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Improvisation as Experimentation in Everyday Life and Beyond

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Introduction

> A man does something; he lifts, let us say, a stone. In consequence he undergoes, suffers, something: the weight, strain, texture of the surface of the thing lifted. . . . The stone is too heavy or too angular, not solid enough; or else the properties undergone show it is fit for the use for which it is intended. The process continues until a mutual adaptation of the self and the object emerges and that particular experience comes to a close. What is true of this simple instance is true, as to form, of every experience. The creature operating may be a thinker in his study and the environment with which he interacts may consist of ideas instead of a stone. But interaction of the two constitutes the total experience that is had, and the close which completes it is the institution of a felt harmony.
>
> —John Dewey ([1934] 1980, 45)

> This way of imagining experience takes the form of an encounter the outcome of which is unforeseen. It is a dialogue between the self and the world, searching for a "fit" that leads to a new place, an adaptation that gives rise to a new point of departure. It offers a definition of experimentation as integral to human experience, to being and moving in the world.
>
> —Anne Douglas (2012)

In this chapter we analyse two interrelated projects across the fields of visual art and music, philosophy and anthropology. *Calendar Variations* (2010–11) is a visual activity initiated by Anne Douglas, visual artist and researcher. *A Day in My Life* (2011–12) mirrors this activity in music and is developed by Kathleen Coessens, pianist and philosopher. The two projects are research driven and frame questions about the relationship of improvisation to experiential knowledge.

First, what might experimentation be in the context of experience of life and experience of art? Does improvisation as a concept and a practice offer new potential to inform experimentation in a distinctive way?

We will use Dewey as a starting point for a phenomenological approach to experience as a form of ongoing experimentation and adjustment, a process of learning endemic to life itself. We will map this articulation onto Hallam and Ingold's four characteristics of improvisation. These closely resonate with Dewey while nuancing/inflecting the resulting learning as an experience between people, formed socially and culturally. Moving deeper into experience, experiment, and improvisation as three key interrelated concepts, we look briefly at Bergson, who offers a way of imagining experience as time dependent: life is constantly in a process of formation that is unstoppable even in reflection. This implies a conflation of intuition and intellect into one single activity, leaving the artist-as-researcher in a paradoxical situation. How is knowledge created if we cannot look back on experience by stepping outside what is ongoing? Arnheim helps us to unravel this paradox: intellect and intuition are distinctive but interrelated modes of being. We limit ourselves in life, Arnheim argues, to what is useful and necessary to know, working within this contingent. Art enriches possible ways of imagining. These challenge and extend experience.

We lay out this theoretical ground as the basis from which to analyse the two artistic projects. By interpolating between the theoretical and artistic experiences, we enlarge not only our perspectives on but also our actions in the world.

From art as experience to art as improvisation via experimentation

Dewey's articulation of art as experience consciously positions the individual as a subject. Open-endedness emerges as a significant quality—"A man does something," offers himself to the world around him, and through that action, mobilises that world in relation to himself. The world pushes back, offering resistance. Questioning the affordances of the environment as well as his own possibilities, he engages in action. He learns and moves on (see Dewey [1934] 1980, 45). Where an experimental endeavour in science might set out to validate and verify particular anticipated epistemic constructions and concepts, the experimental act here inverts this trajectory. Being responsive—open to the unexpected—demands an openness to what is as yet unknown and unforeseen.

This echoes Hallam and Ingold's perspective on improvisation (2007, 1-14). For them, improvisation is a necessary and spontaneous way of coping with the world in which imagination, thought, and action meet again and again in situations that are both specific and unforeseen. Improvisation is dynamic, never static, never perfectly repeatable.

Hallam and Ingold attribute four characteristics to improvisation (ibid.1). In the first place, they argue, improvisation is *generative*, meaning that it always creates something

different, even minimally. The active unfolding of actions, even imitative ones, always contains unexpected variations, depending upon time, context, growth, and inner feelings. Second, improvisation is *relational*: it is continuously directed towards the other. In this sense improvisation is socially generative: it brings new elements into our interactions with others. It is also materially generative—as an interaction between one's own body and the inner and outer world. Third, improvisation is temporal: it is always part of a dynamic ongoing action, an event, experienced in and adding to the narrative of life. It does not participate in chronological time because different improvisations all relate differently to different times—they depend on what came before and what comes after. Fourth and finally, it is "the way we work" (ibid.1): improvisation is an innate part of our human condition (Hallam and Ingold 2007; Douglas and Coessens 2012).

The improvisatory act in experience as an openness to the unknown is also evident within the writings of a number of artists, including John Cage, Allan Kaprow, and Paul Klee. These artists consistently evolve their artwork as a form of inquiry, writing, analysing, placing, and shaping their endeavours within a much wider field of play than art itself, making connections culturally, socially, and politically.

John Cage defined the experimental work as "one the outcome of which is not foreseen" (Cage 1958, 39). Allan Kaprow expanded this definition to embrace method as well as outcome: "Imagine something never before done, by a method never before used, whose outcome is unforeseen" (Kaprow 2003, 69). Paul Klee resonates with Cage and Kaprow, introducing a new dimension, that of movement. This dimension reminds us of the generative characteristic in Hallam and Ingold's perspective on improvisation. Klee imagines the transition from stasis into movement in terms of a line shifting its position forward, constructing "a walk . . . without goal. A walk for a walk's sake" (Klee 1953, 16). The line as walk moves us from an indefinable and undifferentiated state to feeling our way by creating a direction. By feeling, suffering, creating experiences within the "as yet not known," activity (including thought) becomes concrete, expresses something that is never complete but always in formation. Again, as with Dewey, there is an open-ended process of learning by moving. Johan Siebers, the philosopher constructs a similar idea—"the notion of utopia is reconceived by Bloch, not as the programmatic march towards a perfect state of being, but as the active, secular, concretely anchored response to a foundational openness in existence. . . . We do not yet know what freedom, community, humanity, nature can be" (Siebers and Fell 2011, 5).

However, for the purposes of analysis would it not be easier for us to treat the world as static and immobile than to imagine ourselves within its movement? "Our mind has an

irresistible tendency to consider that idea clearest which is most often useful to it. That is why immobility seems to it clearer than mobility" (Bergson [1912] 1999, 44). This tendency to spatialise time falsifies experience in Bergson's view. Bergson distinguishes intuition from the intellect, creating a polarity. The intellect (science) approaches experience from a point external and alien to experience. Through intuition (metaphysics), we enter into the thing itself, "immersing oneself in the current of direct awareness" (Goudge [1912] 1999, 12). Like Klee, Bergson encourages us to imagine making a drawing that begins as a point and unfolds as a line. In the case of Bergson, the line is constantly lengthening. By fixing our attention on the line not as a line but as an action by which a line is traced, we inhabit experience intuitively, by entering the thing itself, rather than intellectually by positioning ourselves outside it (Bergson [1912] 1999, 26–27).

But do we need to choose between intuition and the intellect? Bergson places the artist-as-researcher in something of a dilemma within the polarities of intuition and the intellect. Within artistic research and artistic experimentation, the intellect by force co-exists with intuition, the analytical by force co-exists with the generative. This apparent paradox is the core of the challenge we set ourselves in this body of work.

The two artistic experiments (2010–12)

As artists and researchers we seek to understand the sense in which the whole art situation itself is constantly changing: genre, public, purpose, context, and form (Kaprow 2003,201-206). From the outset of this work, improvisation emerged as a key concept that allowed us to enter into experimentation as a living, situated, and discrete experience of managing both constraint and freedom. Each project is playfully framed, a means to enter into the world afresh. As artists we set up an experimental environment, allowing for moments of improvisation—in the sense of being open to the unexpected. This means we take away one step in which artists normally evolve expert languages and practices to a very high level of skill. In fact, improvisation in art is not immune to this kind of refinement and professionalisation—think of music improvisation in jazz. However, as contemporary artists and researchers, our experimentation is more concerned with understanding than perfecting skill. Each experiment might be described as a process of unlearning—a tactic of deliberately "suspending (dis)belief" (Douglas and Fremantle 2009, 1). In this sense we seek to reclaim an aspect of the meaning of improvisation as an encounter with "life without a script" (Hallam and Ingold 2007, 1).

The two projects, *Calendar Variations* (2010–11) and *A Day in My Life* (2011–12), follow in chronological sequence. We will use the analytical framework of Dewey's four stages: activity, resistance, adaptation, learning.

On *Calendar Variations* (2010–11)

Activity

Calendar Variations is based upon "Calendar" (1971), a written score poem by Allan Kaprow (2003, 120), which invites the imagination into the environment of California, focusing on grass, moisture, time, and greenness. We took this score into our own context in Scotland, developing a variation. The project started with an invitation sent by Anne Douglas in July 2010 to the artist-researchers at Gray's School of Art: Georgina Barney, Chris Fremantle, Reiko Goto, Janet McEwan, and Chu Chu Yuan. Kathleen Coessens later joined the experiment at the point it was presented to the public.

The original emailed invitation went as follows:

> Dear All, I would like to invite you to participate in a small experimental drawing project. Here is the exercise. The following is a score by the artist Allan Kaprow
> *Planting a square of turf amid grass like it*
> *Planting another amid grass a little less green*
> *Planting four more squares amid grass progressively drier*
> *Planting a square of dry turf amid grass like it*
> *Planting another amid grass a little less dry*
> *Planting four more squares in places progressively greener*
> Activity, A.K., California, November 2 1971 (Kaprow 2003, 120). (Coessens and Douglas 2011, 9)

The score is a riddle that evokes time through states of change. The values of green to dry increase in contrast and then decrease, establishing equilibrium at its final point. Importantly the score does not take the form of an instruction but situates the reader directly in an everyday activity. One is already immersed in the activity through the present participle "planting" in a way that is both potent and economical.

The motivation to embark on *Calendar Variations* came from a question and a discomfort with the way creativity in art had become absorbed in social/political discourse and cultural policy imperatives that consume the idea of participation. The score presented a set of possibilities to work with that encourage alternative ways of imagining. By

understanding that Kaprow sought to develop social experience by artistic means, by revisiting a significant historical moment in which he advocated a blurring of art and life (Kaprow 2003), the score allowed the freedom to work from our own individual centres and also to create common ground within the group.

Resistance

As we worked, our differences as artists emerged strongly and confrontationally within the group, in terms of aesthetic approaches and related beliefs. Like the score, these escalated at a point in time. The lines of our drawings, "planting squares of turf," at times became boundaries to contain and stabilise an aesthetic approach. At others, the drawings opened up choices, opportunities to experience differently and to accommodate difference. Generative and relational aspects of experience—as described by Hallam and Ingold (2007)—emerged, allowing us to move on.

At first we interpreted the score more or less literally, negotiating a possible site of six metres by six metres at Woodend Barn Arts Centre, Banchory, Aberdeenshire. We spoke with turf farmers who could advise on simulating the conditions and gradations of green to dry. Contextualising the score in the real world is arguably a very necessary quality of the understanding, a means by which the score entered into our experience. It was only when activity threaded back a new idea, a new concept or narrative, in a sense resisting reductive, fixed interpretations, that we could move beyond a superficial reading of the words. The challenge was to suspend disbelief and become deeply immersed, giving ourselves over to the experience of allowing Kaprow to present a different world in which we too might adopt a different position, even a different character, through which to "see" differently.

We will explore in depth the movement of one of the seven artist participants, Chris Fremantle.

Adapting

During 2010–11 Chris Fremantle made two drawings of a square of turf, one from his garden in Scotland and another from his father's garden in the United States. Both drawings involved digging up turf from its surrounds ("green to green") and transposing it to a domestic environment, from "green to dry," creating the conditions for a still-life study. In approaching the exercise this way, he was doing what he knew how to do well: still-life drawing. He created compelling visual representations of turf as tonal drawings. He realised the score, elegantly transposing to the visual—a notion of score that one might find in music. In his

words this was “a perfect abstraction to be made real through performance by someone other than the composer” (Coessens and Douglas 2011, 24). At the end of each drawing, he returned the turf back into the ground.

In the first drawing, he carried the turf from one place in South-West Scotland to another in North-East Scotland, returning it to a different ground. This opened up a new level of awareness for him. It was the realisation that visual art could also be performative. By isolating the turf but not discarding it at the end of its “use” value to the production of his artwork, he came closer to the core problem articulated within Kaprow’s score. One could understand “green to green,” “green to dry” as processes of isolation and “dry to dry,” “dry to green,” “green to green” as processes of reverting to the original state. In this way, Fremantle perhaps made a complete action of the piece, not only by constructing a figurative image in response to the first line of the score poem but also by choreographing a set of movements that complete the action in “places” progressively greener or drier.

Learning

This in turn led to the deeper realisation that art in public is situated in the gap between site and non-site. His turf drawings were a movement between different sites: the site of the turf to the non-site of the studio. Making a drawing could be a movement in the world taken momentarily outside the world. By not discarding the first turf as an object, by carrying it with him to the group discussion and replanting it in a new home, a new set of possibilities emerged. Fremantle normally works as an arts manager/producer and as such is removed one step from the making of art. The project created an important space for a different quality of experience as an improvisation leading to a much longer-term project for a larger set of drawings.

Figure 1. Chris Fremantle, drawings of two sods 55cm x 76 cm, 2010 and 2012, and their contexts.

This is one of seven responses; each is different from the next and each is complex in Dewey's pattern of taking action, of encountering resistance, of mutual adaptation, learning, and closure. The original score faded away. New "scores" appeared like small improvisatory leaps. These leaps could not have been anticipated or pre-planned. They emerged out of the particular individual in response to their specific situation—material and social—shaped through an encounter with the score. The resulting newly created objects became accessible to others within new interactions and thereby enlarged the sense of play. As such they echo Hallam and Ingold's understandings of improvisation as a necessary and spontaneous coping in unforeseen circumstances.

In a second stage of the project, the artists worked together to figure out how to "perform" the score as a shared experience, following closely what they understood to be Kaprow's aesthetic. Kaprow drew directly from Dewey the idea that artistic experience is not located in the forms of objects, media, or genres but that art is shaped by a lively interaction with social processes and human shared encounters. As such, the performative and contextualised "happening" of these experiences contain the quality of improvisation as an

intervention in the everyday. They bring in the important notion of art as part of the human condition, and echo Hallam and Ingold's fourth condition of improvisation as an inherent part of life.

Moving deeper into Kaprow's reconception of art, we agreed to realise the score through improvisatory walking. This choice—a combination of many journeys, individual and shared—culminated in a few simple decisions:

> We threw a dice to determine who would go first, who would plant the first square and by doing so create an equivalent between making a mark on a piece of paper and moving in this particular place and space. Reiko, an ecologist artist, walked the first square through the long space. She could not see her trace; she repeated it. One by one we each joined in at intervals walking behind or alongside, until we were all in the square walking round and round each other, impressing the long grass into a mark. Through repetition we embodied the score's patterns with increasing familiarity letting the writing emerge through flattening the grass, keeping up, judging distance. By the afternoon our performance was seemingly effortless, intuitive as if all that mattered was that very particular moment of experience. Being free in that moment somehow meant finding an equilibrium between our inner world experiences that had brought us to this point and the outer world we were sharing with others. It was like finding, mastering a new sound as one single activity, sensing and acting, judging and listening as new experiences unfolded as if for the first time. It was at this point that I really understood Kaprow's aesthetic idea. Engaging with the riddle of the score in our own time and space, sharing activity, reaching agreement on how to act, constituted the work of art. Since that moment we have been challenged by exhibiting this sense of improvisation. (Georgina Barney quoted in Coessens and Douglas 2011, 36–37; reproduced with minor amendments)

Figure 2. *Calendar Variations*, drawing realised as an improvised walk, 5 August 2010.

If we had approached this project through the first definition of experimentation—the discovery of what is unknown or uncertain by "putting something to the proof"—its trajectory of development would have been very different. Instead we followed the second definition, aligning experimentation with experience. We followed an open-ended trajectory, taking the score into our creative imagination and experience, leaving traces through drawing in the outer world as a means to a new cycle of experience in our inner worlds. Improvisation in the sense of a spontaneous and imaginative coping with the unexpected was a pivotal idea. The score held us in its own rhythm and momentum, in its possible meanings, in the fragments of layering and overlapping, each gesture, idea, or thought modifying, contesting, clashing with, or complementing the next, then re-entering consciousness differently. This temporality of the experience, taking its own pace, resonates with the third characteristic of Hallam and Ingold. Our discipline was to attend, to keep moving with this momentum, to resist falling into familiar grooves or simply selecting "what we liked" (Cage's objection to improvisation [Kostelanetz 1987, 222]). This was our form of improvisation inside an artistic experimental setting.

This reflection (and analysis) can be imagined as an extension of the same quality of process—of open endedness, movement—but it is qualitatively different in being predominantly intellectual, recalling selectively the moments of struggle and moments of insight within a new narrative that sets out to be a point of learning. Bergson acknowledges this tension along with the importance of analysis but, like Dewey, emphasises the primacy of experience, of encountering phenomena through which we connect analytical forms with experience. "I could never imagine how black and white interpenetrate if I had never seen gray; but once I have seen gray I easily understand how it can be considered from two points of view, that of white and that of black" (Bergson [1912] 1999, 60). Bergson (ibid.) raises a powerful metaphor for acts of reflection and analysis.

> Something here dominates the diversity of systems, something, we repeat, which is simple and definite *like a sounding* [our emphasis], about which one feels that it has touched at greater or less depth the bottom of the same ocean, though each time it brings up to the surface very different materials. It is on these materials that the disciples usually work; in this lies the function of analysis. . . . But the simple act which started the analysis . . . proceeds from a faculty quite different from the analytical. That is, by its very definition, intuition.

"Sounding" as metaphor is a gerund, a movement in process, used here to describe an intervention in the ongoing flow of experience as a looping back. Through this metaphor Bergson subtly avoids the stasis of analytical processes that he has earlier criticised as a stopping, a process of spatialisation that falsifies experience.

Arnheim, as an art theorist and psychologist, argues more boldly in favour of the coupling of perception and thinking, intuition and intellect: "Thinking requires a sensory basis" (Arnheim 1986, 14). This coupling is useful to artistic research in embracing both aspects of the task that it sets itself. Arnheim (1966, 7) observes that the arts are among the "most puzzling implements man has ever made"—illusive, but nonetheless accessible to understanding. He draws on the arts as a means to understand human cognition. They offer "an uneasy rapprochement between the philosophical and poetical interpretations of the mind on the one hand and the experimental investigations of muscle, nerve, and gland on the other," an attempt to deal scientifically with "the most delicate, the most intangible, and the most human among the human manifestations" (ibid., 1–2). "The dancer does not act upon the world, he behaves in it" (ibid., 261). Arnheim is not the dancer but looks in on the dancer. In a bid to free the sensory from the aura of poetic inspiration by giving it a name, Arnheim

(1986, 16) articulates intuition as “a cognitive capacity reserved to the activity of the senses because it operates by means of field processes, and only sensory perception can supply knowledge through field processes.” In formulating a whole, creating a stable image out of the complexity within the field, all components depend upon one another, one colour depends upon the colour of its neighbours. Interestingly Arnheim notes that in everyday life, we limit ourselves to what is necessary to notice in order to move around. But in art, we engage in an improvisational dialogue with experiential knowledge that is constituted of more stable entities. The kinesthetic control of the bicycle rider repeats itself in the movements of the dancer. The dancer works intuitively with the language of dance: the shared signs, symbols, and patterns of movement. The bicycle rider focuses to stay upright and in motion—a more primary level of experience. In this sense Arnheim embraces the complexity of the human mind as “double edged.”

We will explore the implications of the new level of complexity Arnheim offers in the second experiment, *A Day in My Life*.

On *A Day in My Life* (2011–12)

Activity

As the experience of *Calendar Variations* had opened up new possibilities by deploying a seemingly “alien” element in the form of a verbal poem score, Kathleen Coessens and fellow researchers at the Orpheus Research Centre in Music (ORCiM) wanted to continue with a parallel project that would allow for similarly diverse, collaborative, and often improvisatory outcomes, merging everyday life and artistic expertise. This time the work was to be in the field of music. Coessens established the following experimental setting for *A Day in My Life* in May 2011. The research aim was to understand the kinds of transformations that might occur between individual experiences of everyday life and the artistic domain, on the one hand, and between visual/verbal and sound/aural perception, on the other.

There were two stages to the project. The first was to see the processes of transformation as a translation from verbal to aural and to map them, understanding and revealing both the individual artistic trajectories and the semiotic translations of the text into sound. How and why did an artist take this or that approach or perspective, choose those materials and not others, and develop those particular constructions? The second stage set out to take the knowledge that resulted from this into new forms of artistic creativity. How could one set of created works become material for new created works?

A text by Kathleen Coessens, *A Day in My Life*, was used as the starting point—an equivalent to Kaprow's score. Like the score, the purpose of the text was to provide a means for the participating musicians to enter into their own artistic/aesthetic experience. Artists were asked to interpret the text in a sounding result, implying personal artistic actions of translation and transformation.

A Day in My Life—score

Turning on the radio—discovering a first sound
Walking around in nature—collecting another sound
Listening in a dark room—embracing a sound of night

Exploring the activity of your heartbeat
and the rhythm of a conversation
adding a measure of time and process

As an anthropologist
giving the sounds a space
merging culture and nature
questioning alternatively
subjectivity and collaboration

As an ethnographer
recreating the patterns of time
under the blows of rhythm
embedding alternatively
improvisation and constraint

Merging nature and culture once more
in waves to listen
in waves to walk
before making a (w)hole
growing into silence

Kathleen Coessens, May 2011

Let us consider the score. It is a written text offering open-ended instructions for exploring the relation between everyday experiential knowledge and artistic know-how. The score reveals life as an experiential activity: it has a beat, a rhythm, a movement, sounds. It describes life as being performed in movement and through trajectories, gesture, and motion—movements in space and time. In these elements, music resembles life. The score is an invitation to create music out of life experiences—everyday materials, embodied and enacted in the now—and to look at art as a form of intensification that links the energies and intensities of the lived body to the rhythms and forces of the earth itself (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2004, 310–50).

For a first elaboration of the experiment, we requested a number of musicians to prepare and perform the following experiment:

> Take the score/text and create your own sounding version of it.
> First, find the musical output that suits your interpretation best: make a traditional, or non-traditional score, create a specific sound set-up for performance, develop a full piece out of it.
> Secondly, document your choice and the process of elaboration of your musical output (questions, hesitations, materials, narratives).
> Thirdly, the title of the text is not "just" a title, but an invitation to explore the findings of an actual day in your life. We also ask that the maximum duration of the musical output should be no longer than 24 minutes. (Coessens's emailed instructions to artists, June 2011)

Different versions of *A Day in My Life* were created in a metaphorical as well as literal sense. Everyday materials developed into pieces of music, which in turn became the material for other music creations. As the different artists and groups merged and collided with the complexities of the material, individual and group outputs emerged. As these took shape, the possibilities for manipulation multiplied.

Juan Parra developed a sound layer based on a drone effect—a sound effect where a note or chord is continuously sounded throughout most or all of a piece. Figure 3 shows the brainstorming between Juan Parra and Kathleen Coessens triggered by the different translations and transformations between the text as score and its sonification. This is one perspective of *A Day in My Life*. Parra created a version of *A Day in My Life* as a contribution to the $100 Guitar Project.[1]

1 On 20 October 2010, Nick Didkovsky and Chuck O'Meara bought a one-hundred-dollar electric guitar from Elderly Instruments. They did not know what it sounded like or if it even worked, but were charmed by its no-name vibe and single bridge pickup that resembled an old radio. Their guitar playing friends were instantly

Figure 3. Mapping and conceptualising the transformation processes of Juan Parra's sonification of *A Day in My Life,* 2011.

In a different response, Catherine Laws created twenty one-minute sound tracks on the basis of environmental sounds of one day in her life. They offered minimal sound representations of everyday noises of nature and culture and part of her movements and habits: being on a train, writing, hearing the calls of birds. She then translated some of these sounds into short ideas and material to improvise on an extended piano (see figure 4).

charmed. The $100 Guitar is now passing through the hands of guitar players, each of which will record a piece with it (anywhere from a few seconds to three minutes long), and then pass it on to the next player. http://www.100dollarguitar.com/. Juan's outcome can be seen at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmdzVgD55c0.

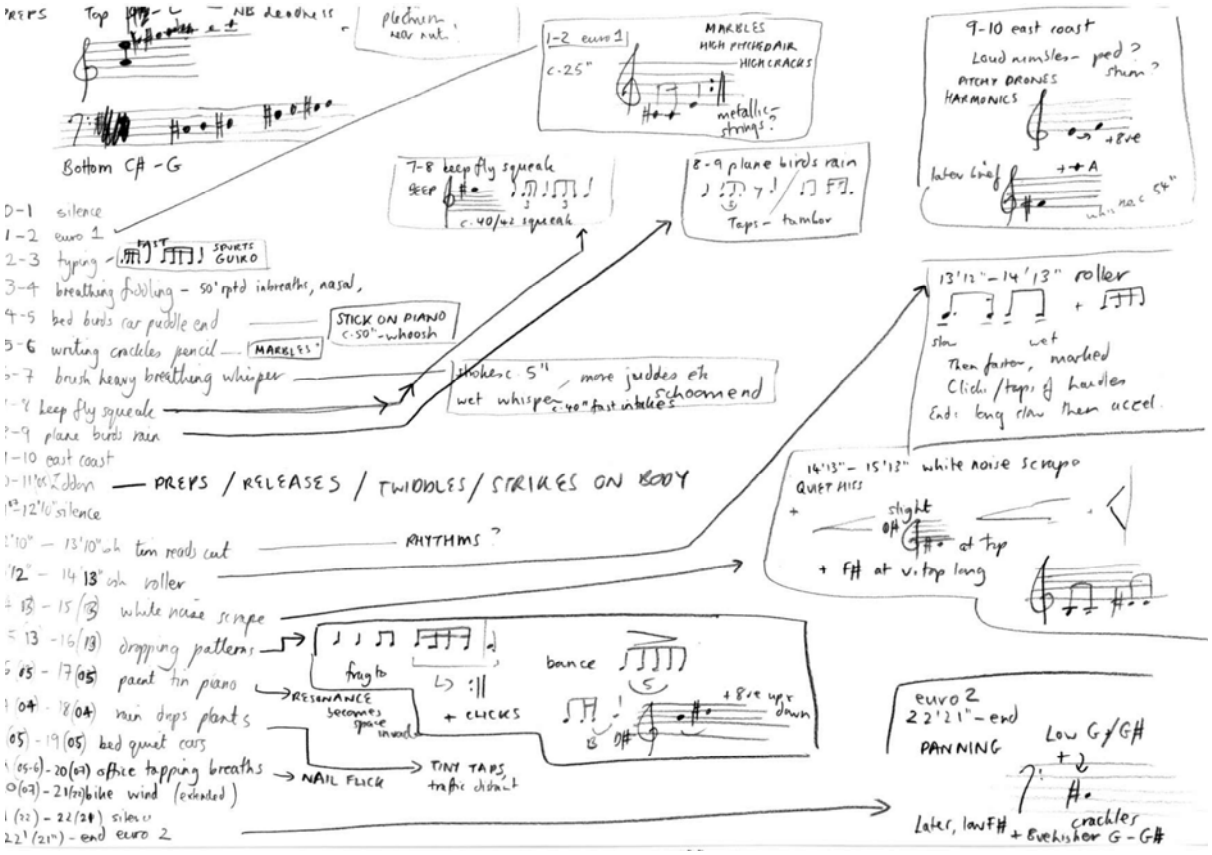

Figure 4. Catherine Laws's notes for *A Day in My Life*, 2011.

Kim Cunio and Vanessa Tomlinson made a twenty-four-minute musical performance of the text, bringing to it their own life experiences as well as their artistic expertise.[2] Everyday life is made up of new encounters and events that occur simultaneously and to which we have to adapt. These dynamics are mirrored in the musical creations that resulted. The score forced some of the artists to reflect more upon the relation between their daily lives and their artistic practices, putting them in a situation that was unfamiliar. The process was generative, leading to different rich outcomes.

We gathered the first results of individual and group musical outcomes and considered them as new materials from which to create a single piece.

Resistance and adaptation

[2] The twenty sound compositions by Catherine Laws, as well as the version by Kim Cunio and Vanessa Tomlinson, http://mosamplab.posterous.com/#!/a-day-in-my-life-preparations-partial-contrib. page discontinued

The project *A Day in My Life* entered its second phase with a concert at the ORCiM artistic Research Festival[3] in Ghent during October 2011. Seven musicians came together to set up a collaborative version in two rehearsals and an end concert. They started to experiment in the joint session, each sticking to his or her original version. The awareness of their significant differences—coupled with the fact that the performance space could not support such contrasts between simplicity and complexity, subtle and powerful sounds—yielded the need to approach the challenge differently. The participating musicians started to negotiate ways to communicate musically. The first rehearsal was chaotic and noisy, each artist trying to find a space as if in a crowded train. Everybody wanted to "play." Frustrations and confrontations emerged, while, as in a train, everybody continued to try to respect one another. Resistance and adaptation followed each other rapidly. In contrast, in the second rehearsal, the waves of music became much more introverted: musical patterns started to emerge calmly. Everybody "listened." Both improvisatory rehearsals were completely different from each other, and in a certain sense both were somewhat unbalanced. Time impeded more adaptation. Just as in improvisation in life, in which we have to respond immediately and without reflective thought, the artists had to create a real concert in a moment from these two preliminary experiences of the new material.

Learning

The twenty-four-minute performance was different from the rehearsals. The musicians were still searching for equilibrium, still adapting, still finding space. But as with improvisation in life, there was no other chance to refine, to adapt, to create an optimum interaction. The process was still in its experimental phase, and thus still in a phase of improvisation within that experimentation. The experiment was not closed, not concluded. In the act of the concert, experimentation and improvisation merged. The artists found themselves in a vulnerable position. They had to create the best possible improvised performance in the best possible world of that moment. For the outsiders, the audience, it was clear that this setting was moving forth and through processes of the known and the unknown, improvisation and experimentation, and surpassed habitual ways of making music.

Moving on

[3] The improvisation-performance happened on 5 October. The participating artists were Kim Cunio (hurdy-gurdy), Vanessa Tomlinson (percussion), Eliot Britton (electronics), Erika Donald (electric cello), Ben Duinker (percussion), Juan Parra (guitar and electronics), and Catherine Laws (piano).

It is clear that this improvisation-experimentation setting resonated with everyday life improvisation, as discussed by Hallam and Ingold. However, the concert experience was neither rewarding nor generative at this point—at least for the musical performers—because the musicians stayed in a very experimental setting for which they still had no right answer, each time around trying different improvisational responses. The complexity of the relational aspect—playing with so many unknown artists—and the differences in preconceived ideas about it, contradicted each other and became obstacles. Experimentation and improvisation do not necessary lead to improved experiences—of learning, for instance—but can leave the experimenter/improviser puzzled.

A Day in My Life brings into play the structures of thought that Arnheim (1986, 29) describes as "intuitive perception" and "intellectual analysis," as well as drawing into play a performative relation between motion and emotion. Arnheim might describe the first phase as a grappling with the immediacy of experience—gathering sounded responses, making notes, sharing possibilities. He might describe the second as intellectual cognition—a linear, diachronic process of making connections between "standardised units," such as in the note-to-note, sound-to-sound protocols of notation, composition, and performance. For example, in the video of him preparing for his $100 Guitar Project performance, Parra assigns sounds to each stanza of the text score and plays these in the sequence of the original text. The whole has a rich and diverse complexity while still working as a whole. Tomlinson carefully selects everyday objects as potential percussion instruments, including upturned rice bowls, chains, and wine bottles collected from the site of the performance. In other words, both forms of cognition—intuitive and intellectual—are necessary and mutually dependent activities necessary to make sense of the work of art in the same way as we make sense of the world. Being open to the uniqueness of the moment of interaction with the world in specific experience checks any tendency to view the world purely through generalised stable entities. Likewise, unique and specific experience without generalisation does not allow us to learn from experience and transfer knowledge from one situation to the next.

In conclusion

We began with two questions: What might experimentation be in the context of experience of life and experience of art? Does improvisation as a concept and a practice offer new potential to inform experimentation in a distinctive way?

We referenced Dewey as a starting point for a phenomenological approach to experience as a form of ongoing experimentation and adjustment, a process of learning

endemic to life itself. We mapped this articulation onto Hallam and Ingold's four characteristics of improvisation; we explored the characteristics as time dependent and investigated their inflection towards the social and cultural. Bergson too imagines experience as time dependent: life is constantly in a process of formation that is ongoing even in reflection. This movement is also a quality of artistic forms of conceptualisation in Cage and Klee; it implies a conflation of intuition and intellect into one single activity: imagining ourselves in the line (the life process) as it is being drawn. The artist-as-researcher is left in a paradoxical situation: how is knowledge created if we cannot look back on experience by stepping outside what is ongoing? Arnheim articulates intellect and intuition as distinctive but interrelated modes of being. We limit ourselves in life, Arnheim argues, to what is useful and necessary to know, working within the contingent. Art enriches possible ways of imagining. These challenge and extend experience.

The two artistic projects, *Calendar Variations* (2010–11) and *A Day in My Life* (2011–12), are experiences that set out to be consciously experimental and improvisational. Each project constructs a setting. By purposely framing the setting (e.g., through the tactic of verbal scores), we established the ground of an experience, demystifying—to an extent freeing—artistic endeavour from the "aura" of poetic inspiration by opening experience up to scrutiny. Each individual participant was invited to respond, exploring the score's particularity as a shared element across a group through one's own centre and view of the world as it takes shape within an artistic practice. The settings predispose each individual towards the unknown and unexpected: visual artists do not normally work with "scores"; musicians do not normally work with scores that do not determine note-to-note procedures. In creating art, the participants engaged the senses in exploring materials. They also engaged in processes (musical and visual) that involved negotiating the presence and meaning of the work as a group, experiencing tension and contradiction in that process, encouraging each of us to rethink the kinds of assumptions that had accrued around our artistic approaches. Together we documented, analysed, and made public the creative outcomes, to an extent testing these with audiences, who became participants in the endeavour.

Aesthetic perception is already a special case, as Arnheim argues, of watching intuition at work. There is a palpable difference between the actions of a cyclist and those of a dancer, who calls upon us to experience by looking in on his or her actions. Within artistic research practice we build in yet another layer of observation, containing experience in such a way that we can scrutinise closely the inner and outer world of our actions and offer these to critique. This critique occurs within the artists working as a group as well as with the

audience: we observe Fremantle, Tomlinson, and Cunio dealing with the challenge and confusion of an unfamiliar creative opportunity, striving to create a balanced order not as a rationalisation but as a moving on and into new forms of creativity and insight, generalising from the particular. In this way Fremantle, for example, offers us a new insight into site and non-site grasped through his experience. We are watching intuition at work and moving through its possible articulations.

In answer to the second question—does improvisation as a concept and a practice offer new potential to inform experimentation in a distinctive way?—we might observe the following: While improvisation in life is part of a contingent situation that we haven't chosen, experimentation is part of an explicit position and choice. However, inside artistic experimentation, the unexpected can pop up and invite an improvisational intervention. Improvisation in art is a particular approach to form building. This may be defined as a concern with "the inevitable situatedness of the improvisor in a work, the contingency of that work, and . . . the agility necessary to avoid becoming trapped in the communicative community created by it" (Peters 2009, 3). In our experiments we are concerned neither with finished works nor social interaction per se, but rather with a deepening of experience through movement that "'interrupts' the given and produces difference" (ibid., 4, in part quoting Walter Benjamin). In others words we are seeking the kind of freedom and open-endedness that allows us to encounter experience, even familiar experience, as if for the first time, to open up our senses to new possibilities while tracing the path as it unfolds.

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