Improvisation as anarchist organization

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to consider the practice of collective musical improvisation as a form of anarchist organization, exemplifying both its possibilities and its dangers. As such, I argue that it has significant pedagogical value for anarchists. I will also consider how capital has attempted to utilize improvisation, a phenomenon that highlights the fallacy of approaching anarchism simply as a theory of organization. In making these arguments, a number of areas of issues of importance for the intersection of anarchism and critical management studies (CMS) will be highlighted. The practice of 'musicking' will be raised as a hitherto underdeveloped area of significance for both areas; the relationship between critical management studies and anarchist thought will be explored through a grounding in practice; and the vital importance of thinking through the relationship of anarchist organizational forms to contemporary forms of capitalism and the concept of communism will be raised.

Introduction

A frequent lament among those on the left is that there is no political music anymore. Quite apart from the inaccurate nostalgism and narrow, mainstream bias of such a claim, the substance of this complaint is called into question by its focus on the lyrical content of music. According to this logic, a 'political' piece of music is one that explicitly engages with politics in its lyrics and which impacts on the political consciousness of the listening subject (given contemporary listening habits this is usually, though not always, an individual). While anarchists are largely unconcerned by the absence of 'anarchist music' from the

mainstream (though I would be all for an anarchist popular music)[1], the underlying assumptions about what makes music 'anarchist' often remain, such that an 'anarchist' piece of music is one that sympathetically engages with anarchism in its lyrics[2]. Whilst I do not want to belittle the importance of such musical forms – nor the encounters they may generate – this focus on music's lyrical content results in an incomplete understanding of how music might operate politically.

Indeed, in recent years a vast number of works have been published that supplement (and sometimes critique) these textually focussed arguments by drawing attention to the political 'function' of music rather than the 'meaning' of a specific work, though function and meaning should not be seen as mutually exclusive: what a piece of music 'means' to someone is largely a result of how it 'functions' for them (see, for example, Thompson and Biddle, 2013; Korczynski et al., 2013; Shaprio, 2007; Thaemlitz, 2010; anonymous, n.d.; Goodman, 2009; Void Network, 2007 – the last of which is explicitly anarchist). Others have broadened the understanding of what 'political music' might be through engaging with practices of DIY organization in the recording, distribution and performance of (usually punk or post-punk) music (for anarchist approaches see

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1   For a fascinating discussion of anarchism and popular music see Aaron Lake Smith's (2012) history of Chumbawamba.

2   The thread 'Anarchist music?' on the libcom forums neatly illustrates this point. Across 163 posts almost all of the suggestions put forward are for punk or folk musicians whose lyrics are explicitly or implicitly pro-anarchist. A small number of posters expand the focus, however: 'wellclose square' suggests that the culture of Greek Rembetika music resonates strongly with anarchism; and 'Igor' offers an argument similar to that developed here, writing 'I think there's a distinction to be made between music that has an anarchist propagandist purpose and music that is made according to anarchist principles – in the latter category... I'd include American composers John Cage and Christian Wolff (composer/improviser, libertarian socialist – check out 'Exercises', 'Wobbly Music', 'Changing The System') and Dutch composer Louis Andriessen (libertarian socialist – 'De Volharding', 'Workers Union'), free improvisation groups like MEV (musica electronica viva – a group of improvisers/composers originally based in Italy though mainly American) and AMM (see drummer Eddie Prevost's books 'No Sound is Innocent' and 'Minute Particulars')'. Later in the thread, he adds 'in the classical world there's a very clear hierarchy with the composer at the top (being the creative one) and the players as (uncreative) wage slaves whose job is to reproduce the composer's ideas as accurately as possible via the medium of the written score. Composers like Cage, Andriessen, Wolff etc. try to create situations where the players have ownership of the composed music as much as them, and groups like MEV and AMM make their own music (much as pop/rock/jazz/folk etc musicians do, only through free improvisation or 'instant composition' as some people call it) rather than reproducing other peoples' music'.

Gordon, 2005; Dale, 2012; and Ward, n.d.. For an important feminist contribution, see Griffin, 2012).

What such works do is shift music away from its common status as a 'thing' (a noun) and towards processual understandings where 'music' functions as a verb. In this, they resonate with the work of the musicologist Christopher Small, who argues that the 'meaning' of music lies in its doing, which he calls 'musicking'. He develops this concept in his 1998 book *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, where it is defined as 'tak[ing] part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance... or by dancing' (1998: 9). He even goes so far as to suggest that the cleaner of a concert hall is 'musicking' (9), though he asserts that performance is the '*primary process* of musicking, from which all other processes follow' (*ibid.* 113, emphasis in original). It is from this that I take my cue, with improvised performance the focus of this article (though performance here should not be understood as necessarily 'for an audience').

Anarchist musicking

At this stage, the reader may be wondering what the performance of improvised music has to do with CMS, and what anarchism might have to do with any of this. The rest of this paper, it is hoped, will answer this, but one particular concept is key: organization (as a verb, rather than a noun). This is central for Small, who argues that 'whatever meaning a musical work has lies in the relationships that are brought into existence when the piece is performed' (1998: 138). For him, then, musicking *is a form of organization*. Thus, alongside textual and functional approaches to reading music politically; a third, organizational approach can be suggested. 'Organization' here takes two (related) forms: the organization of sounds, and the organization of those participating in the performance (1998: 139). Whilst I engage with the former when particularly pertinent, it is the latter of these forms of organization that this article grapples with, and that is of particular relevance for the field of CMS.

One of CMS' major contributions has been to highlight that organization is an inherently political phenomenon (Parker, 2002). Small acknowledges as much for musical organization, writing that:

> By bringing into existence relationships that are thought of as desirable, a musical performance not only reflects those relationships but also shapes them. It teaches and inculates the concept of those ideal relationships, or values, and allows those taking part to try them on, to see how they fit, to experience them without having to commit themselves to them, at least for more than the duration of the performance. (1998: 183)

If the term 'ideal' might alarm anarchists (an issue I return to later), this claim nonetheless presents the intriguing possibility that musical performance could be organized along anarchist lines. Drawing on Colin Ward's claim that anarchism should be seen as a theory of organization (1966, 1982: 7-8), this would allow for an organizational approach to identifying 'anarchist music'. It is my contention that improvisation offers one such form, such that *when people take part in collective musical improvisation they are practising an anarchist form of organization*. Small himself makes a similar point, arguing that:

> improvisation celebrates a set of informal, even loving relationships which can be experienced by everyone present, and brings into existence, at least for the duration of the performance, a society whose closest political analogy is with anarchism[, with] each individual [contributing] to the wellbeing of the community. (1987: 307)

As any improviser will tell you, however, this does not always work quite so smoothly in practice. And nor, of course, does anarchism. Improvisation is thus useful for highlighting both the potentials and dangers of anarchist organization; and as such – I will suggest – could be of significant pedagogical value to anarchists. Current 'uses' of improvisation by capitalism also suggest, however, that adopting a purely organizational understanding of anarchism is an error – something I discuss in the final section of this article.

Before going further it is necessary to define what I mean by improvisation. This is a notoriously difficult task, but the fairly standard definition offered by the improvising percussionist and writer Eddie Prévost suffices as a useful starting point for the purposes of this article. For him, improvisation is defined by the fact that performers 'are searching for sounds and their context within the moments of performance' and 'the relations between musicians are directly dialogical: i.e., their music is not mediated through any external mechanism e.g. a score' (2009: 43), although I will argue that certain 'external mechanisms' may actually be conducive to improvisation, and certainly to an anarchist improvisation.[3] What is clear is that improvisation offers a certain degree of

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3   Improvisation here, then, refers to a *practice* rather than a style, and so must be differentiated from concepts such as 'free jazz' and 'free improv', which are generally (although not always self-consciously) used primarily to refer to the sonic properties of the music created rather the practices that produced it, although writers using these terms generally acknowledge that there is a relationship between the way music is produced and how it sounds. It should also be noted that Prévost is describing a western tradition of improvisation here, with roots in African-American jazz and avant-garde European music. Forms of improvisation from other traditions often function very differently, and are beyond the scope of this article, though this is not to say that they would not have something to offer anarchist organization – indeed, I suspect they may well.

'freedom' for performers – and it is for this reason that the term 'free improvisation' is often used to label the most 'absolute' forms of improvisation that concern me here. I do not use the term 'free improvisation', however, for reasons that are made clear below. I also exclude solo improvisation from this article, for obvious reasons (though see Gilbert, 2004; Borgo, 2005; and Corbett, 1994 for fascinating analyses of solo improvisation that challenge the supposed unity of the subject. If read alongside Gilbert's (2013) work on 'preindividuation', these works can be seen to offer important insight for organization).

This brief definition of improvisation has obvious resonances with common understandings of anarchism, according to which the relations between people should not be mediated through the external mechanism of the state. Here, however, I want to complicate this a little by suggesting that the state is not simply an external mechanism, but is rather a particular mode of thought that can immanently (or 'internally') mediate relationships. It, too, is a process and not a thing (Landauer, 1994: 1; Newman, 2007; 2010; Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). Contemporary anarchism is therefore not simply directed against the geopolitical institution of the state, but against statist forms of organization on all levels, including the 'micropolitical' relations of power internal to anarchist groups. To this end, I want to offer adopts four 'core concepts' of anarchism: freedom and non-domination, mutuality, a commitment to difference and prefiguration and open-endedness.[4] Each of these – and the problems anarchists may face in seeking them – can be explicated further through a consideration of musical improvisation.

Freedom and non-domination

Anarchism is frequently (mis)understood as the belief in absolute freedom, which is (to be) brought about through the eradication of hierarchies that impose power over the individual (a negative freedom, in other words). Such a state is often claimed for 'free improvisation', with musicians perceived as playing in a state of absolute freedom given the absence of a score, pre-agreed structures and/or hierarchical organization. I want to contend that such an understanding of freedom is mistaken for two reasons.

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4   These 'core concepts' of anarchist ideology are heavily inspired by Uri Gordon's *Anarchy Alive!*, though he lists these as non-domination, prefiguration and diversity and open-endedness (2008: 28-46). They are primarily descriptive (which is to say I believe all these concepts are prominent in contemporary anarchist organization), but they are by no means universally accepted and – whilst it is not my place to 'gatekeep' the concept of anarchism – they also carry a normative weight inasmuch as I believe they are desirable features of organization.

The first of these is semantic (though it has material effects), and can be simply illustrated with reference to improvisation. To the extent musicians are free to play as they choose, they are free to express their power. Thus, it would be ludicrous to be hostile to power *per se,* and anarchists should therefore be understood as hostile to power-over, in which one body is compelled by another to behave or act in a certain way: a relationship that is best referred to as one of 'domination' (Gordon, 2008: 47-52). Such a relationship reduces the amount of power-to the dominated body is able to express (though as I will argue below, this is also true of the dominating body), separating both that individual and the collective from what it might otherwise be able to do. It is this second form of power (power-to) that improvisers express when they perform, and which anarchists seek to foster. Freedom and power, then, are not opposites – as they are so often perceived – but rather are mutually inclusive (Proudhon, 2009), and it is for this reason that I avoid the term 'free improvisation', which encourages ignorance of the importance of power in the music's formation.

My second complaint regarding the view of freedom presented above concerns the manner in which domination functions. As Foucault has highlighted, it is not simply the result of 'the king in his central position, but [of] subjects in their reciprocal relations; not [of] sovereignty in its one edifice, but [of] the multiple subjugations that take place and function within the social body' (2004: 27). Thus, insidious, informal acts of domination occur – even in nonhierarchically organized groups – 'through performative disciplinary acts in which the protagonists may not even be conscious of their roles' (Gordon, 2008: 52). This, I suggest, is particularly likely when the organization in question is part of a broader society that is still organized through hierarchy and domination. In other words, there can be no realm of unfettered freedom free from 'micropolitical' operations of power-over: freedom is always contingent upon circumstance (May, 2011).

This point is illustrated neatly by Scott Thomson, who flags up the danger of 'performative disciplinary acts' (which he labels 'authoritarian gestures') occurring within improvisation. For him,

> A... thorough (and realistic) analysis... must acknowledge how 'authoritarian' gestures threaten the musical and social well-being of a performance.... The fluidity of authority within a group can be easily circumscribed by gestures that fix social power in a domineering or negligent way; the good faith that a group works to establish as a foundation for responsible and responsive play is under constant threat of being demolished in this way. Authoritarianism, from my own experience as a performer and listener, is commonly exemplified by a player's inability or unwillingness to listen to the other members of an ensemble, often coinciding with his or her unresponsive, soloistic musical contributions. This type of musical activity constitutes a very basic authoritarianism in which the player

> effectively suggests that 'I have nothing to learn from you, but you have something to learn from me.' (2007: 5-6)

If this analysis suggests an at least partially conscious decision by particular musicians to dominate (a scenario no doubt familiar to anyone with experience of anarchist organization), it is important to remember Gordon's claim that those who dominate may not be aware they are doing so. Thus, an 'inability or unwillingness to listen' (and the accompanying exercise of power-over) may result from insecurity, inexperience, bad mood, or the persistence of forms of domination that exist in society more broadly.

This latter point is particularly important, for it highlights the relevance of Gibson Burrell's (1988) argument that organizations should not be considered as autonomous from the broader forms of societal organization in which they are embedded. Whilst he applied this to institutions more commonly considered under the remit of CMS, it is equally pertinent here: improvisation does not occur within an anarchistically organized society, and cannot escape the dominations that characterise our present order. This can be neatly illustrated with the example of a female-gendered person who takes up improvising for the first time. Assigned the female gender from birth, she is unable to instantly shake off the ways in which society has encouraged her to 'perform' her gender (Butler, 1990), and her socialised reluctance to speak publicly (Holmes, 1992) translates into musicking, during which she feels unable to express her 'power-to' by playing. She is not subject to any hierarchy here – nor, let it be assumed, to any dominatory acts by her fellow improvisers – yet she still feels unfree. This may be less of a problem if her fellow improvisers are also female, but at least so far as existing improvising communities go, this is unlikely to be the case (cf. Oliveros, 2004: 55).

There are numerous tactics that improvisers might adopt to overcome such power relations. The 'Unmusical Project' run by Charlie Bramley in Newcastle-upon-Tyne utilises 'safe space' principles and explicitly encourages those who may ordinarily feel intimidated by taking up improvisation to join in (Bramley, 2013). It also encourages children of all ages, allowing those who have childcare issues to join in – an oft-ignored issue in anarchist organization (amberraekelly, 2001), and one that disproportionately affects women. Sessions are well-attended and include a number of people who identify as female. In London, Maggie Nicols utilizes her charismatic authority (Weber, 2009) so that women feel confident about expressing themselves musically at 'The Gathering' – a weekly improvising session she runs (http://www.maggienicols.com/id13.html)[5]. Within

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5   Many anarchists would be uncomfortable about the concept of 'charismatic authority'. Yet to deny it would be to disavow its ubiquity, and it can play an

specific performances, meanwhile, acts as simple as allowing female improvisers to play first may help – a tactic similar to that adopted by many Occupy camps, where women, people-of-colour and other under-represented and dominated subjects were given exclusive access to the floor at the start of assemblies.

Mutuality

The term 'anarchy' was originally used pejoratively to describe the chaotic state of affairs that would emerge without a hierarchical order: a form of (dis)organization characterised by a 'perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death... because [man] cannot assure the Power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more' (Hobbes, 1996: 70). This understanding persists both colloquially and academically (in the discipline of International Relations, for example – though see Prichard [2013] for a work that challenges this from an anarchist perspective), and is often applied to the practice of improvisation. Although he doesn't use the term 'anarchy', the novelist Ralph Ellison describes jazz improvisation in decidedly Hobbesian terms, writing that:

> The health of jazz and the unceasing attraction which it holds for the musicians themselves lies in the ceaseless warfare for mastery and recognition – not among the general public, though commercial success is not spurned, but among their artistic peers. And even the greatest can never rest on past accomplishments, for, as with the fast guns of the Old West, there is always someone waiting in a jam session to blow him literally, not only down, but into shame and discouragement. (2008: 555-556)

Such understandings view power-over as the only possible form of power, such that when a musician exercises their power they necessarily dominate others (reducing their freedom). This is one of the foundational principles of liberalism (and realism in International Relations), necessarily pitting individuals (or states, in the case of IR realism) against each other; and the (heroic) individual against the (tyrannical) collective (cf. Gilbert, 2013). My point here is not that Ellison's empirical analysis is necessarily wrong – improvisation *can* be a war of all against all, but it does not have to be.

Indeed, anarchism rejects the necessity of this Hobbesian approach – instead stressing the importance of 'mutuality', in which individuals are co-dependent upon and constituted by each other. The anarchist (and Marxist) philosopher Chiara Bottici draws on Cornelius Castoriadis to show how the boundaries between the 'individual' and 'society' can never be clearly established, for 'society

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important part in making people feel welcome and confident in anarchist forms of organization (and to attract them in the first place).

does not exist without the individuals that constantly create and re-create it, but, at the same time, individuals exist only as a product of society itself' (2013: 15). In order to drive home the force of this argument, I borrow Lewis Hyde's use of the term 'dividual' – a subject thought of as being 'constituted by the complexity of the world' around and within them (in Hyde and Wallace, 2010).[6] This mutuality means that power-to is not a zero-sum game, but is held in common and functions reciprocally: the increase in the ability of one dividual to express their power-to results in an increase of others to do likewise. Or, as Bakunin puts it, '[t]he freedom of others, far from limiting or negating my liberty, is on the contrary its necessary condition and confirmation' (1953: 267). Drawing on a concept of Starhawk's (1989), I name this collective freedom 'power-with'.

According to this understanding of freedom and power, acts of domination reduce the power-to not only of the dominated partner; but also of the dominator (Malatesta, 1891; Bottici, 2013). Where power was previously held in common, such acts enclose it and encourage it to be viewed as a scarce resource. Anarchist organization, therefore, does not proceed from the *ressentiment* of the slave who despises power (Nietzsche, 1994: 52) – nor from the master's addiction to 'power-over' – but from the figure of 'a new human who was to be neither master nor slave' (Sunshine, 2005: 36).[7] It may be that conflict emerges from particular expressions of power-to, but this should not be seen (or approached) with the aim of dominating. Rather, it is productive of 'sustained dissensus' (Cohn, 2006: 256): a productive force that allows the organization to develop (Springer, 2011; Maeckelbergh, 2012).

If this is all a little abstract, improvisation offers an excellent indication of how such organization might function in practice. Imagine, for example, three musicians improvising together. At a particular point, Musician A expresses their power-to by introducing a drone. Musician B picks up on slight rhythmic variations in the amplification and improvises around these. Musician A may then play across this rhythm in their playing, whilst Musician C adds an emphasis to particular notes played by the assemblage of Musician A and Musician B, which in turn influences the way in which Musicians A and B

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6   Here I differ from the use of the term by Gilbert (2004), who uses it to refer to the collectivity that cannot be 'reduced to the individuality of its members or to some Leviathan meta-subject which encompasses them all in perfect unity' (124-125).

7   For Nietzsche, this figure is named the 'Übermensch', but I prefer not to use the term given its tainted history. With regards to the organization itself, Deleuze's term 'crowned anarchy' could be used (1994: 55), whilst George Woodcock's claim that anarchism universalizes aristocracy (1975: 30) can be read in a similar light.

continue to play.[8] Thus, as one popular description of improvisation has it, 'nobody solos, everybody solos': the improvising group is neither a homogenous collective nor an aggregate of 'free' individuals. The relationship governing this non-soloing may be consensual or marked by conflict – it certainly shouldn't be misunderstood as inherently cozy (Watson, 2004) – but what is clear is that Musician A's expression of their power-to did not limit the power-to of the other performers, but rather enhance them, creating 'power-with'. Each expressive act is a placing of power-to into the common realm.

Musicians, of course, would never be able to trace the flows of power so clearly as the description above; and nor is it always possible for listeners to determine who is leading. What listeners do hear, however, is what George E. Lewis (2002) has called 'multidominance': the simultaneous, polyphonic expression of power and freedom that he argues is characteristic of much art (both visual and sonic) of the African disapora. This can be a simultaneously wondrous, dizzying and inspiring feeling for the listener (I still remember the shock I felt when I first encountered the music of Ornette Coleman), and points to how the power-with of anarchist musicking might cross from musicians to their audience; how organization might 'give something back' to the world from which it draws so much.[9]

Whilst improvisers often stress the importance of 'unlearning' conventional musical techniques, developing the mutuality that marks successful improvisation requires a great deal of skill; and improvising educators have developed exercises designed to maximise this (Clark, 2012; Higgins and Campbell, 2010). Certain forms of score can also be useful in maximising this

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8 Whilst space prohibits me from exploring such factors here, it would undoubtedly be possible to develop what Jane Bennett (2010) calls 'a political economy of things' here, by considering the influence of instruments, amplifiers and the environment on (or indeed as part of) the improvising assemblage. Tokyo's 'onkyô' movement, for example, stresses such factors – its member Toshimaru Nakamura states that '[w]hen I play with other musicians, I don't play with them, I play with the space including this musician – not directly human to human. If you're a musician, okay, let's play together. But I don't play with you – I play with all of the elements around you, around us. So I don't really confront you as one individual – you are part of many other elements in the space around you' (in Novak, 2010: 46).

9 There is, perhaps, a problem here though, inasmuch as a lot of improvisation simply isn't that much fun to listen to; suggesting some truth to the old adage that it is more fun to play than it is to listen to. I would contend that this is a particular problem for improvisation in the European tradition, though this may of course just be a matter of personal preference. The problem is neatly summarised by Simon Reynolds, who describes the tedium he felt when attending a free improv gig, and even compares this to the problems anarchists face in making their organization aesthetically appealing to those outside its sphere (2008). I intend to explore this problem (through the concept of utopia) in greater depth in future work.

mutuality (contrary to understandings of improvisation that place it in a binary opposition with composition). If a musical score is usually a document that determines how music should sound, with the form of organization required to realise it a secondary (but important) effect, the composer Helen Papaioannou reverses this with her graphic score 'Cogs' (Figure 1), in which:

> the emphasis is very much on the type of interaction that the visual information may engender, rather than encouraging an ethos which values a 'perfect', reproducible representation of a score. The aim is to heighten the different intensities involved in [the] relationships [between improvisers], the beating back-and-forth, and the shifting dynamics between individual/collective focuses in achieving/dissolving the synchronisation of parts. In a sense, this type of hyperactive, frenzied exchange is aimed towards collapsing the distinction between individual/collective (email conversation with author, 2011).
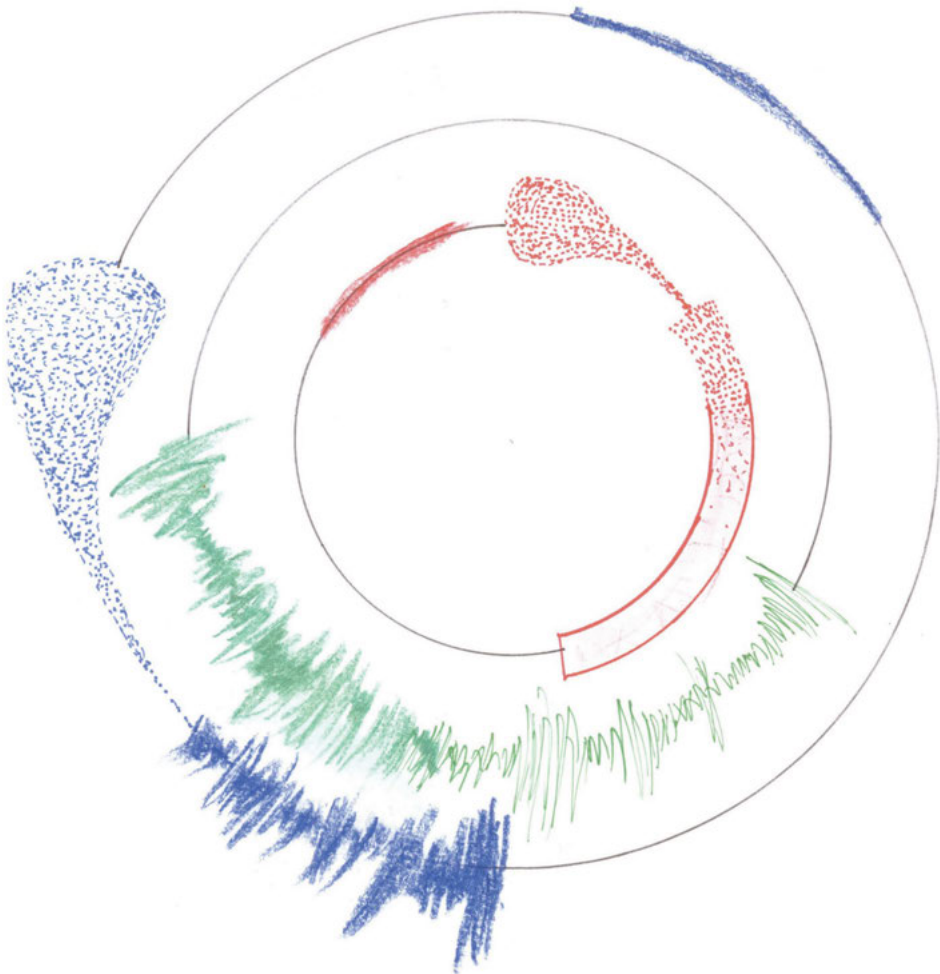

Figure 1: 'Cogs' by Helen Papaioannou. (Source: helenpapaioannou.com)

Papaioannou's score is clearly an 'external mechanism' brought to the group, and illustrates that an influence from outside the group's immediate temporal and spatial confines can be useful in helping it self-organize; which is to say that this score is neither generated by the group, nor does it occur during the group's performance, but that it may help the group generate the kind of mutuality I have discussed above.

Difference

In order for mutuality to be productive in creating new formations, it is important that an organization is constituted by 'difference'. Each member of an anarchist organization will (ideally, at least) have different histories, experiences, knowledges etc. (many of which may well have served as a locus of oppression); and these can be combined to generate productive solutions to problems that may emerge (cf. May's reading of Deleuze, 1994: 134) – a process that has been compared to the self-organization of matter in complexity theory (Arrigo and Williams, 2004). Here, difference should not be understood in terms of liberal notions of 'diversity' – in which a cosmopolitan order can be made up from relatively stable identities; and through which certain 'differences' come to be respected by the dominant order (Newman, 2010: 118), because these differences then strengthen this dominant (and dominating) order (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 521); and because 'difference' cannot be equated with the individual, which is always-already made up of 'preindividual' differences (Gilbert, 2013; Deleuze, 1998: 77; Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 288-289). Rather, the 'order' is (permanently re)constituted by difference.

In improvisation, then, the musicking of performance is organized by the multiple 'differences' of dividual performers – their histories, their playing styles, their mood on the day, their choice of instrument, etc. Resonating with Arrigo and Williams' work on complexity, David Borgo (2005) draws on non-linear dynamics to show how improvisation pushes these differences to self-organize new forms. This process can be illustrated with reference to the improvising band K-Space, who utilise techniques and styles from traditional Tuvan and Celtic musical forms alongside those drawn from jazz and the electroacoustic tradition, creating new forms that transcend these influences. It is not, therefore, a question of K-Space's Tuvan throat singer Gendos Chamzyryn adapting his style to a pre-existing form, but rather of a new form being created from his – and his bandmates' – differences (a form which then transforms each of them).

The danger here, of course, is that difference fails to self-organize. Whilst the frequency of 'chaos' as a pejorative descriptor for improvised music often illustrates an ignorance of the practices of musicking that produce it (such claims

also rest on a binary between chaos and order/organization, which is troubled by complexity theory, and may – as Lewis [2002] notes – be the result of racialized norms), it would be wrong to disavow the dangers of disorgaznniation altogether. Indeed, improvisation often fails to 'self-organize' into anything coherent: 'nobody solos, everybody solos' functioning as a recipe for explorations of the (supposedly) pre-given self rather than the production of new forms through mutual co-dependence; and performances frequently dissolve into tired noodling in which power-to seems entirely absent, or a Hobbesian struggle for power-over (thus returning us to the first danger). Again, an external influence can be useful in such instances: specific instructions for improvisers; or some form of score or game play may help catalyse self-organization (although of course this 'external influence' does not have to be imposed on the group from outside, but rather one that the group chooses to engage with). But there can be no guarantee here, and just as with failed attempts to start anarchist groups it may be that there is insufficient common ground: people cannot agree on what works and what does not; or they simply do not get along. Dissensus can be productive, but if it is not underpinned by some common ground it is simply destructive; and can even be damaging for some participants (Motta, 2012). In such cases, it is best to know when to admit defeat and accept that not all projects will be successful.

Prefiguration and open-endedness

The final of anarchism's 'core concepts' I want to consider here is 'prefiguration and open-endedness'. The former term highlights that anarchism eschews a separation between the means and ends of organization; instead seeking to immanently create 'a new world in the shell of the old', as the old IWW saying has it (cf. Gordon, 2008: 34-40). It would be easy to see improvisation as an example of this, with musicians creating temporary anarchist communities in the here-and-now. Yet divorced from open-endedness – which insists that the 'ends' must not be pre-determined – the object of anarchism's prefiguration can still be a once-and-for-all state of emancipation in which freedom is believed to have eternally triumphed over domination. Thus, to paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari's definition of immanence, it can be said that anarchism's prefiguration 'is prefigurative only to itself, and leaves nothing to which it could be prefigurative (1994: 45)'.

To a considerable degree, this open-endedness results from anarchism's previous three core concepts. In other words, if it is accepted that domination's insidious nature means that freedom can never be achieved once-and-for-all; and communities are structured around the mutual self-organization of difference-in-itself, open-endedness will follow as a matter of course. Yet it is useful to position it as one of anarchism's core concepts in and of itself, as acknowledging the

importance of open-endedness can in turn facilitate commitment to anarchism's other core concepts. Anarchist improvisers would thus need to slightly modify Christopher Small's claim about the political function of musical performance: it is not a question of trying on (and prefiguring) 'ideal' social relations, but rather of experiencing the radical unknowability of anarchist organization. As the free jazz saxophonist Ornette Coleman notes in the liner notes to his album 'Change of the Century': '[w]e [the musicians] do not begin with a preconceived notion as to what kind of effect we will achieve' (2004: 254). Similarly, the critic John Litweiler describes Coleman's music as

> mak[ing] clear that uncertainty is the content of life, and even things that we take for certainties such as cell motives) are ever altering [in] shape and character. By turns he fears or embraces this ambiguity; but he constantly faces it, and by his example, he condemns those who seek resolution or finality as timid. (1984: 39)

A commitment to open-endedness may also help to ward off a particularly subtle threat to anarchist organization, which I name the 'tyranny of habit', after a phrase of Oscar Wilde's (2008: 21). This is a particularly subtle form of domination, which arises collectively and immanently. An excellent account of the threat this poses to anarchist organization can be found in Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed*, which (among much else) depicts life on Anarres – a seemingly utopian anarchist planet which is ossifying into dystopia as 'laws of conventional behaviour' come to function as an organizing principle (2006: 286). What is particularly chilling about these, however, is the way they pass unnoticed: 'we've...built walls all around ourselves, and we can't see them, because they're part of our thinking' says Shevek, the novel's chief protagonist (*ibid.*).

This is a common danger in improvisation, and may occur within a single performance, across a number of performances by a group, or even across a particular (geographic/temporal) 'scene', where there is a cross pollination of habits between musicians. The guitarist Michael Rodgers expresses his dissatisfaction with such a state of affairs at improvisation workshops run by Eddie Prévost, claiming that:

> The workshop in its early years was diverse, lively and full of risk and debate. [Later], it started feeling more like church, where one must avoid offence and observe ritual. A hegemony was replacing a much more vibrant state of being. (in Clark, 2012: 38)

This leads some to claim that this danger is inbuilt to improvisation. The composer Pierre Boulez, for example, notes that the improviser 'can only turn to information that he [sic] has been given on some earlier occasion, in fact to what he has already played' (1985: 461). Whilst I would argue dividual musicians can

(hopefully) turn to other musicians to find new ways to play, it is clear that habit may 'infect' the whole group, leaving them stuck in a repetition of the same. There are, again, a number of tactics that might be utilized to avoid this – including bringing in new musicians, swapping instruments or using some form of score or gameplay to break habits. Papiaoannou's scores might again be instructive here; or it might be possible to use something along the lines of Brian Eno's 'Oblique Strategies': a list of vague instructions such as 'Try faking it' or 'What would your best friend do?' that improvisers sometimes use to instigate new modes of behaviour and to prevent habit from ossifying into domination.

An ambiguous utopia?

So far I have presented a picture of improvisation as creating anarchist forms of organization. As an anarchist, I believe that these forms of organization (re)produce space in a 'good' manner, and so the term 'utopia' might be appropriate to describe them (see Bell, 2013 for a longer discussion of the relationship between improvisation and utopia, and for a Spinoza-inspired account of what the term 'good' might mean in this context). But 'utopia' is, of course, a pun: meaning 'no place' as well as 'good place', and I have also shown that no improvising group can ever claim to have reached the ultimate form of anarchist organization, for there are a number of dangers constantly threatening to rear their head. Like Le Guin's Anarres, improvisation is, therefore, an 'ambiguous utopia': always on the verge of ossifying into a dystopia.

This fragility is neatly expressed by Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, who note that many improvisers see their practice as 'a utopian space... as strong and fragile as a spider's web, and, as such, constantly under construction and repair' (2006: 251-252). Above, I have noted some tactics that improvisers might use to constantly construct and repair their organization, lest it succumb to the dangers posed by exclusion, domination and habit. These must be decided upon in moments outside the group's primary purpose (making music), meaning that the 'utopia' of improvisation is one that must be realized across time and between – as much as during – performances (Toop, 2005: 239; Borgo, 2005: 194). This, too, applies to anarchists – who need to reflect on what has worked in their organization, what hasn't, and what tactics might be utilized to address these failures. In so doing, attention needs to be given to the particularities of circumstance: anarchists (and improvisers) need to, well, 'improvise' (in a non-musical sense) in order to deal with contingencies and problems that will undoubtedly emerge. There can be no one-size-fits-all approach to this because of the variations in how power functions from group to group.

Degenerate anarchism and the importance of communism

This would be a lovely place to leave improvisation: strung delicately between success and failure; showing us how anarchist organization might work but also how it might break down. The story cannot end here, however: for there is one final danger that needs considering here. Unlike those identified so far, this is not a danger to the internal functioning of the (anarchist/improvising) organization, but rather stems from the way the form can be put to work for the decidedly un-anarchist end of profit[10]: a further example of Burrell's claim that organizations must not be seen as discrete from society. As a relentlessly inventive form that privileges the creation of the new and enables collective solutions to difficult problems, improvisation has – understandably – had a great deal of appeal for capital in its drive to find new markets to exploit and new ways to cut operating costs (cf. Hegarty, 2012; Mattin, 2009; Saladin, 2009; Brassier et al. 2010); part of a broader trend that sees managers (and even military commanders) utilising non-hierarchical (though not non-dominatory) and/or self-organized forms of organization (Barker, 2005; Monk, 2007). Artie Lewin, for example, reports that:

> The 1996 annual report of the LEGO Corporation featured the top management team decked out as a jazz ensemble with the CEO, Kjeld Møller Pedersen, playing the saxophone. The CEO of LEGO used the occasion to highlight his belief and expectation that improvisation is an art form that needs to become the hallmark of all levels of management, beginning at the top. (1998: 38)

Elsewhere, (largely uncritical) theorists of management and orgazniation have published a number of articles extolling the potentials of improvisation in a business context (for a very small sample, see Oakes, 2009; Cunha et al.: 2011; Kubacki, 2008; Weick, 1998). Meanwhile, the website 1000ventures.com – which describes itself as offering '"Broader knowledge, better ideas!" for entrepreneurs, corporate leaders, innovators and consultants/trainers' – hosts an online 'mini-course' by Vadim Kotelnikov for 'creative achievers' entitled 'The Jazz of Innovation' (some of Kotelnikov's other courses include 'Strategic Management', 'SMART Innovation', 'Winning Customers', 'Your People Skills', '12 Leadership Roles' and 'Inspiring Corporate Culture').

Whilst none of these works seeking to recuperate improvisation for the gain of capital contains a particularly in-depth analysis of improvisation (and many take less 'extreme' practices of improvisation than those under consideration here,

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10 Further work on this relationship will hopefully surface with the publication of a special issue of *Critical Studies in Improvisation* entitled 'Ethics and the Improvising Business' (see http://www.criticalimprov.com/announcement/view/42 for the call for papers).

with the focus largely on forms of improvisation with a considerable degree of internal hierarchy), their very purpose is inconsistent with the internal organization of improvisation: capitalism relies upon and perpetuates power-over, artificial scarcity results in competition between individuals, and difference-in-itself is reduced to the commodity form. Improvising groups, then, may function internally as an anarchist utopia – but their methods can be taken from them to generate dystopian forms of organization more broadly.

It is difficult to suggest strategies to defend against this. Complaints that capitalism is using 'your' forms of organization for purposes utterly alien to your intent are little more than pissing in the wind, but one potential answer comes from an unlikely source (for an anarchist): the work of Jodi Dean. Whilst her Leninism makes her hostile to anarchist forms of organization, her insistence on the rhetorical power of 'communism' to name the incompatibility between what we want and what currently exists (2012) can, perhaps, be utilized here. Though anarchism often functions as a useful media bogeyman in capitalism's ideological battle, a hollowed-out version of its forms of organization (such as improvisation) can clearly be productive for capital by providing forms of organization 'suitable' for the post-fordist climate, with its stress on creativity and flexibility. Yet as Dean notes, the term communism retains the rhetorical power to shock and to clearly demarcate a boundary that capital is (for now, at least) reluctant to cross. Furthermore, improvisation's anarchist utopianism is predicated on the power that musicians hold and develop in common, and 'communism' provides a label for this. Private property creates scarcity and makes anarchism's mutuality impossible.

Here, it is perhaps pertinent to apply Marx and Engels' critique of the failure of 'utopian socialism' to appreciate the importance of class struggle (2004: 48; Engels, 2008) to an excessively organizational understanding of anarchism. Whilst Marx and Engels argued that the utopian communities of Owen, Saint-Simon et al. failed to truly challenge capital by not engaging with the material relations of the broader society in which these communities were embedded, I suggest that simply creating prefiguratively utopian, anarchist forms of organization not only fall victim to the same flaw, but can actually *reinforce* capital. If one of the great strengths of Colin Ward's anarchism-as-organization approach is to show that anarchism exists in the here-and-now like a 'seed beneath the snow', its weakness *vis a vis* contemporary forms of capitalism is that such 'anarchism' is just as likely to be found in the post-fordist workplace as it is in a community health-centre or housing project. Anarchism *is* a theory of organization, but if that is *all* it is then it is a theory of organization that can be turned against the working class: a 'degenerate anarchism'. Anarchism needs

communism, then, just as – in order to avoid the failings of state power – communism needs anarchism (cf. Bottici, 2013).

Conclusion: The shape of organization to come?

In Lorna Davidson's (2010) account of musicking in Robert Owen's utopian New Lanark community, she notes how musical performance, song and dance were used to instil the discipline Owen believed was necessary for his community to function successfully. We don't yet live in an anarchist (ambiguous) utopia, but to the extent that music can help us learn how we might organize our lives differently I would suggest that improvisation can play a similar pedagogical role for those interested in advancing the anarchist cause. This is not only because it shows how it can work as a mutually empowering form of organization, but also (and perhaps especially) because it is frequently challenged by many of the dangers that threaten anarchism. Working out how to overcome these could be of considerable pedagogical importance for anarchist organization; and it may even be that some of the techniques used by improvisers could be adopted in more explicitly political forms of anarchist organization. Oblique strategies for anarchists, anyone?

Yet the manner in which improvisation has been (ab)used by capitalism highlights the fallacy of an exclusively organizational politics. We cannot simply prefigure the world we would like to see: we must also challenge the world that (sadly) exists. Jodi Dean is fond of wearing a t-shirt saying 'Goldman Sachs doesn't care if you raise chickens', and this could equally state their ambivalence (or perhaps even enthusiasm) for improvisation. Utopia, however, is as good a place as any from which to launch a challenge on the present state of things (Weeks, 2011: 204-205), and improvisation is a utopia as ambiguously wonderful as the most dazzling science fiction. Communism makes possible the universalization of its conditions, and must be the vehicle of our attack.

Who says there's no political music anymore?

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