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Free improvisation

a way for the expansion of listening and technique for
the contemporary performer

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Introducing the subject

- Music of the twenty-first century requires a more thorough preparation for the performer. The performer is expected to realize an increasing number of tasks - which usually go beyond traditional instrumental techniques - and more than often is required to assist the composer in solving specific technical problems of each work. The explicit challenges in the ultra-detailed scores produced by some contemporary composers refer to a repertoire of instrumental resources, commonly referred to as extended techniques and which has gradually been incorporated in contemporary musical practice. The very idea of extended technique is strongly related to expanding the possibilities of sound production. Examples: Iannis Xenakis, Helmut Lachenmann (*musique concrete instrumentale*), Brian Ferneyhough (*new complexity*), Gerard Grisey (*musique spectrale*)
- Example: Frank Bedrossian: *L'excess du son*
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_m69XX_Nt3c

Free improvisation – political and aesthetical assumptions

- Reevaluating the role of the performer in contemporary music.
- Imagining and aiming a radically creative performer.
- Questioning the hierarchical division of labor that has been established in Western music: composer - performer - audience.
- Criticize the traditional forms of music education that usually reproduce models of music that do not encourage creative practices, and favors the reproduction of the repertoire.

Free improvisation: what does that mean?

- Democratic, non-hierarchical and often, collective practice with emphasis in the process.
- Musical thought in action, usually not worried about creating finished *works of art*.
- The essence of improvisation is the very act of artistic creation: the search for *the new* in every moment, the intensification of the present.
- Experimental music based on a dip in sound, free from idiomatic constraints.
- It is a collective and interactive construction in real time, so it can be thought of as a kind of game or conversation.

Free improvisation: what is it? Musical examples

- Orquesta Errante

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P94rHJ48nl4>

- Duo Puckette/Costa:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LCae4-Gvuc>

- Musicaficta 1:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0I1spUdLKeM>

Free and idiomatic

- Idiomatic improvisation: *game* governed by rules established in the context of socially formed complex systems (such as blues, Jazz, Flamenco music etc.),
- Free improvisation: musical practice based on the *molecular* dynamism of pre-musical sound, in which the improvisers come into direct contact with each other and interact with the materiality of sound.
- Free improvisation: can be thought as pure physicality without the mediation of any abstract pre-established grammaticality.

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- *The basic element of the free improvisers method can be found in their attitude with regard to musical traditions, languages, genres, etc. Idioms are not seen as prerequisites for the music-making, but as tools that, at any time can be used or not ... just as the starting point of the free improviser contains a refusal to submit to any particular or traditional language (Derek Bailey).*

Sound as a prime force: the idea of a reduced listening (*écoute réduite*)

- Knowing that every musician is conditioned by his/her own biography (which existed previously as systems and idioms).
- It is necessary to develop a discipline, or an intention of listening.
- For Schaeffer, reduced listening is one that seeks to escape from comprehending any sort of “meaning” from sounds. **All attributes are supposed to be in the sound itself as if it were an object.** These sounds are put into a myriad of combinations, presenting novel timbres as result of the use of extended techniques, introducing also new concepts of rhythm, form and ample expressive possibilities.
- The unconditional way of hearing brought by *reduced listening* turns our audition permeable to that which is unpredictable, unknown and not yet structured.
- In short, the idea of the *sound object* is more inclined towards an attitude that allows us to appreciate the sound as it is, divorced from any extra-musical meaning and musical systems strongly consolidated.

Sound as a molecular level of music: Deleuze's approach

- *In the environment of free improvisation is predominant the molecular level which cross the molar levels. This – the molar level - would be manifestation of stratification and should relate to the external environment of the strata. In the other side, the molecular environment would relate to the interior. In the molar level there are particular stratifications of the molecular and hence there is a gestalt perception that produces differentiation of an identifiable whole (styles, idioms, systems, gestures). According to Deleuze, it is necessary to aim the molecular to overcome the idioms and systems. The well-known Deleuzian idea that “art is not to reproduce or to invent forms but to capture the forces”, is essential to understand this concept of molecularity. The "forces" are present at the molecular level. It is here that the sound thought of as a power line becomes the original material, powerful for a musical practice free from any pre-established system.*
- *In the axis of stratification/destratification free improvisation would happen within the ambitus of the second, while idiomatic improvisation would take place in a more stratified context. In fact, it is absolutely necessary that the musician who participates in practices of free improvisation establish a policy to overcome the idioms in which perhaps he is immersed. In other words, the musician must stand in a constant process of deterritorialization, destratifying all the time. For this, from his face with his refrains and territories, his techniques, systems and styles the musician should seek the molecular level that's where it is possible to accomplish an interactive practice released of molar stratification (idiomatic, stylistic). Only within this perspective can a collective performance exist between musicians of different backgrounds*

Free improvisation as a tool for:

- integrating composition and performance in a creative perspective;
- turning the interpreter into a creative - performer;
- favouring the development of a kind of deep and "microscopic" listening.

Strategies for extending and organizing instrumental and listening abilities:

- Pierre Schaeffer: the sound object
- Alain Savouret: *sofèje de l'audible*
- Brian Ferneyhough: gesture, figure and texture
- Tom Hall – *Free improvisation: a practical guide*

Alain Savouret: *solfège de l'audible* 1

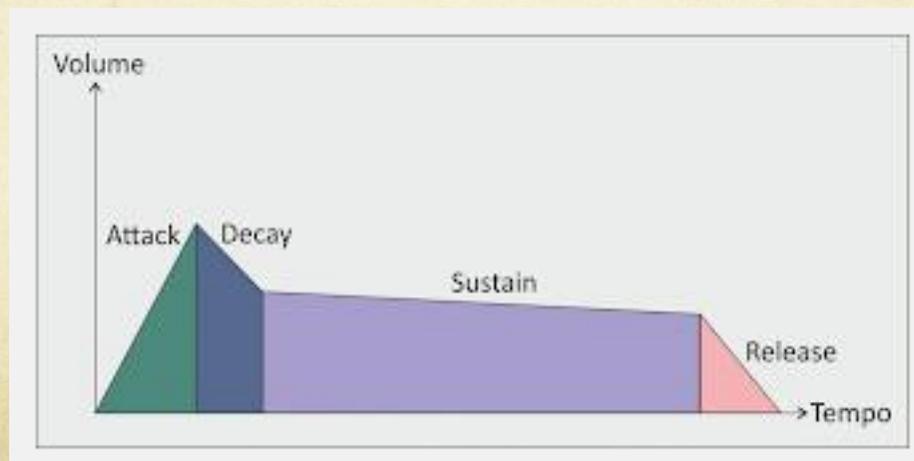
- Teacher and composer Alain Savouret introduced the discipline, *Improvisation Générative* in CNSMDP. His pedagogical approach, based on the formulations of the inventor of *musique concrète*, Pierre Schaeffer, uses three complementary and interconnected *forms of listening* from which he proposes exercises for groups of improvisers.

Alain Savouret: solfège de l'audible 2

- The first - *microfonic* - relates to hear a timeless and decontextualized sound (*morfemic* level), and focuses on basic criteria and qualities of sound: substance (simple or tonic mass, hybrid mass, complex mass or noise), density, grain and appearance (degree of fluctuation in height, mass or harmonic intensity - like the vibrato).

Alain Savouret: solfège de l'audible 3

- In the second type - *mesofonic* - there is already a context or a temporal focus. The goal is to photograph the dynamic sound flow, drawing units (such as sound objects or, metaphorically, like words in a musical discourse). In a narrower temporal scope, focuses on the *form - temporal - envelope* and relies on notions of beginning (attack), medium (suspension, maintenance, body) and end (decay). Or, in other words (or image...):



Alain Savouret: solfège de l'audible 4

- In a longer temporal context, articulates the form-temporal-envelopes in sets of: a) homogeneous units (accumulation - Ligeti), b) heterogeneous units (concatenation of a kind of *melody* of sound objects - Xenakis) and; c) nonsensical units (undirected samples - Ferneyhough). There are still three criteria that apply variation at this level: by flotation, evolution and modulation.

Alain Savouret: solfège de l'audible 5

- In the third - *macrofonic* – we turn to a kind of listening specifically *musical*. From listening the relations and joints inside an unstable power afforded by the two preceding forms of listening, we pass to a kind of listening explicitly mediated by culture (forms, styles, genres, references, etc.). This is when it arises the idea of composition: *the combination of sounds becomes musical*.

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