is now time to have a closer look at these unifying underlying principles, the most important conventions of free improvisation and the centers of its idiomatity. They invest the observable materials of improvised performances with their most defining and persistent representations of thirdness. It is a kind of thirdness that does not concern formal pre-engagements directly (of which, in free improvisation, there are very few), but that appears in the form of a code of conduct that, in the form of process parameters, allows sound forms to emerge in real time as the result of interactions.

We mean here the relocalized thirdness that was described in section e) of the first chapter of the third part. To recapitulate, this particular shift is more important than the other one³⁷⁷ because it concerns a more essential idiomatic shift. The very rules of the practice, understood as the parameters that invest the performance with the most thirdness, no longer directly concern its formal aspects or prescribe acceptable or unacceptable formal content. Idiomatity is relocated to the level of underlying principles: aesthetic preoccupations and corresponding ethical codes of conduct, all of which are developed and maintained so that the creative process may unravel without (or almost without) explicit formal prescriptions. These sets of principles, attitudes, skills and hopes, considered as a whole, make up an aesthetic and ethical code of conduct that is generally understood and accepted by improvisers. Just as any artist is more or less strictly bound to the codes associated to their practice (be they of a formal nature or not), there are limitations to the degree to which free improvisers may stray away from the underlying code of conduct that

³⁷⁷ The other one being the increased focus on firstness and secondness.

unifies their practice. Improvisers tacitly abide by these principles and rely on them. Indeed, these values often time are themselves the most stable and recognized rules of the free improvisation practice.

a) Conventions as Shared Concerns, Values, Attitudes and Rationales

We have dropped hints, when necessary, about the nature of the underlying principles that we see as making up the core of free improvisation's code of conduct. Already in the first chapter, we exposed some preliminary delineating features of the practice, as well as some parameters that cannot be separated from our conception of free improvisation: real-time organization of sound, collective creation, a process-oriented attitude and a concern for the maximization of emergence. In order to function within these parameters, improvisers also dispose of a set of unifying underlying principles that, since they make up the practice's rules of action or codes of conduct, and since they are arbitrary, should be seen as the center of its idiomaticity. As free improvisation's most unifying principles, they in turn inspire sets of values, attitudes and skills that are expected of competent improvisers (and engaged audience members). These are quite numerous and are regularly mentioned in improvisers' testimonies and books on the subject. Many have been consistently present in improvisers' discourse since the pioneering generation. They include respect and consideration of other participants (NAVARRO 2016), listening skills and mutual awareness (BULL 2015), humility and readiness to leave room for every participant (PALMER 2015) and to be subtle when necessary (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.97). In this sense, the act comes with moral responsibility, which becomes a major constraint in collective improvisation.

Respect and openness in front of other participants is one of the most commonly expressed values of free improvisation. Indeed, it goes almost without saying that, when pursuing a collective activity, acceptance and respect of others is a necessary value to have. This translates into many attitudes such as remaining humble, leaving room for everyone to assume their place, allowing everyone to find and express their own voice. There is a clearly ethical dimension to this list of attitudes and, indeed, improvisers often express concern about the ethics that govern the exchange dynamics of their ensembles. Cadrew's treatise *Towards an Ethics of Improvisation* is a strong testimony of this. Yet ethical preoccupations are universal to the practice. This is perhaps

most obvious with the pioneering ensembles that are explicitly driven by social, political or spiritual ideals (abolition of hierarchies, political liberation, ritualistic communion, *etc.*) but contemporary musicians are just as ready to highlight the importance of these values to their group's approach. Éric Normand, bandleader of the Rimouski based GGRIL, says the following about the orchestra's approach: "We try to determine rules so that each [participant] will find his or her role and preserve his or her identity."³⁷⁸ (TOUPIN 2014) Arthur Bull points out that the success of the process can be jeopardized if a musician imposes himself too much, rather than responding to moment.

Sometimes it happens that you're playing with people that come from a body of musical knowledge and they're playing that knowledge. Instead of responding, they're saying "I have this thing that I want to play". It might be really good, but it doesn't really fit with the moment. (BULL 2015)

Depending on the group, what constitutes respectful behavior within the ensemble can change. For example, some groups will allow more severe breaches of the shared horizon to take place, even if this means placing some participants in a difficult situation and forcing them to leave their comfort zone. As we saw earlier, Derek Bailey refers to this as mutual subversion.³⁷⁹ On the one hand, since improvisation constitutes a playful kind of enquiry, these challenges can be seen as "teasing", as friendly curve balls. Furthermore, as we have seen, it is thanks to these leaps "over the edge" that the group's horizon can achieve its more interesting and astonishing shifts. But if the challenge is truly insurmountable, then some players are left *hors-jeu* (excluded from play) and this can constitute a violation of the principle of respect of others.

Down the line, the degree to which mutual subversion is permitted in a group is determined by their own localized take on this principle. Yet musicians' testimonies suggest that free improvisation's underlying principles support the activity in a way that is so strong that improvisers, even if they do not get along outside of this activity, may successfully improvise together as long as they continue to obey the practice's code of conduct. Tena Palmer comments:

³⁷⁸ « Nous essayons de déterminer des règles afin que chacun trouve son rôle et conserve son identité. »

³⁷⁹ It should be noted that since the collective process is inherently contingent, there is always some degree of mutual subversion. Different performance situations thus differ only in the degree to which they overstep the horizon's edge and whether or not the breach is intentional.

Some of the best music I made while I was deep in a fight with my partner Justin Haynes playing guitar and piano and we're doing a recording in the CBC Montreal studio and we were the first non-classical musicians to get to use it. The soundboard was like the starship enterprise and there was this big Bösendorfer. We were just at the end of a relationship and we were fighting and so pissed off. We were at each other through the whole session. But the music, when it came to play: phenomenal! Like really really connected and strong. I've also made really great music with people that I wouldn't want to have dinner with. I think that how people express themselves and communicate socially is a separate issue from who they are as musicians. If they're very good musicians at experiencing the moment or expressing who they are, I think that's a different set of skills. I think of stories of people who I really admire musically and that I don't feel I would like to get to know them personally. (PALMER 2015)

The ethical principal that prescribes respect and acceptance of others has, in free improvisation, a mirroring aesthetic principle that prescribes treatment of formal sound materials. Sounds and sound combinations and sequences should be respected and accepted for their own "suchness". Improvisers should, then, accept a sound such as it is, in its raw form, before it is appropriated by codes that assign it any kind of symbolic value beyond the instant of their implementation. Acceptance of suchness is also acceptance of the inherent difference of things.³⁸⁰ Every object and action is seen as unique.

Although, in practice, pure qualitative suchness cannot exist without some degree of determination (in other words, it must be actualized and cannot be perfectly abstract), we saw that improvisers can use such ideals as unreachable targets that nonetheless drive their efforts toward deconstruction.

Besides, determination of formal codes or trends can be kept to a minimum if efforts of deconstruction are renewed constantly. As it happens, the principles of free improvisation prescribe exactly this! Improvisers must be ready to accept and react to sound forms in all their diversity and uniqueness and must, through subversive acts of deconstruction, actively reinstate the difference of things whenever repetition has made things too determinate and fixed.

As a value, this acceptance allows accidental or extreme contributions to be accepted and be integrated within the performance, as participants will not have difficulties finding ways to react to it. As soon as it triggers further effects, any material becomes meaningful. This value

³⁸⁰ We may think of the difference to which Deleuze opposes repetition. Difference is the suchness of the world. To determine categories of things is to affirm that they are repetitions of each other. One of the driving forces of free improvisation is the attempt not to institute such categories, at least when it comes to its observable formal features. References to existing codes are unavoidable and, especially in the case of contemporary musicians, often explicitly permitted. However, such references follow no stated prescriptions. Thus, to refer to these categories without committing to the rules that govern them is to cut them off from their usual context: to deconstruct them.

thus also allows materials to easily be deemed meaningful and useful for groups of collaborators, even if they are working together for the first time.³⁸¹ Acceptance of suchness thus brings us back to the acceptance of others.

Another one of free improvisation's values that can be retraced to suchness is originality. Originality is cherished by improvisers and is often linked to the genuineness of the artist's voice. For some, this virtue is directly linked to the two values described above: it is the suchness and openness of the individual, only applied to self. The acceptance of oneself, one's abilities and one's own voice can be reassuring and bring confidence to improvisers who may feel ill prepared for a given performance situation. Tena Palmer makes a conscious effort to acknowledge and accept herself, a gesture that she claims helps her stay connected with each moment of the performance.

Part of my process is, whenever I approach the stand I acknowledge that I'm probably ill prepared, nobody's ever as prepared as they'd like to be. I say "here's where I am" and I think that whatever sounds come out of me or whatever I do is for the best, for the good of whoever comes in contact with it.

I forgive myself for any [fumbling] and just say "here I am". That allows me to just be in the moment, to be really focused in each moment. It's the only way that I can really share with other people. When you're really focused, then there's no room for ego. (PALMER 2015)

We saw in section b) of the first chapter of the middle part of the thesis that a number of improvisers believe that the original genuine voice lies somewhere beneath all of the musician's acquired skills and learned conventions, that authentic expression - the suchness of one's true voice - can only be uncovered if all of these inherited materials are rejected. We distanced ourselves from this position, proving that individuals, stripped of their inherited techniques and codes, are mute: left with no expressive medium.

Yet a more legitimate concern is the common feeling expressed by improvisers of being unsatisfied with their performance because they had recourse to the automatisms of their reflexes, which means not "truly" improvising. Other times, they feel that their performance was genuinely original: that they really did improvise.

Originality, then, must be expressed differently than by the rejection of inherited techniques and codes. We propose a conception of originality where a contribution is original

³⁸¹ Of course, in addition to having this helpful value, the strategies of vagueness, supported by a medium that is kept vague - music - helps to facilitate this collaboration between new collaborators.

when, despite articulating potentially countless inherited elements, it manages to do so in a novel way thanks to a deconstructive approach such as the one that we described in the second part of the thesis. Cycles of deconstruction then give way to cycles of emergence. Originality is expressed by successful executions of both of these types of cycles.

In commenting on the relation that he entertains with inherited materials and traditions, improvising guitarist Arthur Navarro from Vitória-based art collective Expurgação highlights a tendency to accept and welcome tradition, but also to subvert it.

*The aesthetics of this practice, for me, demonstrate something of a mutant nature, while this improvised creation exists at times as "free-form-music", at times as something that redirects us to funk or world music, or even a sound that is more atmospheric, folky or heavy. But the premise of Expurgação's musical experience, in my view, also draws from punk, borrowing its spirit of anarchy and subversion and applying it to a kind of musical creation and interaction where the rule is not to have any rules.*³⁸² (NAVARRO 2016)

In the terms of this thesis, the apparent paradox of having a "rule not to have any rules" can be explained easily thanks to the two fronts/levels that we have proposed since the first part. On the higher level of observable formal materials, there are no rules. But this guideline (the rule of not having rules), along with other aesthetic preoccupations, ethical concerns, values, attitudes, finds its place on the underlying level of the practice's unifying principles.

b) Conventions as Shared Skills, Habits and Strategies

Of course, knowing how to respect the abovementioned principles³⁸³ as one pursues the practice of free improvisation involves the development of corresponding sets of habits and skills. Not all habits are methodical, nor even deliberate. Yet all habits, as individual rules³⁸⁴, represent some degree of thirdness, even when the object of the performance act or interpretative

³⁸² "A estética desta prática tangencia, pra mim, algo mutante, ao passo em que essa criação improvisada hora existe como música 'livre de forma' (free-form music), hora como algo que remete a um funk ou world music, ou mesmo uma sonoridade mais atmosférico, folclórica ou pesada. Mas a premissa da experiência musical da Expurgação ao meu ver também bebe no punk, pegando emprestado à anarquia a sua subversão e aplicando-a na criação e interação musical onde a regra é não haverem regras."

³⁸³ I do not claim to have provided a complete list of the underlying principles of free improvisation. Rather, our account mirrors the testimonies of improvisers with whom I had the chance to discuss over the past two years, as well as the default conditions of free improvisation that are inseparable of our conception of it.

³⁸⁴ It must be stressed that thirdness does not limit itself to group norms, and that it also concerns the regularities of individual behavior.

operation is overtly demonstrative of any one of the other two categories. There are thirdnesses that have firstnesses or secondnesses as their objects. In other words, there are habits that apply to how qualities are perceived and how acts are felt or carried out. Indeed, Peirce defends the idea that habits always concern firstness or secondness, since they are "either habits about ideas of feelings or habits about acts of reaction." (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 4.157) For according to Peirce, "ideas of feelings" and "acts of reaction", along with habits (which can govern the previous two) are the three categories of being. This can help us remember that our momentary sensorial perceptions and our impulsive reactive acts are also governed by habits. Free improvisation, even when it puts firstness and secondness in the forefront, thus shifting the weight of the performance to "ideas of feelings" and "acts of reaction", continues to engage habits. The reason we point this out is that, as far as individual habits are geared towards collective concerns of free improvisers, the way that they manifest themselves in performance settings can provide specific case examples for how the practice's idiomaticity is actualized.

To adapt one of Derek Bailey's statements: every musical activity in the past has produced the performer it needs.³⁸⁵ The approach to performance in free improvisation is markedly different from those that are used in more widely distributed or institutionalized music. Different performing and listening habits must then also be adopted. This means that we must learn to hear the materials themselves not for their pre-engaged reference to specific exterior formal codes or pre-texts, but for how they represent actualizations of the unifying underlying codes of the practice. Listening habits, therefore, must be in tune with the concerns, values and attitudes listed above. It means, among other things, that materials must be appreciated for the aspects that the practice puts forward: quality, presence, agency (aspects that correspond to the first two categories of Peirce's model) The public must then do two things in order to find meaning in a free improvisation performance. It must first appreciate a work's formal content for its quality, its presence and its internal structure rather than for how it symbolically implements a set of rules that, essentially like grammar, oversee specifically formal manipulations. At the same time, it must learn how to see through the observable materials of performance and understand how, at that moment of the performance, they are an expression of an activity supported by a set

³⁸⁵ The original quote was "I suppose all composition in the past has produced the performer it needs." (BAILEY, p.63) However, the term "composer" seemed too restrictive for our use.

of principles. Only by articulating these aspects can an interpretation of the performance hope to approximate that which is intended by the performers.³⁸⁶ For, although improvisers cannot be held accountable for any breach of formal codes, they are mostly loyal to the concerns, values and ethics that make up the underlying principles of their practice. Otherwise, their actions will be considered as exterior to the activity at hand.

In the first chapter of the current part of this thesis, we proposed two important shifts in the way that free improvisation expresses its idiomaticity and generates meaning. Peirce's categories were instrumental in our demonstration. To recapitulate, on the one hand, the thirdness or center of the practice's idiomaticity is mostly shifted away from the observable aspects and relocated in its underlying principles. Another shift involves an increased importance given to those observable aspects of performances that are most linked to firstness and secondness: quality, presence and agency. This is how improvisers pursue the desired effect of presenting performance materials that are not bound to any formal codes.

It goes without saying that the underlying principles of free improvisation prescribe some skills and habits that are meant to allow participants to deem these "rogue" performance materials as significant, despite their lack of formal codification; skills and habits that make practitioners disposed to appreciate these materials for the aspects that are meant to be highlighted instead: quality, presence and agency.³⁸⁷ A good improviser has skills that allow her to appreciate sound for these qualities. She also has the sensibility and particular technical skills that allow her to take part herself in the ongoing playful enquiry concerning these aspects of improvised musical performance.

Since sound forms are left to emerge in real-time during the performance, these skills include all of those that allow the musician to respond well to the unexpected. In his longest passage dedicated to improvisation, worth quoting in its entirety because of the way that it links the development of necessary skills to the default conditions of creation of free improvisation, most notably its unpredictable character, Pareyson writes:

³⁸⁶ A listener is, of course, always free to interpret the performance according to a completely different set of rules and construct her own coherent version of it. As long as a listening is animated by an openness to the "suchness" of a performance, acceptance of what is happening should not be too complicated, especially in a practice like free improvisation, where both the medium and the performance strategies demonstrate an important degree of vagueness and allow participants to benefit from the upper hand that it grants them. However, it must be noted that an openness to the "suchness" of performance materials belongs to the core principles of free improvisation and that, in this case, the listener has some congeniality with the performers.

³⁸⁷ Again, these aspects best exemplify firstness and secondness: the categories that correspond to pureness, newness, immediateness, freshness, presence, action, spontaneity, freedom, vividness, contact, feedback.

It is true that the most striking feature of improvisation in any genre is its unpredictable character that, on the one hand, exposes it to the risk of the common space and the most hackneyed convention. Yet, on the other hand, it can augment its productive capacity and its intrinsic fertility. Although the improviser must be capable of facing any eventuality with the presence of spirit, the timely punctuality and the instantaneous calculation that are required by his work, he is from the start obliged to renounce the project of wanting to predict or anticipate the unpredictable. [...] He must, on the contrary, be ready to "accept" it so that he must not suffer it; he must let it enter his activity so that it will not bewilder him; he must welcome its consequences so that he will not lose the initiative.

Certainly this prior acceptance of any circumstance easily exposes it to the necessity of resorting to memory and convention [...] but improvisation wants to keep itself rigorously away from this docility with regard to automatic contributions. [...] Improvisation is, on the contrary, something aggressive, that accepts the unexpected precisely in order to counter it and that submits itself to things only because it wishes to subjugate them. [...] Improvisation does this in such a way that the prior acceptance of any event and the capacity of not letting oneself get distraught betray a state of fertile productivity thanks to which the improviser is ready to transform any circumstance into an occasion, any accident into a possibility, and even to convert an unfortunate fumble into a charged potentiality.³⁸⁸ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.101)

Improvisers should thus know how to remain open to technical accidents, which, instead of being regretted as errors, can fertilize the performance with fresh materials (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.104) if musicians know how to welcome them by providing a reaction that contextualizes them in a favorable or interesting way. Stévanche writes about *musique actuelle* that it is "one of the few practices not to fear technical error and not to worry

³⁸⁸ Il est clair que le trait le plus saillant de l'improvisation en tout genre est son caractère imprévisible qui, tout en l'exposant, d'un côté, au risque du lieu commun et de la convention la plus rabâchée, peut, d'un autre côté, en augmenter la capacité productive et la fertilité intrinsèque. L'improvisateur, s'il doit être capable de faire face à toute éventualité avec cette présence d'esprit, cette ponctualité opportune et ce calcul instantané requis par son travail, est contraint dès le début à renoncer au projet de vouloir prévoir ou anticiper l'imprévu. [...] Il doit, au contraire, se disposer dès le début à l'« accepter » justement pour ne pas devoir le subir, à le laisser entrer dans son jeu justement pour ne pas s'en laisser surprendre, à en accueillir les conséquences justement pour ne pas perdre l'initiative.

Certes cette acceptation préalable de toute circonstance l'expose facilement à la nécessité de devoir recourir à la mémoire et à la convention, moins pour en essayer les possibilités formatives que pour résoudre les situations créées au cours de son opération; d'où la facilité avec laquelle l'improvisation devient une collection de lieux communs, d'associations automatiques, de réminiscences aisément reconnaissables, de formules à l'effet sûr et acceptable.

Mais l'improvisation veut se tenir rigoureusement à distance de cette docilité aux apports automatiques.(...) L'improvisation est au contraire quelque chose d'agressif, qui accepte l'imprévu justement pour y parer et qui s'abandonne aux choses seulement par volonté de les subjuguer; elle fait tout cela sans hardiesse ni outrecuidance, mais avec un mélange de décision et de ductilité, d'élasticité et de promptitude, d'adaptation et de vigilance. Elle le fait de telle manière que l'acceptation préalable de tout événement et la capacité de ne pas se laisser prendre au dépourvu traduisent un état de fertile productivité grâce auquel l'improvisateur est prêt à transformer toute circonstance en occasion, tout accident en possibilité, et même à convertir une cadence malheureuse en virtualité prégnante. Il se dispose alors à tirer instantanément parti des épaves émergentes de la mémoire et des faciles associations conventionnelles, et à subordonner une impasse à éviter ou à contourner. Dans ce sens l'improvisation met à nu l'un des aspects les plus secrets des débuts du processus de formation, en montrant avec la plus grande évidence l'instant décisif où la matière peut soit imposer sa volonté soit se laisser dominer, et où n'arrive à la dominer que celui qui sait la suivre.

about success."³⁸⁹ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.38) Since error can be brought to profitable use, improvisers must develop skills and habits that allow them to spot interesting accidents and profit from them. (NACHMANOVITCH 1991, p.89) This ability is closely linked to the acceptance of "suchness" that we mentioned earlier; since every contribution is irrevocable, performers and interested observers must demonstrate an underlying acceptance of the "suchness" of that which is generated during the performance. Since free improvisation also values respect and acceptance of others participants, then it follows that improvisers must develop the kind of receptivity that allows them to listen to their collaborators in a respectful, open, and accepting way. The collective creative process unravels in real-time, so this kind of receptivity articulates both the acceptance of others and the acceptance of spontaneity.

There is, therefore, an acceptance of suchness that applies to sounds, people and spontaneous acts. Indeed, since it is never easy to separate the identities of these aspects in a performance, it is surely better to speak in terms of a generalized acceptance of, ideally, anything that can happen during the performance. In an interview with Henri Jules Julien, saxophonist Cathy Heyden describes her state of concentrations as:

*[...] a form of well-being, a state of confidence and openness with regard to whatever happens. Before, I had an exterior ear that judged and finally didn't let the sound go where it wanted to, where I had to bring it or not bring it, because I had chosen another direction.*³⁹⁰
(JULIEN 2008, p.60)

This kind of acceptance may be best summed up as openness and respect for the process. For the exploratory dimension of the process, its trial and error dynamic, is a finality in itself³⁹¹, which does not submit to the same gauges of success and error as works that are appreciated first for their formal dimension. Due to their necessary relation to linear time and unpredictability, skilled improvisers are expected to demonstrate boldness and to dare to "make the leap into the unknown" (Bailey) and run the risks (Piekut) of making irreversible contributions whose effects and potential are uncertain.

Returning now to Pareyson, let us recall that he defines the true artist as "one who always

³⁸⁹ « Ce genre est un des rares à ne pas craindre l'erreur, ne pas s'inquiéter de la réussite. »

³⁹⁰ « [...] Une forme de bien-être [...], un état de confiance et d'ouverture à ce qui arrive. Auparavant j'avais une oreille extérieure qui jugeait et finalement ne laissait pas le son aller où il voulait aller, où j'avais à l'emmener ou ne pas l'emmener, parce que j'avais choisi une autre direction. »

³⁹¹ This again highlights Peirce's two first categories, especially secondness.

finds *spunti* around her." (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), pp.95-6) Truly, if we project this definition into the context of free improvisation, keeping in mind that the artist's formative intentionality must operate within the conditions of creation and semiotic possibilities of the practice's particular playground - sound, ephemerality, real-time, collective process, semiotic flexibility - it can stand as a definition of the skilled improviser. To sum it up crudely, "the contents of the fridge and cupboards determines the point of departure, we improvise with whatever we find in front of us"³⁹². (HAUSER 2011, *Frage über Fragen*)

However, another dimension must be added to this description, considering that the process-oriented improviser is less likely to see the achievement of an aesthetic form or object as the finality of her activity. She is more concerned with maintaining the dynamic movement and relevance of her process and, in the long run, of her practice. She avoids letting the materials of her performances settle into well-determined formal codes, choosing instead to stay on the "edge", where cycles of deconstruction and emergence ensure that her activity remains fresh, spontaneous and representative of the instants in which it unfolds and to which it is bound. In free improvisation, nurturing this dynamic creative space of exchange is itself one of the activity's most consistent finalities. Skills expected of improvisers mirror this particular orientation. Any skill that allows an improviser to remain on the edge, to successfully juggle her delicate position between acquired know-how and spontaneous creation, to deal with these seemingly paradoxical aspects, is a desired skill for an improviser. In this vein, Stévanche enumerates a few pairs of contrasting skills that good improvisers should master: "critical sense and spontaneous expression, the idea of control and that of release, the presence of memory and forgetfulness, as well as the ability to listen to oneself while remaining totally available to one's collaborators and spectators."³⁹³ (STÉVANCHE 2011, p.64)

As we defended earlier, it helps to explain these apparent paradoxes if we conceive the aspects of free improvisation as largely divided onto two levels: the emergent and evanescent observable formal aspects being supported by an underlying level of unifying principles and habits. Thus it is not paradoxical to describe, as Stévanche does in the following passage, a process that is simultaneously supported by habits and the yearning to break free from habits. This is the

³⁹² »[...] der Kühl- und Küchenschrankinhalt bestimmt die Ausgangslage, man improvisiert mit dem, was man vorfindet.«

³⁹³ « Coexistent alors l'esprit critique et l'expression spontanée, l'idée de retenue et celle de lâcher prise, la présence de la mémoire et de l'oubli ainsi que l'écoute de soi et une disponibilité totale vis-à-vis des partenaires sur scène et du public. »

reality of any skilled improviser who knows how to operate comfortably on the "edge".

While they improvise, "actualists" call up physical gestures that are inscribed within them, then reorganize (or disorganize) their composing elements around an unprepared program. They must then not be dominated by what they have acquired musically and must seek to explore beyond what they know, beyond their technical limits.³⁹⁴ (STÉVANCE 2011, p.59)

The attitude of openness that allows improvisers to receive a proposition in real-time and immediately react to it in a way that "works" for everyone (or at least in a way that allows the process to continue) is a skill expected of improvisers. Like all of the other skills and habits mentioned in this section, since it is expected of its practitioners, it is a convention of the practice, an item of its code of conduct and idiomaticity.

c) Volition

Although improvisers are champions of the present moment, we have seen that the coherence of their activity depends on its articulation of unifying underlying principles that perpetuate past understandings and consensus. Similarly, any action in the present is, in the mind of the improviser, oriented towards future manipulations and exchanges, even if they are targeting a strictly immediate future. Volition, a projection of subsequent developments in a performance, is similarly supported by this backdrop of principles, as well as any other thirdness that is articulated by the participant at that particular moment. Improvisers have reasons for undertaking their practice³⁹⁵ and, at any moment in a performance, have some vague projections of where they may want the performance to go.

In order to imagine how volition plays out in a performance, we may recall here the ideas of projection (Becker) and presentative aim (Ryan) discussed in section c) of the fifth chapter of the second part of the thesis. Live collective activity implies projections and expectations in a context that is subject to conditions of uncertainty and contingency, yet where these conditions

³⁹⁴ « Au cours de l'improvisation, les actualistes font appel aux gestes physiques inscrits en eux dont les composantes sont réorganisées (voire désorganisées) autour d'un programme non préparé. Il s'agit alors pour eux de ne pas se laisser dominer par les acquis musicaux et de chercher à explorer au-delà de ce qu'ils savent, au delà de leurs limites techniques.»

³⁹⁵ Similarly, audience members have their reasons for being there.

are instrumental in keeping the process dynamic and fertile. We can now affirm that these desires and projections are directly linked to the personal constraints, experiences and habits of participants; they are thus strictly bound to thirdness. They are particular, however, in that, as they enact established personal habits, unifying idiomaticities and cases of *entente* on the one hand, they remain open and vulnerable to the reactions of others, to negotiations and to outside influence. For Peirce, volition, caught between the accomplished and the "open"³⁹⁶ is thus "through and through dual". (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), p.1.332) In words more relevant to this research, volition departs from convention or *entente*, but is left vulnerable to negotiation and feedback.

[Volition involves] the sense of action and reaction, resistance, externality, otherness, pairedness. It is the sense that something has hit me or that I am hitting something; it might be called the sense of collision or clash. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 8.41)

The clash for which volition sets us up can vary in intensity, according to the degree to which the external reaction differs from the expectations that various forms of thirdness - conventions, pre-texts, pre-engagements, *entente*, principles - have set up for that particular present moment of volition.

That shock which we experience when anything particularly unexpected forces itself upon our recognition (which has a cognitive utility as being a call for explanation of the presentment), is simply the sense of the volitional inertia of expectation, which strikes a blow like a water-hammer when it is checked; and the force of this blow, if one could measure it, would be the measure of the energy of the conservative volition that gets checked. Low grades of this shock doubtless accompany all unexpected perceptions; and every perception is more or less unexpected. (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 1.332)

Volition thus engages thirdness in a way that is more dynamic than does interpretation of past actions and objects. Peirce links this dynamicity to our dealings with the future, but logically extends it to the moment of volition: the immediate present moment, mediator of past and future, of dynamic and cognitive reactions.

The soul reacts dynamically with the future, cognitively with the past. Both are mediate. In the immediate present, volition and experience are indistinguishable, are they not? What is the

³⁹⁶ "Open" in the sense elaborated by Umberto Eco in *The Open Work*.

distinction that can exist in that instant? If I am right here, is there not a pretty accurate correspondence between our dealings with the Future and the Past, as far as mediacy is concerned, at any rate? (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 8.78)

Pareyson echoes this idea, declaring about improvisation (in one of his few passages dedicated to the subject) that it constitutes a dynamic link between production and expectation.

*In improvisation, we especially need to consider the aspect from which, with regard to the arrival and development of points of departure, it firmly links the productive character of expectation and the tentative character of production, as is made particularly obvious in the case of musical improvisation.*³⁹⁷ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.102)

For Pareyson, this dynamic link between production and expectation, the immediate present moment, is expressed by the *spunto*, or point of departure.

*Before the arrival of the form, there is of course something else that announces it and lets us anticipate it, something that reaches toward it and creates our expectation of it, that directs and orientates the artist in his production; and that thing is the *spunto*: the form's point of departure.*³⁹⁸ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.88)

In section c) of chapter 2 of the present part of the thesis, we preferred the term "point of relay" instead of "point of departure", due to the fact that its function is one of dynamic renewal. Its inner (past) edge is *entente* and its outer (future) edge is left open. The immediate present, the point of relay, is marked by volition. We could use these delineations as a way of defining the "instant" in free improvisation.

Volition can be a sensitive question in free improvisation, where the instant is sacred and expectations can be seen as obstacles to the true obedience of some of the practice's values, such as remaining completely open to the exigencies of the present moment and the propositions of collaborators.

But, as we have defended, coherence in the improvised activity depends on reference to a

³⁹⁷ « Mais dans l'improvisation on a surtout besoin de voir l'aspect au regard duquel celle-ci, par rapport à l'avènement et au développement des points de départ, lie solidement le caractère productif de l'attente, et le caractère de tentative de la production, comme cela ressort surtout dans l'improvisation musicale. »

³⁹⁸ « Avant l'avènement de la forme il y a bien quelque chose qui l'annonce et la laisse présager, qui tend vers elle et en crée l'attente, qui dirige et oriente l'artiste dans sa production; et ce quelque chose est le *spunto*, point de départ de la forme. »

body of conventions that is shared to at least some degree and for at least a moment. Similarly, musicians cannot move forward in complete darkness. The tentative "caress" of their enquiry, playful as it is³⁹⁹ can only be performed if oriented by some habits, ready to respond to, and outstretched towards an array of possible outcomes. Pareyson writes:

*If it is true that execution is an adventure, we cannot say however that it is left entirely to itself, with no guide or criteria, entrusted to its own doings and condemned to fuel itself with chance. [...] How could an execution left by itself ever find its way?*⁴⁰⁰ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.86)

The question of volition, its scope and nature in free improvisation, therefore, must be answered in the same way as we did previously with other questions regarding conventions and idiomaticities. Besides, since volition is bound to the established thirdness of a practice, it also must be the case that its necessity, applicability and scope mirror those of free improvisation's particular idiomaticity. Just like this idiomaticity, volition in free improvisation must simply be accounted for differently or retraced elsewhere. Either volition concerns emergent and fleeting features of the performance, in which case, as was also the case with *entente*, they simply demonstrate a smaller scope of recognition and applicability; or else, volition concerns unifying underlying features of the practice. Thus, when musicians project or expect something during a performance, the substance of their volition can be an immediate reaction to an observable formal material that has reached *entente*, or it can be a more enduring sense of wanting and expecting to respect specific guidelines that belong to the practice's code of conduct and its underlying principles.

This last type of volition certainly exerts a strong and lasting unifying force in the practice of free improvisation. If we look beyond its immediate applicability in particular moments of individual performances, we can see that volition is key in letting the practice endure and remain relevant. Most obviously, this can be observed in the fact that free improvisation is a practice of deconstructive enquiry, enquiry being by definition driven by volition.

Improvisers have objectives that go beyond the execution of a single performance: they

³⁹⁹ Let us recall these expressions by Peirce, Huizinga, Pareyson and Levinas, developed in section e) of the third chapter of the second part of the thesis.

⁴⁰⁰ Mais s'il est vrai que l'exécution est une aventure, on ne peut pas dire pour autant qu'elle est livrée à elle-même, sans guide ni critère, confiée à sa propre péripétie et condamnée à se nourrir du hasard. [...] Comment l'exécution abandonnée à elle-même pourrait-elle trouver sa direction?

believe their activity can help them push forward their enquiry into sound organization, that it can keep music fresh and new, that its conditions help it to serve as a powerful expressive tool. In some cases, the enquiry is ideologically driven. Or more simply, it gives improvisers a reliable playground where they may always return to "play" or have a meaningful exchange with others, because it simply feels good to speak with one another⁴⁰¹. (NANZ 2011, p.9) These reasons are volition and they greatly influence the way that creative conditions, skills and habits are developed, maintained and nurtured. Becker notes:

Professionals' reasons for doing things are built into the organization of the art world. (...) If people do things for reasons which are not standard in a particular world, they look (to active members of that world) unsocialized and more than a little crazy - one of the ways we recognize a reliable, well-socialized person is that we immediately understand the reasons for his behavior. (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.241)

⁴⁰¹ "zusammen zu reden"

5. - NEW MEASURES FOR GAUGING SUCCESS, VIRTUOSITY AND FAILURE

Becker highlights the importance of consensus for a community's ability to judge the quality of its work.

Judgments of value not held jointly by members of an art world do not provide a basis for collective activity premised on those judgments, and thus do not affect activities very much. Work becomes good, therefore valuable, through the achievement of consensus about the basis on which it is to be judged and through the application of the agreed-on aesthetic principles to particular cases. (BECKER 2008 (1983), p.134)

Following some notable shifts of idiomaticity in the practice of free improvisation, it follows that the measures of a performance's success or failure cannot be set or applied in the same way as is customary for non-improvised music practices. The "basis on which it is to be judged" shifts along with the idiomaticity. It seems unfair to hold improvisers accountable for unsuccessfully exemplifying principles to which they do not adhere. One cannot win or lose at a game that one is not playing. It is important that improvisation be appreciated instead according to the principles that really do govern the musicians' activities; the activity can only make sense to those whose interpretation articulates its proper thirdness.

Stévançe says about *musique actuelle* that it "constructs its own field, in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu. We couldn't, then, understand it according to classical aesthetic rules."⁴⁰² (STÉVANCE 2011, p.18) Success and error, therefore, should be gauged according to how well they actualize the pre-texts and pre-engagements to which they really do commit. Contrary to other musical activities, these commitments are rarely made to artifacts and codes that prescribe specific formal manipulations. Success, virtuosity and error can only truly exist when measured in relation to those aspects that make up the rules and habits (thirdness) of the activity at hand. We must then relocate these notions to those aspects of free improvisation that carry its thirdness.

a) *Redefining Success in a Context of Real-time Collective Creation*

In object-oriented (or score-oriented) music practices, success is in large part (but not exclusively) measured by how successfully a given score or pre-established form (formal pre-

⁴⁰² « La *musique actuelle* construit son propre champ, au sens de Pierre Bourdieu. On ne saurait alors la comprendre à partir des règles esthétiques classiques. »

texts) is actualized, as well as by how successfully an artist manipulates the formal codes to which the practice adheres (formal pre-engagements).

A process-oriented practice that, like free improvisation, favors the emergent and evanescent sound forms, is necessarily, even by definition, never fully bound to a formal pre-text. Formal pre-texts in free improvisation are usually fragmentary directions, proposed as devices that are meant to frame or stimulate emergent materials. And then again, the most common (and often unspoken or implied) pre-text is something like: "the work, its materials and content, will be determined at the time of the performance, according to real-time interactions between its participants". A successful free improvisation performance is crowned not for its ability to render a pre-text, but rather for how it manages to thrive in its conditions of real-time creation (although, given the vague and open-ended nature of pre-texts in free improvisation, both of these measures could easily be equivalent).

As for formal pre-engagements, none in particular are prescribed by the rules of free improvisation in music, except perhaps that operations should involve manipulations of sound forms. The pre-engagements of free improvisation mostly have to do with the concerns, values, attitudes that make up the practice's codes of conduct and idiomaticity, and that provide our experience of improvised performances with much of its thirdness. The commitments, responsibilities and aspirations (all bearers of thirdness) of improvisers are thus entirely different from those of musicians of object-oriented musical activities. Improvisers commit to rules (thirdness of thirdness), but not to forms (thirdness of firstness). Of the two categories expressing generality, only thirdness is codified in the practice of free improvisation (even if this codification sometimes manifests itself as an unspoken agreement). This distinguishes it starkly from most other musical activities, where formal pre-engagements are an important determining and identity-constructing factor.

Of course, it is not enough to say that a work successfully applied a certain underlying principle. Musicians do not choose to abide to these rules just for the sake of it, but rather in order to pursue musical activity. Furthermore, the rules of free improvisation target certain aspects of the performance in a way that is entirely different from how they are applied in music activities that commit to non-open⁴⁰³ scores and formal codes.

The very definition of the work and the performance shifts in the case of free

⁴⁰³ "Open" is, again, used in the sense developed by Eco in *The Open Work*.

improvisation. The goals still include the application of certain codes. However, since these codes do not govern the formal content of the works directly or exclusively, they are not engaged in order to enable the proper rendition of a pre-determined aesthetic object, nor are they enacted in order to prescribe certain acceptable formal manipulations. The codes of free improvisation are meant to nurture and maintain an ongoing collective process, as well as maximize emergence; their successful application amounts to how well they let the process keep its momentum and remain fertile. Although the process involves the actualization of (mostly non-formal) codes, a more important purpose is that of playful enquiry described in chapter 3 of the second part. A performance can be considered successful if it allows musicians to further their enquiry. Since the activity of improvisation is concerned with deconstruction and since its enquiry is largely driven by it, the success of a performance may be evaluated by what it was able to deconstruct.

Stévançe stresses the importance of the artistic experience, another one of free improvisation's purposes that can be seen as an important gauge for performances' success, namely that of involving participants and audience members. She says that they are a "creative project whose only goal is to live and let others live an artistic experience that remains open to the greater number of participants."⁴⁰⁴ (STÉVANÇE 2011, p.134) The focus here is the collective nature of the activity, which we highlighted as one of the basic parameters of the free improvisation practice. In this sense, a work is successful when a collective experience can arise as the performance unfolds.

Since experience is presented here as a goal, and therefore as volition, it belongs to the realm of thirdness. It is indeed difficult to classify "experience" as an object-oriented or a process-oriented aspect of a performance... or even as an "aspect" at all, since experience is of the essence of performance: any appreciation of a performance *is* itself an experience of it. Furthermore, from the perspective of Peircian semiotics, the experience that one has of a performance is inseparable from both its objectal and processual facets, aspects that roughly correspond to the categories of firstness and secondness. In the context of an improvised performance, it is thus inseparable from the ongoing interactions and feedback that characterize the process (secondness), as well as from the emergent and evanescent sound forms (firstness) that are the results and renewed points of departure of the same process. The experience, a

⁴⁰⁴ « projet créateur dont le seul but est de vivre, et de faire vivre, une expérience artistique ouverte au plus grand nombre. »

momentarily meaningful thirdness, is renewed and redrawn with every interpretative act; it serves as both the result and point of departure for the ongoing process. To clarify what I mean by this, the experience on the one hand represents the real-time actualization of the underlying concerns, values and habits (thirdness) that enable participants to articulate the performance's objectal and processual aspects in order to coherently interpret and develop the ongoing performance. On the other hand, experience is the interpretation of the ongoing performance's developments and outcomes: the updated individual and congenial perspectives that, as the feedback loop pursues its movement, enable participants and allow them to locate new fertile points of departure. It is a momentary convention and a sort of *entente*. Experience also determines how musicians are likely to develop these points of departure. In any case, a performance may be deemed successful if it lets its participants participate in such an experience.

Still, in the spirit of judging improvised performances according to the principles that it commits to, the greatest measure of success for improvised works no doubt lies in how effectively its underlying principles (to which the improviser *is* committed) are able to articulate the performance's emergent and fleeting aspects (aspects that, by definition, are the object of no commitment) in a coherent way. In other words, successful improvisations are those where the underlying rules and conditions, applied in real-time, are able to produce works that put forward the spontaneous quality, presence and agency of their materials.

b) Redefining Virtuosity

Free from the exigencies of having to reproduce and render documents and codes that are highly prescriptive with regard to formal manipulations, the virtuosity of improvisers can no longer be expressed according to their ability to perform these tasks. It follows that the requirements involving technical prowess and interpretative sensibility or attitude are regulated far less strictly in free improvisation; the skills expected from improvisers are not geared towards any specifically prescribed formal manipulations, but are the ones best adapted to the practice's particular concerns and marks of success. This is, of course, true for any practice; the required skills are the ones that are most apt at achieving what peers and audiences consider to be successful examples of the practice at hand; the measure of success depends on the practice's particular promises and commitments. These vary greatly from one activity to another. Marks of

success in certain forms of pop music include certain rhythms, certain types of catchy melodies and texts, certain vocal timbres and certain dress codes. Skills that are cherished in the world of free improvisation, as we saw in the previous chapter, include things like the ability to help maintain the process's momentum by seizing the contributions of other participants and turning them into fertile points of departure for further operations. The skilled musician can respond to a maximum of potential contributions and outcomes that will arise spontaneously at the time of performance.

Another mark of virtuosity is the authenticity of a musician's voice. While technical prowess is certainly valued in improvisation circles, genuineness and originality are generally admired to a higher degree. Evan Parker is an example of a musician who rates highly on both fronts; his authenticity is intimately linked to the ways that he puts his technical prowess to original uses. The high value of originality can be retraced directly to the practice's concern with emergence and its pursuit of an enquiry driven by deconstruction. Deconstruction indeed should bring to light the aspects of an activity that had hitherto resisted to its general practice and that had remained forgotten or unknown by past practitioners. It should destabilize that which was established; it reveals new possibilities within the practice. In short, it translates into originality. An original improviser is one who successfully deconstructs the musical devices that are at her disposition so that she may propose materials and configurations that are new and unique.

Of course, any type of virtuosity involves the development of certain habits, for what is virtuosity if not an exceptional proficiency involving certain habits that are well adapted to a given task? "Habit" is a word that is often frowned upon in the improvisation world, since improvisers, driven by the idea of emergence, constantly strive to operate beyond their habits. But the habits that we are describing are, for the most part, not the same technical automatisms that improvisers wish to outstrip and transcend. They are the underlying principles that enable them and allow them to pursue their deconstruction of these automatisms.

c) Can there be Errors in Free Improvisation?

In Pareyson's *Teoria della formatività*, the dynamic conception that the author professes involves considering the work's materiality alongside as well as in relation to the process that

brought it into being. Such a conception may also include a consideration of the trials and failed attempts that were abandoned before the final form of a work is determined. For Pareyson, the elaboration of a work involves proceeding, only by trials and attempts, towards an eventual successfully completed work. The work's value may be evaluated according to the challenges that its creator(s) had to overcome in order to complete it.

This consideration applies to free improvisation in an interesting way, since the trials and attempts that lead to the elaboration of the work are simultaneous to the delivery of the work and are necessarily an integral and observable part of it, both formally and processually. The work, simultaneous to the process that creates and delivers it, is necessarily considered dynamically; it contains the trials and mishaps that allow it to flourish. Which leads to the question: if a musician fumbles or botches an attempted contribution, yet the result becomes an inextricable part of the performance (as all real-time contributions are), can we still call it an "error"?

Pareyson says of works that are interpreted from a dynamic perspective that "they 'succeed' simply because, as we make them, we find the way of making them."⁴⁰⁵ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.33) A work, once completed, achieves "perfection" in the classic sense of the word: "perficere", or to do until completion. There is, in this conception of a completed act⁴⁰⁶ as a perfect one, an acceptance of the "suchness" of whatever happens during the performance. Besides, good improvisers usually have the right attitude and develop the right skills to be able to use any kind of occurrence constructively. Unintentional fumbles can easily become fertile points of departure for the next moves and thus reset the entire course of the performance, to the point where it is often perfectly unclear whether there really was a fumble or not. Can there indeed, in this context, be any errors?

From Pareyson's perspective, which articulates object and process, any completed work is a successful one, since the process reaches its end and the object achieves its "perfect" form. But Pareyson's dynamic perspective considers only two aspects of the performance: its objectal and processual facets. It articulates not three, but only two categories, Peirce's thirdness being the neglected one.⁴⁰⁷ In Pareyson's model, there is no aspect of the dynamic aesthetic experience

⁴⁰⁵ « L'oeuvre « réussit » puisque, en la faisant, on trouve la manière de la faire. »

⁴⁰⁶ For Pareyson, the work as a whole must be complete in order to be perfect.

⁴⁰⁷ To account for contingency or congeniality of experience, and to explain established norms, he describes the elaboration of a "way of making" that shapes itself alongside the elaboration of works. The antecedent experiences are treated as past steps in the creative process. The rules and habits that govern individual and group creation, seen as a "way of making" are thus not treated as a third category, but rather fall within the processual facet of the work.

reserved for the underlying principles and habits; there is no thirdness to support the work, to complete the three-tiered articulation along with its objectal and processual aspects, and to allow the whole to be coherent.

This is problematic for us because, as we have defended, the bulk of free improvisation's rules are located on the level of underlying principles. A perspective (even a dynamic one) that fails to consider the level that carries the practice's idiomaticity cannot account for ways that practitioners may err.⁴⁰⁸ This may be why so many musicians and writers say that there is no error in free improvisation.⁴⁰⁹ Stévanche also writes that *musique actuelle* is one of the few genres to have no fear of error, nor worry about success.⁴¹⁰ (PAREYSON 2007 (1954), p.38)

Yet, improvisers do not all agree on this point. Some interventions by one member of a group may be seen as inappropriate by his collaborators. Unwelcome contributions may be seen as obstacles, irrelevancies, intrusions, something tasteless or even something disrespectful. Again, the gauge according to which these considerations are made is the unifying thirdness that supports the group activity: the underlying principles and momentary *ententes* that, as they enable the process, nonetheless also regulate it and ensure that some contributions are more admissible than others. Error can only exist in relation to the expectations that are set up by an idiom. That certain behaviors can be deemed impertinent or inappropriate in free improvisation again attests to the idiomatic nature of the activity.

I will allow myself to defend this point using a personal anecdote. In a 2015 presentation that saxophonist Alexandre Augé and myself gave on the subject of musical improvisation during a conference in Perpignan, we concluded with an improvised performance where audience members were free to join if they wished to. Various attendees of different levels of experience chose to participate, some of whom had instruments while others chose to sing. One instrumentalist had very basic technical skills on her instrument, but understood many of improvisation's ethical principles such as respect and consideration of other participants, listening and mutual awareness, humility and readiness to leave room for every participant. She was also unafraid of going out on a limb and trying new things with her instrument. Her participation was successful because other participants were able to make room for her contributions and everyone

⁴⁰⁸ An even more basic and important problem, but one that we have already discussed, is that a model of interpretation that neglects the interpretant and the category of thirdness is untenable; it is notably unable to account for the contingency of interpretations or for coherence.

⁴⁰⁹ Musicians' testimonies to this effect will be commented a little further.

⁴¹⁰ « Ce genre est un des rares à ne pas craindre l'erreur, ne pas s'inquiéter de la réussite. »

was able to find their place and interact with everybody else in a respectful and constructive way.

A second volunteer participant, a singer with some professional experience, then got on stage. Perhaps thinking that the situation could allow anyone to shine however they pleased, and that free improvisation was the right playground for producing the most extreme sound forms, she immediately made an assertive act of her own presence, pushing out a deep, loud, abrasive roar. The contrast with what was otherwise going on in the performance was so great that other participants later said that they felt her contribution had been rash, intrusive, egotistical and disrespectful. In some cases, such a sudden contrast could be seen as an example of "mutual subversion", as a challenge to the collaborators, to be accepted and developed. Hugh Davies explained that in order for such a particular challenge to be understood as such and tackled collectively, participants need to know each other well, trust each other and dispose of a common language. (BAILEY 1980, p.95) These simply were not the conditions that our makeshift Perpignan group was dealing with. Though she gradually adapted her gameplay and progressively found a more humble place in the group dynamic, the singer's initial musical statements were perceived by most as a failure to engage with the underlying ethics that make up free improvisation's unifying codes, and more particularly of the momentary *entente* that reigned at the moment. This disregard is, according to the argument that we have been constructing, a perfect example of an error in a performance of collective free improvisation.

Misconceptions or false projections about the underlying unifying principles of free improvisation can also lead to similar errors. Despite many improvisation collectives' efforts to be inclusive and to welcome collaborations with all types of musicians (notably by EMV above), the success of these attempts has been variable. For example, some classically trained musicians, when they are brought into a situation of collective free improvisation, tend to begin by reproducing some clichés of what they think free improvisation is supposed to sound like.⁴¹¹ Ben Watson, in his book *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation*, describes how this played out in Bailey's *Company*. Saladin summarizes and comments:

Ben Watson points out that the participation, in Company, of non-improvisers was very often not a guarantee of the quality of the produced music, since it was likely to bring about clichés from novice players. [...] According to the biographer, on the one hand these musicians did not manage to totally liberate themselves from their own musical idiom. On the other - and this was surely more

⁴¹¹ The same can be said about musicians with more traditional jazz training (like myself), or coming from any other kind of background.

problematic - what they often proposed was a simple parody of improvisation, a reflection of what they considered, according to their own origins, to be the way that free improvisation was supposed to "sound".⁴¹² (SALADIN 2014, p.199-200)

These clichés often take the shape of frantic, loud, uncontrolled noodling. It should be clear by now that free improvisation is not all about chaos, loudness and extreme use of alternative instrumental techniques. However, whatever limited experience some people may have had with this musical approach could have led them to believe that these clichés indeed are what defines free improvisation. Their attempt to take part in improvised activities thus often begins with the reproduction of such clichés.

For many who judged it according to the standards used for other practices, free improvisation as a whole is unsuitable as a musical activity. It has drawn the criticism of jazz critics and contemporary erudite music critics alike, just as, moving backwards up through the lineage that links these practices to free improvisation, free jazz and aleatoric music had before it. In a 2014 article in *The New Yorker*, Richard Brody comments on Geoff Dyer's critique of John Coltrane as he was moving towards an approach that was more free.

In Offering, there are astonishing, deeply moving moments in which Coltrane uses his voice - he cries out during a solo by Sanders, and twice sings in a sort of vocalize, pounding his chest to make his voice warble. Dyer writes condescendingly in his review that "these eagerly anticipated moments actually sound a bit daft - which is not to say that they were without value." They don't sound "daft" at all; they sound like spontaneous and ingenuous expressions of rapturous joy. But they are gestures that would have had little place amid the prodigious musical strength of Coltrane's classic quartet. On the other hand, they're right at home in Coltrane's open-ended quasi-hangout band, in the familial intimacy that gives rise to its vulnerable furies. (BRODY 2014)

Dyer's critique of Coltrane is, of course, anchored in an idiomaticity that is at least partially foreign to that of the music that Coltrane was developing. Brody's view, perhaps more finely tuned to what Coltrane was pursuing, and polished by a few extra years of hindsight, points out some of Dyer's misplaced judgments. He comments on some extended techniques that

⁴¹² « Ben Watson relève que la participation à *Company* de musiciens non-improvisateurs n'était bien souvent pas un gage de qualité dans la musique produite, car elle était susceptible de faire réintervenir des clichés de "novices". [...] Selon le biographe, d'une part ces musiciens ne parvenaient pas à s'affranchir totalement de leur idiome musical, et d'autre part - de manière sans doute plus problématique - ils ne laissaient bien souvent entendre qu'une simple parodie d'improvisation, reflet de ce qu'ils considéraient, selon leur milieu d'origine, comme la manière dont devait "sonner" une improvisation libre. »

Coltrane was implementing and tries to (vaguely) clarify the perspective from which they should be considered. His most important point is that this perspective must be different from the one which we were accustomed to appreciate in the days of Coltrane's classic quarter.⁴¹³ He insinuates that Dyer is contemplating the more recent performance from the perspective of a fan of Coltrane's earlier works, and thus is failing to recognize the newer work's own standards of value.

And so, keeping in mind that free improvisation prescribes no particular treatment of formal materials, we posit that formal manipulations in performances of free improvisation are erroneous only as far as they represent a breach of an underlying principle of the practice.

d) Entente as a Momentary Gauge

There is at least one common type of perceived error, however, that distinguishes itself from this proposed rule. Arthur Bull is one of a few musicians with whom I had the opportunity to conduct interviews that admitted that they sometimes felt they had committed an error when they perceived that their contribution had not been up to what the moment required of them.

I can think of times where I thought back and thought "I wish I hadn't played so loud" or "I wish I hadn't played so quiet" or "I wish I had listened to that player", but the tricky thing is that you don't really know which are the errors. Sometimes I think "boy I wish I could do that one again I really don't feel that good about it", but you listen to the recording and it's good. And sometimes you feel good about it and you're with your friends and you listen to it and it's average. So I do think you can make errors, but I think it takes a lot of experience to know what is an error and what isn't. (BULL 2015)

Putting aside, for now, the idea that the judgments on the quality of the proposition are not easy to make, let us propose the following: musicians' contributions follow projections and are thus charged with volition, which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is an example of thirdness. It is a momentary commitment just as open to transgression as any other type of rule. In improvised performances, momentary *entente* and volition may, then, serve as a gauge for considering something as a success or failure, or simply for evaluating how one is progressing. Drummer Daniel Kokowitz tells Henri Jules Julien:

⁴¹³ The classic quartet, with McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones could still be considered firmly anchored in the jazz tradition.

At a certain moment, a trigger will set in motion a process that will result in a repertoire, a performance. This idea, this flash⁴¹⁴, will, until it settles, remain the vision to which I will constantly refer in order to situate myself.⁴¹⁵ (JULIEN 2008, p.39)

In a collective setting, a musician's perception that she is sharing projections and expectations with her collaborators is an example of *entente*, complete with its constraints. To act against them or to fail to live up to the commitments that they represent signals a breach of *entente* and can also be seen as an error. However, this is never fully clear in collective improvisation because the interpretations of different participants are always contingent to some degree.⁴¹⁶ Consequently, different people may disagree on whether a particular contribution was successful or not, or even whether it was intentional or not. It is even common that a contribution goes unnoticed by some participants while others use it as a point of relay for their next actions.

In a context of free improvisation, projections and momentary *entente* may be the only measures against which success or error may truly apply to formal properties. Since the momentary rules carried by projection and *entente* are the only ones that may offer specific prescriptions concerning the adequateness of formal manipulations, they also constitute the only measure according to which these formal manipulations could themselves be judged or seen as errors.⁴¹⁷ Yet improvisers are not offered the possibility to review and correct any failed attempt. Thus, these propositions are errors and, at the same time, they are not errors. One could say that they are errors because they fulfill a development that is alternate to that which had been planned. They are not errors because they are full-fledged integral parts of the work.

But even in these cases, improvisers dispose of strategies to compensate for the breach and to help integrate the given proposition as an integral piece of the coherent whole that is the performance. In any case, it is likely that the subsequent sequences of operations will have been

⁴¹⁴ The comparison with Pareyson's *spunto* is inevitable. This flash is the *entente*, momentary thirdness, and point of relay that serves as a localized gauge for evaluating the current developments within the performance.

⁴¹⁵ « À un certain moment, un déclenchement lancera un processus qui aboutira à un répertoire, à un spectacle. Cette idée, ce flash, restera jusqu'à aboutissement la vision vers laquelle je me tournerai constamment pour savoir où j'en suis. »

⁴¹⁶ We saw, when discussing Klinkenberg's typology of situations of communication, that a performance act that is proposed accidentally can be interpreted as an entirely intentional contribution.

⁴¹⁷ Errors that represent a disregard of some of free improvisation's values and principles are obviously made manifest through a formal manipulation as well. However, the contribution will be considered inadequate not because it fails to render expected formal manipulations, but because it fails to respect the aesthetic and ethical code of conduct that should unite free improvisers and support their activity.

affected by the breach and will have responded to it (perhaps echoing it or developing it) in a way that diminishes whatever intrusive character it may have had at first, thus nurturing its belonging to the performance: its form, process and rule. Arthur Bull says:

When you have more experience as an improviser, you can take those funny shaped things that don't fit and make them part of the music. I'm not saying you're correcting as you go, but you're not afraid of those things. (BULL 2015)

Besides, since *entente* in free improvisation is always highly contingent and volition in free improvisation is rarely clearly predefined - it extends towards the future in a state of curious openness - the concept of error becomes all the more elusive. This may explain why, in the quote at the beginning of the section, Arthur Bull said that judgment about the quality of contributions is not easy to make. Since the unexpected can liven up improvised performances, Tena Palmer wonders if, even gauged according to the volition of a certain moment, it can ever be considered as error:

Even if something doesn't happen as you planned, I don't consider that to be error. Some of my very best singing is what wasn't planned at all. There's a lot of leeway in free improvisation. That's my method. I may think I'm going for something but I'm really just interested in seeing what I can create. The objective isn't as explicit. I'm a real idealist when it comes to this. Ideally this music is a subjective thing. It depends on what your intentions are going into it, what your parameters are. But even when it's completely free and ideally nothing is wrong, we all feel when certain elements can interrupt the flow in a not fantastic way. (PALMER 2015)

It is important for the dynamicity and productivity of the free improvisation practice that the exigencies of *entente* avoid becoming too fixed, too enduring, and that their scope of applicability does not spread too far. The playful deconstructive enquiry that is carried out by improvisers does not seek a fixed goal, but rather an eternally renewable front where their activity may be sustained indefinitely. The gauges of success, error and virtuosity, especially when it comes to technical or formal criteria, change with every instant. On the edge between that which is inherited and that which is allowed to emerge during performances, momentary trends (especially ones concerning formal materials) are not encouraged to be solidified. This would mean that musicians have yielded, put down their guard, and that their deconstructive enquiry has been put to rest.

e) Trends as Localized Gauges

The measure of success, virtuosity, control and error according to the expectations generated by *entente* is, of course, also carried out in cases of the relatively more enduring cousin of *entente*: localized trends. At a certain time and place, through collateral experience, certain group configurations elaborate conventions of varying strength and scope of applicability. There is, among the participants of such localized groups, a "personal consciousness in bodies of men who are in intimate and intensely sympathetic communion." (PEIRCE 1931 (1966), CP 6.271) The localized thirdness that carries this consciousness suggests particular attitudes, strategies and even technical devices to be employed in certain performance situations. These all serve as points of cohesion. A performance passage that enacts the prescriptions of one of these localized trends will probably be considered to be successful.⁴¹⁸ Similarly, the convention, regardless of its durability or scope, may, in the time and space of its relevance, gauge perceptions of virtuosity, error, and any other kind of judgment on the quality on the performance.

We saw in section d) of the third chapter of the first part that some groups and communities of improvisers are more concerned than others with social, political or spiritual preoccupations. These localized concerns entail corresponding measures of success, failure and virtuosity, always according to the group's specific concerns.

⁴¹⁸ Given free improvisation's tendency towards deconstruction, it may also, conversely, be seen as a more successful outcome if a localized trend is subverted in real time.

CONCLUSION

Free improvisation is, like any other collective activity, supported by shared understandings and codes. Its actors are traversed with histories of habits in performance practice and their collaboration gives them real-time collateral experience. We have argued that this discredits it as a non-idiomatic practice. Simply, the idioms to which it commits make little to no specific prescriptions with regard to formal sound content. The concept of idiomaticity as we use it extends to more than symbolic formal codes. As such, it moves away from ideas of language conceived in the traditional sense and bears more likeness to Peirce's category of thirdness, which accounts for all aspects of signs that have to do with laws and habits. We proposed two axes along which we may retrace the bulk of free improvisation's idiomaticity: its unifying underlying principles on the one hand, and localized momentary formal conventions which we call "*entente*" on the other. Our reflections were largely conducted thanks to a theoretical corpus mixing aesthetics, sociology and semiotics. Musicians' testimonies were referenced abundantly, both from interviews that I conducted myself and from other documented interviews.

We discovered that despite the fact that different artists have different stances and approaches with regard to their improvisation practice, and despite there being a tendency to want to deny the place of rules or conventions in free improvisation communities, reliance on shared sets of codes of conduct make it such that free improvisation cannot be said to be truly non-idiomatic. There exist consistent values and principles that sustain the activity and have done so since the pioneering generation. These do not always overlap perfectly from one artist or scene to another; different perspectives have arisen over the years, some well into the movement's development, notably with regard to conceptions of freedom, rapport to tradition, and the role of social, political or spiritual ideals. Nonetheless, as the most unifying aspects of the practice⁴¹⁹ these underlying principals serve as its conventions. These principles, applied to the basic conditions of real-time collective music creation, are organized in such a way that they provide the attitudes and devices that allow improvisers to collectively manipulate sound forms despite their not having any enduring formal pre-engagements. The particularity of free improvisation's idiomaticity is that its aspects can be sorted onto two levels : a lower, enduring level where recognizable conditions and principles unify its participants and govern their activity, and an upper level represented by the emergent and evanescent aspects of improvised performances that

⁴¹⁹ Let us recall that free improvisers make no pre-engagement to any formal codes.

are meant to be determined only at the moment of the performance (quality, presence, agency).

We demonstrated this by disentangling these different aspects, with apparently contradictory tendencies, and retracing them to the three categories of Peirce's semiotic model, which is well-suited to articulate these different tendencies and account for them as constituting individual signs. The aspects related to firstness and secondness (quality, presence, agency) are left to emerge in real time and meant to be largely emergent and evanescent, never committing too seriously to any preexisting formal prescription nor itself establishing any overly engaging formal conventions. Secondness is, in any case, always unique to the event that triggers semiosis. Free improvisation's particularity is its proposition of an intimate relation between firstness and secondness, where quality is strictly bound to presence and agency in an attempt to maximize the emergence and evanescence of formal sound content. By constantly deferring the completion of the determination of its formal content, free improvisation limits the importance of the category of thirdness, at least with regard to these formal aspects. Formal conventions are necessary, but they are quickly overturned, often serving only for the moment of their elaboration, as an *entente*. Shared horizons made up of formal content are usually kept in a highly contingent state of liminality, purposefully and strategically vague: an edge between that which has been inherited and that which has yet to be determined. This is, as we have seen, a particularly fertile laboratory for free improvisers' playful enquiry. All the while, the underlying unifying principles that govern improvisers' activity (listening, concentration, openness to others, openness to whatever happens, etc.) are the object of much more enduring consensus. These aspects of the performance are the ones that make up most of its thirdness, which, again, is the realm of law and habit.

Methodologically, this distribution of the aspects of free improvisation and the retracing of the practice's idiomaticity were not conducted arbitrarily, but always in accordance to improvisers' testimonies. Musicians' testimonies were consistent in denying any commitment to any formal codes.⁴²⁰ At the same time they revealed sets of habits and skills that, it is expected, any good free improviser should develop in order to integrate the practice successfully. Gauges for the quality of an improvised performance or the individual contribution of one of its participants are intimately bound to these principles and the musicians' ability to actualize them during a performance.

⁴²⁰ Improvisers either avoid obvious references to pre-established formal codes, or they borrow from them freely, deconstructing them, severing them from their usual context and thus avoiding any commitment to the obligations that they usually entail in their practice of origin.

The immediate strength of Peirce's model is that it allows us to account for the contingency of interpretations, the strategic vagueness and liminality that characterize the free improvisation process. It also helps us retrace different aspects of the improvised performance - some enduring and some fleeting - by linking them to theoretical categories that, precisely, highlight these different aspects of signs. It is thus no longer problematic for the practice to be "enduringly fleeting". These advantages highlight two of the major contributions of this thesis to studies of improvisation and performance. First, this project succeeds in consolidating semiotics with relation to performance studies, fields that, for lack of an appropriate semiotic model, have often been deemed incompatible. Second, by employing a semiotic model that is well developed and detailed, it provides a solid basis on which we may retrace the different aspects of free improvisation - the enduring and the emergent/evanescent ones - as belonging to a single musical event. Thus, this thesis proposes a theoretical model that is flexible enough to account for some of the more elusive phenomena that characterize this practice, a practice that, we must recall, has generally expressed mistrust of theory.

In truth, the findings of this research should serve as methodological parameters for a second round of investigations: one that could apply the idiomatic axes discussed in this thesis to a corpus of performances, as an analytical device. Now that we have identified some gauges of success that are better tuned to free improvisation's idiomaticity (we mean here both its enduring unifying principles and its momentary formal conventions or *entente*), we can easily envision some corresponding ways of analyzing and commenting on improvised performances. A semiotic analysis makes it possible to account for free improvisation's idiomatic aspects (thirdness), which, by definition, are also the gauges of its success, alongside its emergent and evanescent elements; it accounts for and articulates all of these aspects together. The contingency that characterizes the interpretation of every sign is due to the fact that a portion of the thirdness always has to do with each participant's individual habits, which are inaccessible to others, except through inference. Our semiotic analysis cannot hope to account for the full scale of what each participant experienced during the performance. We may only account for whatever semiotic operations that participants express, one way or another, during the performance and afterwards. Lucky for us, the real-time interactive and participative nature of free improvisation makes it such that, in every contribution, we may read a reaction to other earlier and ongoing propositions. Many reactions are observable and what triggers them is retraceable. Each contribution is thus an

expression of how its producer has interpreted that particular instant in the performance. It is not possible to get a complete picture of the participant's semiosis, but the kind of observable agency that we have described constitutes valuable data for our analysis.

We may hope to retrace, with some detail, relations of causality or cohesion, as well as identify instances of *entente*. By describing the observable formal materials that serve as mediators for different instances of *entente*, we may describe whether cohesion is attained through similarity, complementarity or mutual subversion. In the case of mediating features that can be understood as belonging to dichotomies that are the object of the group's manipulations (volume, harmonic density, orchestral density, range, *etc.*), we may quantify them by illustrating, on graphs, how, throughout the process, the group's activity moves back and forth along between both ends of the dichotomy. Finally, we may speculate further on the nature of the encounter, drawing, for example, on Klinkenberg's typology of communication scenarios⁴²¹.

The chains of linear causality that characterize the musicians' interactions and for which *entente* serves as points of relay may be retraced according to the descriptive methods of Actor-Network Theory. Recalling that this theory grants agency to all participants, human and non-human, we can extend the category of agency-bearing participants to include signs as well. This is especially important because participants always access and influence each other through the mediation of signs.

Firstness, which concerns the works' raw physical quality, should be analyzed according to the provisions that the principles of free improvisation make for them. That is to say that, although improvisers have no obligations towards any prescribed formal codes, formal sound content must be elaborated and interpreted in accordance to the codes and principles that do sustain the collective process. How well do the sound sequences actualize the enduring underlying principles of the practice and the exigencies of momentary formal conventions, or "*ententes*"? Thus, the observable formal aspects of the performance will often be deemed appropriate when they demonstrate that some of the principles cherished by improvisers, such as emergence, cooperation and good listening, are being observed. The proposed conception proposes a kind of binding agency between the different aspects of signs in music. It asks that we consider the sound materials of performances simultaneously with the principles and codes that support them in the unique moment and circumstances of their elaboration. Free improvisation's

⁴²¹ On Klinkenberg's typology, see section d) of the second chapter of the thesis' third part.

openness comes from the fact that any sound content will "work" as long as the participants are able to accept it and develop it in the context of the principles of their practice. Furthermore, the practice's values promote openness to any and all formal propositions in their own suchness.

Indeed, free improvisation accepts and integrates the content that arises in real-time through the collective process. As the word "improvisation" suggests, the musicians' sight has limited scope in the future. The kind of enquiry into sound organization that improvisers pursue is open-ended, does not seek a particular final result. It playfully deconstructs inherited dichotomies and, with every new contribution, proposes a new agency of its aspects, even one whose scope is localized and very brief, and whose achievement is never meant to be final. This conception of a playful enquiry can certainly fuel new discussions if we oppose it, as we have done, to the goal-oriented enquiry that is usually pursued by scientific discussion and that is described by Peirce. Peirce's semiotic theory, while completely affirming of the contingency of interpretation of signs, sees the ideal results of enquiry as the elaboration of signs that are more precise, the reduction of the gap between interpreters, and eventually the elimination of contingency in our exchanges. Of course, this ideal, a kind of upside down version of the *ex nihilo* ideal of some pioneering improvisers, is just as illusory as the latter. This problem does not escape Peirce, who nonetheless pursues this kind of enquiry. By proposing a more open-ended conception of enquiry that draws on play and deconstruction⁴²², we avoid this problem and even open up the way for using contingencies and controversies as empirical data. Peirce's model is, after all, fully assertive of these contingencies and controversies, and is suitably flexible to account for them. It can seem surprising, however, that he nonetheless mainly promoted a kind of enquiry that always strives for more and more precision and determination, rather than also accounting for more open-ended, playful, deconstructive⁴²³ enquiries that not only assert the inevitable contingency of interpretation between participants, but also make constructive use of controversies. This is, perhaps, due to his occupation as a scientist. In a process-oriented activity like free improvisation, the basic goal is for the process to be sustained for the duration of the

⁴²² Certainly, some processes have a more or less specific result in mind and are not as open ended as free improvisation, an activity that wants to remain as open-ended as possible. But even the most rigorously pre-planned processes are subject to some uncertainties, leave some room to emergence, and are thus open-ended to some degree. We believe that the playful, deconstructive model of enquiry that has been described in this thesis is always at work, even when some specific finality is envisioned.

⁴²³ Of course, Peirce died long before Derrida published his work on deconstruction. But he does talk about the deferral of the completion of the determination of signs, which in some ways foreshadows Derrida's concept of *différance*, where we must indefinitely adjourn the determination of words and signs.

performance. In the long term, this would translate into being able to keep the practice relevant. In other words, the goal of the enquiry is the enquiry itself. We demonstrated that this indefinite endurance depends on the continued deferral of the completion of the determination of performances' content. In other words, the movement is fueled by contingency and deconstruction as much as it is by order making. The practice positions itself at the crossroads of these two movements; it stays liminal, on the edge. It should therefore not be reproached to improvisers if they do not bring their enquiry to a definitive conclusion, for this achievement would, according to the principles that they hold with regard to pre-engagement to formal codes, constitute a failure to uphold its principles: it would signify a failure to launch the process in its next phase, one whose enduring vitality depends on its contingency, vagueness and liminality.

ANNEX - INTERVIEWS

Tena Palmer
Nova-Scotia and Toronto, Canada
Singer for *Aperture Trio*
February 6th, 2015

1-Is it necessary for musicians to have similar backgrounds when they improvise together? Can it be an obstacle for musicians in a single group to have very different backgrounds?

My experience is that consensus is achieved just by playing enough times together. Maybe some discussion if necessary, if there is any structure to be discussed. In many cases there's much less said rather than more. There's rather little discussion until after the fact.

AB: Do you think good music can happen despite conflicting personalities?

TP: Of course, oh my god! of course! Some of the best made while I was deep in a fight with my partner Justin Haynes playing guitar and piano and we're doing a recording in the CBC Montreal studio and we were the first non-classical musicians to get to use it. The soundboard was like the starship enterprise and there was this big Bösendorfer. We were just at the end of a relationship and we were fighting and so pissed off. We were at each other through the whole session. But the music, when it came to play: phenomenal! Like really really connected and strong. I've also made really great music with people that I wouldn't want to have dinner with. I think that how people express themselves and communicate socially is a separate issue from who they are as musicians. If they're very good musicians at experiencing the moment or expressing who they are, I think that's a different set of skills. I think of stories of people who I really admire musically and that I don't feel I would like to get to know them personally. But I'm not going to cut off my appreciation of Ray Charles, great signer, because he's a total misogynist, really bad. And I've heard terrible stories about Keith Jarrett.

2-Is your practice motivated by political, social or spiritual preoccupations? Or particular aesthetic preoccupations?

I don't really think in terms of rules or anything like that, but I guess listening is the most important thing. Before you open your mouth or blow, have your ears open and: awareness. But it's got to be simultaneous. Your own authenticity somehow. I think free music really suffers when people are thinking too much cerebrally and imposing ideas. Really making a plan and imposing it on a improvised session is really counter intuitive for me and it doesn't create the best music. For musicians, any musicians, actually, in any style, the best is to push the ego out of the way immediately, before you even approach the stand, make a conscious decision.

Part of my process is, whenever I approach the stand I acknowledge that I'm probably ill prepared, nobody's ever as prepared as they'd like to be. I say "here's where I am" and I think that

whatever sounds come out of me or whatever I do is for the best, for the good of whoever comes in contact with it.

I forgive myself for any [fumbling] and just say "here I am". That allows me to just be in the moment, to be really focused in each moment. It's the only way that I can really share with other people. When you're really focused, then there's no room for ego.

So then there are like two sort of rules for free improvisation: Number 1: listen. Number 2: complete focus in the moment.

André Bourgeois: Can people throw curveballs at each other?

Tena Palmer: Oh yeah! That's all completely valid! My tendency is maybe, I was going to say MORE to throw a curveball than to integrate, but it's probably 50/50. I have no qualms about it because it's coming a very strong flow of music. And if the music just happens to flow here now, which is counter to the previous moment, then that's just absolutely fine and musical and most of the time these curveballs inspire people to respond. It always seems to liven things up a little bit as opposed to resistance.

I'm thinking of these situations where people don't know what to do with these curveballs - I've been in situations where some participants were maybe not as skilled at free improv and it's really tough. It's like they're not listening. And you lose your connection to the moment because you get interrupted and disturbed.

I try to be the best musician that I can. Try to interact with it if it's possible to make some music. Or try to interact with other people or try to make some music out of what's going on. And other times I'll just shut up because there's just no room. If I don't feel there's any space for me I'll just stop. I don't need to force myself and I don't need to play. If it's not musical for me to add something I'll just shut up. I've seen situation's where everyone just ends up shutting up and one person is left playing all alone and the others just wait, sort of like "helloooo, didn't you notice that there's nobody playing with you anymore?"

AB: Is there error in improvisation?

TP: If it is totally free, then there is no error. There are subjective opinions on what's happening musically, but... I guess if you're not listening, then that's error.

Even if something doesn't happen as you planned, I don't consider that to be error. Some of my very best signing is what wasn't planned at all. There's a lot of leeway in free improvisation. That's my method. I may think I'm going for something but I'm really just interested in seeing what I can create. The objective isn't as explicit. I'm a real idealist when it comes to this. Ideally this music is a subjective thing. It depends on what your intentions are going into it, what your parameters are. But even when it's completely free and ideally nothing is wrong, we all feel when certain elements can interrupt the flow in a not fantastic way.

AB: Do you think that free improvisation can represent some kind of narrative structure like that and tell a story?

TP: I never really focused on that and I always thought it was a bit posing on free music to have that as a goal. BUT! I've experienced it in these sessions with Al [...], these Monday night session that I've told you about. A couple of times I totally naturally and in the flow of things, I would start verbalizing small ideas. I even resist that - I don't like to impose too much narrative on anything, but some things were coming out very naturally. And I found myself seeing and, as abstractly as I could, describing a situation. And it was a very emotional and very... clearly defining... because I was talking with my colleagues later and they got the story and they got the

picture of what was going on. So it actually can happen.

And another experience, playing a gig in Ottawa, just voice and electronic percussion. We were doing a duo gig and brought members of the audience to tears through the emotional expression. There was something, not so much a narrative, but a feeling that was very clear. I felt it strongly and I thought "let's put this all in the music" and it was registered with a lot of people in the audience that got this powerful feeling. I was terribly happy to feel that connection, that it was getting across, but I don't usually infuse the improv with any particular ideas or any specific emotional idea.

Back to the first example, I was yammering about backing up a trailer in someone's driveway. And then it was this metaphorical connection to how you lived your life. It wasn't detailed. Just "what are you doing?", and about how awkward and unsure people can be in that kind of situation. This all happened very spontaneously. It sounds contradictory that it was very clear but at the same time not detailed, but I guess I'm speaking about that communication and language of feeling in response to the moment. There are many times when there's absolutely no detail, but it's very clearly understood. Communicating with your colleagues what you're on about at that moment. It's that being in the flow of creativity, of spirit, however you choose to recognize this process. When I'm doing free music, I try to be, 80% of the time, completely in that.

If you're talking about a moment, you can't pre-compose a moment. So then you've only got immediate improvisation to express the moment.

3- What is your relationship to other musical traditions?

I'm an odd person for improvised music because I've been doing it almost since I started playing, but I never ... it's never been primary focus. It's always been there right beside everything else that I do, which took a lot more focus and practice and, you know, a lot more challenging and a lot more skill in different ways, whereas I know there's all kinds of skill that I require, enormous skill that I apply to free music, but, it's never ever felt like anything but natural expression.

I have an entire bag of skills that I've been using and developing just from playing from 30 years as a free improviser. You know, like weird sounds and stuff like that. I guess it's just my attitude towards it. I've never spent an enormous amount of time really exploring the whole genre and really listening to tons and tons of recordings. I enjoy it much more live.

I think consciously, like the first time I made a conscious decision "oh let's play free" was in university (SFX) with guitar player Geordie Haley. I think it was with him and we just started doing it. It felt absolutely comfortable and natural and the most normal thing in the world from the very beginning. I never felt odd or slightly embarrassed like some people do, you know doing all this weird shit. It was like "oh yeah, this makes total sense." That was in '81 or '82.

I've mostly worked in jazz as an instrumentalist and as a singer. In the mid-90s, I began diverting away from jazz which I had grown up with, because of my father's interest in big band. Going into jazz felt really natural. Then in the mid-90s, I began branching out into Celtic and folk and chamber kind of music: art music with kind of poetry and things like that. And then when I moved to Iceland in '96, for 6 years, it was a lot more experimental music, which included minimalist electronica and improv and poetry and weird mixes and stuff... spoken word and stuff.

AB: Was there a free improvisation scene in Iceland as well?

TP: I would say that there was more of an experimental scene which encompasses a lot of different elements rather than just... people coming together and playing free music.

AB: Do you have any other professional activities other than music?

TP: At the moment no, other than teaching. I'm getting into stand up comedy the days too. It's something that I'm pursuing. I've just made a conscious decision to get odd my ass and do it. I'm actually much more interested at the moment in stand up comedy than in music. I'm a good story teller. What happens it that when I do gigs, I tell stories and I set up the tunes. And its happened in the past few years that people really enjoy the stories as much as the music. They want more stories. It used to be the other way around. I would get myself really centered and grounded on the stage and comfortable by singing. By really focusing my creative energy that way. The last time I did a gig of my own music, here at the Rex (in Toronto), [...] I found that my focus had shifted and I got really centered and inside myself by telling stories. And that is a major aesthetic shift for me. I still find my creative space singing free, though.

AB: Back to singing, are influences from other traditions something that should be avoided in free improvisation? Or can you borrow things?

TP: The voice is pretty limitless, and I'm not too interested in being "pretty", you know? (laugh) I never have been. I think it can be frustrating for some people who would maybe like to hear more pretty sounds. I'm much more fascinating with **Tena does chain of sounds** and really deep throat harmonics and the fascinating play of overtones. Those are my instruments. Sometimes I feel self-conscious because I go too melodic on some days, you know. It's too clearly, like, almost jazz improv or something. Whereas I may be doing **Tena makes what might be described as a "frightful screech"** and it's still a solo, free lets me explore this.

AB: So do you try to avoid something that is too melodic, something from a specific tradition?

TP: (hesitation) I just try to be responsive to the moment. I try not to oppress what's going on between a group of people. It's just in that delicate balance between being completely in the moment and just following what your impetus is. That's easy for me. I can be overpowering, so I try not to be. In a session recently I was exploring some indian vocal techniques, for which I've had lessons.

AB: Would you say that there is now a free improvisation tradition?

TP: I'm afraid so. You must know of the British "school", those dudes, and they're all dudes! I'll tell you as a woman, it gets... ah! You know jazz is the last bastion of misogyny and male dominated music in my estimation, and I'm not alone. It's usually me and a bunch of guys, but it helps with the balance if there is another woman.

There's the black American tradition: the *Art ensemble* (of Chicago). I have trouble with that, with traditions, because I'm not really following one school or another. I'm rather aware of the Dutch school and the British school, there's the Afro-American scene that was very politically Afro-American and then in Canada the CCMC is sort of the rear guard. It's all nice, but I think every person should bring al of what they have.

AB: With these traditions comes the idea of trends. Do you think trends have changed in the past decades?

TP: I don't think that I follow these schools enough for any educated sort of response. I do believe that there is development in free music. First of all the arrival of electronica is huge! It's kind of a paradox isn't it? Tradition and free music. I feel uncomfortable with it. I recognize it right away when I'm a scene with people who are from a particular style and it's a bit restrictive because I'm starting to check my expressions... will they fit with this?

I like a lot of musical style that have parameters and boundaries. Graphic scores. This creates a beautiful specific idea where you're improvising within the realm of the composer's structure. That's really totally valid and beautiful.

AB: How does the environment affect the outcome of the performance.

TP: Oh my god, tremendously! tremendously! I did a **laughs** oh my god... I did a gig at a museum out in the country in Iceland outside of Reykjavik. The situation was that the keyboard player (Johann Johanson - golden globe). We're playing beautiful improvised music and it's a cocktail party! It's a daytime snoozefest and absolutely no body in the room - or maybe one or two people - were listening at all. And we just played for ourselves, because the situation was too odd to get into that space.

Arthur Bull
Nova-Scotia, Canada
Guitarist for *Aperture Trio*
February 25th, 2015

**1-Is it necessary for musicians to have similar backgrounds when they improvise together?
Can it be an obstacle for musicians in a single group to have very different backgrounds?**

-Shared references might help musicians in a group. I tend to think that there are people who are just good at it. Some musicians' sensibilities lend themselves to this more than others. Like Bob (Vespaziani) he has a lot of drive because he's a blues drummer, but he also has this openness, and so those qualities are very good in improvised music. People think it's very cerebral music, but I think it's very physical music, quite often.

***Bourgeois*: What could lead to a lack of cohesion?**

Bull: Sometimes it's lack of listening to the whole group. Sometimes someone can be listening to what one person is doing but doesn't hear what the whole group sounds like.

Sometimes it happens that you're playing with people that come from a body of musical knowledge and they're playing that knowledge. Instead of responding, they're saying "I have this thing that I want to play". It might be really good, but it doesn't really fit with the moment.

What's interesting to me is that you'll find good improvisers from all kinds of music: folk, classical, jazz, you name it, different cultures. It's just amazing how people sort of fall off the edge into this.

2-Is your practice motivated by political, social or spiritual preoccupations? Or particular aesthetic preoccupations?

I like this kind of music. It's one of the kinds of music that I like. I enjoy going out to listen to it. I feel involved and I wonder what these musicians are gonna do. I find that enjoyable from an audience point of view. I listen to this kind of music because I like it. It's not some abstract kind of quest or something. Some people like country and western music. This is the kind of music I like.

I think the basic rules for me are: listen, imagine, connect with the audience, feel the whole group. If you don't do those things.... also playing with feeling. There's this kind of common good that you're trying to submit to. It doesn't really work if somebody trudges in the middle of this. There is something that's quite social about it. Sort of like political anarchism - the idea that everybody takes care of everybody else and you don't need the state. I'm not saying that I'm an anarchist, but there are some people like AMM that are quite political about their thought about this.

It is about the audience too. Sometimes people think that it's some kind of abstract thing that musicians are going off and doing on their own. It's very much about those people in the room. They are part of what happens, whether they like it or not. It would be totally different if we were playing in an empty house. So I see that as important. This thing about presence and connecting

with people.

But there's also this part that's about imagination, you know. You're actually trying to imagine what's gonna happen next in the music. People who really like the music like it because there's this sense of immediacy like this sound happens and then what's the next sound that's gonna happen? Boom, it happens and you're very close to the musician's sound imagination. It's alive this music. It's raw, but sometimes it's also very gentle.

3- What is your relationship to other musical traditions? Are influences from other traditions something that should be avoided in free improvisation? Or can you borrow things?

I think there's probably different conventions that people have. I'm playing with a lot of different people these days and there are different points of view. I tend to play with people who have a rule about there being no rules. They don't talk about the music before they play. It never comes up. We just don't talk before the set. But some people like to organize it much more than that.

4- Have you collaborated with many foreign musician? How did you meet them? Did it work well? Why?

For collaborations with musicians, you have to go where they are. So I did some gigs in Mexico, several gigs in Rome with Fabricio Sperra and Mike Cooper. I'm based in NS, but I had different projects in different places, I'm willing to travel. I've got a project in Toronto called Red Lantern that does silent films.

I'm also a writer.

I work with fisheries. I did some conferences on fisheries in Mexico. Got involved with the small boat fishermen struggle.

Meeting with foreign collaborators has become very easy to do. Word of mouth, when we go around, colleagues tell us to meet so and so. It's easy to go on the internet and you can hear all of my music. It's pretty informal.

People who aren't familiar with free improv are sometimes puzzled by how easily we can play a show together without rehearsing. Especially other musicians who are like "when's the rehearsal?"

In fact what you're doing is based on what you've been doing for a long time. People who do this kind of music tend to base what they do on a lot of experience. They're very in tune to listening and adapting. This is fundamental to the music. It seems to be part of the DNA of improvisation that you can do that (form collaboration easily without rehearsal). It doesn't always work by the way. Quite often it does.

***Bourgeois:* Are there any skills that help an improviser be good at it?**

Bull: I do think having some sense of vocation and doing a lot of... to the point where the instrument is your voice - as natural as walking and running - an extension of yourself. It happens when people put in many many years of playing. Having a sense of being able to find sounds

very much in the moment. You hear a sound, you imagine a sound that goes with it, you reach for it and it's there. Just putting in the time is very important.

Another thing, and this is something that it has in common with jazz, especially older jazz, and that is having your own voice. I mean, in jazz this used to be the criteria for a good player. It wasn't anything technical, it wasn't how fast you could read. Ben Webster was the only person who sounded like Ben Webster. That's very much true about improvised music too. Certainly someone like Derek Bailey has had a lot of influence on many guitarists, but there's nobody that sounds really like Derek Bailey. He developed his own personal voice. If there are people that go another route that isn't finding your own voice, then it's harder to improvise, I think.

You're on this continuum, this creative tension where on the one hand, be yourself, jump in, you can be transgressive. The other end other end of the spectrum is we're a group. This is a thing that we're doing together between us that's greater than either of us. The meter's kind going back and forth between the meters of that spectrum. That's where the energy comes from.

Bourgeois: Can there be such a thing as "error" in free improvisation?

Bull: Yeah, I can think of times where I thought back and thought "I wish I hadn't played so loud" or "I wish I hadn't played so quiet" or "I wish I had listened to that player", but the tricky thing is that you don't really know which are the errors. Sometimes I think "boy I wish I could do that one again I really don't feel that good about it", but you listen to the recording and it's good. And sometimes you feel good about it and you're with your friends and you listen to it and it's average. So I do think you can make errors, but I think it takes a lot of experience to know what is an error and what isn't.

When you have more experience as an improviser, you can take those funny shaped things that don't fit and make them part of the music. I'm not saying you're correcting as you go, but you're not afraid of those things.

Henry Schroy
Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil
Bassist and composer in various projects
September 2015

1-É necessário que os músicos têm o mesmo "background" musical para conseguir tocar juntos? pode ser um obstáculo de ter assim backgrounds muito diferentes num conjunto?

> Absolutamente não. Alias acho que pode ajudar ter bastantes diferenças de background. A música facilita um intercâmbio trans-linguístico, o improviso abre a porta para a troca imprevista. A surpresa é uma qualidade bastante querida no improviso, e ela pode aparecer com mais frequência entre músicos com grandes diferenças. Claro que é preciso existir algum tipo de simpatia para rolar algo que satisfaz.

2-Sua prática musical é motivada por preocupações sociais, políticas ou espirituais??

> Tudo isso e mais. A música existe antes da linguagem, movimentos de pensamentos mentais que nós definimos através de nossos mecanismos linguísticos. Então sim, a motivação da minha prática é afetada por todas as preocupações da vida, emocionais, pessoais, sobre o amor, a morte, a política, a filosofia, ideias do "além", ideias sob mitologia. Tudo cabe dentro do pensamento musical. A música é um grande oceano em que essas coisas todas se misturam e se informam.

3-Preocupações ideológicas ou estéticas?

> Esteticamente eu prefiro um movimento na direção da paz espiritual. As vezes é necessário trazer um "harsh noise" para desbloquear alguma estrutura não-cooperativa ao redor. Mas minha ideia é melhorar minha vida, a vida das pessoas. Então algum gesto, algum movimento, que facilite a liberdade de pensamento, que acalme as ansiedades, que providencie uma visão mais ampla e atemporal. Uma visão aberta a um futuro mais ideal para humanidade. Trazemos com nós todas nossas experiências. Um músico que já viajou bastante, já tocou com muita gente, pode oferecer uma perspectiva cognitiva que traz valor ao local. É por aí.

4-No improviso, qual é sua relação a outros gênero e outras tradições? da para emprestar? ou é uma coisa que tem que evitar?

> Pra mim vale tudo. Gênero é categoria, o som vem antes de qualquer categoria. Nosso sistema nervoso inventa o resto. E nossas memórias de tudo que já sentimos, todas as canções, batucadas e delírios musicais instrumentados, tudo isso informa nossa reação do momento. Pode tanto servir como uma "censura", ie., vamos tentar evitar repetição de algo que já conhecemos, ou como uma linguagem comum. O importante é a sensibilidade da cabeça, o que estou trazendo no momento está batendo com o todo?

5-Como que você percebe sua música? É mais erudita? mais popular?

> Eu me considero um amador. Minhas várias direções ou estudos seguem meus interesses do momento na minha vida. Então não sei dizer exatamente. Mas creio que poderia me adaptar á situações, "eruditas" ou "populares", dependendo das pessoas envolvidas. Pra mim é sempre muito pessoal. Existe sempre a questão, eu sinto uma conexão real com esta pessoa? Tenho algo honesto para compartilhar? Sinto valor nascendo dessa união?

6-Já colaborou com músicos estrangeiros? Como encontrou eles? funcionou bem? porque?

> Sim. Morei em NYC por 16 anos. Lá vc encontra o mundo. Toquei com grandes músicos Malianos como Salif Keita, Toumani Diabate, Bassekou Kouyate. No momento isso funcionou bem. Acho que minha naturalidade rítmica e harmônica que vem da música brasileira facilitou estes intercâmbios.

7-Como você reconhece outros músicos que têm afinidades criativas com você?

> É feito amor, ou como o sexo. Você sente a coisa na pele.

8-Já recebeu financiamento publico ou privado para seus projetos musicais?

> Não, eu escolhi outro caminho á muito tempo atrás. Eu trabalho fora da música, tenho uma carreira como programador de software. Trabalho em casa. Tenho grande flexibilidade e sigo meu coração, procuro completar meus projetos com o objetivo de lançar los ao universo. Mas até agora nunca procurei outro tipo de financiamento. Prefiro continuar meu processo independente ás políticas e burocracias locais. Claro que existe um lado negativo disso, que é uma certa falta de visibilidade nas cenas artísticas. Mas até agora consegui fazer o que amo. Gostaria de amadurecer minha prática além disso um dia, considero isso um processo em fluxo.

Arthur Navarro
Vitória, ES, Brazil
Guitarist for *Expurgação*
August 2015

1-É necessário que os músicos tenham o mesmo "background" musical para conseguir tocar juntos? Pode ser um obstáculo de ter assim backgrounds muito diferentes num conjunto?

Imagino não ser necessário que os músicos tenham o mesmo background musical para interagirem musicalmente, sendo a distinção de repertório musical entre eles algo que pode resultar numa mistura interessante através de suas variadas influências sonoras. Porém, de outro modo, os músicos com backgrounds musicais semelhantes, seja este repertório a música que ele exerce como músico, ou mesmo a que pratica como ouvinte de outros gêneros, estes músicos na minha opinião têm alta probabilidade de terem afinidades ao criarem música em conjunto.

De qualquer maneira, também imagino que a interação musical também é influenciada por algo para além da música, algo que habita na instância mais sutil do ser, que emerge e que potencializam a técnica e a comunicação musical existente enquanto as pessoas tocam juntas. Algo para além mesmo da comunicação corporal e visual entre os músicos, as quais também colaboram muito pra interação musical. Penso que o que permite que as pessoas toquem juntas está para além da construção do som propriamente, através dos músicos, de seus instrumentos e alto-falantes e, se não forem elétricos, suas caixas ressonantes.

Isso que tento tornar palpável em palavras talvez seria uma combinação alquímica de diferentes ingredientes, que transferido para o âmbito musical, se dá em um nível quântico, que permite um flow musical semi telepático entre os músicos em alguns momentos, que no mundo concreto acaba por se decodificar através da execução dos instrumentos e o resultado musical criativo que emerge dessa experiência, a música.

2-Sua prática musical é motivada por preocupações sociais, políticas ou espirituais?

A prática musical que exerço é associada ao Expurgação, onde tenho a chance de compor e produzir músicas para diferentes projetos, ao exemplo de filmes de ficção, documentários sobre reservas biológicas, aulas de ensino a distância, e a produção de discos musicais de artistas independentes.

Além dessas atividades, a prática musical também se realiza através de jams improvisadas junto aos membros da Expurgação em nossa própria sede, seja de maneira acústica no CPA (o Centro de Pesquisa Anunnaki carinhosamente batizado de Centro de Pesquisa de Áudio) ou na cozinha, sendo as jams realizadas nesses locais atos de reunião, de irmandade, e também de experiência espiritual e lúdica.

As jams realizadas com a Expurgação em formação de banda nos estúdios é uma outra esfera da minha prática musical. Considero esta muito uma pesquisa que vai além da experimentação, musicalidade e ritmo, abarcando também a conexão com o outro ali naquele momento, sendo esta

também uma busca espiritual através de uma interação musical, da criação de música espontânea.

Inclusive, o estúdio está desativado temporariamente. Estamos realizando a reforma do espaço estúdio para que em outubro iniciemos a nova temporada de edições do Ensaio Aberto, onde acontecerão dez eventos musicais abertos ao público realizados com financiamento de um órgão nacional de cultura. Cada evento terá duas bandas locais e uma de fora do estado do ES.

Acredito que a realização de eventos muito positivas para a cidade em geral, e para o centro da cidade de Vitória, em especial. E a Expurgação tem criado um lastro de atuação nessa área de eventos realizados abertos ao público, ao exemplo também do Cine Expurga, evento que já aconteceram algumas temporadas e que projeta filmes, documentários, videoclipes locais, nacionais e internacionais. Esse tipo de atuação junto a sociedade é muito satisfatório pois gera uma circulação de pessoas nas ruas e nos eventos, com a proposta de interação num ambiente diferente, descontraído, tranquilo, e com a oportunidade de uma experiência musical ou cinematográfica.

Vejo e percebo esses projetos todos como obras e acontecimentos que funcionam como ações transformadores que atuam e podem oxigenar diversos âmbitos da comunidade, e torço para que mais pessoas continuem realizando suas ideias criativas em prol de atividades que contribuam com a potencialização da sociedade, e a criação de espaços que permitam as pessoas experimentarem o diferente, o oculto, a vida, também por meio da cultura.

3-Preocupações ideológicas ou estéticas?

Diria que existem sim preocupações ideológicas e estéticas nas práticas musicais que exerço e me envolvo. Entretanto existem diferenças nessas práticas, e em cada uma delas, questões ideológicas e estéticas diferentes.

Na prática de músico livre, agindo criativamente em uma sessão de música espontânea, junto à Expurgação e convidados, vamos dizer, as questões ideológicas se tratam da interação musical, de um momento de irmandade, além também dessa prática incitar a libertação das amarras musicais convencionais. A estética desta prática tangencia, pra mim, algo mutante, ao passo em que essa criação improvisada hora existe como música ‘livre de forma’ (free-form music), hora como algo que remete a um funk ou world music, ou mesmo uma sonoridade mais atmosférico, folclórica ou pesada. Mas a premissa da experiência musical da Expurgação ao meu ver também bebe no punk, pegando emprestado à anarquia a sua subversão e aplicando-a na criação e interação musical onde a regra é não haverem regras.

Na prática de compositor pra trilha sonora de um filme, por exemplo, existem preocupações ideológicas pois é necessário criar música de maneira que esta acompanhe musicalmente uma narrativa que surgiu de um roteiro, de uma ideia, de um diretor e realizador. A obra cinematográfica já é permeada por questões filosóficas, imagéticas, ideológicas e estéticas, as quais contribuem pra direcionar mais especificamente a criação dos momentos musicais, o que pode talvez tornar a composição livre em uma criação limitada pelos vetores que o filme implica, ou, ao contrário, também pode abrir portas infinitas de possibilidades de extração, em som, dos climas, atmosferas e músicas que determinadas sequências de um filme pedem.

4-No improviso, qual é sua relação a outros gênero e outras tradições? da para emprestar? ou é uma coisa que tem que evitar?

No improviso é onde percebo que o repertório do músico pode emergir e transbordar, diluído em meio ao acontecimento musical que se dá junto ao outros músicos nesse momento. E no caso da minha relação com o improviso não seria diferente. Creio que o background do músico, a sua memória musical de outros gêneros e outras tradições musicais podem emergir no improviso, seja emprestadas e executadas racionalmente, ou também surgir em movimentos inconscientes de resgates de temas e climas que remetam a outros gêneros e outras tradições. Dessa maneira, percebo que cada músico tem uma tendência natural, uma pulsação interna que o impulsiona a passar por caminhos musicais que remetam a diversos gêneros e tradições.

5-Como que você percebe sua música? É mais erudita? mais popular?

O caminho musical que produzo individualmente, e o mesmo se aplica em conjunto com a Expurgação, seguiria o experimentalismo, que é algo erudito. Entretanto percebo em mim a facilidade de mutação e atuação tanto com a música erudita quanto com a música popular.

Na Expurgação a música sempre foi algo que permeou a relação interpessoal dos membros, sendo que o ato de fazer som juntos é muito responsável pela união e gênese da Expurgação que existe na atualidade. E por ser algo que emergiu entre os membros de maneira natural e descompromissada, esse espaço musical sempre foi uma área de improviso e experimentalismo livre de gêneros, sendo sempre bem-vindo a incorporação de diferentes influência musicais e rítmicas.

6-Já colaborou com músicos estrangeiros? Como encontrou eles? funcionou bem? porque?

Algumas colaborações aconteceram, em momentos diferentes muito específicos. Em 2012 no prédio do 6B, localizado em Saint Denis, conhecemos o Jackson Thélémaque, músico de naturalidade haitiana. Esse encontro se deu ao acaso quando estávamos realizando uma residência artística onde representávamos o Expurgação e também o Instituto Últimos Refúgios, lá, no 6B. Tivemos o acaso maravilhoso de ficarmos hospedados no atelier número 502 do prédio, onde, na porta ao lado se encontrava o espaço de produção do Jackson Thélémaque.

Descobrimos que ele utilizava o espaço ao lado em um belo dia de manhã de Setembro, enquanto despertávamos, pois ouvíamos a música que ele estava criando vindo do através outro lado das paredes e pelas janelas. O som que ele fazia era uma espécie de blues, onde ele tocava guitarra, e ia sobrepondo camadas de arranjos através de um pedal de loop, e em seguida tocava, junto dessa massa de loop criado, o par de percussões voodoo que ele tinha lá. A impressão sonora que tinha era que tinham quatro pessoas no outro cômodo fazendo aquela música, mas na verdade era apenas ele, multiplicado em algumas entidades sonoras.

Após um tempo, depois de ouvi-lo, admirados, fomos conhecê-lo. O encontro foi muito proveitoso, conversamos e fizemos um som improvisando nesse espaço de produção dele. O

encontro foi realmente muito bom, e chegamos a realizar uma entrevista em vídeo e também convidá-lo para participar da apresentação que a Expurgação faria no festival Fabrique à Revê, realizado no térreo do prédio 6B. A apresentação no festival e a interação musical tendeu a algo mais rock n roll, mais enérgica, pois nesse momento estávamos com todos do grupo, com bateria, e instrumentos elétricos amplificados, e microfones para as vozes.

Essas experiências musicais se desenvolveram harmonicamente, o motivo é difícil explicar, acho que houve afinidade musical, terrena e espiritual, mesmo. Houve um entrosamento bacana. O Thélémaque possui uma gama de influências, caminhos de criações, influenciadas pelos blues, rock, ritmos do Haiti, especificamente o voodoo, e também por músicos brasileiros, Gilberto Gil, e também a música americana, ao exemplo de Jimi Hendrix. E são influências que possuem semelhança com as dos backgrounds dos membros do Expurgação nessa apresentação.

7-Como você reconhece outros músicos que têm afinidades criativas com você?

Imagino que primeiramente observando-os fazer música, tanto em performance quanto em estúdio, podemos fazer uma ideia de que haja afinidades criativas em comum. Mas creio que apenas trabalhando junto, realizando uma jam session, por exemplo, ou produzindo música junto em estúdio, essa afinidade pode ser concretizada.

8-Já recebeu financiamento publico ou privado para seus projetos musicais?

O financiamento para os projetos musicais que participei também vieram de fontes públicas, privadas também de fontes distintas, ao exemplo das particulares, ou artistas independentes. Por via de fontes públicas foi possível realizar em 2010 a produção de um álbum de música experimental da Expurgação, chamado Noaretério. Outros exemplos também são as produções musicais de trilha sonora do curta-metragem Milagre, em 2008, e o longa-metragem Punhal, em 2014, ambos filmes da diretora brasileira, capixaba, Luiza Lubiana, os quais foram rodados e produzidos com financiamento público e também privado.

Uma das ideias do Expurgação que também foram realizadas através de financiamento público é o Ensaio Aberto, que consiste na produção e realização de eventos de música abertos ao público no andar térreo da casa que é nossa sede no Centro de Vitória. Realizamos em 2014 uma temporada, e em breve, mais precisamente a partir de outubro de 2016, será iniciada a nova temporada Ensaio Aberto, a qual também está sendo realizada através de financiamento público.

Marcos Campello
Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil
Guitarist in various projects
September 2nd, 2015

1-É necessário que os músicos têm o mesmo "background" musical para conseguir tocar juntos? pode ser um obstáculo de ter assim backgrounds muito diferentes num conjunto?

Acho que não é necessário. Sobre ser um obstáculo, depende da proposta do projeto musical em questão.

2-Sua prática musical é motivada por preocupações sociais, políticas ou espirituais?

Sim.

3-Preocupações ideológicas ou estéticas?

Sim.

4-No improviso, qual é sua relação a outros gênero e outras tradições? da para emprestar? ou é uma coisa que tem que evitar?

Uso muito da música brasileira no improviso. Acho que dá pra tomar qualquer coisa emprestada, desde que se saiba o que se quer fazer. Coisas a se evitar depende da proposta estética de cada um, mas acho que todo mundo já passou por essa questão.

5-Como que você percebe sua música? É mais erudita? mais popular?

É difícil pra mim colocar nesses termos. Chamo simplesmente de improviso.

6-Já colaborou com músicos estrangeiros? Como encontrou eles? funcionou bem? porque?

Sim. De várias formas: amigos em comum, workshops, afinidades musicais... Na maioria das vezes funcionou bem, acho que porque nos demos liberdade para improvisar.

7-Como você reconhece outros músicos que têm afinidades criativas com você?

Não sei se consigo reconhecer isso sem ser tocando.

8-Já recebeu financiamento publico ou privado para seus projetos musicais?

já

Diego Brotas
Vitória, ES, Brazil
Guitarist for *Expurgação*
August 2015

1-É necessário que os músicos têm o mesmo "background" musical para conseguir tocar juntos? pode ser um obstáculo de ter assim backgrounds muito diferentes num conjunto?

Essa questão é um ponto interessante de discussão. Dentro do projeto musical *Expurgação* há um viés muito forte em dar espaço à músicos que possuem backgrounds diversos. Na verdade essa questão do background não é levada muito em conta na hora de uma participação e um show ou em uma gravação. Acredito, que o mais importante é possuir uma conexão, uma afinidade que passa por diversas instâncias. Certamente o background musical pode ser um facilitador de uma experiência musical, mas não é determinante para uma performance em conjunto. Dentro deste contexto, já passaram músicos com background e interesses muito diversos, que acabam por se adequar ou adicionar suas experiências.

2-Sua prática musical é motivada por preocupações sociais, políticas ou espirituais??

Acredito que esses três fatores citados por você são influenciadores, mais do que motivadores. Essas preocupações, certamente fazem parte mais de um inconsciente do que um plano estritamente elaborado. Em muitos casos essas preocupações que dão o tom de uma performance musical. Outras vezes não.

3-Preocupações ideológicas ou estéticas?

Certamente, há um alinhamento ideológico e estético dentro da prática musical.

4-No improviso, qual é sua relação a outros gênero e outras tradições? da para emprestar? ou é uma coisa que tem que evitar?

No improviso, na minha opinião, há de ser respeitadas todas tradições musicais e não ficar preso a gêneros ou tradições. Acredito que o improviso é aberto a uma agregação e integração de diversos campos da música.

5-Como que você percebe sua música? É mais erudita? mais popular?

Nem um, em outro. Acho que falar em categorias para definir a minha música é limitar a percepção do público/ouvinte. A experimentação pode passar pelos campos eruditos e popular, mas o que prevalece é a experiência, a performance, que cria um híbrido.

6-Já colaborou com músicos estrangeiros? Como encontrou eles? funcionou bem? porque?

Já sim. Com alguns. O primeiro contato forte com músicos estrangeiros foi em um show que o *Expurgação* fez em Saint-Denis. Conhecemos vários músicos por lá e convidamos eles para

participarem do nosso show. Em outro caso conheci um estudante de doutorado estrangeiro e ao saber que era músico o convidei para fazermos uma reunião para experimentarmos uma parceria. Nos dois casos funcionou muito bem, pois houve uma conexão musical muito forte, resultando em uma parceria muito rica em sonoridades.

7-Como você reconhece outros músicos que têm afinidades criativas com você?

Essa é uma pergunta interessante. Tenho mais uma pista do que uma opinião formada sobre o assunto. Acredito que reconheço outros músicos a partir do nível de imersão que se desenvolve em uma prática musical. Se essa imersão é profunda me parece que as afinidades ficam ressaltadas a partir da composição musical em conjunto. Mas, outros elementos podem ser responsáveis por essas afinidades, como por exemplo timbres, harmonias, melodias, cadencia rítmica, etc.

8-Já recebeu financiamento publico ou privado para seus projetos musicais?

Já recebi os dois tipos de financiamentos. Os dois foram importantíssimos para o desenvolvimento das práticas musicais.

MEDIA REFERENCES

The following is a collection of links to websites containing recordings or videos of performances by most the musicians with whom I conducted interviews. Excerpts were chosen for being representative of the musicians' free improvisation practice (since all of these musicians are also involved in many other types of projects) when such representative media was easily available. More detailed information on each performance is available on each individual page.

Arthur Bull

- Excerpts of recordings from a selected part of his discography:

http://www.actuellecd.com/en/bio/bull_ar/discog/

Arthur Bull and Tena Palmer

- Video excerpt of *The Aperture Trio*, of which Arthur Bull and Tena Palmer, along with Paul Cram, are members: <http://www.upstreammusic.org/ensembles/aperture-trio>

Henry Schroy

- Audio excerpt of a performance in Rio de Janeiro with the *Non Human Orchestra*, which also had the participation of Biônicos, David Charles Cole, Felipe Ridolfi, Gama, Negalê Jones, Peppe de Souza e Re Sil, Leslier García and Paloma López:

<https://soundcloud.com/lessnullvoid/sets/non-human-rhythms-3>

Marcos Campello

- Recording of (and interview with) Marcos Campello and J.P. Caron: <http://materialmaterial.blogspot.com.br/2014/12/hiper-instrumento-entrevista-com-j-p.html>
- Full discography of *Chinese Cookie Poets*, a trio made up of Marcos Campello, Felipe Zenícola and Renato Godoy: <https://chinesecookiepoets.bandcamp.com>

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