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Inventing the Iceberg: Exploring Derek Bailey's Dichotomic Taxonomy

Simon H. Fell

During a forty-year career as a leading figure of European Improvised Music, Derek Bailey often emphasised the somatic, playing-based nature of his engagement with musical improvisation. He repeatedly avoided discussion of the philosophical, political or aesthetic implications of improvised music praxis by invoking the intangible emic intimacy of the link between player and instrument (and other 'players'), while contrasting this with the ethnocentric apologia of etic improvisation commentators and 'demonstrators'. Bailey also bemoaned a lack of investigation of what improvising musicians actually do, suggesting that the wide-ranging discussion of improvisation aesthetics within academic discourse had effectively displaced analytical technical examination of the actual substance of improvised music performance and its modes of realisation, a process of apparently irresistible subject expansion he described as 'inventing the iceberg'. If Bailey's ideas have (or had) validity, what consequences might player/demonstrator differentiation have for the oft-positing inclusiveness of improvised music practice? And how might Improvisation Studies need to be re-aligned in order to address more effectively such practical aspects of improvised 'musicking'? Does an emic rejection of 'public discursive abstraction' (Scott) and the avoidance of the 'sclerotic tendency' (Bailey) facilitate or mitigate inclusion within improvised music? This study makes use of unprecedented access to Bailey's archive of unpublished writings and correspondence, along with a range of musician interviews and the author's personal experience as an improvising musician. It reflects upon what developments there have been in improvisation studies in the 13 years since Bailey's death, and to what extent the situation he describes may have changed. The author investigates the unease or distrust with which a proportion of practising improvisors (those whom Bailey describes as 'players') view the activity of the theorists and critical commentators who discuss what they do, and considers Bailey's positing of the improvising 'demonstrator'.

Keywords: Improvisation; Improvised Music; Derek Bailey; Free Improvisation; Alternative Pedagogy

Much recent work on improvisation in music has explored the potential ability of improvisation practice to extend 'musicking' beyond that activity's traditionally

designated practitioners, with the implied consequence of being able to include participants with a wider range of backgrounds, experiences and abilities than can generally be integrated into other music idioms; as Hargreaves and MacDonald rightly observe, ‘Improvisation is a *universal* creative capacity’ (2012, 15; my emphasis).¹ While this may be true, this characteristic often forms part of a potentially misleading discourse of exceptionalism associated with improvised music; when discussing Free Improvisation² it is often implied or assumed that the lack of predetermination in such music is a destabilising, revolutionary or perturbing element of such force that the ‘traditional’ aesthetic politics of music creation and performance no longer apply, or at the very least can be indefinitely suspended.³ However, this elevation of the degree of predetermination of a given performance to the status of key determinant, a marker by which many fundamental characteristics of a music practice are to be determined, reflects the persistent yet misleading legacy of the *poiesis*-driven *oeuvre* ethic of the Western European ‘art music’ tradition. It is this thinking which has led to a remarkable theoretical homogenisation of improvised music, to the point where it is often written of and analysed as if it were one type of practice—with a relatively coherent and self-similar range of practitioners and aesthetic and philosophical aspirations—rather than the dramatically heterogeneous and philosophically amorphous undertaking which any extended study of the music itself must reveal it to be.

In fact, all music (at least that which involves an element of live human performance) is realised using a given combination of determined and undetermined elements, with the proportions varying between genres, traditions and cultures. Free Improvisation, where frequently nothing is pre-determined except the identity of the performers and time and place of the performance,⁴ presents an example from an extreme end of this spectrum, but is nevertheless part of it, rather than a unique and somehow exceptional way of making music.

It should be borne in mind that the (theoretically) non-hierarchical and collaborative nature of Free Improvisation is most significant and remarkable for those musicians whose aesthetics, training or experience have developed within, or are extended from, the European notated music tradition. For musicians with experience of the often open, sketchy and/or malleable structures found in the looser and more fluid parts of the jazz, blues and rock traditions, the differences are only a matter of degree, rather than a fundamental inversion of established models. The same would apply in the case of musicians with backgrounds in the traditional musics of certain cultures in which improvisation and collective decision making are a key part of music practice.

While clearly most of the musics I mention above would nevertheless have elements of pre-determined structure, either thematic, harmonic or stylistic, those outside a given tradition may overestimate the effect of such elements on the performer. For example, given the right context the degree of ‘freedom’ and creative input I have when playing a given theme in an exploratory (yet relatively traditional) Modern Jazz trio or quartet is not dramatically different from that I would experience with a freely improvising small group. The main differences are not ones related to hierarchy

and collectivity, but rather those of stylistic (or idiomatic) choice. While I am of course describing a 'best case scenario', and have played in many jazz groups which were not particularly free or collective, and where my contribution felt constrained by stylistic rigidity or performance politics, I have also had similar experiences playing improvised music. (Improvised music is no more immune to the machinations of musicianly ego and the need to massage an established hierarchy of 'stars' than any other field of performance; however its limited value in the music marketplace makes such pressures less acute and easier to deflect.) The persistent musicological focusing on the improvised or predetermined origin of a given piece of music has served to obscure significant differences in aesthetics, objectives, technical means, organisational strategies and historical context within improvised music practice and its associated communities.

Two Nights of A/D

Derek Bailey's (undated and apparently unpublished) text '2 Nights of A/D—A Preview' articulates observed variations in approach to improvised music, which Bailey hypothetically links to differences of musical and educational background, using them to suggest a series of possible stylistic, social and perhaps hierarchical distinctions within improvisation practice. The essay is hand-written on 20 pages of scrap paper of varying shapes and sizes, and is part of the Derek Bailey/Incus archive, formerly held at Downs Road in London, and currently in the process of being relocated to the Heritage Quay Archive at the University of Huddersfield.⁵ The event which provoked the essay—the two nights of A/D—has not yet been identified; nor has the meaning of 'A/D', although it may signify 'academics/demonstrators'.

In '2 Nights of A/D', a breadth of experience of the wider musical world outside 'European Straight Music' (Bailey n.d.-e, 1) is part of Bailey's profile of the musicians he describes (with implicit approval) as 'players'. Bailey appears to suggest that such idiomatic experiences enrich or stimulate the vocabulary of 'non-idiomaticism',⁶ allowing it to incorporate the disconnects of post-Cagean thinking without simply replicating the characteristics of experimental composition. Bailey's text raises important questions for any generally held perception of improvised music as a conceptually homogenous, non-hierarchical, open practice; he not only explicitly identifies different types of improvisation praxis, but also implies there are differences in improvisors' faculties of conception and realisation. He also makes a connection between idiomatic instrumental experience and the generation of challenging or rewarding improvisation contexts.

Bailey's comments in the A/D essay need to be read in the context of specific structures in (British) musical life which are no longer extant, or at least applicable to the same degree. In particular, Bailey's 'players' reflect an aspect of professional practice with which Bailey grew up (and with which I am familiar from my own youth) i.e. the large, alternative communities of professional musicians who serviced the musical needs of the nation before the widespread use of pre-recorded media. Like myself, Bailey became a musician at a time when if you needed music, you needed

musicians; the work possibilities generated by such a situation were such that musicians with even the most idiosyncratic training—including the autodidacticism of Lewis’s ‘earlier pedagogical model’ (Lewis 2008, 38)—could be guaranteed full-time (if ad hoc) employment should they exhibit sufficient natural talent. The resulting corps of essentially working- and lower-middle-class professionals⁷ are essentially those people from whom Bailey’s ‘players’ are drawn; it is significant that (by implication) they have avoided ‘long stretches of cultural instruction’, having essentially learnt by doing rather than by specialised academic or professional training.

Bailey contrasts these ‘players’ with those improvisors he describes as ‘demonstrators’. This term appears variously to include musicians who (a) are primarily concerned with theoretical questions surrounding improvisation, and whose playing merely serves to illustrate these ‘academic’ concepts, (b) who have a possibly extensive formal training (usually in European notated music), but who are in consequence restricted in their understanding and experience of alternative approaches to musical creativity, and finally (c) those ‘players’ who have effectively ceased to improvise and are now content simply to recycle the creative discoveries previously realised through improvisation.

Studying Bailey’s text without a full understanding of the historical differences (and tensions) between commercial and ‘straight’ musicians in the mid-twentieth century inevitably limits the reader’s ability to contextualise Bailey’s comments, since there is an implicit (but not directly applicable) mapping between these two categories and Bailey’s ‘players’ and ‘demonstrators’. This once again points to the need for a more granular, historically-sensitive approach in the discussion of improvised music.

Bailey’s writing is frequently mischievous, provocative or even tongue-in-cheek, playing with ironic implication while simultaneously remaining deadly serious.⁸ Consequently, care must be taken in asserting that a given text represents his ‘true’ feelings on a subject; nevertheless, certain themes recur persistently throughout the unpublished texts in his archive. ‘2 Nights of A/D’ is acutely sensitive to the social and educational implications of having one group/class of people who are primarily responsible for living musical practice, and a second group/class whose contribution is a verbal theoretical elaboration extended from the activity of practitioners. For many, this essentially class-based, blue-collar/white-collar perception may seem either simply mistaken, or at the very least somewhat out-dated; however my personal experience as an improvising musician, and my PhD research undertaken 2013–17, suggest that this division based on ‘public discursive abstraction’ (Scott 2014, 6) is still very keenly felt by a certain proportion of the improvised music community.⁹

Clearly, some elements of Bailey’s text might be different were he writing today.¹⁰ He begins his text by observing that ‘the lack of doc[umentation] which is an (endemic) part of improvisation provides many advantages[,] but one definite disadvantage is the constant recycling of old arguments’ (Bailey n.d.-a, 1; parentheses and emphasis in original).¹¹ It is unlikely that many observers in 2018 would complain of a lack of documentation surrounding improvised music; certainly in academic terms, the discussion of improvisation in and outside music has seen a remarkable

growth in activity over the last ten years or so. However, much of what has been published may not have provided the kind of ‘documentation’ that Bailey felt was lacking; in his private writing, he repeatedly bemoans a lack of investigation of what improvising musicians actually *do*, suggesting that the wide-ranging discussion of improvisation aesthetics within academic discourse has effectively displaced analytical technical examination of the substance of improvised music and its modes of performance. As he wrote to Ben Watson in December 1999,¹²

One reason for going along with this caper [Watson’s biography] is that I thought it might involve some interesting discussions about freely improvised music, something completely absent at this time ... There are aspects of this music that need confronting: complacency and self-satisfaction, its preoccupation with territory claims, the failure of its self-organisations—FMP, ICP, LMC—to do anything beyond creating cosy ghettos for the music for instance, but also many other things. Things that affect the way the music is and the way it’s perceived, what’s wrong with it, what’s right with it. (Bailey 1999a, 2)

As this comment suggests, Bailey felt that the substance of improvised music and its organisational structures would be the more valuable primary field of investigation for the critic or theorist of improvised music, but that this challenge was not being met. Describing a series of writings¹³ he had been sent since the publication of his own book *Improvisation: Its nature and practice in music* (1980), Bailey notes that

The most striking feature shared by almost all these writings, I have to say, was a very apparent lack of knowledge about the practice of improvisation, which in some cases appeared to be almost total. There is only one discussion [among the texts] of the actual music—how it sounds. What appears to excite [the authors’] interest is not the thing itself, more the idea of it, an idea sometimes having little or no observable connection with the activity as experienced by an improviser. (Bailey n.d.-b)

It is arguable that very little has changed since Bailey’s comments were written. The majority of current literature pays little attention to ‘the actual music—how it sounds’, preferring to take the *idea* of improvisation as a starting point for more abstract aesthetic and philosophical explorations. Valuable though such texts may be, it is difficult to identify another musical discipline or idiom in which musicological study has so significantly avoided basic discussion of the mechanics of the music, what the musicians play and why—especially important given the concrete performance implications of the accretion of idiom and genre around an initially (arguably) non-idiomatic music.¹⁴

Bailey continues his A/D piece by observing that ‘one particular, almost continuous, debate is the one which can be identified as [being] between players and demonstrators. To a large extent the argument reflects a genuine division between two types of improviser’ (Bailey n.d.-a, 1). Bailey doesn’t precisely identify the subject of the debate in question, simply noting that it concerns ‘matters which were last debated,

almost to the point of suicidal tedium, around, I think, 1967' (Bailey n.d.-a, 2). Several of the surviving first-generation improvisors I contacted during my PhD research reflected on the exhausting nature of the bitter ideological debates undertaken between them in the late 1960s; clearly Bailey has no wish to revisit such territory in his own essay. He does, however, outline the different characteristics of two types of improvisor, the 'player' and the 'demonstrator'.

Players

[Players] are invariably the people with a practical, a performing musical background and often have connections, past, present or (speculative) with other musics—as performers. I think it is right to say that for all of them there is no self-conscious allegiance to anything called 'improvisation'. It's a word they usually have reservations about and in describing what they do they are most likely to call it 'playing'. The appeal improvisation holds for 'players' I would guess is that improvisation guarantees that their involvement in music will be as players; it provides a wholly 'playing' way of playing.¹⁵ (Bailey n.d.-a, 4–5; parentheses in original)

Bailey made repeated reference throughout his career to the importance being 'a player' held for him,¹⁶ one implication of which seeming to be that he was more concerned with the practice of improvised music than its theory (despite his own important contribution to the literature). He frequently emphasised, in various writings and interviews throughout his creative maturity, the (for him) fundamental nature of the somatic aspects of Sachs's 'instrumental impulse'.¹⁷ In the passage above, he appears to be identifying 'players' as those musicians who, like himself, have a close allegiance to the idea of instrumentalism,¹⁸ an allegiance which is quite likely to extend beyond the boundaries of improvised music, although this latter music is favoured because it (theoretically) offers the widest range of contexts in which playing skills may be exercised. However, it should perhaps be stressed that by 'playing' Bailey did not simply mean the opportunity to make continual sonic contributions with relatively little rational processing; 'playing' here means challenging the player's instrumental and intellectual technique, both vocabulary and syntax, by a wide variety of contexts and playing situations, on both micro- and macro-structural levels.

Bailey writes approvingly of a pan-idiomatic instrumentalism as a praxis in its own right, proposing the significance of improvised music as its ability to liberate this instrumentalism from the constraints of idiomatic practice. Clearly this reflects Bailey's own background as an accomplished idiomatic musician, intensifying his relationship with instrumentalism through improvisation—a role he shared with several of his 'first-generation' colleagues such as Tony Oxley, Paul Rutherford, Trevor Watts, Kenny Wheeler and Dave Holland. But it is the supposed absence of idiomatic elements which is key to the 'inclusiveness' of improvised music; since this is a music which does not rely on previously learned and perfected secret codes, specialist knowledge or arcane performance practice traditions, presumably this

music will be able to welcome the widest possible range of participants, irrespective of ability and background. Bailey's comments suggest that to extrapolate from this starting point a music that is above all quintessentially inclusive is to ignore the fact that Free Improvisation, like all music practices, requires for its very survival that musicians can identify and develop what they perceive to be the most satisfactory examples of that practice (according to their personal aesthetic understanding). While Free Improvisation may be best placed to welcome rapidly the inexperienced, untutored or experimental musician into a performing situation, such a musician will nevertheless be required to demonstrate the ability to make an effective or stimulating contribution, albeit perhaps limited, if relationships with their peers within the improvised music community are to develop or thrive.

Improvised Music's theoretically *tabula rasa* approach to idiomatic language does *not* automatically result in an intrinsically inclusive music; improvised music practice inevitably includes a wide spectrum of positions with regard to inclusiveness/exclusiveness, in common with almost all other musicking activities. The criteria used to judge a performer's relationship to (and personal standing within) the improvising community may be different to those encountered in composed music, jazz or other areas of activity, but they exist (and are keenly felt by practitioners) nonetheless. These criteria (and the assessments derived therefrom) will vary from individual to individual, but again this is not unique to improvised music. The end result is that some performers will be more readily incorporated into the wider improvising community, and will be invited to play more frequently and thus be given more extensive opportunity to develop, whereas others will not be and may struggle to establish their relationship to improvisation.¹⁹

Demonstrators

In contrast to the 'performing, practical background' of the 'players', those improvisors Bailey describes as 'demonstrators' appear to have a different career path, reflecting possible differences in social and educational background from those of the 'working musicians' with whom Bailey apparently aligns himself.²⁰

Demonstrators: In background these improvisors are usually academic.²¹ This is possibly not exactly the right word to use but I mean that their background is usually not practical, is sometimes wholly theoretical and usually involves long stretches of cultural instruction of one kind or another. In its sonic character and general feeling a performance by demonstrators is quite often indistinguishable from the realisation of an indeterminate composition. (Bailey n.d.-a, 6)²²

The situation has changed in the years since Bailey's death, but during Bailey's lifetime the majority of musicians freely improvising (and facilitating improvisation) in academic contexts were arguably not the kind of 'practical' players Bailey puts in opposition to the 'demonstrators'. Often these 'academic' musicians had arrived at the practice of improvisation through the influence of Cage, Fluxus, Larry Austin, Lukas

Foss, Cardew, The Scratch Orchestra or other experimentalists, rather than through the *in situ* pedagogy of artistic development within commercial music and/or idiomatic jazz.²³ Bailey's suggestion that the work of such improvisors tends to resemble experimental, composed music probably reflects its frequently associative nature, in other words its tendency to treat improvised performance as a container-state rather than a dialogic or developmental situation.²⁴

Bailey's subsequent comments on the way these two groups tend to improvise reflect both the physical continuity effects of somatic interaction with an instrument,²⁵ and the ability of compositional material to fracture such automatic actions and neutralise the expressive or emotive impulse.²⁶

It's not true to say that one lot (the players) are fast and loud and the other lot (the demonstrators) are slow and soft—sometimes stationary and silent—but players do sometimes give the impression that there is no tomorrow. But demonstrators quite often sound as if they are saving the music for a rainy day. And players repeat themselves endlessly while demonstrators tend to repeat each other. (Bailey n.d.-a, 7–8; parentheses in original)

While the twenty-first century has seen a developing aesthetic of minimal and reductionist improvised music, often created by musicians who, in all other respects, would conform to Bailey's 'players' template, my experience with various groups suggests that there is nevertheless a tipping point at which conceptual thinking constrains improvisation, and in this case 'players' may become 'demonstrators'.²⁷ As Bailey observed in 1999 'the exploratory element in "Improvised Music" has now virtually disappeared. There are groups and individuals now playing a music whose original purpose no longer exists. What's left are standardised recitals of personal, idiosyncratic musics' (Bailey 1999b); by this date he felt that many of his fellow improvisors were actually no longer improvising, but demonstrating a now-idiomatic music which Bailey had helped bring into being over 30 years earlier.

Bailey identifies a residually *poiesis*-orientated need for designated final-state outcomes in his posited 'academic' approach to improvisation, and its corresponding difficulty with the discussion of a continuing practice which eschews the significance of 'end results':

For demonstrators, one is safe in assuming, just 'playing' is neither intellectually nor aesthetically adequate. For them, the sub-structure which underlies all kinds of improvisation etc. [*sic*] They prefer to invent the iceberg. A characteristic of the demonstrators is the detailed and usually lengthy apologia that goes either before, or more usually after the performance.²⁸ The careful exposition of the pre-determined (creative posture) which sheds new light on the whole performance, and which, had you only realised it at the time, would have transformed the whole dreary business into a thing of wonder and beauty. This tendency provides one of the many parallels to be found between the demonstrator and the composer. The sub-structure which underlies all kinds of improvising needs, for them, to be revealed. (Bailey n.d.-a, 9–12; parentheses in original)

This passage carries a hint of resentment, the not-infrequent resentment of the practitioner being ‘explained’ by the non-practising theoretician; (we) academics should take heed of this tone, and avoid underestimating the distance which such feelings can generate between musicians and writers, subjects and researchers, doers and talkers. As Bailey explains elsewhere ‘musical relationships between improvising musicians—ANY improvising musicians—are usually so complex that clomping all over them in intellectual jackboots doesn’t even provide a sighting’ (Bailey n.d.-c). Although it’s tempting to ascribe such feelings to generational differences (Bailey was born in 1930), and invoke changes in approach since Bailey’s death, in both my own practice and my formal academic research I have encountered musicians who view all theoretical discussion of what they do with marked suspicion, and may even regard such activity as depriving the researcher of the status of fellow-practitioner.²⁹

At this point it might be helpful to briefly summarise some of the characteristics detailed in Bailey’s text, and how they may be related to the categories he suggests:

Players will be more likely to have one or more of the following characteristics; self-taught or without formal professional training, an experience of a range of idiomatic musics outside the world of improvisation, a close and often sophisticated relationship with a given instrument or sound-source, a primary orientation towards practice rather than theory, a greater interest in invention than in perfection.

Demonstrators will be more likely to have one or more of the following characteristics; formal musical training, limited experience of musics outside their own idiom, a more experimental approach to the use of sound-sources other than their usual instrument, a strong interest in theoretical questions and ‘discursive abstraction’, a greater interest in either radical experiment or poietic refinement than in continuous invention.

Academics may imply one or both of two categories; those who write about, research and discuss music more often than they play it (if they play it at all), and those performers whose training has been along formal or institutional lines and whose improvisation (and wider music-making) is constrained by this fact.

It is clear from this list that these categories are not exclusive, and that a musician may have characteristics from two or more categories, and that these characteristics may change over time, or between (even within) different performances and performing contexts. However, although Bailey’s attempt to differentiate between ‘players’ and ‘demonstrators’ may ultimately break down in the face of the fluidity, complexity and polyvalence of improvisation practice (and human behaviour in general), his identification of the heterogeneous and potentially divided nature of the improvised music community remains valuable.

Detail, Context and Heterogenisation

Do Bailey’s evident reservations about the type of improvisation activity undertaken by demonstrators have implications for any posited inclusiveness of improvised music, and our way of examining it critically? While it is true that Bailey did not suffer

fools gladly, and sometimes expressed frustration with musicians who did not engage in ‘playing’ as he understood it,³⁰ his comments are not simply a matter of a notoriously curmudgeonly individual expressing dissatisfaction with those who fail to stimulate his ‘instrumental impulse’. They also relate to specific aspects of Bailey’s improvisation practice and reflect subtleties of individual aesthetics and technical concerns; these are the kind of subtleties which are frequently overlooked as a result of the homogenising tendency in improvisation studies. Such individual differences between practitioners are of vital importance if we are to understand the material practice of improvised music, particularly when it is being examined in a historical context.

In addition to questions of historical and social background, there are significant audible variations in improvised music practice that suggest the pressing need for a refinement of criteria used in discussing such work. Commenting on two CD releases by Incus Records (1995’s *One Time* and 1996’s *Short In The UK*³¹) Bailey observes that

these two records have absolutely nothing in common, except that they’re both freely improvised. They don’t sound alike, their references and identity don’t match in any respect, their intentions differ. I can’t see how they could both be in the same ‘idiom’. They use the same methods that’s all. To describe what they do as an idiom would be like describing all composed music as an idiom simply because it’s composed. (Bailey n.d.-d, 1)

Unfortunately improvised music discourse still lacks the precision of taxonomy which those writing about composed music take for granted, and even such differences as Bailey describes here are rarely referenced, let alone the subtler ones involving modulation of personal aesthetics or the effect of historical context.

Significant first steps in redressing the imbalance in improvisation studies which I have discussed might include, for example, (i) the development of more sophisticated analytical approaches and taxonomic categories for historically important recordings of improvised music, enabling a degree of discrimination comparable to that applied to notated music scores, and (ii) a more holistic understanding of the place of a musician’s improvisation practice within their general creative activity (including both in different subsets of improvised music, and other work within notated and/or oral music traditions); a clearer understanding of an individual’s aesthetic and philosophical priorities could significantly inform the analysis of decisions made and contexts chosen while improvising, but such a level of detail is rarely employed.

Bailey’s concluding assessment of what he considers academic improvisation, i.e. associative improvisation strongly influenced by indeterminate composition, is that it is ‘anecdotal music: it comes to its full flowering only in the post-performance discussion’ (Bailey n.d.-a, 17). The demonstrator’s improvisation is only validated by the retrospective construction of aesthetic, political or social theories which the improvisation serves to exemplify; the musical practice, despite its sonic complexity and richness, is insufficient. While clearly the vast majority of the metaphorical iceberg which is concealed from view is of great significance and potential interest, Bailey’s point remains valid: there would be much to be gained from a focussed study of that

which is already in full sight (or more properly hearing), before losing ourselves in abstruse extrapolations developed from an as yet relatively superficial understanding of actual improvised music practice.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on Contributor

Simon H. Fell is a bassist and composer; he is primarily known for his work as a free improviser and as the composer of ambitiously complex flexible-notation works for improvisors. In 2015, Simon undertook a major archive project, identifying, restoring and preparing performing versions of Derek Bailey's archive of his compositions from the 1960s. Three concerts of ensemble, duo and solo pieces were presented at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival in November 2015; the performance of the substantial Bailey ensemble work *Ping*, and a similarly restored piece by Paul Rutherford, were broadcast live by BBC Radio 3's Hear and Now programme.

Notes

- [1] In addition to the work of Hargreaves & MacDonald, see for example that of the Sonic Arts Research Centre at Queen's University Belfast (<http://performancewithoutbarriers.com/>). Also note the quintessential role of improvisation in music therapy (e.g. Ruud 1998).
- [2] See Fell (2017, 14) for discussion of questions of definition and capitalisation regarding terms such as Improvised Music and Free Improvisation.
- [3] For example, Callingham (2007) appears to suggest that the significance of improvisation lies in its non-musical otherness; Prévost (in Cardew [2006, 295]) states that 'contemporary improvised music ... supersedes all the alienating forms which preceded it'. Although these may be extreme examples, a prevailing musicological tendency to undertake primary taxonomical triage based on whether music is identified as 'improvised' or not has embedded milder versions of such thinking into much writing on the subject.
- [4] While I use the idea of 'pre-determination' here in the sense in which it is usually understood (score, arrangement, theme etc), the personalities and proclivities of the musicians programmed to perform will of course tend to have a sometimes foreseeable effect on the character of the music that develops. But the interest of Free Improvisation is its particular ability to accommodate and exploit the unforeseen effects of the interaction of a given combination of performers.
- [5] I am indebted to Bailey biographer Ben Watson, who first brought this essay to my attention and provided me with an initial transcription of Bailey's often hardly-legible handwriting. However, having inspected the original documents I have made my own transcription, correcting what appear to be several mis-readings in Watson's version.
- [6] For a discussion of the use of the term 'non-idiomatic' see Fell (2017, 79–82); see page 81 for a discussion of the paradox of non-idiomaticism without existing idiomatic precedent.

- [7] See Heining (2012, 45) and Fell (2017, 23–29) for discussions of class origin questions regarding British ‘non-classical’ musicians during the 1950s–1970s.
- [8] For those of us who knew Bailey personally, this style of discourse is familiar from his verbal critiques and general conversation.
- [9] The use of terms such as ‘discursive’ may suggest a bifurcation between performers and commentators; however in the taxonomy that Bailey suggests some individuals could play dual roles, being both (verbal) commentators and (demonstrating) performers. (Bailey’s taxonomy seems less inclined to acknowledge the possibility of a verbal commentator also being a ‘playing’ performer, despite his own contribution to improvisation literature; see note 10 below.) Performers may also transition from ‘playing’ to ‘demonstrating’ or vice versa, a phenomenon Bailey noted in respect of his own solo performances (see Kaiser [1975, para. 25]).
- [10] Most strikingly, Bailey’s taxonomy offers no place for a figure such as George E. Lewis, an extensively experienced ‘player’, but also a significantly important academic. Lewis is perhaps the most notable example of a generation of ‘players’ who have successfully infiltrated (and occasionally dominated) academia.
- [11] Bailey (n.d.-a) page numbers are based on the editorial assembling of the complete text, and do not always correspond to Bailey’s original hand-written page numbers, which are sporadic and incomplete. Editorial interventions are bracketed.
- [12] Although undated, this letter can be accurately pinpointed to late December 1999; it makes reference to it being ‘the season of goodwill towards all men’, and Watson is thanked for a Christmas card and wished ‘Happy New Year’; according to Watson, the letter was a response to one sent by him on 14 December 1999.
- [13] ‘Theoretical in nature and, yes, usually written in pursuit of some academic purpose’ (Bailey n.d.-b).
- [14] What Bailey elsewhere describes as ‘the sclerotic tendency’; see Fell (2017, 86).
- [15] See Kaiser (1989, 50m 50s) for further discussion of this idea.
- [16] For example see Dalton (1978, 21–22), Bailey (1992, 97), Scott (1991, 222) and Kaiser (1989, 50m 50s).
- [17] See Bailey (1992, 97) and Fell (2017, 71–72).
- [18] Throughout this passage ‘the instrument’ would include the voice and any other sound source with which it might be possible to have a somatic relationship.
- [19] I am referring here to the ‘outside world’ of the freelance/ad hoc improvising community and the slender network of performing opportunities in clubs and at international festivals; here the quality of the music (however that might be judged) is the main criterion. Those improvising within educational institutions, social outreach schemes or other inclusion-specific contexts should be able to expect a longer and less selective induction into improvisation practice.
- [20] See Fell (2017, 31–33) for further discussion of Bailey’s views on the changes in social position of working musicians.
- [21] Bailey is clearly referring to performers (rather than all discursive commentators) here, so as he himself admits the use of the word ‘academic’ is potentially problematic. I suggest that what Bailey is referencing here is the difference between formal or institutionalised musical education, and the alternative pedagogy of learning-through-doing, intrinsic to the commercial music and jazz worlds of Bailey’s youth. (Of course, some performers with this background are also academics.)
- [22] An alternative version of this paragraph (probably an earlier draft) reads ‘Demonstrators: these are the ones who have usually never found it intellectually or aesthetically adequate just to “play”’ (page 3).
- [23] It is not my intention to imply that the musicians listed in this sentence are therefore all ‘demonstrators’, and indeed a similar scrupulousness concerning self-taxonomy can be

- found within the composed music community. For example Earle Brown clearly feels that Cage's 'problem' with the orchestra was a result of his not being a 'player' (Piekut 2011, 41), while Frederic Rzewski feels his experience of being a 'player' resulted in a deeper understanding of improvisation practice than that of his composer colleagues (Toop 2016, 190).
- [24] See Fell (2017, 70–75) for a discussion of the differences between what I have called 'somatic' and 'associative' improvisation; my comments here essentially relate to 'somatic' improvisation. To briefly summarise: somatic improvisation is inextricably connected to the exploration of instrumental technique, conventional or otherwise; somatic improvisers (especially of the earlier generations) are usually highly accomplished technicians on their instrument (or voice) and may have extensive experience of high-level music-making in more conventional idiomatic situations; they often remain associated with only one instrument (or instrumental family) and derive a great deal of their inspiration and motivation from the physical act of playing their instrument. Associative improvisation is closely related to the idea of deconditioning posited in Toop (2016), and tends to use the designated improvisation space as a container, during which period of time anything may happen, in any relationship, which may or may not evidence the employment of skill, instrumental technique, stylistic congruity or communicative discourse. This approach has clear links to experimental composed music and to indeterminacy in particular. The difference between these two types of improvisation is intimately linked to the arguments Bailey develops.
- [25] An effect of which Bailey was well aware, and of which he consciously sought to rid himself; see Kaiser (1975, para. 67).
- [26] Bailey's archive contains numerous early compositions in which he uses different strategies to pervert the normal flow of conventional musical or expressive logic. The archive also contains ample testimony to his admiration of the work of Cage (along with composers such as Stockhausen, Webern and Debussy). See Fell (2017) for more details of the archive's contents.
- [27] This 'tipping point' is usually reached when the musician or musicians seek to replicate the felicitous outcome of a prior improvisation in subsequent improvisations. Improvisors will often be reluctant to acknowledge that a desire to reproduce previous 'success' is in essence a compositional act, but an explicit recognition of this would possibly result in a more satisfying outcome than ostensible improvisation constrained by repressed *poiesis*.
- [28] While Bailey specifically mentions post-performance *apologia* here, I would suggest that it is the irresistible tendency to verbalise, whether it be in person or in print, and whether it be independent of or before, after or even during a performance (cf. John Stevens) that Bailey considers a characteristic of the demonstrator. But it is evidently not in itself a defining characteristic (Stevens was clearly a 'player' nevertheless); for Bailey it may have simply been a question of the balance struck between verbiage and musicking. Whether the same performance—with the *apologia* suppressed—would have been less likely to be classed as 'demonstration', or whether the tendency towards *apologia* nevertheless casts an audible shadow over the music remains a moot point.
- [29] See Fell (2017, 86–88). Bailey (1999a) describes 'the usual writer/player relationship as imagined by the writer: inarticulate artist preoccupied with the inexpressible who needs an interpreter with a comprehensive cultural overview etc etc'.
- [30] See for example Keenan (2004, 44).
- [31] *One Time* by Stevens/Carter/Bailey (Incus CD 22; recorded 1992), *Short In The UK* by Beresford/Palmer/Stagner/Turner (Incus CD 27; recorded 1994).

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