

At the start of any improvisation i am racked with one / some / many anxieties.

Some of the time / on a good day these manifest in the form of a preliminary adrenal surge, one that launches me into whatever i'm doing with both uncharacteristic confidence and an energy (that is) massively disproportionate to the context but

most of the time it just feels a bit unpleasant.

i find myself, If i'm with ... you know ... *proper* improvisers who do that non idiomatic stuff right out of the high modernist tradition getting uncomfortable that my approach is often too musical ... too conventional.

i find myself when playing with *proper* musicians becoming conscious of my limited abilities as a guitarist. i become very afraid that my lack of conventional musical knowledge will become evident and people will see right through the Pascal Colman – The Free Improvising Guitarist smoke screen i have evidently (apparently) created for myself.

i find myself when playing with past collaborators, no matter how healthy our relationship becoming petrified, positively that what I contribute this time round will fall short of what has been in the past. i become fixated on the fact that whatever I do will never measure up to past glories or even the recordings of past glories from days of yore, to the effect that i become (slowly and surely) crushed by the weight of our collaborative history (crushed by the history of our playtime) .

To get round this i often find myself striking a poise; adopting a certain mental style / mindframe / intent on how to be, and painstakingly plotting out the first note (gesture / sound / silence) that I will offer as my entrance to the fray. The struck poise is chosen to directly contradict any evidence in support of the specific inadequacy i'd been feeling prior to the improvisation getting underway (if i'm playing with avante gurdy types i'll concoct something most definitely *out there* / hyper non-idiomatic, if i'm in with the jazzers i'll work out a particularly excited harmonic form with which to land on my first step and if i'm playing with a collaborator with whom i share a history i'll latch onto something which evokes past glories from days of yore). i work all this out whilst completely caught up in my head and then when the first note (gesture / sound / silence) is struck it all becomes completely irrelevant.

It seemed appropriate to attribute words to my pre-improvisational mess as this is the part of the process which is most verbal (too many voices ... none particularly helpful).

When i was in Japan my violinist / collaborator / partner in crime intimated to me, during an excited exchange (about improvisation) over online messenger that "at the moment I am falling in love" (i was taken aback; this declaration was both unexpected and out of context. It functioned to open a slightly confusing emotional space in which we suddenly had to talk about any feelings that did or didn't exist between us. Through this i learnt that her spoken English was maybe better grasped than her written. Her intended declaration was "in the moment i am falling in love" (it's amazing how the meaning of such can be altered so profoundly by inclusion of the wrong two letter preposition)) .

"In the moment i am falling in love" i think encapsulates how improvisation feels. After working myself up to where i'm almost not able to act there comes a tripping point where i fall ... just kind of slip into a state of doing instead of thinking about doing. The doing excites itself so i continue to do and it is through this doing that my self is lost. Just like you lose yourself in love .

Here's a bit from a piece about improvisation i was writing on a bus:

“ improvisation is like feeling the pulse of a life of music; palpitations and oscillations, the beating, breathing, eating, sleeping life of music which

you as an improviser

are living and already

in real time i correct myself

*improvising music is like feeling the pulse of a life of music

*improvising is like living whilst feeling the pulse of life

it's feeling

and doing in response to that feeling

and feeling your doing

and doing in response to that and

thinking is also a doing but (there is thinking as part of any improvisational process (how can there not be?) just in this case

the thinking isn't about itself) thinking about your doing isn't improvising

Improvisation is living to the fullest extent of what that word can imply (dogmatic ?)

(living and existing are not synonyms (if a tree falls in a forest ...))

but i am (i guess) specifically talking about improvised music (because it is from this which i draw as i write this

cascade)

Mengelberg (paraphrasing heavily) talks on

“improvisation as being the truest (non-idealised form) of musical life ; the beautiful along with the

ugly indiscriminately” ;

the life of music is not just a finished product (if anything (particularly concerning recorded music) this could be construed as its death)

and with improvised music there is no pre-requisite for there to be a sexy tombstone at the end ”

If Love constitutes a state of egolessness as facilitated by submission to a sympathetic process (not saying that the process sympathises but rather that the process is in itself sympathy) then love and properly being in the throes of an improvisation aren't dissimilar. Love can be as dramatic, rocky and terribly violent as it can be soft, soothing and tender. Love is felt and it is felt a lot. If improvisation is not felt then it's not improvising. If living is not felt then it is not more than just existing .

When i'm playing (attempting now to ground what i've written with something both more concrete and directly relevant to what i was asked (what does it feel like when i improvise?)) i lapse in and out of just doing and becoming conscious of what i'm doing. Sometimes i get excited by what i hear in my doing and sometimes i become desperately aware that i have to stop it / change it / throw some kind of spanner in the works that will break the mechanism and open it up onto different terrain completely. At these times the "I" complet with all aforementioned anxieties comes roaring back into focus and begins plotting the poise from which to launch back onto the track the "I" wants, but this time in real-time and this time severely compromised because it is (I am) charged with both prospective planning and contemporaneous action simultaneously. The "I" inevitably becomes left behind and (like Leonardo in 'the Titanic') falls into the depths of listening, which is oftentimes an active listening (a listening which is in itself a doing). With time the "I" is soon forgotten and (like Kate) living resumes unfettered.

The moments where i'm deepest submerged in listening (doing) are the hardest to articulate. These are the least verbal but the most true to what improvisation is so for me to articulate "what it feels like when i improvise" it is these which to words i must attribute.

attempted articulation of the moments that are hardest to articulate ... (let's go swimming) ...
an active grounded state, punctuated with gasps and grasps of flow and form, feeling my way through the clutching of an instrument (more often than not a guitar) like a boat's oar i can, rather than propel myself through, influence the ebbs / flows / water's movements around me (swimming the pool in place of the person). Through this doing a tactile knowledge is born; radiating out from the hand, up through the wrist, spreading through the body and eventually back out into the world external where it / reflected \ feeds back. This is a knowledge born of doing; the knowledges of how to push and pull (gained through pushing and pulling), to sink and swim (gained through sinking and swimming) and how to reinforce and disrupt (gained through reinforcing and disrupting) all manifest themselves as one processual body; an agent of change that is formed of the same sympathetic substance that is the improvisation. This knowledge; this processual body is the translation of the "I" (the most proper of all nouns) into a verb.

"body of water" is what i think of as we drive past one of those great Canadian lakes (great from an English boy's perspective, possibly passé to a French Canadian whose day to days have been steeped in such wonders). Taken literally the term denotes an undefined volume of water. Since the human body is (on average) around 60% water it seems fitting to assume that it (this body) has at least some right to qualify as such.

" The rhythms of the sea are many: infrabiological – for the water changes pitch and timbre faster than the ear's resolving power to catch its changes; biological – the waves rhyme with the patterns of the heart and lung and the tides with night and day; and suprabiological – the eternal inextinguishable presence of water. " *R.Murray Schaefer The Soundscape*

i'm thinking about the term "body of water" at the same time as this body of words is forming ;

a conduit for process / change, a medium through which vibration can flow;

water responds to gravitational (pushes and) pulls

and tides are moved by the moon.

The notion of being submerged in the medium through which process courses and having that same medium existing also on the inside; feeling the movements of the external as those of the internal

body of water
feels like such a great metaphor for "what it feels like when i improvise"

: the simultaneous swimming of the waters of the internal within the waters of the external and vice

versa.

...

up for air ...

...

..

Every "i" subsumed in this process becomes an agent of change. In a group improvisation we are subsumed together. i speak of it terms of my body as that is very much how i relate to the world. My experience is tactile, amo(u)rphous and impressionistic. Improvising with a guitar i feel change in wrist motion and chord shape; not mapped onto the fret board in a formally musical sense but imbedded into my fingers like the strings which i push or pull; bending them into a smile or mashing the flow with my picking hand into an abrasive impasse (choppy waters through which tonality cannot safely cross).

Every "i" articulates the process differently (musically / visually / kinetically / narratively); drummers describe it different to singers, dancers describe it different to painters and no two painters describe alike. Other improvisers who relate principally through touch wouldn't liken their experience to a dip in the pool.

In conclusion ... (the end of this piece of writing)

When listening back to recordings of myself i'm generally struck with this dual nature my playing has. It rocks between what feels like a supremely confident (maybe even overconfident) presence and one that is small, nervous and indecisive. i used to resent hearing the little voice (the one which stutters ... the one which can't commit and hedges all the time and gets its tongue tied ... etc.. etc..) as it seemed a manifestation of a part me i'd rather wasn't there. The confident presence (which is the one i think i'd like to be all the time) impresses me upon listening and i'm frequently surprised with what it is (I am (apparently)) capable of.

i think that maybe for me improvisation (in the moment ... in love) must feel like how it sounds on record; wild oscillations between feeling somewhat godlike and then somewhat incredibly small, anxious and afraid. By now there are quite a lot of recordings of me free improvising; I seem to do it enough so clearly it must be something i enjoy. It is the simultaneous sounding of two very fundamental constituents of me (the beautiful along with the ugly indiscriminately) and since I (apparently) do it a lot

i'm going to assume that for me

improvisation probably feels quite

good