

## Improvisation in Dance and Music Simon Rose with Ingo Reulecke

### I

Leading from parallel mid-century developments of improvisation in contemporary dance and music the practices of improvisation in dance and music (IDM) are becoming increasingly integrated. There is a multiplicity of activity and history involving such improvisation; the diversity of experience and range of engagement with improvisation together with the varied interpretations and uses of improvisation in both music and dance is so broad it defies categorisation. Improvisation may be employed explicitly as: a method and a goal; a codified performance; a way of composing; a strategy within rehearsal towards a more fixed, repeatable outcome for performance; and in myriad permutations. Improvisation's fluidity is attractive in offering creative openness to individuals and groups. This will be aided and developed by means of learning from experience as performer, and as audience of improvisation in performance, creative choices, the aesthetic orientation, and the practical experience and skill of participants. But it is also dependent upon language that leads to how improvisation is articulated and becomes understood and shared within practice. This essay sets out to explore and reveal the process of improvisation in music and dance by means of the shared practice of a dancer and a musician. The unfolding discussion aims to extend the discourse of shared improvisation in music and dance in this underarticulated yet growing field. Significantly, improvisation is an artistic practice in which collaboration is a formative feature, one that occurs in changing contexts and across domains (Rose 2017). This collaborative, social aspect distinguishes the artistic form – the understanding of which can be a corner stone for the development of practice.

IDM can represent a culturally significant meeting of scenes: improvised music and contemporary dance. It is formed through a kind of percolation of improvisation practices in both dance and music – a movement from hermetic to generally understood, accepted practice that can absorb and cross styles in an aesthetically fluid manner. Improvisation is currently implicitly employed within the development of dance performance and dance training, and improvisation has become a lingua franca that enables contemporary creative musicians. The improviser's curiosity and particular skill in exploring forms, that may cross boundaries, leads to the meeting of these practices. This essay aims to give shape to this distinct form of artistic encounter by exploring the shared process.

The diversity in improvisation in music and dance is wholly characteristic of activity and this presents a challenge to thinking that seeks generic definition. This diversity is also a particular strength that is capable of embracing a multiplicity of both different approaches from music and dance and different ways of sharing of music and dance. At the same time the broad range, the lack of generic definition within shared practice, results in a theoretical tension that has problematized the development of IDM discourse and its understanding, and thus the development of shared knowledge and practices. This is, perhaps, evidenced by the way in which the practice of shared improvisation in music and dance is not even named. The need for a workable nomenclature is long overdue - for this reason we make use of IDM

as a means of encapsulating the tendency for shared improvisation in the performance of music and dance.

This essay involves an exchange between dancer Ingo Reulecke (IR) and musician Simon Rose (SR). Since 2015 the pair have performed through shared improvisation in music and dance in numerous contexts: as a duo, in small groups, in large ensembles. Together they have also co-taught, facilitated workshops and presented themes of their shared work at conferences. Through the sharing of practice their overlapping interests led to a rich, ongoing exchange that became focussed on the potential and simultaneity of improvisation in music and dance. In November 2019 they decided to consolidate their inquiry through a structured period of practice based studio sessions involving improvising in music and dance dedicated to explicating their shared process in dance and music. Over a five month period the two met for weekly studio sessions in order to address questions that are commonly asked in the field of IDM. How does this shared practice emerge? How does open-improvisation become particularly potent for such working together? How are processes shared? Are there shared touchstones and techniques of practice as music and dance work together? Can we articulate useful approaches without becoming overly prescriptive? Are there strategies that can become shared between dance and music? Both are experienced teachers and a pedagogical lens has been employed in sessions that delimits the scope of research, one that makes acknowledgement of IDM as creative process while allowing for the necessary complexity at work. These questions are addressed by the prioritising of *doing* first – through which shared practice develops and reflection follows. The goal is to go deeper than a ‘trafficking in procedures’ (Chrysa Parkinson) common in much arts education and training but to question *why* we are engaged in IDM as well as how and what we do. In the process key features of working in this manner are identified that, in turn may become a reference for practitioners and students of dance and music, researchers, as well as those interested in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary processes.

In studio sessions an approach was agreed in which open improvisation activity was privileged and then reflected upon; subsequently, strategies for working in IDM were explored. Sessions were recorded in audio and written form. Reflections and discussion were transcribed and exchanged in written thematic exchange – and then subjected to further shared, thematic reflection (a hermeneutic circle). For practice in improvisation, the agreed need to prioritise participative action in not pre-determined fashion through embodied processes that are shared has been balanced with the overall reflexivity needed for the aims of the project. While value was placed upon individual and shared experience, the pedagogical lens’ consideration of the work’s more generalised application led to a deepening of questioning of activity and the broadening of findings. Improvisation had a central role as the mode of creative activity and also the means of discovery or method for the purposes of research. In this way, the research method was integrated within the nature of the shared IDM practice. This created a processual complexity that called for a lengthy subsequent period of cyclical reflection and analysis.

IDM begins and ends in improvisation. For practice, the term *open-improvisation* became favoured. A related term that can be helpful (also from music,) is not-pre-determined improvisation (Bailey 1992). Terms such as Instant Composition and Contact Improvisation,

while offering possible partial descriptions of what happens in IDM are also already associated with other practices and procedures. Improvisation in music is a very broad term that can include idiomatic (styles) as well as non-idiomatic improvisation. While *free* improvisation is commonly used in music to refer to the kind of open improvisation that is the shared practice in IDM, it also has particular historical associations, and, while significant, the philosophical enormity of connotations leading from the *free* aspect is tangential to our current focus. Rather, open improvisation emphasises the necessary quality required for IDM practice. The openness to the discovery of the other's presence and practice, the willingness to be vulnerable and adaptable to how the other's practice may call upon you to respond. *Open* here relates to an open-mindedness in creativity that can be developed though building confidence in IDM as a practice and this is described in what follows.

## II

IR: I was at the early stages of becoming a professional dancer during the late 1970s when the contemporary dance scene emerged in Berlin. I'd worked on a variety of projects with different choreographers and was studying classical dance but felt limited by the form. When Tanzfabrik [Dance Factory] began in 1978 this really marked the beginning of contemporary dance in Berlin. At that time Tanzfabrik was a radical collective working in an experimental manner with different expertise and interests within and beyond dance, it became a cultural corner-stone for a new approach to dance making. But dancer / choreographer Regina Baumgart was a main influence for me, I admired her work and could see how it related to contemporary post-modern choreographers in the US. As a mover she had her own special qualities and as a choreographer she was interested in abstract dance in a pure form. I joined her company.

I was always connected to music. I found it particularly interesting if a composer became directly involved in the choreographic process, as a form of exchange. This was inspiring for my own choreography: at this time, I also developed my own dance pieces as soloist, in duos and larger groups. As a teenager I'd explore contemporary and experimental music and subsequently made music by myself and enjoyed that very much: playing piano, keyboards and percussion. Improvisatory forms in both music and dance opened my eyes to a larger field and broadened my artistic horizon. In the 1980s Gisela Colpe and others, who had studied with Mary Wigman [expressionist dance], began large group improvised performances in which I participated. I found the risk involved in the not-fixed performance particularly exciting. It was a relief from the never-ending cycle of rehearsing material for the stage. I enjoyed the responsibility that I was given through improvisation in dance - to respond in the moment and this could include the music.

SR: I play baritone saxophone, a large instrument that brings its own particular physicality and presence to any collaboration (be it in music, dance or elsewhere) and that in itself is a consideration for IDM, I'll come back that. I've become committed to improvisation both as performer and a researcher and fascinated by its broad processes and IDM plays directly into this interest. Having said that I don't identify as a kind of 'improvising fundamentalist', I take a broad view of improvisation as a process - and I enjoy good work regardless of its

relation to improvisation, although improvisation is ubiquitous, most certainly in music. My present interest in working with dance grew from a PhD study (2013) that explored improvisation in music and learning via phenomenology. One outcome of that study was that, as well as disciplinary, improvisation could be usefully situated as what I described as an 'important human capability' that can be found across experience. From there I decided to 'walk the talk' by testing this in practice and, initially, a rich performance / research partnership developed with dancer Andrew Wass (Rose 2016) who, in addition, also researches improvisation but in dance. To give a fuller context I should mention that, although I am a professional musician, an autodidact in music, I studied drama at Dartington College of Arts, England in the late 1970s and Release dance taught by Mary O'Donnell Fulkerson was a mandatory, daily part of the drama course. In keeping with the zeitgeist, visiting lecturers included Steve Paxton whose approach included his dynamic developments in contact in improvised dance. There may well have been some broad, perhaps less conscious influence in my background as well. My parents met while working in the theatre and my father, David Rose, for example, prior to his long career in television and film, was tour manager for the influential Kurt Jooss Tanztheatre Company. I realize I've been interested in the potential of what I'd now call interdisciplinary artistic work since the 1970s -co-founding Fish Theatre Company (1979) all members were theatre practitioners and also musicians - when the theatre group ceased after two years the resulting music group continued successfully in the post-punk London scene of the early 1980s. That group involved drummer Mark Sanders and, through his influence, was where I first experienced the more exciting possibilities offered by open improvisation.

Considering the very relation between improvisation in dance and music is necessary in order to better understand the relation between the two. Some of the music / dance background can inform thinking. For example, it is notable that in the work of Kurt Jooss, Mary Wigman and others in Germany in the last century, dance moved away from any presumed connection to music. And, since the 1970s, developments from the US such as Release and Contact Improvisation (somatic dance) typically don't make use of music. These developments, and others, pointed to dance as free standing art form. This calls for a reflexivity concerning how and even why improvisation in music may relate to contemporary dance. So too, the description of artistic activity involving sound and movement, music and dance in improvisation in performance can acknowledge the fluidity of identity found in this field. There may be a commonality between approaches but there are also many interpretations. The terms of reference are so broad - sound and music in conjunction with dance and movement is both as-old-as-the-hills and ever present. This breadth and potential is particularly exciting as it demonstrates the endless possibilities arising through shared improvisation practice. This offer of creative choices to individuals and groups is life affirming, a profound feature of IDM, so overly prescribing this shared activity is unhelpful.

IR: I've been involved with this sort of practice for about twenty years - working in sessions with musicians in what I've described as real-time composition. I like to make this reference to the established, distinct Echtzeitmusik (real-time music) scene in Berlin. I'm curious as to how we make sense out of what we are doing. For example, how do we manage to create a coherent improvisation, or real-time composition? How can we better understand such

composition, that appear in the moment, without specific preparation? I find this experience regularly in sessions with dance and music. And so, in our work together over the five month period I've been interested in how a development of shared practice can take place alongside a deepening of understanding of the complex processes at work. In order to do this, we privilege what we call open improvisation or real-time composition, as this compositional aspect is a constant. Through our research design we immediately reflect verbally upon and record that which has occurred in IDM activity. This then forms a flow of iterative activity within our process. Often, we'll find an immediate reflective response with substantial thoughts and ideas concerning the relation between music / dance, sound / movement. I guess we are able to reach this level quickly as we've both been involved in extensive work in this field for many years.

SR: The connection to Berlin's *Echtzeitmusik* is interesting. This music scene is now an umbrella term for a wide range of music practices – you can find noise, string quartets, electronics, jazz based, compositional procedures, and much more. However, beyond styles and labels, a closer look reveals improvisation, in different ways, as a thread that runs through, and connects musicians. Typically, musicians are able to collaborate and perform within this array through some shared understanding of improvisation. In this way improvisation forms a connectivity, much as how we are using it.

Over the months since we began this systematic research approach, turning over what the nature of our practice together is, this simple word *shared* has become a constant. Shared is referred to in its broadest sense – the shared agreement to do something together – even if this is activity that can be oppositional or have great juxtaposition – the shared-ness remains. Collaboration is happening, and this is an important theme of improvisation, but shared-ness seems to go to deeper level of mutual understanding – perhaps because in addition to collaboration IDM includes this interdisciplinary aspect that calls for the other to further trust in the development of a new area. It is certainly to do with working with sensitivity. At the level of embodiment and intuition we already know what is going on, after all we successfully perform together, and this is, in large part, due to knowledge and skill that we are bringing from our respective fields. But the challenge here is to articulate this embodiment in words. Of course, *shared-ness* can suggest a 'touchy-feely', cocooned kind of activity that may be suited to privacy and in which consensus is the likely goal. Incubatory activity is certainly nurturing but I think we are dealing more in terms of having left the nest – we're not spring chickens. Shared-ness here is also towards the development of understanding a professional performance practice.

We are involved in a situated performance practice in which, through improvisation, context and the content are intertwined. So, this shared-ness of performance practice extends to the audience. The being-in-the-world nature of what we do through engagement with improvisation is important. So, shared-ness involves a robust, dynamic activity. Working closely with the other, who is simultaneously involved in a practice other than your own, requires a kind of heightened sense of sharing. Truly being there for one another in a creative, public context requires real commitment in terms of time, energy and thinking, I experience this as felt in our collaboration.

IR: What I've experienced in sessions with musicians, as well as dancers, I find very special. These moments of shared space and time tend to occur more often with musicians than with dancers - these days I'm performing more frequently with musicians. Often what takes place is not described or discussed in advance. This emphasis on the temporal creative process is in high contrast to rehearsing in order to construct a fixed dance piece or product. I find the former more productive and creative. We are immersing ourselves, together, in a zone of openness, an open field. This is a particularly interesting shared, participatory moment. The idea of shared space, in which we are paying attention, together, is really important. The space is working for us and this supports the outcome of the improvisation. The consideration of time is also important: explicit choices about the way we relate to time, for example deciding in advance how long we will work for, perhaps five or thirty minutes, can lend to productive outcomes - particularly for those new to this shared improvisation practice.

For the development of practice the quality of attention in practice needs to be highlighted. And this is informed by experience - there's a discernable difference when we encounter those who have developed a conscious quality of paying attention via work on awareness, listening and so forth. Through which empathy in practice becomes possible in the moment of improvising and this enables a kind of flow to develop between us.

SR: Since working with dancers I've a deepened interest in the body as a through theme of both dance and music - while musicians are often preoccupied with an instrument we undeniably share this theme of body, we have an equal bodily presence. This explains why ideas and material arising from the field of dance rather than music per se has become naturally foregrounded in our work on strategies for approaching IDM together -such practice offers huge interdisciplinary potential. Let's discuss some specific examples from our studio sessions. You introduced the idea of the four corners of the feet for our improvisation work in music and dance. I found this increased awareness useful, as a musician I don't much consider how I am standing, or moving, and the very basis, the contact with the ground is fundamental.

IR: I find the awareness of the extremities very important in dance as it connects us physically with the space and the environment. The feet carry such fundamental importance for our movement. Directing and enhancing our perception of how the feet engage with the ground is very important for me and I do this through work on what I call the 'four corners of the feet'. The four points are: inner ball, outer ball, inner heel, outer heel. By aiming to experience these more fully we may achieve an increased conscious approach to grounding. We also increase awareness of how our body's weight is distributed through parts of the feet. My approach in this work on awareness and perceiving is to focus upon one part of the body and from there direct the concentration to other parts. We then expand our perception, making us more present, more concentrated. I think of this part of the practice as becoming tuned. This work prepares us for open improvisation. And, it's worth registering how precise preparatory work may influence and determine the quality of the open improvisation that follows.

SR: I also found concentrating and developing awareness of how I am in contact with the ground also led to a kind of calming, sort of meditative state, and when we began the improvisation I was led to continue rather than break this feeling and connectedness with the ground. So, in that respect through improvisation the exercise shaped the composition of the music. In our sessions you also introduced the idea of what you call the four dignities.

IR: Yes, the four dignities are: sitting, standing, lying and walking. I like to introduce simplicity, be it with dance or dance plus music, and there are various reasons for this. By paying close attention to something that is very familiar and simple we can open new perspectives about ourselves, how we move, and how we relate spatially. We employ these postures all the time yet we are hardly aware of them, we're not conscious of them. The task in the exercise is to carry these out consciously, to feel and become more aware of how we move from one posture to the next, what happens in transition, and how we create a posture (dignity) with our presence. This activity can move from an exercise to a kind of score that is limited by choices regarding the four postures, or dignities. This can become as challenging and complex as participants choose, depending upon ability. But the important thing is to retain the awareness found in the exercise. I find this work necessary in working towards individual and group improvisation as it 'opens up the space' to the body – in other words participants may begin to experience an increased sense of proprioception as a tool for improvisation work. By spending time paying close attention to what we usually think of as the simple things, increasing awareness of these, we can fly high in improvisation. Through this kind of activity, I often find a kind of meditative or highly concentrated state with which I play.

In free exploration I'm often astonished by how much we share in dance and music, the intensity of shared experience, which is multi-layered. It goes far beyond, say, a conversation. Daily, more pedestrian activities rarely reach a deeper level of awareness and communication. There is huge potential for communication and shared experience in this codified art space when we dig into this shared process.

SR: You also introduced a focus on seeing, or looking, as a way into our work. It's a very useful interdisciplinary reference as, regardless of the different orientation of dancers and musician, seeing is equally shared. It's a way of developing awareness and also offers a means of developing material in improvising. I found this engaging: increasing perceptual awareness; noticing and considering the elements of the given space; sensing proprioception, and how we may relate to and within the given space. This subsequently led to William Forsyth's (Forsyth 1996) idea of making the eyes go out of focus as an extension of the seeing exercise. A technique aimed at overriding habitual patterns of moving by creating a different sense of the body as we move.

Foregrounding awareness became a feature of our session and this has covered sensory work that led into the consideration of consciousness, or what it means to be more fully present and available in IDM. This all arose within our *somatic* practice, it seems that what we do is most obviously asking questions of my body, the musician's body – that simply doesn't arise in the everyday culture of musical practice. For a musician, typically, it's only if you have a physical problem that you begin to seriously consider the body, by visiting a

physiotherapist or something similar you may begin to think ergonomically. Sharing such ideas by using the sensory as a reference offers a world of interdisciplinary possibilities. Listening and improvisation is an important interdisciplinary theme (Rose 2018). Of course, listening is crucial in and of itself, and how that is understood can vary immensely in music – from ear-training and the identification of pitch intervals to Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening (Oliveros 2005) which is both a multidisciplinary practice and way of thinking about engagement with sound and music. Oliveros' significant work in this field has extended the use of the word listening to encompass a holistic way of considering the self through listening and sound and Deep Listening has now become a synonym for a more overarching approach, it has been taken up by some in dance.

IR: Yes, awareness is a necessary part of our sharing. In a way the aspect of listening is a holistic one and, in this sense, covering the sensory and even the proprioception. I have the feeling that I'm to some degrees able to listen with my skin and the layers of the body underneath (muscles, bones). But here I mean the whole instrument of the body as a listening or aware one in the best case - that might be something to aim for. I apply all kinds of fine-tuned work to get close to this kind of awareness. By fine-tuned work I mean different practices such as mindfulness training (concentration, meditation, awareness exercises etc.). I believe this is more important work than becoming a virtuoso on an instrument or as a dancer. I connect to Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening - she used different methods and techniques to develop the capacity for listening, in a very broad sense. You can fine tune yourself as a receptive being and you can also fine-tune a way of exchanging information with the outer world in an improvisation in which you are communicating with others in time and space. I appreciate a receptive and aware partner as a co-improviser in the space. I do view this as a holistic process. The whole situation of improvising in performance across artistic disciplines is so complex we need to be fully equipped on many levels to be ready for these huge challenges. I believe strongly that in IDM everything in time and space matters and how we are dealing with ourselves, the other performers as well the audience in any given context is important.

SR: I find the idea of working together in sound plus movement is on the face of it a beguilingly simple idea that turns out to be enormously complicated! As I was becoming more interested in the potential of developing inter-disciplinary work with dance I saw an established dance company in Berlin. The dancers were working with classical musicians and it was clear that there was a thematic choreographic decision for the dancers to work closely and in contact with the musicians' movements, in a way that invited the musicians to form reciprocation – on paper a good idea. But as the classical musicians complied there was also an awkwardness, I felt it was a misunderstanding of the embodied nature of music – the aim overlooked the already highly skilled form of embodiment, the nature of the musicians' presence, already taking place with the musicians. In other words, there are bigger, more interesting questions than how can we draw musicians into dance. Equally, when some enthusiastic musicians work with dancers in improvisation there can be a compulsion to move with or try to mirror the dancer that can be unreflective. Of course, a lot of this is to do with experience, and how much time and care is spent in developing a relationship. There are many sides to this, but by acknowledging the complexity of what we're working with we can develop a useful understanding for the development of practice. To begin with, we can

think of it as musicians developing a dancers awareness, or more holistic awareness, and this as a sensible, practical way in. But, as a point of entry, it's also useful to acknowledge some important differences in the two activities. From a musician's perspective, we are already wholly engaged in an embodied activity, with our instrument (that is also itself a body), this has its own demands for the aesthetic production of music and sound and, of course, this calls for its own perspectival awareness. As musicians are already engaged in their embodied instrumental activity this also contributes to the shared development of IDM. What is the nature of the musician's embodiment? And how does this relate to the dancer's embodiment? Such questions may give rise to contradictions, for example if you look at instrumental pedagogy, in purist saxophone teaching and practice for example movement is frowned upon as it alters the alignment of body / instrument posture and resultant sound production. I find saxophonist Wayne Shorter an amusing and interesting thinker, he is rare in that, even in his eighties, he is constantly seeking to be inventive and creative. He says don't tap your foot, by doing so you are introducing a limitation via a bodily diktat – a limitation to the temporal, improvisational possibilities. He's saying don't move! His preference is to free the musical possibilities by dedicating all activity to creativity in sound without the hinderance of extraneous movement. This is an extreme position but it nevertheless indicates the challenge to overly simplistic thinking about the relation or translation between the two disciplines. I'm thinking here particularly in terms of possibly entry level and pedagogy. Such limitations and resistances also form part of the sharing and indeed offer frameworks for action. Working with such limitation leads to creativity – for example I cannot work successfully without the resistance of the reed in my mouthpiece and we are both working with the limitation and resistance created by gravity. Perhaps one initial way of forming an explicit acknowledging of the nature of our activities is to consider that we simultaneously have a spatial plane and a sonic plane, and we situate ourselves in relation to these – through awareness we have varying degrees of consciousness of these, in IDM we make informed choices regarding the sonic and spatial planes. This can leave the door open for everyone, regardless of experience, skill or level of interest or instrumentation. The interdisciplinary nature of IDM is at its core and interdisciplinarity is achieved through a clarity of approach that acknowledges and values the other. Having said all that, the development of IDM through necessary openness becomes overarchingly holistic, but this holistic nature needs unpacking.

Although the large baritone saxophone can be cumbersome, it has its own form of strong bodily presence. I am fond of it. Now, the logic could be, OK, you want to work with dancers, play a piccolo or use voice but I have developed a love of the sound-world possible with the baritone saxophone; this is my main musical interest, one that I foreground and contribute in collaboration, in any artistic context. I'm consciously working with the resistance and limitations created by the choice of this instrument. So, in my case the somatic ideas that we're exchanging are processed within this limitation. To offer a specific example, in IDM I am working with spatial awareness and developing movement and certain positions, relational choices, and kinds of movement / choices are going to affect the diaphragm that supports the air column and its consistency that creates the sound. (I'm not thinking in this manner while engaged in the activity but this kind of reflection aids the development of practice.) The spatial and sonic is but one strategy for increasing awareness in IDM, in practice we are already thinking and behaving in highly integrated or interdisciplinary ways

- we have already talked about listening as a strategy for dance and movement - being with others in space can be thought of as having its own sense of musicality. Again, the holistic way of working with presence is of practical use when we are dealing with improvisation which, as Sonny Rollins had said, happens too fast to think.

Improvisation, broadly construed, is defining of our shared practice. The term carries different nuances and understandings. What does improvisation mean to you personally? Is it possible to say more about how improvisation is generally understood when dancers meet?

IR: I believe each musician and dancer has their own idea of improvisation and amongst dancers there can be very different approaches to improvising. In our interdisciplinary work you've introduced the term 'open improvisation' from music which we've agreed upon as useful way of exploring together. However, the idea of an open improvisation isn't necessarily shared in the dance community. Improvisation is more generally used in dance as a specific means of generating dance vocabulary. This can be a very different activity from being engaged in open improvisation, the goals are different. In the latter we use the process of improvisation to make a coherent piece together in sound and movement. But what is involved in creating such a coherent piece or dialogue with a partner through improvisation? Listening is perhaps one of the most important tools. Spontaneous activity without preparation is certainly part of my idea of improvisation. However, this can also be questioned by the fact that I warm up my body / mind system and, as I choose put it, the space, and in so doing I form ideas that may inform the performance. And, if I'm active with another improviser, musician or dancer, we're likely to have a verbal exchange, this won't necessarily have anything to do with the following improvisation, nevertheless, this can set the tone for the following exchange in performance. In order to clarify improvisation from my dance-maker's perspective I can explain some ideas of the strategies I'm using in my own work. I have certainly developed a particular, idiosyncratic way of interacting, moving and performing in time and space. I've worked with my body / mind through extensive, rigorous practises over the years and these have become very much inscribed in the body and mind; aspects of these practises are clearly apparent in my improvising. I work with awareness of habitual patterns by deciding upon a kind of tone or strategy that enables me towards a new kind of outcome. This can then become reshaped in the moment as the improvisation develops. This calls for high level awareness and facility in order to gestalt or shape the emerging material in an active, temporal manner. A further approach I employ for improvising is to allow the moment to gestalt the improvisation. This is possible by means of a more allowing attitude. Again, this calls for high level awareness, a responsiveness of body and mind, the creativity stems from spatiality and proprioception. For example, a specific decision to move on a particular line, or on a spot, or working with a specific body tonus, with a very light quality and open joints. Here, I'm deciding in advance what to follow and this can include a decision regarding time. On other occasions I may also employ a thematic component, such as narration, as a trigger for improvisation.

Dancers and musicians in improvisation share and interact in the same space; we've gained disciplinary expertise over a long period in order to develop skill and knowledge of our instrument / body; there may be overlapping strategies and approaches; and, of course,

we're involved in a performance practice. For these reasons I like to refer to the 'common ground'.

SR: There are many different takes on improvisation and this unfixed quality is itself an important aspect of improvisation phenomena. In music, free improvisation and *Echtzeitmusik* are tendencies but also umbrella terms that now encompass many different kinds of music making and aesthetics, a wide diversity of practices in which improvisation is a commonality and you'll find different views and interpretations of the role of improvisation within these scenes. Improvisation can be helpfully understood as an available, adaptable process than a fixed way or even genre. There are discernable differences between how improvisation is situated in the worlds of music and dance. There is not a self-standing improvisation scene in dance comparable to that of music. But there are also regional and local differences in how improvisation is regarded in both music and dance. Improvisation's shifting quality has its own life and power. The diversity of approaches, and the tensions between approaches, is an essential feature that, overall, contributes to the rigorous, creative, growing phenomenon and the avoidance of stagnation. George Lewis has described 'the agility in the term' (Rose 2013) improvisation and Steve Paxton described improvisation as 'a term for something that can't keep a name'. This illusive, not fixed, adapting, shape-shifting quality is also feature of improvisation.

As a musician engaging with interdisciplinarity via music / dance activity, it's worth making this reference to other bodily or somatic practices more overt – it's very present in your work and other dancers I've collaborated with. That may seem all too obvious for a dancer but this has become been a constant presence in our IDM practice together. For example, the four dignities is a term from yoga. I get the impression these somatic practices are so present for contemporary dance that they are simply a given – for example: yoga, tai chi, aikido, Feldenkrais, meditation, Alexander Technique, and more, in addition to the myriad systems of dance that may themselves include aspects of these other bodily practices. This is something of a contemporary milieu of contemporary dance that is rich for sharing with the musician. For any musician with an interest in extending their practice to include working with dance, developing bodily awareness through intermediate activity can certainly offer a bridge, although I would add that this is a question of personal preference and not prescriptive. Overall, we can refer to this kind of activity as somatic – and of course the dance is itself a somatic practice. This is significant for music more generally, music is often regarded via the written, the score, particularly in 'serious' music that is supported institutionally, and by implication this leads to an over-riding more cerebral cultural orientation for activity. The image of the orchestra exemplifies this with static musicians fixedly attached to the written score in which there may be no concern for the embodied nature of music. Rather, through improvisation, developing awareness of music as also a somatic experience has certainly informed my work in a more general way. I have an increased sense in performance of the possibilities offered by any given space. I don't mean that I introduce dance in music performance situations, but I am more alive to how decisions regarding the given space contribute to the shared experience of performance in an interesting manner.

IR: This is a huge topic for me. I have been integrating somatic practices for a long time and Regina Baumgart, who I mentioned previously, was involved in somatic practice through dance. First of all, I became interested of immersing myself in practices that offered other ways of experiencing the body – other states of being - by working consciously with other bodily systems, beyond those most commonly used in dance, such as the muscles and bones. Working with Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method and the Susan Klein Practice led me to a deeper layer of bodily perception. This involves reflective activity that seeks to include the inner bodily state within the overall practice. These methods supported awareness of physical alignment in time and space and my kinaesthetic awareness improved significantly. Unsurprisingly this affected the quality of my dance which became altogether lighter, softer with increased responsiveness and my spectrum of movement qualities increased. Practical engagement with different somatic activity, often in individual work with a teacher, fed self-reflection through conversations about the specifics of a given bodily practice. Over the years, I've found that extensive engagement in extra-somatic activity has impacted upon my dance practice and led to changes in my aesthetic approach. My dance vocabulary has changed: I am more attentive to movement qualities; I tend to question the way in which force is employed. Leading from self-reflection and the improvisation context, this rather searching, or perhaps researching approach has changed the quality of my dancing very much. I'm also sure my work in dance has become prolonged by this kind of additional somatic work as I still dance and perform actively at an advanced age.

SR: A theme we have repeatedly returned to is how improvisation is situated differently within the parallel music and dance scenes. It can be illuminating if we say more about how our practices exist within the broader cultural scene.

IR: There's a very large community of dance practitioners in Berlin that constitutes a diverse contemporary scene within which improvisation is present in a variety of ways. Although in dance there is not really an equivalent to the Echtzeitmusik scene, Berlin probably has the largest group of dance makers in Germany with an interest in improvisation. But within the whole, the number of dancers with a dedicated interest in improvisation is not great. In response to this situation, since 2017 I've run a monthly performance series called Common Ground hosted by Tanzfabrik, Berlin. The impetus was to create a platform where musicians and dancers are able to meet and exchange in improvisation in front of an audience. For each event, we usually program three small groups who each perform a set with a discussion at the end of the evening that involves both audience and performers. This is a chance to reflect upon what has taken place, the approaches taken by musicians and dancers in shared activity, and the effect of working with the other discipline. Despite the increase in this shared IDM activity performance opportunities tend to be sporadic, there was a need for a consistent platform and Common Ground offers the only regular series in Berlin dedicated to presenting music and dance together through improvisation. From time to time other initiatives appear in Berlin dance, usually lone individual's projects. Jenny Haack's Soundance Festival is notable. Since 2016 Soundance has held an annual week of performance activity, workshops, seminars centred upon dance working with music and improvisation is central for much of the work. Commonly we see known visiting improvising dancers in Berlin at venues associated with experimental dance performance. These are

often in the city for teaching work and take the opportunity to perform. In this respect there is little continuity, making it difficult to nurture a consistent scene.

In improvisation practice I've found that establishing working relations over substantial periods of time can certainly contribute to development. In giving an account of our recent more formalised period of weekly session we need to look back in order to assess the current progress and where we are headed. Our duo has been active for several years now and through the development of trust and our shared interest in genuine exploration our work together holds its own particular dynamic and intensity. This shared work is balanced by frequent sessions and regular performances in duo and also in larger groups of musicians and dancers. A strong feature of our sessions is the way in which we have intense reflective exchange arising from the themes and ideas leading from the enacted improvisation. For me, this is quite rare, this verbal exchange is highly informed, and offers exciting content. These interdisciplinary exchanges have provided an opportunity to reflect upon and conceptualise the primary embodied experience of improvising together. In these conversations we've been able to reach other levels of practice, deepening our experience, we've quickly arrived at points of interdisciplinary exchange in which specific aspects have surfaced. In the formalised sessions the exchange was further focussed through audio recording of discussion and written reflection, a research process that, through the spoken and written articulation of what is taking place, fed back by supporting and reinforcing the important embodied processes. Through discussion we often arrive at point in which we'd need to re-enter bodily practice in order to explore. Approaches to bodily awareness and methods of perception were discussed and then jointly selected and we employed joint exercises aimed at focussing and deepening perception. Interdisciplinary exercises were often guided by me and explored together. Typically, this was then followed by a session of improvisation in which perceptual attention would be employed in shared practice. This would lead to further discussion and evaluation. This approach was illuminating as it provided an opportunity to reveal the impact of perceptual work upon the act of improvisation.

### III

There may be a fine line between the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary - both provide ways of thinking about IDM. Interdisciplinary is understood here as those with different disciplinary knowledge and skill sharing in a common aim. Transdisciplinary, as when this disciplinary knowledge and skill is pooled and a third way emerges. In clarifying the nature of IDM this fine line offers a conceptual pivot. Being clear about our disciplinary perspective and the perspective of partners, it is the interdisciplinary nature of our working together that allows for the development of shared practice. The activity is founded in the interdisciplinary through which it can move to more holistic, transdisciplinary performance. We need each other, but are not co-dependent, rather, the more identifiable and rigorous the practice of the other, the deeper their knowledge and skill, the more there is to play with. Systematic reflection forms a powerful means for the sharing that supports this interdisciplinarity. The acknowledgement of interdisciplinarity also creates a more even playing-field for development from a basis of understanding towards *mutual composing* (Rose 2016) in IDM. This foundational acknowledgement of interdisciplinarity offers a baseline position from which the multiplicity within the field of IDM can be embraced, and

we are able to approach limitless questions arising from the diversity of tendencies, opinions and beliefs within IDM.

But, how does interdisciplinarity's emphasis with different disciplines allow for the truer holistic nature of our experience? Isn't IDM more concerned with that which is shared than dwelling upon difference? We all have some sort of experience of music and dance. Some are involved in IDM and have confidence in both fields? What of those whose preference, or way into IDM is to view music as a kind of dance, or dance as music? Of course, to enter the field of IDM requires a curiosity and motivation to share with the other practice creatively. And as the work on learning styles suggests, different people will rightfully prefer to approach a problem in their own way, and this may be kinaesthetic, visual, aural. I recently attended a dance class held by Maria Colusi in which we were guided to develop improvisation within the frame of 'staccato' and 'legato' movement, and Colusi demonstrated the development of 'phrases' by means of 'your inner music'. Everybody in the group of dancers understood the intention via the use of interdisciplinary terms from music, there was no need for discussion. Earlier we referred to the sonic plane and the spatial plane in order to initiate a focus that is capable of embracing both fields without bias. But of course, sound and music are also spatial and, as we see, dance is musical. Nevertheless, the possibilities and opportunities arising from contemporary improvisation in dance and music require that we more consciously develop awareness of ourselves and the other in order that we may delineate our choices in the shared moment of IDM. By going more deeply into IDM practice we become not only more aware but more appreciative of the other's history of practice, as distinct from our own. And this deepens the relational aspect of practice. Such an attitude does not negate but grounds our intuitive, impulsive, and spontaneous responses to the other.

Developing from this informed basis, IDM is freed to develop in becoming a transdisciplinary activity, that is more holistic. Why transdisciplinary? As the distinction between practices softens in collaboration, we become engaged in a less separated third way. Through IDM - shared improvisation in performance – and open-improvisation in particular, we can enter a not-known space, together (the transdisciplinary). Put another way, guitarist Derek Bailey (1992) referred to 'not-pre-determined' improvisation through which outcomes develop in the course of performance. The use of the descriptor 'not-pre-determined' here describes the creative process that takes place *together* forming through a shared unknown – while individuals will have familiar ways of working, it is this participation in the *shared* unknown that is the site of IDM. Essentially, IDM is formed through the agreement to share in exploring through this unknowing. Improvisation is often characterised by a searching quality, discovering together, and in this study improvisation has rightfully been both the subject of investigation and the means by which we explore questions of IDM. This 'not-pre-determined' feature of free improvisation intersects with Borgdoff's (2012) description of the significance of 'not-yet-knowing' in artistic research contexts, and what Kershaw (2007) describes in performance studies as the necessary state of unknowing or 'lacuna' of transdisciplinarity.

This transdisciplinary, unknown aspect is both at the core of IDM and also the most challenging to articulate beyond the act of performance. And in a sense the entire IR/SR exchange can be read as a concern for an articulation of the conditions that allow for this

unknown, not-pre-determined lacuna of not-yet-knowing to arise, through which some creative 'magic' may happen. But in so doing the focus of this essay, to discern the nature of IDM in the act of performance, should not be steered too far from its core purpose by secondary concerns for aspects of supportive activity. Paradoxically, the holistic vision of IDM seems inevitably disrupted by the need to attend to the specifics of, for example, the development of awareness through exercises that support the whole. However, the more prepared we are for exploring the more likely we are to discover this not-yet-known territory.

We began by describing the field of IDM as characterised by a diversity of approaches - some have seized the form in asserting their own artistic identity and practice. And this diversity of practice found in IDM can make potent connection to pedagogy. The myriad ways of doing things in IDM means there is great opportunity for inclusion, to celebrate individual 'voice', and otherness. This diversity forms a key in the development of individual and group learning through IDM. Improvisation offers the individual the opportunity to assert identity, through making artistic choices, while at the same time working creatively by allowing and supporting the other in group contexts. The structures that are introduced can aim to support this openness in IDM.

Pedagogy of IDM can consider this transdisciplinarity as a super-objective. To this end, maintaining the moment of IDM activity as performance *event* will support the development of transdisciplinary IDM. This can be seen here in our research approach to IDM in the studio: open improvisation activity was preserved and other activity, such as exercises that develop awareness, was supportive. However, as the development of IDM as a practice is incremental it will benefit from support. Confidence will be nurtured through simple structures and empathic instructions that value imagination and experimentation. An atmosphere that implicitly encourages trust in tandem with risk can be communicated via the teacher's enthusiasm. The development in IDM from playful initiation to independent artistic activity can be thought of systematically via Vygotski's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD is the moving from what is known towards that which is currently unknown by means of degrees of support. *Scaffolding* has become an interchangeable term. In IDM, for example, with guidance, musicians new to dance may simply consider their spatial relationship to the dancer, and then begin to experiment with this in a compositional manner without guidance. Simultaneously, we need to be mindful of the complexity created by the 'not-pre-determined' character of IDM. In transdisciplinary IDM we are transitioning from the known towards an acceptance of the unknowing as the condition of IDM.

Reflection can offer an important, secondary, supportive role in IDM's shared practice. In transdisciplinary IDM we are moving in embodied action towards that which is not yet known, through moments that may be unrepeatable. With the aim of developing practice, reflection benefits from attempting to stay in touch with the experience of transdisciplinary IDM, as felt, as disciplinary, as interdisciplinary, as transdisciplinary -in attempting to articulate how IDM is experienced. Reflection can take place following embodied, transdisciplinary IDM (Oliveros in Rose 2017). The same qualities of awareness and listening valued in IDM activity can also carry over to this shared reflection. Reflection can form a different function from discussion - the job of the listener is heightened. In this way

reflection can be a precise tool. Of course, discussion also has a role, but grasping the need to delineate a truthful articulation of 'what just happened' in IDM is a particular aim. In shared reflection, the quality of listening is of equal importance to what is said. In IDM activity intersubjectivity occurs as the process of improvisation happens faster than the thought and, typically, we internalise the psychological state of the other by means of empathy. Carefully handled reflection is an opportunity to explore the sense of intersubjectivity found in improvisation through subsequent spoken articulation. For our research, doing and reflection formed an iterative research cycle in which reflection informed subsequent practice. This cycle of doing and reflection also offers a secure framework for pedagogical thinking.

The development in collaborative IDM depends upon affinity; the quality of engagement; and the level of commitment. It is an opportunity to share tacit disciplinary knowledge and the process of IDM will extend participants' knowledge through an increased awareness and understanding of the other. In IDM we primarily develop knowledge through doing, this can be at odds with dominant modes of thinking (a theme Crysa Parkinson (2016) has highlighted by describing how in the art world the *concept* is valued over the *act* or *craft*). The recontextualization of our own practice in the inter- disciplinary setting can lead to a self-reflection and reappraisal of our own work. In music it is notable how those attracted to improvisation can typically engage in an ongoing process of artistic development that is likely to continue as long they remain active – it can form a lifetime of engagement, and, as Roscoe Mitchel (Rose 2017) has commented, you may need more than one lifetime to achieve all that is wished for in music. In these ways, engagement with IDM forms a process of in-depth learning. While working in improvisation with those of another discipline, we bring this enquiring attitude within the development of improvisation practice, we want to discover what 'makes them tick'. The depth of knowledge within the other's history of practice will likely reflect decades of disciplinary experience and achievement from which a well of new artistic knowledge is available.

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