

INTERWEAVINGS

Towards a new view of the relation between composition and improvisation

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Our (German) official view of music history since 1945 is still centred on two paradigms which were developed within the Darmstadt Summer Courses. These are serialism on one hand including the reaction against it from the side of Cageians - and aleatorics and other strategies for opening up the musical work on the other. In composed music of today, aleatorics play only an insignificant role, just like strict serialism. Open structures in music works are exceptions within contemporary composition. Thus, the quasi official view of music concerns itself with positions stemming from the origin of New Music after 1950. They admittedly implied a radical thinking through of principal possibilities for employing a new view of the musical work. Consequently they also appeared necessary and revolutionary, but they have remained without a real succession.

When employing this view, the dominant view of the developing new contemporary music represses or marginalises the fact that aleatorics and open work structures were only a small part of a diverse movement against the traditional notion of music, musician and musical work. And, remarkably, exactly these repressed dimensions of this reaction have lived on and unfolded a strong influence precisely in recent years. Improvisation plays a central role in these new views - and this is the case inside as well as outside the traditional context of New Music.

This development was not primarily about the rediscovery of a forgotten tradition of music history, although that was *also* the case. Of course, improvisatory elements were also a fundamental part of composed and notated Central European music - until it was repressed during the nineteenth century. But the re-consideration of improvisation, of that which is unpredictable and indeterminate, was not a linear extrapolation of this tradition which was believed to have become obsolete, it was its rediscovery. We do not possess a binding concept to describe this rediscovered improvisation, its function, meaning, scope of influence and its relation to handed-down parameters of composed art music. We have only a provisional one, that of "free improvisation". This is so despite the fact that the new view of improvisation sees the claims made on its behalf of a special spontaneity and subjective "freedom" in a new light.

The new view of the relation between improvisation and composition was widely practised in the sixties. It laid down aesthetic foundations, on which contemporary composers and improvisors can equally build. It is to an important degree the result of a thinking through of the role of freedom, that is, the apparent spontaneous selection by the performing musician.

As was the case at that time as well as today, most academically educated composers are sceptical of the general possibilities of improvisation as a force in creating musical works. Especially of "free improvisation", which in their view became connected to spontaneity, lack of form, esoteric self-expression, occasionally even to haphazardness. Not least, they would only allow it in a jazz context, which was considered a part of popular music. Such hostilities often, however, had a mutual basis. Improvisors celebrated their way of creating music as spontaneous, free, communicative, intuitive and unpredictable and, from their side, devalued composers as academic, outdated, cold, elitist, rigid or simply superfluous.

These hostilities are documented in music encyclopaedias: they describe generally the concepts of improvisation and composition as contrary poles or even as opposites. Art music is explicitly or implicitly understood as a form of music which has been composed and which continues traditional, composed music in a legitimate way. An antagonism consisting of composition and improvisation as two types of music which mutually exclude each other¹ is possible here, because composition is primarily understood in terms derived from its goal, the musical work which has been fixed notationally and which can consequently be reproduced. Improvisation, by contrast, is supposed to be connected to the simultaneous, unplanned invention and realisation of music. In recent years, however, more and more composers and improvisors have found this thinking in stereotypes to be outdated and have recognised new challenges in composing for improvisors which are concerned with no less than our notions of musical work and practise, of musical time and perception of sound as a whole. On their side, improvisors see in open scores and in structural prescriptions (made by others or by themselves) a setting free of creativity by means of imposing limitations - and not any more an inhibition of spontaneity and freedom. The basis for this is the recognition that a belief in absolute freedom is founded in wishful thinking. What feels like improvising with no prerequisites in a spontaneous way often reveals itself at later listening as a retrieval of sounds, gestures and textures which have already been played and acquired before - and this is so not only in the saxophone solo of a jazz standard employing scales, but also in improvised music operating without explicit prescriptions.

To describe it in a simplified way, for the representatives of the first generation, composition and improvisation were two parallel music cultures which had equal rights and which, in the end, would mutually exclude each other. For those of the second generation, by contrast, they were aspects or moments of one art music.

Today, improvisatory elements in composition are just as little an exotic exception as composers who improvise. Improvisation is slowly finding its way also into New Music festivals. Since the nineties, one can speak of a second renaissance for improvised music within the context of new composed music. Improvising composers like Richard Barrett, Wolfgang Mitterer, Michael Maierhof, Karlheinz Essl or Bernhard Lang, just to mention a few, can thus already be seen as part of the second generation which re-invents improvisation through a new view of their relation to composition. Concerning this new view of improvisation it is true that their ancestors do not, according to their birth dates, all belong to one generation. But these founders of the first improvisation renaissance have one thing in common: they have found their way to improvisation through differentiating themselves from dominant composing styles. And all of them developed their (original) concepts in the sixties and beginning of the seventies. To describe it in a simplified way, for the representatives of the first generation, composition and improvisation were two parallel music cultures which had equal rights and which, in the end, would mutually exclude each other. For those of the second generation, by contrast, they were aspects or moments of *one* art music. Precisely this difference accounts for the reason why the reinvention of improvisation by this second generation can be called a *second* renaissance of improvisation.

This second generation presupposes the first one. They take up ideas, sketches, and strategies from the first generation and develop them on productively. In order to understand the nature of this second renaissance, one must know the concerns of the first one. By means of a quick examination I will take attention to the strategies, ends and motives which this first generation re-invented, inside and beyond New Music. The groups Nuova Consonanza, Musica Elettronica Viva and New Phonic Art stand, for example, for a new view of improvisation originating in the canonical New Music. The English improvisation group AMM stands for an attempt to arrive at a new view beyond composed music and jazz. Seen from today it was probably the most influential initiative of its kind. Cornelius Cardew forms a special case among others, in that he both utilised newly invented improvisation as a composer, and he was also active as an improviser. So, leading his life in two cultures he is the immediate forerunner for the second generation. In a somewhat different way, this is also true of Franco Evangelisti, Frederic Rzewski and Alvin Curran.

The "first" renaissance which took its starting-point from the composed music of the sixties was a re-invention, because one saw the innovating potential first and foremost in the "free" improvisation, that is, which was not any more guided by fixed rules for the parts, harmonics and melody, whereas all improvisation that had existed before had only taken place in fixed frameworks for its operation: rules which, likewise, were also binding for the composers in question.

The historical situation regarding music as well as the cultural climate on the whole of the sixties and beginning of the seventies was apparently characterised by a strong need to rediscover improvisation as a part of, and as source of, music playing, and in this process the internal musical hopes of innovation were often accompanied by common ethical and

culturally political motives. Several New Music composers' groupings having a collective nature turned to it emphatically, but at the same time it was actually reinvented by non-composers who turned away from traditional jazz as well as also from Afro-American Free Jazz. In two cultures the new view of improvisation thus became the foundation of a new concept of music in general.

Nuova Consonanza

Many composers did not see any valid way to compose on without falling into repeating themselves after the development of serialism and the countermovement and amendment by aleatorics. With legendary radicalism Franco Evangelisti represented this position: During the last seventeen years of his life he turned entirely away from composition and towards improvisation. In 1965 he founded the improvisation group Nuova Consonanza.² All the musicians of this improvisation collective were composers. Besides Evangelisti, members on an on-off basis were Larry Austin, Mario Bertoncini, Walter Cranchi, Aldo Clementi, Egisto Macchi, Ennio Morricone, Giancarlo Schiaffini, Antonello Neri and yet more. Evangelisti held emphatically on to the idea of a work to be created - quite contrarily to other improvisation collectives which originated in the sixties and in which also composers besides other musicians were involved, like AMM, New Phonic Art, Musica Elettronica Viva. Spontaneity and the moment were not ends in themselves for him, but means to reach new strategies and dramaturgic ways of the musical work. For Evangelisti these were the only means left yet to make it possible to create non-redundant works. He said it apodictically: "One can certainly say that the art of improvisation is fascinating. This form of composing together leads to a very sensitive internal and external tension, which for me, in the contemporary music which is not any more fixed in writing, is the only magic still possible today".³

For Nuova Consonanza it was decisive that the group's members were improvising composers: Evangelisti's collective of improvisors was never concerned with the "creative moment" in itself...

But how did Franco Evangelisti, who in the fifties and beginning of the sixties had regularly visited the Darmstadt Summer Courses, arrive at finding new composition by means of improvising? And moreover, this at a time in which at those Darmstadt Summer courses, the Mecca of New Music at that time, serial and postserial composition was dominating?

In this respect, Evangelisti is a child of his time. After John Cage had performed with radical through-organised works composed by means of chance procedures at the Darmstadt Summer Courses in 1958, the traditional concept of the closed and radically through-organised work was questioned. Also Evangelisti experimented at first with different variants of serial composing, later with open forms: with so-called indeterminate or aleatoric scores. It may be remarked that aleatorics is not just to be taken as equal to chance, even if the concept could give rise to such suspicion. This is according to the way

the term was understood in Europe for example by Pierre Boulez. The degrees of freedom given to the interpreter when realising the work are also important. This might remotely remind of baroque music, in which the musician likewise had to provide details on her or his own authority in addition to the prescriptions from the composer. But with his collective of improvisors Evangelisti went even one step further; musicians improvised without any notated prescriptions or playing instructions. Evangelisti attempted, by means of his variant of free improvisation, to revive the former personal union of composer and musician - and at the same time he saw, like many improvisors of the sixties, the demand from the individual to cooperate on a musical whole on equal terms and one's own authority, as a model of a more liberated humanity in general.

For Nuova Consonanza it was decisive that the group's members were improvising composers: Evangelisti's collective of improvisors was never concerned with the "creative moment" in itself, or with the fascination of the fleeting nature, or with the fulfilled "being in the moment", but with giving birth to a post-traditional musical work: the musicians of Nuova Consonanza declined any written laying down, but they explicitly understood their improvisation activity as composing in a collective. How? Instead of a written prescription (which was indispensable in defining the concept of the musical work not only to Carl Dahlhaus who is mentioned here as a prominent example⁴, intensive rehearsal work was introduced. Here, regular specified tasks were set up, such as how to create specific sounding textures, to evaluate them and to combine them. Building up and taking apart of textures and sounding spheres were worked through in rehearsals, always with the goal to be able to react fast within spontaneous, free improvisation, because one had a musical space consisting of a wide array of possible choices at one's disposal regarding sounds, sound constructions and textural surfaces, like a vocabulary.

New Phonic Art

Their characteristic musical gesture which in phases reminded of the anarchistic Free Jazz was fundamentally different from the textural sounds of Nuova Consonanza which were brought forward by delicate listening - and, in fact, two fundamentally contrary attitudes to playing are involved here.

This strictly work-oriented way of working by Nuova Consonanza stands for a phenotype of free improvisation. A contrary attitude to playing was taken by the quartet New Phonic Art around composer and trombonist Vinko Globokar. The highest premise was: no agreements, no rehearsals, no discussion before or after concerts.⁵ New Phonic Art was founded in 1969. Besides Globokar, composer and pianist Carlos Roqué Alsina, clarinetist and Saxophonist Michel Portal and percussionist Jean-Pierre Drouet were members. Portal and Drouet are both well-known jazz musicians, Drouet an outstanding percussion soloist of New Music. The only common ground with Nuova Consonanza, apart from the desire and intensity in researching new sound spectrums, was the strict ban against traditional sound sequences, playing techniques et cetera, and consequently, against well-known clichés. However, as

time went on, New Phonic Art was forced to realise that also the ban of conventions may become a convention. Therefore, they soon again admitted every possible kind of musical ideas, from new noises to traditional instrumental cliches and quotations. Their characteristic musical gesture which in phases reminded of the anarchistic Free Jazz was fundamentally different from the textural sounds of Nuova Consonanza which were brought forward by delicate listening - and, in fact, two fundamentally contrary attitudes to playing are involved here. For New Phonic Art, the end product having been collectively worked out was not in the foreground: the meaning of individual responsibility of the musician here was on the contrary, for every individual improviser, to arrive at an individual language as much as possible. Improvising means for Globokar: experimental testing out of different musical interaction structures which stand for different forms of universal human behaviour. Results and insights from these experiments were taken in as elements by Vinko Globokar in his compositions. "Laboratorium" and "Diskurs II-IX" (which originated during the years 1973 to 1985, respectively 1969 to 1993) are both compositions in the usual sense and also introductions to universal human interaction structures in the medium of music.

Musica Elettronica Viva

Besides Franco Evangelisti and his colleagues of composers and improvisors of Nuova Consonanza and Vinko Globokar with New Phonic Art there were towards the end of the sixties even more composers who either participated in improvisation ensembles or founded one. The American pianist and composer Frederic Rzewski who at that time lived in Rome, was for instance 1966 co-founder of the group Musica Elettronica Viva, MEV, an ensemble of which till now only few recordings exist, even though it has lived on to the present day, in shifting line-ups. The core of the improvisation ensemble is formed by Frederic Rzewski, Alvin Curran and Richard Teitelbaum, and also Allan Bryant, Jon Phetteplace, Ivan Vandor and Carol Plantamura were among the founders. Steve Lacy joined somewhat later. Members were improvisors, who from the beginning utilised electronic instruments like the first Moog-synthesizer, but they also build their own sound production means using pick-ups and small electronic devices and altered the usual instrumental sound. These were also mostly composers who found their way to improvisation, in order to escape the straitjacket of serial ideology. Musica Elettronica Viva was an improvisors' collective with high political ambitions. At the outset, the musicians started their activity as an ensemble which they dedicated to the live-electronics which was under development at precisely that time. To begin with, they performed works which integrated live-electronics. But what served as their field of experimentation was not just the work with new electronic instruments, it was also playing from plans and playing instructions. "Spacecraft" was a playing plan which the collective used about eight times at public performances and which was paradigmatic for the group. "This work was conceived of as a collective undertaking aiming at the creation of a common music, using as few compositional rules as possible"⁶, Frederic Rzewski writes about "Spacecraft". Unlike Nuova Consonanza who postulated to create a musical work with their collective improvisations, the playing plans of Musica Elettronica Viva, as well as the free improvisation which they developed soon after and which came

with no prescriptions at all, were part of a search for an entirely new form of music, as Rzewski elaborates on it: "This desired event could happen or not - in art like in life; the decisive thing was the possibility to reach a fundamentally new music form (and, in doing so, taking up an old one again), in which the risk had been calculated. The free improvisations of Musica Electronica Viva were thus to a certain degree experimental in the sense that also at concerts they played according to plans, the outcome of which was not only partially unpredictable (as is the case with improvisatory elements), but in which the possibly desired outcome did not happen at all.

Gradually, plans and playing instructions became more and more loose and open, until finally only the confidence in the fellow players was left as the only reference point - and the collective improvised freely. This phase of free improvisation did not, however, last long. Soon, free improvisation went somewhat into the background again. After 1968, the combination of improvisation plans with theatre elements was central, like in the political street theatre. The vehement demand for the "liberation of the performer" was shared by the musicians of Musica Elettronica Viva with Nuova Consonanza, New Phonic Art and many other improvisors of the sixties. Like what was also the case with New Phonic Art, there was every now and again a lively exchange with musicians from the Free Jazz scene. The music had, accordingly, a range from anarchistic, wild forms of chaos to thoroughly structured sound bands brought forward by delicate listening. And, like with New Phonic Art, the time span of totally free improvisation lasted only a short time.

AMM

Active as well since the sixties and playing with a stable core was the British improvisation group AMM, which is a must for every history of free improvisation. AMM and MEV both belonged to the founder generation of (free) improvised music beyond jazz. A few times, musicians from both groupings joined forces; last time in 2005. The result can be heard on the CD titled "apogee".

Even though, or precisely because, several (former) jazz musicians are part of the formation AMM, they understand their way of "free improvisation" not as a further development of jazz, but as a counter-model to it.

The group AMM which was founded 1965 - what is behind this abbreviation was not revealed till now - makes an exception in this series of improvisation ensembles. Apart from Cornelius Cardew who died in an accident in the year of 1981, none of the members were composers. Members were jazz musicians and musicians with their backgrounds in the visual arts. They belonged to those who developed an original, European improvisation music going beyond Afro-American Jazz. Members of the core were the inventor of the prepared table guitar Keith Rowe, saxophonist Lou Gare, percussionist Eddie Prévost and composer and pianist Cornelius Cardew who was replaced after his death by the pianist John Tilbury. Cardew, who after his school time in England was educated the best way

possible, worked then in the electronic studio of WDR in Cologne and was an assistant of Karlheinz Stockhausen during the time of the creation of "Carré". However, he turned his back to established New Music in order to put himself entirely into the service of left radical ideology with compositions resembling workingman's' songs. Like for all other composers presented here, improvisation also for him meant liberation from the narrowness of the academic composers' universe, and at the same time a universal appeal to becoming active on one's own authority. Or it was even an experimental arrangement for a free, not alienated life. Moreover, it is a symptom that points to the similarities between different groupings during the breakthrough of free improvisation that the sounding outcomes of AMM and Nuova Consonanza are, partly, remarkably similar. Playing aiming at laminal, timbral surfaces is common to both collectives. This is the case even though AMM is vehemently denying the fundamental thought of Nuova Consonanza, the aiming at a musical work, just as is also Globokar's New Phonic Art. The AMM musicians did not want to create musical works; the process character, the transitory and unrepeatable was for them just as decisive as the liberation from all conventions and the search of new sounding materials. Thus, they like to name one of their ideals, "to be in the moment".

Even though, or precisely because, several (former) jazz musicians are part of the formation AMM, they understand their way of "free improvisation" not as a further development of jazz, but as a counter-model to it. Jazz was regarded and has till now been regarded as simply improvised music. Traditional jazz is, however, strictly bound to a firm system of rules concerning rhythm, melody, harmony and timbre. Exactly this binding to pre-laid patterns, to a continuous groove, to melodic formula and expressive clichés was something all pioneers of free improvisation wanted to overcome. Also within jazz, some musicians with apparently similar goals revolted against these bindings of improvisation to a system of conventions. Especially European Free Jazz refused this being bound by rules. Even so, the free improvisors of AMM understood what they were doing as a contrary attempt to Free Jazz. Exactly Free Jazz of the sixties and seventies was mostly interested in energetic density, intensity of expression and gestic expressiveness. At the same time development of material, spectra, shades and multi-layeredness of the sounding and processual design were by far much more important for free improvisation than intensity of gesture. An additional aspect for the British improvisors was the determination to develop an original musical aesthetic rooted in their own cultural tradition as white Europeans - just like jazz and consequently also Free Jazz on their side is rooted in Afro-American tradition.

Scratch Orchestra

Cornelius Cardew was not only a member of AMM. 1969 he founded together with Michael Parsons and Howard Skempton a special kind of ensemble, the Scratch Orchestra. Anyone, regardless whether amateur or professional, could participate; besides some musicians from the AMM context and some visual artists it was, among others, music students from Cardew's "experimental music classes" at Morley College in London who played along. The Scratch Orchestra was a loose pool of about forty musicians with or without musical

training. Halfway anarchistic, halfway left-radical, performances varied on a line between sounding performances, happenings and Fluxus-events. One by one (and following an ascending line of age), each member came to the fore and was to compose a piece, respectively design a performance, most often aided by graphic scores, playing instructions or (typically Fluxus) suggestions of action. By contrast to a group like Musica Elettronica Viva, the core of which has continued to exist till now, the Scratch Orchestra dissolved relatively fast. By 1971 it was first and foremost John Tilbury, Keith Rowe and Cornelius Cardew himself who characterised the playful activities of the orchestra as “in the best case flipped out and in the worst case reactionary”, as the former member Stefan Sczcelkun writes in an article about the Scratch Orchestra.⁷ This critical group became more and more political and Maoist influenced, which had consequences for their ideas about the working of the Scratch Orchestra. Besides this Maoist group of members, an anarchist wing and a more apolitical, neutral group, there were vehement discussions regarding the organisation and contents of the orchestras’ working. Soon after, 1974, the Scratch Orchestra was dissolved. It was a child of its time, the political late sixties. During the short time span of its existence, the Scratch Orchestra represented typical ideals of the sixties - the staging of life as art and the proclamation of freedom from hierarchy. Cardew formulated at the beginning a kind of fundamental idea for the orchestra. Among other things, all members should keep a notebook in which they were to write down ideas and accompaniments for possible soli. Recordings, sections of scores or memories of well-known works from classical music were to be collected, in order to reproduce them in excerpts, whether by musically informed people or by amateurs, and to incorporate them into performances. Each member should also bring her or his own ideas into the orchestra. Certain Improvisation Rites were to intensify the sense of community. This idea, which is only suggested here, originated with a composition by Cardew: “The Great Learning” which was inspired by Konfucius’ thoughts. For this piece he chose besides professional musicians also musical amateurs - these were supposed to be, among other things, spontaneous and curious towards unconventionally produced sounds. “The Great Learning” was, then, also the starting-point for the Scratch Orchestra.

Cornelius Cardew’s “Treatise”

...the interpreter of open scores by Cage was a servant of the composer in the traditional sense. Cardew, on the contrary, wished to bring the interpreter to a maximum of personal involvement and individual research through the openness of his structural prescriptions.

For the theme of composing for improvisors, Cardew’s “Treatise” is more important than “The Great Learning”, though. It stands at a half-way point between the two themes of “improvising composers and composing for improvisors”. After his return from Cologne to England, Cardew earned his living as a draughtsman. During these days he created “Treatise”, one of the most well-known and most open graphic scores. An improvising composer who wishes to liberate the musicians and who nevertheless begins to write

scores? “Treatise” consists of many pages of graphic elements for which there are however no concrete playing instructions. Avoiding concrete playing instructions is, so to speak, a means to force interpreters to investigate relations and realisation possibilities on their own. Spontaneity means in “Treatise” not expression of emotions, but careful researching of unheard relations within a collective which can flexibly react to every new constellation. Although a realisation of the “Treatise” score is certainly not a free improvisation, Cardew was guided by similar motivations to those that brought him to the improvisors’ group AMM: the attempt to overcome the author composers’ ego in favour of a collective musical work. Fixed scores were regarded as degrading the interpreter to a slave-like execution organ. Instead, there was an instigation to the interpreter’s own activity and to co-authoring the whole. Given this objective, the ideas of Cornelius Cardew were similar to those of Franco Evangelisti, even though the ways of realising the liberation of the interpreter and making possible a collective musical process are different. Evangelisti counted on common rehearsal work and the ensuing specific sound of the group. To a high degree, Cardew leaves the authorship of the sounding realisation to the improvisor and demanded creativity, not only by leaving the creation of sound from the graphic signs which have no playing instruction to the interpreter, but also through the necessity from the side of the musician to submit to a group, the reactions of which he or she (in the ideal case) cannot foresee. The creativity which was demanded here from the instrumentalist is something wholly different from an emotionally motivated belief in the creative moment. It is a score which makes it impossible to proclaim “creativity” and then pour out rehearsed sound patterns. So “Treatise” is much more than a self-reflective composition with some factors of uncertainty, like in many aleatoric or indeterminate works originating in these same days as a reaction to serialism. Providing ways in which to read the “Treatise” score and coordinate them to those of the fellow players is so similar to just improvising that the two activities could appear almost indistinguishable from each other. However, the former would be a structural, pre-structured improvising.

In Nuova Consonanza only composers participated, which was the result of a conscious choice from Evangelisti, whereas “Treatise” is a score without any prescriptions stating which sound sources that can play. It can be played by the most different musicians; for instance, New Music interpreters like the ensemble musikFabrik along with experienced free improvisors with differing musical background. AMM brought this work to its “first performance” - although only in the sense that in this very concert they realised the first of innumerable individual variants.

Cardew was strongly influenced by the ideas of John Cage dealing with opening up the composition process and the final realisation of musical works to indeterminacy. But regardless of all this openness, for Cage the interpreter remained mostly just an interpreter in the traditional sense. Improvisatory qualities, personal spirit of invention or originality with the interpreter was only demanded by Cage after he got to know such extraordinary interpreters as David Tudor, for whom he developed his conception of “Indeterminacy”. Employing this, one or more dimension of the composition remained free. But the interpreter of open scores by Cage was a servant of the composer in the traditional sense.

Cardew, on the contrary, wished to bring the interpreter to a maximum of personal involvement and individual research through the openness of his structural prescriptions.

Earle Brown

The examples of graphic notation by Cardew or Brown have shown that structuring is not necessarily the same thing as limiting.

Such fronts that demarcated clear borderlines between improvisation and composition were typical of the sixties which were also in other respects ideologically loaded. In the border area between indeterminate composition and improvisation which was only visited by pioneers like Cornelius Cardew or Franco Evangelist at that time, many composers and improvisors are working today who are often also experienced interpreters of contemporary composed music. Also in the USA there were already in the fifties contrary positions to John Cage, in which improvisation was certainly included in the interpretation of graphic scores. Earle Brown is probably the most well-known of them. Whereas Cage insisted on the musical work character of his indeterminate compositions, Brown, who like Wolff, Feldman and Tudor was in the beginning of the fifties a companion to Cage, wished to stimulate collective improvisation. He developed "December 52" and other works from "Folio" of the fifties on the background of his own experiences with jazz and improvisation. Here it is made clear that the boundary between composition and improvisation, between composition for purely interpreters and for improvisors who are creatively participating is a floating one and strongly dependent on terminological dictate.

The examples of graphic notation by Cardew or Brown have shown that structuring is not necessarily the same thing as limiting. On the contrary, Cardew's suggestion, through his graphic prescriptions, to release creativity in a special sense, forbids the musician in question to engage in a purely spontaneous improvisation, but simultaneously makes her or him free to be responsible for the developing of an individual interpretation system which will contain certain degrees of freedom.

So structuring may be a way to avoid clichés and is, paradoxically, a means to make unforeseen things possible. Compositional thinking in structures, in purposeful processes, the processing of melodic phrases and the goal-directed transformation of musical gestures provide, particularly for a large ensemble, the opportunity to free oneself from playing automatisms and to discover new forms of interaction and communication also in freely improvised passages.

Barry Guy

Contrabassist Barry Guy is a composing improvisor who belongs to the British improvisors of pioneer times. His way being different from the AMM members, Guy belongs to the group of

improvisors who, although they developed their own European variant of free playing, largely hung on to the Free Jazz gesture and developed this further, as can be seen in the basis of musical material. The idea of connecting the possibilities arising from the providing of spacious structures and detailed formulation to individual, improvisatory generated idioms of individual improvisors was a concern of Barry Guy already since the seventies, when he founded his first orchestra. His compositions for London Jazz composers Orchestra and the recent Barry Guy New Orchestra stand here as examples for notated works for special improvisors, in which also free, not totally fixed passages play a role. These are, accordingly, often meant to be played by soloists or are collective textural improvisations. Here, strict pre-structuring of passages with detailed notation is complemented by others being relatively unpredictable. The structured passages may at times also quite purposely be a means to inspire the soloist or the soloists in question to not automatically fall back into individual idiomatic clichés.

Alexander von Schlippenbach

Pianist Alexander von Schlippenbach with his Globe Unity Orchestra works in a certain way similarly to Barry Guy with his orchestra which celebrated its 40 years anniversary in 2006. Both musicians have their roots in Free Jazz; both admit their intensive occupation with (contemporary) composed music to influence their compositions for their orchestras. Barry Guy and Alexander von Schlippenbach both count to the founding fathers of free improvised music. When they, precisely in their larger ensembles, attach great importance to organising the music by means of structuring elements, then this has a different priority from that encountered with Frederic Rzewski and the group Musica Elettronica Viva. Here, all musicians were composers who first sought the road to the "freedom" of improvisation, and later they took in structural elements. Guy and Schlippenbach were Free Jazzers and free improvisors from the pioneer times. They did not have to first of all detach themselves from fixings and musical total organisation. Their way to relative freedom was quasi already laid down by Free Jazz. They had the goal to develop an original, European variant of free playing and, in so doing, also relate to their own Central European traditions.⁸

Anthony Braxton

The result is not a collective work, but indeed a composition the sounding result of which depends very much on the interpreters in question.

Composers with a Free Jazz background are found not only in Europe. Saxophonist, clarinetist and composer Anthony Braxton is one of the first Afro-American improvisors, coming from Free Jazz, who dedicated himself to compositional thinking. He also took inspiration from Central European tradition. (Central European influences and

compositional thinking were, admittedly, found within jazz long time before). Braxton was born 1945. Even so, he is counted to the founding generation of Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, AACM. It was the aim of AACM that was founded in the sixties in Chicago by Afro-American representatives of Free Jazz, which was just cropping up at that time, to preserve its tradition and support its musicians. But Braxton's aim was, however, not Afro-American autarchy. He was influenced by John Coltrane, and as he, during his time in the army in Korea, discovered a disc with works by Schoenberg, he started to research the European music tradition. Since that time, he has united jazz and free improvisation with compositional thinking. Whether graphic scores, characterisations of material or playing instructions: he aims to confront his own notions of structuring with the individual idioms of interpreting improvisors and at the same time provide framework conditions for responsible creative activity. Composing for improvisors means for Braxton (like it already did for Cardew) partly to renounce the autocratic author demand from the composer and its determining influence on the interpreters. The result is not a collective work, but indeed a composition the sounding result of which depends very much on the interpreters in question - much more than differing interpretations of traditionally fixed music would allow.

Anthony Braxton, Barry Guy and Alexander von Schlippenbach are only three examples of jazz improvisors who compose for improvisors. They stand here in an exemplary way for two types of composing in the context of jazz improvisation of the more free kind: all three musicians were, from their backgrounds, Free Jazzers. Guy and Schlippenbach count to the European musicians who pioneered an original European Free Jazz. Their involvement also with Central European thinking in structures is an extrapolation and partial innovation of Free Jazz, seen from an European view. By contrast, Braxton turned towards European musical, compositional (and also notational) traditions as an Afro-American individualist and sought in this way to inject new impulses into Afro-American Free Jazz. Guy and Schlippenbach have kept to the fundamental gesture of free playing which is primarily characterised by high energy, and to doing so in European variants in their compositions for orchestra. While they fix passages of exact notation or sound characterisation, Braxton allows improvisors more freedom for their interpretation. With his graphic and verbal playing instructions his practise is, rather, similar to previous European improvisors' collectives. His idea of a universalistic concept of music may therefore also be said to be orientated towards the West; his mental roots he finds, however, in an Afro-American influenced spirituality.⁹

Polwechsel

But is this, then, dealing with an improvisation, a composition with integrated unforeseen moments, or rather about a guided improvisation?

A different concept to relate composition and improvisation to each other is a combined practise: composing through improvising the music forth, improvisation which has been worked upon, and composing through re-structuring of sounding material which has first been improvised forth. The quartet Polwechsel which may from time to time be expanded by guest musicians consists of improvisors and is thus every now and then classified under improvisation, but it plays above all its own compositions. The scores of the individual Polwechsel members consist often of verbal instructions or remarks with time structures. One plays with a stop clock. Some compositions are exactly notated, although not necessarily in traditional music writing. Other instructions and overall structures rather constitute a framework for the process which will be worked out in detail with improvisatory feeling for the nuances of sound relations and the interaction between the musicians when the work is played. The succeeding of these pieces depends significantly on improvisation competences. But is this, then, dealing with an improvisation, a composition with integrated unforeseen moments, or rather about a guided improvisation? Whichever genre one may use for classifying these sounds would be the result of preliminary terminological decisions: perhaps a concept like "comprovisation" would describe such an amalgam. The time design is decisive, improvisatory working out of structured ideas and prescribed time sequences. Compositional pre-structuring and improvisation in the moment complement each other here in a way in which the individual sounds and actions are not any more discernable regarding their origin: that is, neither compositionally prescribed nor worked out by improvisation.

Polwechsel does not commission compositions but plays its own works. The basis for these is made up by the material, the sounding possibilities which have been researched in improvised, collective playing and, over the years, also by interpreting compositions and structured improvisations. A range of possible means going from structuring elements to relatively fixed compositions make it possible for the musicians to put the sounding, structural and communicative elements which they have practised together into other contexts and so to develop new musical ideas and plans beyond these. The unforeseen, which actually is ascribed to improvising, arises here in the connection between structure and freedom - and from compositional working on an idiom and the resulting purposeful breaking of these already known idioms through structuring.

A small, but maybe not unessential remark about notation: being used to work together (not only in the case of Polwechsel musicians) has consequences for the notation. The better musicians know each other, the less strict prescriptions are necessary to make possible a relatively exact sounding or structuring fixing. This is of course not valid for the totality of musical organising elements, but one should not forget this when attempted to jump to conclusions concerning the musical work character from the notation on paper. So criteria for a work must be modulated in the context of a re-interpretation of improvisation, if not even newly defined.

Composition arising from improvisation

Various conceptual and dramaturgical pre-structurings do not preclude the unforeseen but can be a means for emancipation. They can help to avoid reproduction of well-known patterns and support both working with and the search for creative organising possibilities. This is an insight followed not just by Polwechsel among younger musicians, but also by many others. Admittedly, at the beginning times of the improvisation renaissance there were also musicians and collectives centering their work on intensive rehearsing. But besides this, spontaneous free improvisation without pre-arrangements was essential. To play in ad-hoc constellations without previous rehearsal work can still today have special qualities for many improvisors. Generally, intensive rehearsal work that ranges from letting a common idiom arise through improvisation to pre-structuring, has become a natural thing for many improvisors. Like already was the case with the music by Nuova Consonanza, one could also ascribe an affinity to the musical work to many instances of improvised music. The music is not (or only for a small part of it) constructed at the desk, but is worked out during playing within possible sounding spaces. These spaces may afterwards be integrated into more or less fixed structures. Or they are, like with Nuova Consonanza, not exactly fixed, but remain flexible in the creation of their details. An essential difference between such an improvisatory creation of music compared to traditional composition, endorsed by one single person as the author, remains: the invention of music in collective playing, which was named "multi-mindedness" by Evan Parker.

Concepts like "instant composing" attempt in a certain way to treat composing and improvisation as the same thing and to differentiate only between the way the music was created (at the desk or while playing respectively). They do, however, not lead much further, and they neglect or negate the possible specific characters and subtle differences.

If one relates such music that has arisen from improvisation to the concept of the musical work, then this latter must be seen in a new light for various reasons, and not only because this music for the most part is created within a collective. Improvised music is in a certain way associated to electronic music which usually is to just as small an extent realised from previously produced scores. An instructive, expanded definition of the concept of composition which also takes into account the numerous ways to create music with technical media and which has to an important extent been influenced by the development of electronic storage media was proposed by the Austrian music editor Christian Scheib in three steps as follows: "Filter the material - structure it - store it".¹⁰ In this sense, music by improvisors who have developed their own idiom through rehearsing and carrying out of prestructuring means would be a composition - in any case if in a stored form on a CD. The prestructuring means could, for instance, be of a verbal or graphic nature. If one wishes to include the processes of searching for the material and of the creative process which, of course, have a strongly improvisatory character, then the designation of "composition arising through improvisation" lends itself easily. Or the often heard saying of "comprovisation" which attempts to designate music which connects improvisatory and compositional, pre-structured elements. It is, however, difficult or even impossible to draw

a clear boundary between composition and improvisation. Concepts like “instant composing” attempt in a certain way to treat composing and improvisation as the same thing and to differentiate only between the way the music was created (at the desk or while playing respectively). They do, however, not lead much further, and they neglect or negate the possible specific characters and subtle differences.

Compositions / plans for improvisors

Today, improvisors do not exclusively play free improvisations. For many of them, various degrees of structuring are just as important means of creation as free or partially free playing. But what do representatives of composed New Music think about the relation between composition and improvisation? Wolfgang Mitterer, George Lewis, Richard Barrett, Bernhard Lang and numerous other composers of the middle and younger generation are all trained improvisors. The experiences they make as improvisors are every now and then allowed to become a part of their compositions. In case the interpreters of a piece are improvisors, then this influences the notation of the work, as described above in the example of Polwechsel. The four composers mentioned above were in previous years invited to SWR NOWJazz Session in Donaueschingen and to NEWJazz Meeting of SWR in Baden-Baden, in order to compose for improvisors. They wrote compositions for a group of improvisors which were adapted to the special qualities and idioms of the musicians in question. These are compositions which put special musical processes, textural sequences, gestures and communicative interactions into contact with each other. In so doing, the single played pitch or the exact duration of a sound is often not essential, rather the total impression. Thus, dense playing and specialities of playing technique of a specific improvisor are often better described in short playing instructions or with describing a specific sound than in exact notation. Also in these compositions, those elements providing for structure are connected to the spontaneous gesture of improvisation. Because such works are most often written for special musicians, an interpretation by other musicians is usually much more difficult than with traditional notation. The latter is admittedly adaptable to special techniques of individual interpreters but it seeks to fix these into an excessively detailed sign system (which, often, takes great labour to learn). Some composers, like Jorge Sanchez-Chiong, go as far as to purposely writing compositions only for special musicians and do not see it as important any more that the work can be reproduced also by others.

Bob Ostertag

Interweavings between composition and improvisation can be observed not only with improvisors, but also with established, well-known composers. Bob Ostertag, for instance, composes with a sampler for special improvisors and does so while relating to sounding material which they have improvised before. "Everything is composed and everything is improvised" is Bob Ostertag's description of his work "Say no more" concerning the first of

these three parts. He let all three musicians improvise as a soloist in a studio. Then he chose short sequences from the recordings, each of which were characteristic of the individual musician, in order to set up a virtual band using a sampler. So the basic material of the composition is completely improvised, but the end product by the virtual band, the sounding relations and interactions have been composed: filtered, structured and stored. Ostertag's project was not even finished with sampling and re-structuring of improvised material. In a next step, the three improvisors had Ostertag's composition played back and had the task of reproducing it as a factual trio, that is, to interpret it. It must be noticed that, although they were to imitate their own individual gestures and playing techniques, the associations and contexts were partly foreign to them, like for instance abrupt changes or unfamiliar transitions or overlappings. For Ostertag it was a central concern in his compositional sample work not to alienate the personal voices of the individual musicians. Their characters were always to shine through, but in such a way as if they had been broken by a prism. Now, musicians were given the task to play their own material in a new syntax, which led on to new ways of musical interaction, whereby their improvisatory potential could be set free by realising a composition. The title of the CD with the factual trio which "interprets" Ostertag's sample-composition is, adequately, called "Say no more in person". In his reflexion on composition and improvisation, Ostertag went even one step further. Also the sounding result of his reproduced sample-trio he filtered and sampled once more. He created a new virtual work which was, in turn, reproduced in live playing. The result of this composed reflexion on what was previously improvised has been stored on the CD "Verbatim".

Bob Ostertag's project is one more example of how improvisation and composition may be combined and interweaved in a musical work. It is an interweaving of two apparently opposed ways of musical creation which provokes creativity in the musicians in a fruitful way, whether they function as improvisors or interpreters. The interpretation of one's own sounding gestures in new textural and formal contexts serves to break up harmonic sound sequences, which have been rehearsed and maybe even have become well-worn, through free improvisation, or which have become so for reasons of playing technique in the process; to find new ways, to discover new sound processes inside structures.

Bob Ostertag's first step in his cycle was to reconstruct improvisation recordings, to place them in a different formal setting. Also improvisors use every now and then reconstructions of their improvisation recordings, namely when editing CDs. These revisions may be relatively slight; in some cases they may however be reconstructions just as complex as those new combinations made by Ostertag.¹¹ With one difference: Ostertag let the three musicians improvise independently of each other.

Ostertag has, like the other improvisors and composers presented here, developed one out of several new marked positions about how to relate improvisation and composition to each other. These developments of free improvisation and what follows from it, the re-invention and the re-integration of improvisation into composition and the developing of fruitful exchange between improvisors and composers going both ways have since long contributed

to a new situation. In this, despite the reservations made by New Music and by musicology, our concept of music has changed.

*) Translator's note: the German word 'Neubestimmung' has been translated into 'new view' but has also connotations in the direction of 'conceptualisation' or 'definition'. 'Abendland' has been translated into 'Central Europe' out of a consideration of the context, even though this word may sometimes be understood in a more broad sense, as 'Western'. German language has some special words for materials which musicians play from or arrangements made before playing: 'Konzept', which I have translated into 'plan', suggests openness in how to proceed further. Some of its meaning could, in some contexts, even be covered by the English expression 'introduction to improvisation' which would stress connotations of 'starting point'. 'Vorgabe' is a very general designation of something having been stated in some way before playing, and I have translated it with 'prescription'. 'Spielanweisungen' is, rather literally, rendered as 'playing instructions'.

¹ Cf. Riemann Musik Lexikon, 12. auflage, Mainz: Schott 1967, Sachteil, 473; Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, zweite Auflage, Sachteil, Band 5, Kassel/Basel 1996.

² Cf. concerning Nuova Consonanza: Thorsten Wagner, Franco Evangelisti und die Improvisationsgruppe Nuova Consonanza, Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2004.

³ In: Franco Evangelisti. Die Improvisationsgruppe Nuova Consonanza. Das Musikwerk als Arbeitsergebnis eines Kollektivs. Die Gruppenimprovisation, manuscript without date, Archiv Irmela Evangelisti, quoted from Thorsten Wagner, ebenda, 20.

⁴ Carl Dahlhaus, Plädoyer für eine romantische Kategorie. Der Begriff des Kunstwerks in der neuesten Musik, in: Dahlhaus, Schönberg und andere, Mainz 1978, 270-278

⁵ Vinko Globokar, Laboratorium. Texte zur Musik 1967-1997, Saarbrücken: Pfau, 1998.

⁶ Frederic Rzewski: Kalkuliertes risiko, Musica Elettronica Viva, in: Gisela Gronemeyer, Reinhard Oehlschlägel (Herausgeber) : Nonsequiturs: writings and lectures on improvisation, composition, and interpretation, Köln: Edition MusikTexte 009.

⁷ <http://www.stefan-szczelkun.org.uk/phd102.htm>

⁸ "Tales" is a concise example for such a European variant of free playing, because Schlippenbach has actually developed a method which makes him capable of improvising even with twelve-tone rows (CD Intakt 2006).

⁹ To Braxtons spirituality, cf.: Peter Niklas Wilson, Anthony Braxton, Waakirchen: Oreos, 1993.

¹⁰ Cf. Sabine Sanio, Christian Scheib (Herausgeber), Form - Luxus - Kalkül und Abstinenz: Fragen, Thesen und Beiträge zu Erscheinungsweisen aktueller Musik, Saarbrücken: Pfau 1999, 50-60.

¹¹ Cf. the CD: Dafeldecker/Fussenegger, Bogengänge, Wien: Durian (099CD), 1995.