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Contribution towards an ethics of listening: an improvising musician's perspective.

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Preamble

The following paper began as a semi-improvised presentation for "Translating Improvisation"¹ - a project bringing together practitioners from many disciplines, but here particularly lawyers and improvising musicians - with the goal of better understanding the role of improvised conduct in ethical and social transformation. As the author has no philosophical training it might be useful to disclose the loose, inexpert senses of the terms ethics and empathy being used here, and to clarify the relationship between them. Ethical conduct is here assumed to involve voluntary filtering or deferral of individually-oriented goals in the interests of longer-term, emergent, (socially) co-constructed benefit. Empathy is regarded as a key mechanism through which individuals develop and test a capacity to comprehend "the other" (whether construed as singular, plural or multiple). This mechanism may involve risk, doubt, potential loss, a deferral of existing knowledge: a potential "othering" of the self. Empathy is explored interpersonally through the intimate and erotic, but also in such mutually co-constructed behaviours as musical improvisation, in which "meaning" is congruent with participation. As the objects with which we surround ourselves (such as musical instruments) act as prosthetic sensors, amplifiers and transducers of our interactions with our environment, and with others, it is also suggested that a capacity for empathy can be imaginatively designed into the non-human agents with which we interact. Rather than presenting improvising (musical or otherwise) as necessarily productive of ethical conduct, empathy is here regarded as essentially improvisational, and potentially transformative.

To talk of an **ethics** of listening we have to go beyond the mundane vernacular concept (of listening) and approach an extended *intersensorial* concept of listening: one in which all the senses are involved. That's not to say that the Schaefferian concept of "reduced listening" (Schaeffer) - a focusing on the phenomenal detail of sound - or Pauline Oliveros's already intersensorially-inclined "deep listening" (Oliveros) don't have considerable utility in increasing our capacity for aural discrimination. Just that for ethical interaction to occur, the more information we have, the better prepared we are to make good judgments. And *intersensorial* information is already relational: it already enfolds multiple streams of evidence which might modulate or even conflict with each other.

We're familiar with this in everyday life in, for example, the sense of knowing that what someone says in purely semantic terms is not necessarily what they

mean. As Lakoff and Johnson and others (e.g. Austin) have taught us, language isn't primarily propositional - it's primarily performative; and to evaluate performance (human conduct in all its forms) we need all the contextual information we can get: aural, visual, tactile, atmospheric, visceral.

But it's not even this type of nuanced but quotidian interpretive listening (all too familiar to lawyers from life in court) that I wish to discuss here. I regard it as *established* that language isn't *primarily* propositional: the paradox that it is still frequently presented as such is just something the law has to deal with. As an improvising musician my interest is here particularly in links between the tactile and the sonic: in the apparently shared bank of experiences of the material and phenomenal world which precede (and possibly even afford) language and musicking, while simultaneously imbuing them with the potential for meaning. My contention is that, in an environment in which we are perpetually over-stimulated, the link between the sonic and the tactile remains a primary index of verification - of trust, if you like - not least because the correlation between sonic and tactile gesture or resistance is difficult to fake.

Why might this be important for an ethics of listening? Because ethics is about how human beings balance their inquisitiveness about the other, and about otherness, with the production of a sense of self² - about how to approach and engage with otherness without appropriating that other.³ We call the capacity to do this *empathy* - it's the most sophisticated human skill - and the link between the sonic and the tactile is, I believe, one fruitful route to the study of it.

That our inquisitiveness has an equal basis in our early interaction with other humans *and* with the physical world draws our attention to the agency of non-human actors within complex networks of behavior. This might be important, not least for the law, in adequately recognizing and evaluating the role of environment, or of apparently "irrelevant" objects or elements in emergent situations. Further, it suggests that one might, by acknowledging the role of such non-human actors, be able, to some extent, to "plan for" empathy, for example by recognizing the active role of place or location in establishing negotiations regarding conflict resolution, or by designing devices which encourage negotiated, dynamic engagement. This is an issue to which I'll return below.

What Small calls "musicking" - the "making and doing" of music - is so obviously tied up with the business of organizing time - whether this be precise synchronization, the formal relation of materials over time, the organisation of memory and cross-reference or the "almost" suspension of time which improvisers describe when they are inside the process of performing - that it's easy to forget that it's also about the organization of space; of proxemics (Hall) - of touch, intimacy, localness and the environmental and the relations between these. Proximity and adjacency imbue musical organization at every level: the different genres with which we're familiar emerge at least in part as solutions to the logistics of the physical organization of the participants⁴, or of their relationships with the potentialities of their instruments⁵.

Numerous theorists, from Blacking through Small and beyond, have noted the homologies between music's "internal" organization and its broadly (often characterized as "extra-musical") social function, but what I'm most concerned to draw attention to here is musicking's exploration of the privileged relationship between sound and proxemics. Indeed I've elsewhere characterized musicking as touching at a distance (Waters "Touching"). An entire unwritten history of musical listening could be framed in terms of whether sounds are intimate, local or environmental with respect to the listener: with whether we are "grabbed" or "seduced" or have to "find our way into" the music's materiality. Entire industries have grown up on managing this inter-relationship, notably (recently) production, mastering and the various cinematic sound diffusion formats. The microphone and electronic repetition and distribution have foregrounded this aspect of musicking as never before. To paraphrase my writing on performance ecosystems elsewhere (Waters "Performance") the whole of pop music emerges initially from the amplification and projection of the intimate human voice. Forensically close-miked breath sounds which were previously the preserve of porn movies, and tinselly fret noise are used to connote honesty, integrity, connection, lack of illusion and unpluggedness.

The reason I perhaps overstress music's engagement with proxemics and timing is that I suspect that the mechanisms of empathy are similarly bound up with a heightened sensitivity to microtemporal variations in stimulus and response, and with dynamic (though usually cautious) transgressions, heuristics and renegotiations of the invisible thresholds of proxemic domains.

Improvisation (as an organizing principle) inherently recognizes that one can't set up or wait for an ideal context. The context or situation is always already given: it is *now*. The experience and expertise which can be drawn upon in an improvisation is *what is here - what is to hand*, rather than what might be potentially or ideally useful.⁶

Autobiography

As a way of contextualizing my route to thinking through the relationship between listening, improvising, empathy and ethics, I will indulge in a brief autobiographical aside. As a practitioner with "theoretical pretensions" I've always been concerned to try and tell better, more accurate stories of what we do when we're *doing* practice. Writing in the early 1990s about my electroacoustic composition work I was interested in moving narratives of such practice away from descriptions, however accurate, of the sound and its organization, and towards what humans do when they use technology in music-making, identifying the latter as the salient aspect of then current practice. A series of (my own) titles riffing on Benjamin (e.g., Waters "The Musical Process") should perhaps have alerted me earlier to the fact that this was already a long (and old) story, and that it would perhaps have been better to start by asking what an un-technologised musical practice might look like.

Having therefore caught up with the idea that music is *ubiquitously* technologised I moved to narratives which, drawing initially on James Gibson's

(1979) ecologically-framed writings on perception and then from embodied and situated cognition (e.g. Gallagher), tried to think about performance as ecosystemic: as always involving networks and interdependences between people, things and environments (and ideas) in (musical) making. The work of Lucy Suchman (2007) and my then research colleague John Bowers (2003) gave me a way of understanding my narratives of my own practice and that of my students as doing ethnographic work. As a performer in physical theatre companies I was acutely aware of the extent to which *performance* extends offstage into daily life.

Later, teaching in an institution with a history of involvement in interaction design I became increasingly concerned with how humans behave in their conduct with objects and ideas (rather than what designers or composers assume or hope they will do) and came to realise the privileged context which musical improvisation gives for studying the ad hoc, the shiftingly heuristic, the adaptive, the unforeseen and the fleeting in the network of relations between humans and things.

Practice

In practice-based activities, doing is a form of knowing: meaning emerges through participation. It's also a form of speculation, of research. The qualities of dynamic, context-sensitive conduct which are characteristic of musicking are also characteristic of cooking or gardening, and of social interaction and relationship making⁷. This type of knowledge is sustained by continuous activity. To paraphrase Impett, while in some contexts we can consider scientific knowledge to be cumulative, knowledge produced through art is always processual and performative - it needs to be constantly engaged with to sustain its emergent truths (19).⁸ Such knowledge has an ambivalent relationship with (propositional) language.

Language, Speculation and Improvisation

Lakoff and Johnson may have drawn our attention to the origin of language's meaningfulness in touch and physicality, but the habitual deployment of language as if it were propositional conceals or masks this reality. Language can afford the opportunity of conduct at *too much* remove from the tactile to be entirely trustworthy. Music, and particularly improvised music (which privileges the speculative over the propositional) is somehow closer to its origin of meaningfulness in the physical than is language. It more readily admits of its status as *touching at a distance*, and in doing so it allows us to explore intimacies without the invasiveness of *actual* touch, but without the "forgetfulness (of origin)" of propositional language. And we can hear in the proto-linguistic experiment of infants the transition from the speculative performative/poetic mode which operates in music (and in poetry) to languaging in the propositional sense.

One reason why musical improvisation may be such a potentially fertile ground for understanding human relations and activity is its status as a practice which

appears not to rely on, or at least to downplay, talk. It is a “tacit knowledge” par excellence. In a very real sense it needs no theorizing and can be understood entirely by being in the practice. Competence in it is gained by becoming part of the community of practice, and there are, to paraphrase Collins (2001) no *hidden* structures which underlie the practice, or which need to be understood in order to participate.

Conduct within improvisation *is* its meaningfulness. In this regard the improviser’s frequent shyness of talk *about* improvising may significantly reflect natural language’s habitual concern with propositional logic, and downplaying of the performative or poetic. In short, improvisation is usually much more concerned with *how* than with *what* - or with what is shown, rather than what is told.

And of course this is how empathy works too.

Empathy

Empathy - the capacity to engage successfully or mutually beneficially with others - would seem to have only two preconditions: curiosity (inquisitiveness) and trust. “Success” in an empathic exchange might be defined by the willingness of those involved to voluntarily continue the interaction, and “ethical conduct” by acknowledging that the process of mutual calibration and exploration cannot be achieved only through simple mimetic behavior:⁹ that there needs to be a degree of risk-taking, and that any outcome is emergent and unknowable.

As a practitioner rather than a philosopher my loose heuristic take on empathy is that it is processual, and involves non-appropriative recognition of qualities and processes of difference and otherness. It is an opening of the self to the other. As I suggested above, the other(s) in question need neither be animate, nor sentient, despite a vernacular understanding that empathy occurs between living creatures.¹⁰ Empathy embraces unknown-ness and unfamiliarity not in the spirit of the *homo economicus* who engages with another for personal gain, nor entirely in the mode of disinterested altruism, but in the mode of enhanced mutual (and therefore ultimately socially or community-oriented) emergent richness of potential. Potential is not regarded as goal-oriented, but as a space of further possibility - of recognizing “other” ways of being - of an increasing of options - of surplus.¹¹

Empathy and/as “Play”

Improvisation is, fundamentally, behaviour which privileges trust over prior knowledge. Far from being irrational, such behaviour enables humans to engage in interaction faster, and with more complexity, than other organizational strategies. Like its strong relations, instinct and intuition, it affords rapid, supple, dynamic conduct. And competence in improvised behaviours builds stability into broader (social) structures, as even in contexts where trust proves misplaced, adaptation to the new context is a more likely outcome than “failure”.

So improvising - *playing* with possibilities - appears to be a significant “group empathy” skill, and unsurprisingly the literature on play provides strong models for how such skills are developed. Caillois (1958), for example, subdivides “play” into *agon* (rule-based games), *alea* (chance), *mimesis* (imitation) and *illinx* (or vertigo - a deliberately induced alteration of perception). The role (and limits) of mimesis as a strategy for the establishment of trust were noted above, although with *agon*, *alea* and *illinx* it encourages experiment with individuality and identity, regarding these as processual, contingent, emergent, and co-constituted in social action. These key modes of human development are improvisational. Empathy is therefore a process through which encounters with others and otherness may be productive of supplementary potential for the self: productive of a larger, less “boundaried” sense of what a self might be.

Grace and Danger/Othering the Self/Porous Boundaries

Most musicians know the capacity to pick up an instrument and to *find oneself* an hour later (the choice of words is important), still playing, having temporarily put the self into a kind of abeyance - attentive to musicking, but oblivious to ego. And when Billy Elliot is called for audition at the Royal Ballet in Stephen Daldry’s eponymous film, and proceeds in all his supposed unsophistication to demonstrate the sheer exhilaration and beauty of the moving human body, the interviewers ask him what it feels like when he’s dancing. Billy’s response is: “Once I get going I forget everything -. I sort of disappear”.

When Penelope Deutscher, in a wonderful essay, contrasts Sartre and de Beauvoir’s descriptions of sexual activity and the erotic, she finds a crucial difference between Sartre’s insistence that in sex or desire he is *reduced* to his own body, and de Beauvoir’s more subtle observation that “to touch the skin of another, to experience one’s own *and the other’s* desire, is a complex relation both of similitude... ..*and of difference*” (Deutscher 145, emphasis added).

To slightly rephrase Deutscher (147), the erotic is, for de Beauvoir, the context for the rethinking of (what is valuable in) self-other relations. The erotic becomes a locus of engagement with the difference of the other. She quotes Debra Bergoffen, who phrases this poignantly, as “an ethics of protecting the other’s strangeness” (151). So, for Deutscher, in de Beauvoir “the troubling and threatening world that renders me vulnerable” is celebrated as “an erotic world in which we are continually able to experience as ‘new’” (151). Perhaps this “troubling” or vulnerable world which de Beauvoir celebrates is also the world of the improviser (in the broadest sense): a world in which there is continuous dynamical reassignment of roles, interpretations, assumptions.

For Sartre, by contrast, a “good” body is “an invisible body of which I am not directly conscious as I engage in activities in the world”(Deutscher 147). In sexual and erotic activity “reduction to the bodily” renders his concept of desire “fundamentally appropriative: I touch the other’s flesh with hidden and self-serving intent, and my strategy is to possess the other’s consciousness” (152).

It would be easy to see the musician's temporary "losing" of the self when playing, or Billy Elliot's "disappearance" as contiguous with Sartre's "good" body - as disembodied through inattention. But I'd argue that the musicianly "self-loss" and Billy Elliot's "absence" are more akin to de Beauvoir's position: the relationship with the other - whether with the environment or the instrument - is extensive but non-appropriative. The self (body) is in an ethical relation with otherness. One improvisatory strategy of empathy might thus be in "othering the self" through the relinquishing of familiar assumptions that "control" or "exploration" must always be conscious attentive conduct.¹²

Instruments of Extensive Sensing

Musical instruments are prosthetic, amplifying and extending the reach of human conduct and behavior. Just as the voice can manifest the immense range and complexity of human response, "performing" confidence whilst betraying uncertainty, for example, so the materiality of physical musical instruments can transduce the habits and characteristics of the player, affording the most intimate and dynamically supple acts of calibration: of sounding out the space, and of calibrating to others. The business of calibration is not necessarily mimetic. It might be about the mutual determination of *separate* positions, or the exploration of precisely related difference. As I write, I'm imagining this as an improvised musical context, but of course in our vocal conduct - through performative talk, unconscious utterance and propositional exchange and argument - we are "sounding out" our relations with the world and others all the time. Paradoxically our putative "individuality" consists hugely of this processual tuning and retuning to environmental and social context, and of our subsequent reflection on or "replaying of" these interactions.

That we have immense trust in these processes is evident in the language we use in extremis: "I want to hear that from your own mouth" or "tell me that you don't love me" are phrases which acknowledge the voice's capacity to *show* truth, whatever it is telling. Although "finding one's own voice" is such a powerful metaphor of individuation, paradoxically the sound of one's own voice is the one embodied characteristic which is far clearer to others: it's something to which we have objective access only through recording: through being "reflected back" to ourselves. The business of finding one's own voice is, equally paradoxically, largely the result of that voice's improvised interaction with others. It is co-emergent: a shifting outcome of its histories as much as of its physical attributes. In an explicitly musical context an instrument shares with the voice the peculiar capacity to amplify hesitation, inexpertise or insecurity, and equally to transduce grace, "effortlessness", control, certainty and inevitability. Such capacities led Bennett Hogg to characterize the violin, memorably, as a "lie detector" (Hogg "The Resistant Violin").

Humans and Computers

Following this poetic phrasing of the violin's sensor-like increasing of the human capacity for discrimination and for verification, I'd like to revisit an earlier assertion - that in a network of human and non-human actors empathy might be

designed-for - by looking at some examples of attribution of indigenous agency to circuits, computers and software, to knobs and physical interfaces, and to sound itself. This becomes urgent precisely because of the ubiquity of computers, which are effectively open-ended remapping machines, presenting to us possibilities for interactions largely independent of the resistances of the material world. Such resistances must therefore be consciously designed into such interactions. Thus far much “interaction design” has focused on comprehensibility, ease-of-use, legibility, predictability. But much in our meaningful engagement with otherness lies in difficulty, resistance, unforeseeability, fragility, ephemerality, risk.

The work of John Bowers (e.g., 2003) is concerned with improvised conduct which explores the relation of risk, unforeseen-ness, and dynamic adjustment or calibration to the characteristics of the various actors or agents involved in activity, but also concerns itself with the extent to which such conducts can be *designed-for* in our interactions: counter-intuitive principles for the design of improvised musical interactions which potentially link musicking to notions of improvisation as an indigenous conduct beyond the musical.

Bowers suggests that “the body is always improvising, impedance matching with muscles, conforming to the design (resistances and affordances) of the interface”.¹³ In critically investigating the emerging principles of interaction design and human-machine interfacing, he has identified (e.g., Bowers and Hellström) four “transgressive” principles of interaction design which diverge significantly (especially when taken together) from those which frequently inform “good” design practice (e.g., Rovan et al.):

(1) *Algorithmic mediation* stores muscular or tactile input in such a manner that its status and relationship with a particular temporal moment is malleable. Rather than the relationship between a gesture or a complex developing behavior being “hard-wired” a layer (or layers) of data are captured or stored for use “out-of-time”. Such mediation, which is distinct from direct manipulation, might serve to defamiliarise us with our own characteristic patterns of conduct, while retaining connections with that past conduct which can be revisited or repurposed. (Of course at some level all digital information is “algorithmically mediated” but here the point is that the algorithmic mediation allows data to be remapped, transformed, or moved in time).

(2) *Divergent mappings* deploy simple input devices to produce complex results. Devices with a small number of degrees of freedom (such as a knob) are mapped to multiple complex behaviours in order to introduce “expressive lassitude”. These require careful algorithmic design to compensate for the small number of input data streams. Such “divergent” or “few-to-many” mappings can help in modeling systems with the richness and complex interrelationship of touch and response characteristic of many acoustic musical instruments.

(3) *Dynamic adaptation* occurs when devices rescale or remap input

during the time of a performance, the interface's function changing dynamically under algorithmic control. This produces devices which do not respond in an entirely consistent and predictable manner, requiring constant attention and adjustment from the performer.

(4) *Anisotropic interaction space* introduces non-linear and discontinuous mappings, such that, for example, gradual movement of a fader may operate predictably over some parts of its travel, but introduce radical discontinuities at others, perhaps flipping into a contrasting behavior at a dynamically slightly-shifting point, thus requiring real-time evaluation and adjustment on the part of the performer.¹⁴

Taken as a group these design principles reintroduce non-linearity, unpredictability, unforeseen-ness, instability etc. in a manner requiring dynamic, adaptive, improvisational conduct of the performer. Used in a musical context, they encourage attentive listening and constant adaptation. In a sense they are principles which *design-for* empathy, confounding assumptions and emphasizing the dynamism (and risk) of the **encounter**.

Emergent Outcomes/What Might We Learn From Improvising?

My writing here is consistent with my topic insofar as it began without a clear goal, seeking to collide listening, improvisation, empathy and ethics with a view to illuminating a network of relationships among them. I didn't start from a blank page: it's a pervasive trope of both the literature on group improvising in music (e.g., Bailey, Prévost), and of the more informal discourse around it, that this activity is in some mysterious way necessarily a locus of empathy, and by association with that quality necessarily generative of ethical conduct. But despite the historical ties with collectivist ideologies and broadly leftist thought evident in the British flavour of "free improvised" music (e.g., in the work and thought of Cornelius Cardew (Tilbury), of John Stevens (1985) and of Eddie Prévost (1995/2004) it doesn't take much digging to unearth within that tradition the conflicts, jealousies and territorial defensiveness which are prevalent in human social interaction everywhere.

I therefore find myself reversing the logic of this familiar argument, and suggesting that rather than improvisation encouraging empathy, or being productive of ethical conduct, the capacity for empathy is *in itself* inevitably improvisational: productive of improvising.

This reversal is crucial for a variety of reasons. Firstly **it places improvisation centre-frame as a key form of organizing conduct** - one deployed on a daily basis by all humans - rather than as something peripheral or specialised. Secondly **empathy can be brought into conscious focus as a bunch of improvisatory skills to be explored and exercised**: willingly approaching the unfamiliar, the other, can be a powerful tool for productive approaches to relationships, identities, processes and objects. It is a true "**research**" **ethos** in which prior assumptions are minimised, suppressed or challenged.¹⁵

A quick review of some other emergent thoughts which came into focus through the improvisational process of writing might include the following:

- * Intersensorial information is richer than single-sense data, enabling better, suppler, faster judgments: sonic information is intimately bound up with the tactile and proxemic.
- * Bodies are always in complex dynamic networks with things and environments: things, as much as people, may be crucial in empathic, improvisational conduct.
- * Timing is crucial at every level from the micro-second to the millenium. As we never start from an "ideal" or predictable context we (and our objects) bring histories to the table which construct us despite our efforts to open to the other. Improvisation allows us to evaluate and change course without relying entirely on conscious processes: it can thus be fast.
- * Doing is knowing, without the mediation of language: where language takes time to *tell*, doing may more quickly *show*. In tacit knowledge, conduct is meaningfulness. Musical "free improvisation", for example, is characterized by an unusually precise coincidence between making and listening.
- * Although imitation/mimesis may have a role in empathic conduct, empathy typically involves risk, including being vulnerable in the face of otherness.
- * Individuation is a process, negotiated at least in part through empathic conduct.
- * The strong congruence between improvisation and empathy is based on their shared preconditions: trust, risk-taking, and curiosity about "the other".
- * A capacity for empathy is developed through play. Modes of play are modes of improvised *organizing*, often allowing for *emergent, unforeseeable* outcomes.
- * Music is a key improvisational practice not least because it has a history of devising instruments which extend intersensorial capacity.

Empathic interaction leaves time for silence: reflection is crucial, despite the rapid, supple and contingent nature of improvised conduct. Empathy involves privileging "listening" (in the extended sense developed here) over "speaking". As a rule of thumb one should listen more than speaking.

Both improvisation and emergent outcomes are anathema in a world configured to increase "productivity" and reduce "risk". Yet the alternative is a world in which accountability is externally imposed, in which all goals are pre-planned, in

which research is not adequately speculative. Of course an ethics of responsibility (self-accountability), a perpetual opening of the self to vulnerability, is not going to be embraced by everyone, nor is it attainable for everyone, so improvised structures need to be supple enough to acknowledge this. Much current research¹⁶ addresses itself to how (or even if) one can study groups of improvisers with emergent behaviours. Perhaps the ethical is the emergent outcome of a network of appropriately or mutually empathic conducts, something which, like improvisation, can be *designed-for*, but never designed or specified.

I may sometimes seem to have veered away from listening, but it is my contention that music, with its basis in the *tactile-sonic*, born in the womb and elaborated in the first few months after birth, provides a unique site for the examination of *non appropriative self-other relations*. Of course, this is not **only** a matter of listening, or if so, it's a matter of listening with the whole body - the *empathic* body. And that empathic body is also necessarily an improvising body.

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Notes

¹ For more information, see <http://translatingimprovisation.com/about>.

² "Production" because individuality is here regarded as processual rather than fixed, indeed the conception of individuation as process is essential in affording empathy, which thrives in contingent, dynamical situations.

³ See below for a discussion of appropriative and non-appropriative othering in the context of erotic behavior.

⁴ One might say that the repetitions and redundancies of some Irish traditional music afford its co-inhabiting of a bar with other social sounds, the detailed familial relations within a string quartet demand a "chamber" environment for their most successful apprehension, and the elaborate virtuosic pianism of Liszt or the extraordinary non-vernacular technique of the operatic voice are about attempting to overcome the distance between performer and audience.

⁵ I'm currently embarking on a study of the precise manner in which improvising musicians set up their own physical environments, taking into account the manner in which "priority systems" are built into complex assemblages of components through "handedness", adjacency, and distributed forms of autonomy and interaction.

⁶ Collective musicking might be regarded as a crucible for the development and management of multiple attentiveness. In an improvised, unforeseeable context **any** channel of information, **any** state-change might be the "difference which makes a difference" (Bateson 315)

⁷ Indeed musicking is regarded as co-extensive with other forms of human activity in which adaptivity and improvisation are foregrounded.

⁸ And even scientific knowledge is best regarded as processual and performative - it's just that its time-scales are rather longer than those of e.g. musicking. In this respect scientific knowledge might be regarded as analogous with our interactions with the physical material world - which feel cumulative and "permanent" - but the qualities we attribute to the material world - and against which we verify experience - are better regarded as "histories" rather than

attributes of those materials. These are the histories which construct mind, both individual and social.

⁹ And such imitative “co-feeling” is not inevitably good, whether at the level of empathic mimesis, or in calls for the social good, as both individuals and groups can “manufacture” consensus. *Acknowledging* the difference of the other may be more productive (though more difficult) than superficial attempts to “imagine another’s experience” which constitute some flavours of empathy.

¹⁰ The word empathy does not appear to have a Greek origin, growing rather from the German romantic concept of *Einfühlung* - a term from aesthetics describing the spectator’s relation to the art object. Perhaps some of this sense of “reading out” of an object, given a more relational and dynamic twist, indeed getting beyond the object being an object, and regarding it as a network of both potential and past relations - “a lateral set of associations” (Bowers in conversation with the author) might revitalize this earlier sense of empathy encompassing human/non-human relationships. A continuity with the earlier sense of the term is retained too in the capacity to somehow read out a trace of the producer of an object.

¹¹ It is, in this regard, congruent with the idea of “the gift” expounded most beautifully by Robert Macfarlane (2016).

¹² This might be in the mode of Caillois’ *vertigo*, or in performing a task with “appropriate” attention such that it occurs with “grace” (without excess). A banal example of the latter might be that one can often more successfully throw a ball of paper into a waste bin when conversing or otherwise “distracted”, than by concentrating on the task.

¹³ In conversation with the author (April 2016).

¹⁴ Such behaviours mimic the “bifurcations” which occur in interaction with some physical devices, John Coltrane’s fascination with “unstable” fingerings on the saxophone being a case in point.

¹⁵ Note that this is in stark contrast to the “research” ethos prevalent in current UK higher education, which is instrumentalised, goal-oriented and in which “outcomes” are over-determined by “methodologies”.

¹⁶ Notably that (as yet unpublished) of my current PhD supervisees Juan Manuel Loaiza Restrepo and Tristan Clutterbuck.