Mike McInerney

Generative Texts

These texts might be rehearsal exercises, or the precursor to a series of performed works. Each text provides the grain of sand around which the pearl of a performed work might gather. In the right hands, performance floods beyond the bounds of the text, resulting in an event which is a work in its own right.

Mike McInerney
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Guidelines for English Improvisers

Remember where you are.

Be tactful.

Leave enough for everyone.

Don’t hog the conversation.

Don’t impose.

Let someone else have a go.

Muck in.

Maintain standards.

Don’t get too carried away.

Don’t draw attention to yourself.

Pay attention at the back.

Remember your place.

Stand up and be counted.

Attention Studies

“Sshh, who goes there?”
(In the Woods)

Make a sound. Listen.
Make a second sound, different from the first. Listen.
Make a third sound, different from both its predecessors. Listen.

Continue in this manner, making each sound different from all of its predecessors until no more distinctly different sounds remain. Stop.

Embrace the Wave

Choose a sound – an uninteresting one – that you can sustain for a long time.

Take a pause of indefinite length. Or do not pause at all.

Play your sound. Play it for a long time until you find a quality about it that is interesting. When you next play your sound, be sure that the interesting quality is no longer present.

Take a pause of indefinite length. Or do not pause at all.

Play your sound again. Play it for a long time until you find a quality about it that is interesting. When you next play your sound, be sure that the interesting quality is no longer present.

Continue this process until the piece ends. When too many people are playing at the same time as you, break off and try again later.

The Still *Is*

Choose one sound, sustainable in units. Sustainable means bowed, blown or sung sounds of any kind. A unit is defined as the length of a breath, or bow. In the case of sounds which have indefinite duration, let your own breathing, or imagined bow lengths, be the unit.

At the beginning, all enter with these sounds together. Repeat your sound, without variation, until you have a clear acoustic perception of the group texture. At this point it is permissible, but not necessary, to change your sound along one of its axes (pitch, timbre, volume etc.), so long as this change can be made gradually and continuously.

The new sound which you have now attained is to be repeated in a similar manner, until you again have a clear acoustic perception of the group texture. Once again, it is now permissible, but not necessary, to change this sound in a continuous and gradual manner.

Continue this process until the performance ends.

Variation: *Intimate Futures.*

Perform 'The still *is*', but allow variation only along the volume axis.

MA

Perform,
With exquisite taste and perfect timing,
A single sound
Which blends into the mix.

Perform,
With exquisite taste and perfect timing,
A single sound
Which stands out from the mix.

Perform,
With exquisite taste and perfect timing,
A continuous, possibly periodic, sound.

Perform,
With exquisite taste and perfect timing,
An expressive gesture.

(each instruction once only, in any order.)

Articulation Studies

Points and Lines

Let each sound that you play be of one kind, either a point, or a line.

Lines are long and sinuous.

Each *line* aspires to blend with other lines.

Lines tend to create a continuum.

Points are short, and articulated.

Each *point* aspires to its own instant, neither simultaneous, nor overlapping, with another's.

Points tend to occur in clusters, accelerating and decelerating, sometimes as rapid as possible.

Points and *lines* overlap as a matter of course.

Journey (with Obstructions)

One player “takes a line for a walk.”

All other players provide the obstructions and distractions which the line encounters on its journey.

An obstruction takes the form of a sonic unity: it begins; its parts belong together as constituents of an identity; it ends; it does not return.

The reaction of the line to its obstructions and distractions is multiple and open: it is at the discretion of the soloist, as is the understanding of the term ‘line’.

Points to a Soloist

Whilst playing in an ensemble you may (once only, or not at all) indicate one other player as **THE SOLOIST.** If this should occur, then all other players wind up what they are doing, leaving only **THE SOLOIST** playing into the silence.

After this point, beginning with isolated sounds, then small gestures, the other players may reintroduce themselves, until **THE SOLOIST** is again subsumed into the general texture.

After this event another player may - or might not - indicate a new soloist.

Variation: *Simon Says.*

Perform 'Points to a Soloist' but, instead of falling silent once a solo has begun, imitate as closely as possible the soloist's performance.

Variation II:

THE SOLOIST chooses a tonal centre and plays in that key. The isolated sounds and small gestures then become the sound of other players attempting to locate the tonal centre and join in the new key.

Matter and Intervention
- another way of regarding solos

Matter tends to anonymity.
It is continuous, self-generating and self-supporting.

Intervention is personal. It is immediate, dramatic and active.

Intervention is at odds with matter.

*

Perform mostly as matter, occasionally as intervention. Matter cannot become intervention, though intervention might integrate with its material (see below). Alternate freely; allow a graceful pause when changing mode.

*

Matter may experience intervention in one of two ways.

Inscription makes its mark, yet leaves the material fundamentally unchanged.

Manipulation goes to the heart of matter, becomes one with it, and causes it to transform.

*

The artist, who intervenes, can neither predict nor force matter's response.

*

Optional Advice: Let matter predominate; intervention might only be possible in clearly coalescent material.

Form Studies

In Pursuit of Form

Form a small group with some other musicians. Design two signals. At signal 1, begin playing together; at signal 2, fall silent together.

Perform in a larger ensemble, comprising several such groups. Allow the periods of silence and activity of each group to overlap in beautiful and interesting ways.

WEB 1

Choose two other players quietly to yourself. Let us call them A and B.

When A plays, play (unless B is also playing).

When B plays, do not play.

When both you and A are playing and A stops, continue playing until B plays.

If absolutely no-one is playing, you may find it necessary to introduce a little music.

WEB 2

Each performer chooses any one of the first three **minimal interventions** (*The Preponderence of the Small, Contributions* or *No Discernment*) or either of the first two **allusive texts** (*Stars in the Cold Night Air, To Thicken the Plot*) or *Web 1*, or designs their own appropriate instruction. All players perform their chosen text simultaneously.

Minimal Interventions

The Preponderence of the Small

Use only small sounds. If a sound is long, play it very quietly. If it is loud, make it very short and isolated.

Contributions

Contribute:

A lyrical solo

A single sound

An accompaniment figure (long)

An accompaniment figure (short)

No Discernment

Either make lots of noise, or make none.

Going for the One.

At some point, everybody swing together.

Allusive Texts

The Preponderence of the Small

Use only small sounds. If a sound is long, play it very quietly. If it is loud, make it very short and isolated.

Contributions

Contribute:

A lyrical solo

A single sound

An accompaniment figure (long)

An accompaniment figure (short)

No Discernment

Either make lots of noise, or make none.

Going for the One

At some point, everybody swing together.

Two Pieces for Charles

THICKETS/TUNDRA

1. Many high sounds
2. Many high sounds, a few low sounds
3. Thickets
4. Tundra
5. A few low sounds, many high sounds
6. Middle sounds, moving outwards

WALL

Every musician play as much as possible.
Suddenly start and stop at an agreed signal.