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Chapter 19

Indeterminacy and Vagueness in Improvisation and in Experimental Music

Abstract: This essay deals with a family of musical practices that are marked by similar features and grouped under the labels of “indeterminacy,” “experimental music,” and “improvisation.” Although, according to John Cage, musical improvisation, experimentalism, and indeterminacy were originally motivated by different goals and concepts and characterized by different practices—although ethnic and “free” Western improvisation are also very different from each other—they all share a common trait in terms of their intention, the realization of their performances, or their reception, and that is to say: a certain unpredictability in their outcome.

In one sense, some features of these musical gestures are “replicable,” as evidenced by the perception of them as “genres” as well as by the existence of musical circuits and communities devoted to them. However, a performance of this sort is only considered successful by the composer, performer, or listener if something “unpredictable” happens.

This apparently complex situation promises to be a fruitful field for better understanding and testing the concepts of “complete” and “incomplete” gesture and of “vagueness” proposed by Giovanni Maddalena, based on an investigation into “replicability” and the experience of time, place, and community in these musical practices. If a wholly or partially non-replicable practice is to be considered “incomplete,” are improvisational and indeterminate musical practices incomplete gestures?

Keywords: indeterminacy, experimentalism, improvisation, unpredictability, replicability, vagueness

1 Introduction

I would like to discuss a family of musical practices with similar characteristics that can be grouped under the labels of “indeterminacy,” “experimental music,” and “improvisation.” These practices promise to be some fruitful musical material

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through which to test the concept of gesture proposed by Giovanni Maddalena (Maddalena 2021, 35 ff., and 2015). To what extent can they be considered complete or incomplete gestures?

1) According to John Cage, an “experimental” musical performance is an action whose aim is to produce an unpredictable outcome:

An experimental action is one the outcome of which is not foreseen. Being unforeseen, this action is not concerned with its excuse. Like the land, like the air, it needs none. A performance of a composition which is indeterminate of its performance is necessarily unique. It cannot be repeated. When performed for a second time, the outcome is other than it was. Nothing therefore is accomplished by such a performance since that performance cannot be grasped as an object in time. A recording of such a work has no more value than a postcard: it provides a knowledge of something that happened, whereas the action was a non-knowledge of something that had not yet happened. (Cage, 2013, 39)

2) Improvisation can also have different degrees of unpredictability. Indeed, in the modern and contemporary Western musical context, it is often believed that the purpose and essential meaning of improvisation is to produce the unexpected. This concept of improvisation is shared by many listeners, improvisers and musicologists.¹ So, it might seem that we already have an answer to the question of the completeness or incompleteness of these gestures: the purpose is clear, but *thirdness*, the indication of *replicability*, the symbolic universalization of the gesture (Maddalena 2021, 35–47 and 71–82) seem to be partially or totally missing. Is this one of the reasons why this type of gesture should be called “incomplete?”

Things are not that simple. Indeed, one could argue that many aspects of replicability are present in all genres of improvisation and indeterminate music. A sort of “school” of contemporary music was born from Cage’s theories (Pritchett 1993, 143, and Piekut 2011, 71). Different “genres” of improvisation have emerged in Western music (organ, flamenco, blues, jazz, free music, classical: Bailey 1993). There are also different traditions and schools in ethnic music (for example: Indian, Ottoman, and so on).

To investigate the complexity of the subject, I will consider different meanings and modes of improvisation and indeterminacy in music.

But first, I would like to prevent a possible misunderstanding.

¹ See, among many more or less “radical” improvisers: Bailey (1993); Evangelisti (1991); Globokar (1970); and Stockhausen (1971). Among musicologists, see, for example: Caporaletti’s distinction between improvisation and extemporization (2005, 98–170); Bormann, Brandstetter, and Matzke (2010, 7 ff.); and Sparti (2016). Goehr (2016, 460 f. and 470) sees the search for the unexpected and innovative aspects in the *impromptu* rather than in the *extempore*.

2 Improvisation and Composition

A misunderstanding about the completeness or incompleteness of an improvisation could arise if it were understood as an *incomplete composition*. Considering improvisation something “imperfect” with respect to composition is somewhat misleading—even though this concept has been proposed, perhaps somewhat ironically, by a jazz musician (Gioia 1988). This misunderstanding is due to both historical and theoretical reasons.

Musicians of past centuries such as Bach, Mozart, Paganini, Beethoven, Hummel, and many others, used to mix composed and improvised parts in the same performance.

Performers would exercise their skills by improvising according to certain musical styles and to written “patterns” called *partimenti* (Guido 2017).

During the 19th century, in contemporary classical music, the performance of complete written scores became predominant, at the expense of improvisation. But in the 20th century some leading exponents of musical improvisation (Futurists, jazz and “free-improvisation” musicians, classical-contemporary musicians like Franco Evangelisti) started claiming that improvisation was more creative than composition.

The distinction between improvisation and composition has not always been clear. During the 20th century there was a dialectical, sometimes fluctuating relationship between “composition,” “improvisation” and “indeterminacy” (see also Feisst 2016). Improvisation found its way into Schönberg’s thought (Feisst 2022). The improvisers of Nuova Consonanza were composers. Musicologists and musicians championing “free” or “radical” improvisation loved—and still love—to consider this music a form of “composition in real time” or “rapid composition.”² Conversely, composers of contemporary classical music (for example, Luigi Nono and Sylvano Bussotti) required improvised parts in their “open works.” Indeterminacy was sought by John Cage through “indeterminate compositions” with a written or otherwise established score. Cage always claimed to be a composer and was critical of improvisation (until the 1980s, according to Pauline Oliveros³), as he suspected it was merely the expression of the performer’s ego.

Another possible source of misunderstanding can arise from reproduction. A recording of an improvisation can be repeated, the improvisation can be transcribed or memorized and analyzed as if it were a complete work. This circum-

2 For a succinct overview of the whole issue, see Goldoni (2022, 243–248).

3 Pauline Oliveros informed me of this change in Cage’s attitude towards improvisation at a conference at Ca’ Foscari University in 2012.

stance might suggest applying to an improvisation the same criteria of judgment as are used for a composition. However, the recording of an improvisation is not the same as the improvisation itself (see Cardew 1971, *The Problems of Registration*, and Bailey 1993, 103 ff.). I will return to this point later, in the section entitled “non-knowledge.”

3 Play, Game

Musical improvisation can be divided into genres and can also be recognized as belonging to certain trends and schools. That happens even in “experimental music” (see Nyman 1999; Gottschalk 2016; Piekut 2011, 2019; and Goldoni 2022, 251–252). This circumstance does not eliminate the factor of the *unexpected* but suggests that a factor of *replicability* also comes into play. To understand the relationship between replicable and non-replicable factors, I will now talk about different aspects of improvisation.

One might find a competitive element in improvisation: a challenge, an individual, one-to-one, or collective game.

One could find it, for example,

- 1) in the stornelli or *fronn’e limone* of Italian shepherd-poet-singers of past centuries (Tuscany, Lazio, Campania, Sardinia, Romagna); in other so-called “ethnic” forms of improvisation. The game consists in the performer’s ability to use traditional material to invent the music, according to a taste and virtuosity recognized by a community of musicians and listeners (Kezich 1986; Arom 1991, 2013; Nettl 2016; and De Zorzi 2019);
- 2) in jazz jam sessions, in so-called “chases” between musicians on stage;
- 3) in a “solo” exhibition before an audience;
- 4) during the interplay of an improvisation.

As with any game, any type of improvisational practice can be taught to a certain extent. People can learn many ways to “respond” to a musical gesture improvised by other musicians. It is almost like learning to talk to others, to argue, to support one’s point of view. To the extent that this is a practice recognized as correct by a community, it can be replicated, taught, and judged in teaching-learning contexts. Indeed, conversational and discussion patterns are detectable in many Western and non-Western cultural and educational models. Similarly, schools have been established to teach organ, flamenco, rock, jazz, and different “ethnic” ways of conceiving and practicing improvisation. Although individual talent is always required, might we say that, within these contexts and boundaries, entailing an ex-

tensive use of formulas and patterns, improvisation is a complete (replicable) gesture?

In 1971, the composer and improviser Cornelius Cardew stated:

improvisation is a sport *too*, and a spectator sport [. . .] (Cardew 1971, 2)

Are sport games like football, basket, tennis, etc., “complete gestures,” inasmuch as they have rules and are taught? If so, could *cantare in ottava rima*, flamenco, jam sessions, and ethnic improvisations be considered complete gestures? We should note, though, that there is an essential difference between sports in which rules establish who wins and who loses, and improvisation. Cardew continues by saying:

improvisation is a sport *too*, and a spectator sport [. . .] where the subtlest interplay on the physical level can throw into high relief some of the mystery of being alive. (Cardew 1971, 2)

A certain revelation of the mystery of being alive is not the effect of following a rule. Nor is there a winner or loser.

4 An Ideology of Novelty in Improvisation

As I anticipated above, the modern Western word “improvisation” and the usual tracing back of its meaning to the Latin word *improvisus* seem to suggest that the unexpected, or unrepeatable, is the essential nature of the practices that bear this name today. But the words “improvvisazione” and “improvisation” in Italian, French, English, and German were initially applied to poetry and only later, from the 19th century onwards, to musical practices which, however, had hitherto been referred to with other words (see Goldoni 2022, 246).

In the late 18th and early 20th centuries, the ideology of originality (Kant 2000, §§ 46 and 47) and of novelty strongly entailed the concepts of art and music—with composers such as Wagner and Schönberg—as well as that of improvisation. In the 20th century, the emphasis was placed precisely on the novelty, on the non-replicability of improvisation. The Futurist manifesto *L'improvvisazione musicale* by Mario Bartoccini and Aldo Mantia entrusted “free improvisation” with the “absolute destruction of all musical laws.” “Any harmony or motif already listened to” had to be avoided, so as to eliminate the “obsession with tempo, structure, rhythm, and formal laws.” Free improvisation should create an “infinite originality of brilliant ideas,” capable of “electrifying forcefully and immensifying music with genius, a sublime art and, at the same time, a very effective hygiene of social elevation” (Bartoccini and Mantia 1921, my translation; see also Goldoni 2022, 248).

Some relevant aspects of the ideology of novelty are also detectable in the intentions, statements, and practices of many jazz, rock, progressive, free jazz, free music, “experimental music” improvisers in the second half of the 20th century (Piekut 2011, 75). The goal of producing “unexpected,” “surprising” music through a renewal of musical “language” became the very benchmark for improvisation.⁴ As we will see, this goal and the corresponding musical practices have brought to light an essential element of improvisation, but some ideological interpretations have also led to paradoxical results.

5 Freedom

Improvisers like Evangelisti and Globokar prescribed *negative* rules and exercises aimed at avoiding recognizable and traditional melodic, rhythmic, and timbre elements (Evangelisti 1991, 67–71; Globokar 1970; and Schiaffini 2011, 85).

Such caution—when understood and applied by taking account of their true purpose and the context of the performance and, above all, without falling into stylistic schemes or into any “radical” fanaticism—have been and can still be useful in fostering a fruitful freedom among improvisers. Indeed, in free improvisation there are no positive formal rules to establish the boundaries of the correctness of the interaction, even if very few non-explicit conventions can be recognized, deriving from executive practices, such as:

- 1) listening to others and the environment;
- 2) playing together (“together” is a rather “vague” concept: anyone can be silent or intervene when she/he wishes);
- 3) finishing so as to make the end perceptible.

Negative prescriptions such as those mentioned above were created with the aim of making the use of such non-explicit conventions as free as possible. Indeed,

- 4) any overly codified musical material forces improvisers to “follow” it or to counter it with possible non-musical outcomes. Avoiding overly codified material allows improvisers to suggest an idea at a chosen moment through a musical gesture. The latter may be accepted and interpreted by the other musicians, contributing to orienting the music collectively produced in a new direction.
- 5) The lack of a predictable development of the music promotes attention (*Awakeness*: Cardew 1971, 7) towards what is happening in *the present*. It fosters partic-

⁴ See note 1.

ular attention to the sounds, environment, present relationships, and the quality of the ongoing process. This poetics converges, in a certain sense, with the “experimental” one of John Cage. His use of chance was aimed at enabling and broadening the perception of unexpected sounds: any sound, even beyond the prevailing taste in Western musical traditions.

6 Transgressions Become New Clichés

In these contexts, the unexpected, the “new,” can be a *condition for* or a *result of* experimental music and improvisation, but in itself, it is not the essence of improvisation: what makes musicians love improvising, especially with other improvisers, as we will see shortly. When that essence is forgotten and replaced by the formal idea of novelty, those “negative” suggestions risk becoming only stylistic prescriptions and new clichés. These introduce some replicable elements in improvisation.

Derek Bailey (Bailey 1993) urged musicians to avoid “idiomatic” languages.

Indeed, every great improviser of the 20th century has practiced non-idiomatic improvisation. But when you *invent* and *establish* a “new” language, what today sounds unheard risks becoming tomorrow’s mainstream and a set of replicable patterns. This has happened, for instance, with John Coltrane. When one listens to John Coltrane’s *Giant Steps*⁵ or *Interstellar Space*⁶ one might recognize that today many skilled saxophonists can replicate his *language*. However, they do not play his *music*.

Derek Bailey himself invented many new ways of playing the guitar, to avoid “idiomatic improvisation”.⁷ But his musical creations are so well thought out and coherent, that they somehow constitute a new idiom that any skilled guitarist can imitate.

Nuova Consonanza and Vinko Globokar (among others) have invented new sounds, new forms of music, by also using “extended techniques,” that is a non-conventional use of conventional instruments. Examples: Nuova Consonanza;⁸ Vinko Globokar: *Oblak Semen*;⁹ and Vinko Globokar: *Der Engel der Geschichte*.¹⁰

5 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xy_fxj1mMY, last accessed March 6, 2024.

6 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkrMkxIGti0>, last accessed March 6, 2024.

7 See e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMoHRidTQcw>, last accessed March 6, 2024.

8 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqvAhBJ99wA>, last accessed March 6, 2024.

9 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLrtJoRC20w>, last accessed March 6, 2024.

10 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTZI-hZsk4k>, last accessed March 6, 2024.

Some of these ways of transgressing tradition have become tacit, implicit school prescriptions, according to the shared taste of communities of “free” improvisers and their “fans.” After more than fifty years, it is not difficult to recognize new clichés in some of these attempts to avoid melodic phrases and traditional timbres through extended techniques (see also Goldoni 2022, 248–249).

7 A Matter of Taste

More generally, it would be a misunderstanding to believe that in free improvisation taste has never been major factor in the positive reception of performances. This misunderstanding may arise from the fact that intense and unconventional tonal research, the use of non-tempered pitches and micro-intervals, and the positive (sometimes ideological) appreciation of “errors” (see Schiaffini 2011, 83) make such music harsh to ears that are unaccustomed to experimentalism: this music might seem to go against all “taste.” But if, in a so-called “radical” free improvisation, you pick up a regular rhythm for a while, if you play something that looks like a modal or tonal melody, other listeners may look askance at you. Maybe they will reproach you (this was my personal experience as a trumpet player many years ago, when I was still naive: an experience that I then shared with a now famous double bass improviser and a now famous percussion improviser. Sometimes, when we meet, we recall that experience and have a good laugh).

8 A Computational Approach

In relation to the question of replicability, it is also worth mentioning the algorithmic, computational approach as an extremely formal way of practicing musical improvisation, resorting to replicable procedures.

The psychologist Philip Johnson-Laird (2002) claimed that it was possible to practice and understand improvisation through algorithms. I invited him to Ca’ Foscari University, Venice. He showed us how certain algorithms and software could reproduce Parker’s musical language. Indeed, the computer played some formulaic patterns from Parker. This experience can help us analyze Parker’s melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic creations and his approach to traditional jazz forms (blues, 32-bar rhythm changes, songs . . .). It may be useful for a learning purpose. But the whole thing, of course, did not sound like Parker. You cannot simply use algorithms and software to reproduce Parker’s attacks, breath, accent, and timbre in the context of an improvisation; moreover, this also includes other

elements, such as the presence of other improvisers, of an audience, and the sounds of the location. So, I would not take this experiment as an example of improvisation.

In relation to the question of replicability, if a piece of music can be produced through a recursive function that determines a finite number of development possibilities, that music can be replicated in a finite range of cases. Any unpredictability in terms of what happens during the listening could only affect the listener, not the procedure. But if the surprised listener is also an improviser who interacts with that music in real time, the improvisation becomes unpredictable.

The French center for acoustical/musical research (IRCAM) has produced a computer that can interact with an improviser, so as to surprise the performer and force him/her to promptly come up with musical unpredicted responses. The great improviser and trombonist George Lewis has created something similar. When I invited him to Venice Ca' Foscari University, I listened to his trombone interact with his computer, connected to a Disklavier. I really loved the way he played and what happened was interesting. It highlighted Lewis' great improvisational skills. But what is the musical relevance of those experiments?

9 An Ethic of Improvisation

Any purely formal approach to the question of the musical language of improvisation, whether human or computerized, whether made of patterns or performed radically *against* them in order to be surprising, is reductive. Music always has to do with a certain community, with its ways and moments of understanding and misunderstanding, of provoking and responding, enjoying, and playing. Improvisation is no exception. In fact, excellent improvisers, even the most radical ones, say that what they want the most is to play with other improvisers (see Bailey 1993, 112). Music is more than just a good combination of sounds, as it shapes the time and place for shared listening in a special way, different from the time and place of ordinary affairs.

The mutual implication between place, the *present*, and the community becomes clear in the following words by Cornelius Cardew:

A city analogy can also be used to illustrate the interpreter's relationship to the music he is playing. I once wrote: "Entering a city for the first time you view it at a particular time of day and year, under particular weather and light conditions. You see its surface and can form only theoretical ideas of how this surface was moulded. As you stay there over the years you see the light change in a million ways, you see the insides of houses-and having seen the inside of a house the outside will never look the same again. You get to know the

inhabitants, maybe you marry one of them, eventually you are inhabitant—a native yourself. You have become part of the city. If the city is attacked, *you* go to defend it; if it is under siege, *you* feel hunger—you are the city. When you play music, *you* are the music. (Cardew 1971, 2)

Love is a dimension like time, not some small thing that has to be made more interesting by elaborate preamble. The basic dream—of both love and music—is of a continuity, something that will live forever. The simplest practical attempt at realising this dream is the family. In music, we try to eliminate time psychologically [. . .] to work in time in such a way that it loses its hold on us, relaxes its pressure. Quoting Wittgenstein again: “If by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in the present.” (Cardew 1971, 4)

The present, in this sense, is not an instant within a temporal line. This present entails an “ethical” attitude to the place I am in, the people I am with, the sound I hear, my own body and movements (indeed, the title of Cardew’s text is *Towards an Ethic of Improvisation*). There is no longer any separation between myself, the environment, and others:

When you play music, *you* are the music. (Cardew, 1971, 2)

It is not only I who plays.

This is a difference compared to other (musical and non-musical) situations in which commercial or professional aims are predominant and lead to a competition. There is no competition, no winner or loser—unlike in other games and sports—and no strategy.

Once Peirce wrote:

In fact, it is Pure Play [. . .] Pure Play has no rules, except this very law of liberty [. . .] (Peirce 1931–1938/1958, Volume VI, 458–459)

10 Two Examples of Indeterminacy

“Deep listening” is a sort of “indeterminacy” or improvisation in playing-and-listening, that discovers new properties in sound.¹¹

This happens with some “experimental” and “indeterminate” music, for example, by Oliveros and by Eliane Radigue. In *The Heart of Tones*, by Oliveros, the starting material is only a central D. Musicians make changes through improvised

¹¹ See/listen to Pauline Oliveros: *The Difference between Listening and Hearing*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QHfOuRrJB8, last accessed March 6, 2024.

slight variations in the pitch (just above or below the D) and in the dynamics. The performance allows you to discover a rich set of musical possibilities in that central D.¹² The performance can be repeated, but the differences in the pitch, dynamics and in the positions in space by performers are not determined, so the outcome is different every time.

In *Occam Ocean* by Eliane Radigue,¹³ you might hear, above the mass of chords and drones improvised by strings, winds, brass, and percussions, some thin, rapid, and intermittent melodies of overtones, which no one plays intentionally. Thus, this music is partially indeterminate and unpredictable.

11 Exercises

Against the opinion that improvised and indeterminate music are incomplete gestures because they cannot be replicated, one could argue that improvisation and indeterminate music also require many exercises to be successful, and that the exercises are replicable. This is true.

Franco Evangelisti prescribed certain exercises to ensure success in collective improvisation (Evangelisti 1991, 66–71). Many exercises are necessary to be able to master the musical material, tone down the mind's chatter and anxieties, and to promote listening and awareness—in short: to learn to play while staying in the present.

For years, MusicaFoscari ensembles have also been taking part in workshops led by composers and improvisers such as Pauline Oliveros, George Lewis, Evan Parker, Fabrizio Ottaviucci, Daniele Roccato, and Michele Rabbia (among others). The members of the ensemble have been led to appreciate silence and sound, to listen to the others and to the environment, to recognize the “right” moment to intervene and the “right” moment to finish. It has been like learning to “purify” one's listening, and to make the performance space a free and welcoming place for friends and unexpected guests. Much exercise, solid practice, familiarity and friendship among the musicians can remove any sense of alarm in the mind and take down its defenses, favoring improvisation and musical experimentation. But none of these necessary conditions, nor all of them together, are sufficient in themselves to make the “present”—and the marvel of music—happen (see also Evangelisti 1991, 71). No one knows in advance when and why it happens.

¹² See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOKPcDActVw>, last accessed March 6, 2024.

¹³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAWBuyzPwvg>, last accessed March 6, 2024.

12 Non-Knowledge, Vagueness

This present cannot be achieved without a transformation of one's attitude toward time and sound. This transformation cannot be calculated as if it could "be grasped as an object in time" (Cage 2013, 39). *Presence* cannot be placed on a timeline in which a previous phenomenon is a necessary and sufficient cause of its arising.

I do not mean that, in improvisation, there is no concern for a control over the musical material employed. This concern is introjected by the improviser, becoming almost instinctive; probably it is tacitly at work, but not overwhelming.

Indeed, the improviser borrows a lot of already used and known musical material. She/he can retrospectively recognize why she/he made a certain choice, why opted for a given phrase or sound . . . Later, the improviser can remember one of own improvisations or an improvisation by someone with whom she/he was playing, by resorting to own memory, the memory of other improvisers, or a recording. The improviser can use all of this for the purpose of analyzing the strengths or weaknesses of that improvisation, can judge the degree of mastery over the musical material, the coherence of the development, the performance skills, etc. This judgment can be fruitful for a subsequent improvisation or for a composition. Listening to the recording of that improvisation can bring out forgotten aspects, for the better or worse. But the recording of an improvisation is *not that improvisation*: that present is missing. A free conversation about a former improvisation is another improvisation, based on words. A written analysis of an improvisation is a kind of word-composition. The channel that connects an improvisation with a subsequent conversation or with the analysis of a recording is open and often fruitful, but nobody can take a full look at it. They belong to different media, chronological, and experiential dimensions. The "right" awareness of an improvisation takes place during the performance itself, in its "present." I would not consider this awareness an "analysis": its matter is "vague" (see also Maddalena 2021, 91). One may be aware of the pertinence of the musical material employed, how the other improvisers responses to it, of the shape that the whole process is taking, but what decides and shapes the music is joy, the desire to play—or, if music does not work, a feeling of obstruction of the flow, of a level drop, a lack of joy. When a joyous moment occurs, it is like a "grace" from above. Is grace analyzable? I do not think so.

People exercise to receive grace: in religion, also in music. Are exercises replicable? They are. Is there a necessary and sufficient "causal" connection between the exercises and the grace? If there is one, most of us do not know it.

Peirce's sentence quoted above continues with a quote from John 3:8:

Pure Play has no rules [. . .] It bloweth where it listeth [. . .] (Peirce 1931–1938/1958, Volume VI, 458–459).

It is significant that a philosopher (Davidson 2016, 523–538) and an improviser (Lewis 2011) speak of improvisation as a “spiritual exercise.”

According to Plato, considerable practice is required to experience beauty, but when it manifests itself, if it ever does, it is as a sudden (εξαίφνης), unexpected vision and experience (Plato 1991, 204 [210 and 4]).

To summarize the arguments used in this essay in order to discuss a complex musical situation into a simplified conclusion, I would say:

if we consider a gesture incomplete when it cannot be replicated, then we should conclude that any form of improvised or “experimental” musical practice is incomplete.

The vagueness of the connection between exercise, techniques and musical outcome in improvised or “indeterminate” music, suggests that even the concepts of successful improvisation and of the “right” outcome of an “experimental” musical action are vague, even though they are unquestionably detectable in our experience.

I have given musical examples, but those considerations can also be extended to other arts, other practices, and many decisive aspects of culture and daily life—and indeed to life in general.

Vagueness plays a very relevant role in religion, ethics (see Wittgenstein's *Lecture on Ethics*, 2022), art, and philosophy. For example, the idea of beauty expressed in Plato's *Symposium* is also vague (see Maddalena 2021, 35).

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