THE PATH TO ABSTRACTION: 
A PRACTICE LED INVESTIGATION INTO THE 
EMERGENCE OF AN ABSTRACT IMPROVISATION 
LANGUAGE 

TONY HICKS 

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ABSTRACT

This practice led research examines the emergence of abstract musical concepts within my recent free improvisation practice. To contextualize the work I align my professional performance career and creative practice with Attali’s first three codes of production. I then examine the development of an autonomous abstract improvisation language within a specific project, the Expose Project, and view the work in the light of Attali’s Composing code of production.

My journey along the path to abstraction began four years ago when two unconventional professional collaborations, Crossing Roper Bar and Heretics Brew, challenged me to look beyond the conventional contemporary jazz vernacular in search of more contextually appropriate improvisation vocabularies. A range of atonal, microtonal and extended techniques began to emerge that expanded my musical conceptions and woodwind facility. Later, within the abstract electronic sound environment of the Expose Project, conventional musical vocabularies were deconstructed and instruments came to be viewed as generators of sound and texture rather than melody. I discuss amplification and recording techniques that facilitated the integration of a range of extraneous mechanical noises and sound field manipulations into the work. Instrument selection within the project is examined in relation to the evolution of these new vocabularies, and further insights gained through a deeper examination of evolving abstract expressions on the three instruments most commonly played in the project. Audio recordings illustrate this developmental process.

As the vehicle for the final stage of the journey to abstraction, the Expose Project facilitated the development of this new abstract improvisation language and an experiential understanding of Attali’s Composing code, whereby making music becomes a private process of relationship through sounding, situated outside of the commerce-driven networks of the previous codes.
Key Words:

Improvisation, abstract improvisation, abstraction, Jacques Attali, David Tolley, extended techniques, multilayering, bass clarinet, saxophone, Gluisop, recording methods, “playing to the head”, practice led research.
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that:

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Masters,
(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
(iii) the thesis is between 14,000 and 15,000 words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of charts, tables, and bibliographies.

________________________________________
Signature:  Tony Hicks
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<td>3rd piece</td>
<td>February 26 2009</td>
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((track number on the accompanying cd-rom)

All tracks © 2011
INTRODUCTION

The Path to Abstraction

As a creative improviser I have always searched for sounds that express the contemporary music landscape rather than past traditions. However, opportunities for free-wheeling self expression were limited within the commercial music industry that consumed most of the past thirty years of my professional performance career. The improvisation language I developed through these years reflected my own particular version of the postmodern musician’s stylistic dilemma: fragments borrowed from across the globe pasted onto an Australian saxophonist’s version of Afro-American jazz, rock and funk in an effort to keep pace with changing commercial trends and the fashions of the arts scene.

In 2007 and 2008, two unconventional collaborations emerged in my performance practice that demanded deeper engagement with my personal creative process, and triggered a search for new context-specific instrumental and improvisation vocabularies in response to the question that is fundamental to this research: What do I play when nothing that I know works?

Heretics Brew 2007 -

In November 2007 Stuart Favilla and Joanne Cannon invited me to work with them in “Heretics Brew”, an ongoing experimental electronic instrument building and improvisation performance project that expands on the innovative work of
the “Bent Leather Band”\(^1\). My role in this project involves developing instrumental facility and expressive conceptions using the Gluisop (Favilla, Cannon et al. 2008), a soprano saxophone augmented with electronic controllers interfaced with sophisticated computer-based sound processing software.

Acoustic saxophone sounds are sculpted in real-time into multidimensional abstract electronic narratives, facilitating an expansion of my previously monophonic melodic woodwind conception into abstract multilayered polyphony and inspiring an investigation of acoustic woodwind instruments as generators of sounds outside the melodic, harmonic or rhythmic conventions dictated by commercially oriented codes of music production.

**Crossing Roper Bar 2008 -**

In August 2008 I joined the Australian Art Orchestra’s (AAO) Crossing Roper Bar\(^2\) project (CRB) that exists at the interface between the traditional indigenous songs and culture of the Wagilak clan from South-East Arnhem Land and contemporary free improvised music. Musically this project forced a further re-definition of my improvisation conceptions and musical philosophies by revealing the habitual nature of Western musical constructs such as tonality and temperament, and exposing the conceptual flaws in the “cut and paste” approach that typifies many inter-cultural and cross-genre collaborations. A new language was required that could express the raw power and transcultural potential of this collaboration.

\(^1\) More information about the music and technology of “Bent Leather Band” and “Heretics Brew” can be found at: [http://home.mira.net/~favilla/](http://home.mira.net/~favilla/)

While these projects still conform to the “conceptual imperialism” (Goehr 2007:245) that defines the commercialized contemporary music industry, they also demand the development of new approaches to music making that express the immediacy of these contexts, and inject the unpredictability of the improvisatory process into the commodified performance spectacular. Rather than creating a fixed and predictable product, these projects provide recognizable frameworks within which improvisation can exist to drive evolving creative processes, leading to profound creative transformations and the development of new languages.

This research describes the creative journey triggered by the question that emerged during my early experiences in these projects. Investigations of atonality, microtonality, extended techniques, Australian Indigenous music and electronic interfaces led to collaborative work with David Tolley in the Expose Project, and ultimately to the development of an autonomous abstract improvisation language that deconstructs conventions of instrument use, melody, harmony and rhythm, and to an experiential understanding of Attali’s (1985) Composing code of music production.

Defining Abstraction

“Abstraction (from the Latin abs, meaning away from and trahere, meaning to draw) is the process of taking away or removing characteristics from something in order to reduce it to a set of essential characteristics.” (Rouse 2005)

For the object-oriented computer programmer, abstraction involves hiding all but the essential details beneath the surface to simplify the working interface.

3 In this paper Composing (in italics) refers to Attali’s fourth code of music production.
Abstraction in the context of my research occurred as conventional music making characteristics were hidden beneath the surface of the music to simplify the collaborative interface and enable more liberated access to the core energetic and interactive characteristics of improvised music. This process of musical abstraction involved learning to improvise using no conventional melodic, harmonic or rhythmic material, and manipulating and transforming the instrumental techniques, improvisation conceptions and stylistic understandings developed throughout my career as a commercial musician. The process began in the electronically-enhanced context of Heretics Brew, and reached a conclusion in the Expose Project, where concepts and facilities were developed that allowed me to create extended improvisations on my conventional acoustic woodwind instruments with no explicit references to the technical and stylistic materials developed in past practice.

Abstraction in the context of this research occurred in two ways. Firstly, the abstraction of my conventional instrumental techniques occurred through various manipulations and distortions of standard approaches to sound production, and the development of a range extend techniques. This resulted in a vocabulary of sounds that, although not new in a historical sense, were new expressions within my improvisation practice. Secondly, this new vocabulary of sounds gradually developed into a comprehensive and coherent improvisation language that is an abstraction of my conventional and largely jazz-based improvisation language.

The “abstract” of an academic thesis distills the essential themes, arguments and outcomes of the research to provide the reader with an understanding of what is contained in the main body of the text. Similarly “abstract” art omits realist representational details to reveal the forms that are central to the artist’s expression. Melodic, harmonic and rhythmic details that differentiate various musical styles and genres serve only to embellish the essential energetic momentum that lies at the heart of the music. If these referential musical devices
are manipulated, distorted and finally removed it is the pure abstracted energetic essence of the music that remains.

The term “abstract” is used throughout this paper to describe sounds that have been stripped of the details that define and are therefore appropriate in conventional performance settings. A well-produced classical saxophone tone has a clean attack, pure sound, consist pitch and, at times, an evenly controlled vibrato. These attributes allow the sound to blend with other similarly well-controlled sounds to create accurate representations of pre-composed music. Jazz improvisers can take some liberties with sound production but are still largely restricted by the rules and conventions of the genre and the particular style in which they are performing. The player will need to spend considerable energy and focus maintaining various genre-specific representational details, often to the detriment of their connection to the essential energetic nature of the music they are performing. By removing conventions of song form and harmonic structure, free jazz improvisers further simplify their musical interface, attaining greater degrees of abstraction and deeper levels of self-expression, though the music still conforms to clear stylistic conventions including instrumentation, specific rhythmic and melodic approaches, and instrumental sound and technique that help to define the genre. Through my work in this research project I sought to remove various conventions of instrument technique and style from my improvisation practice in order to liberate my expressions from genre and style specific references. Through that process I developed a range of abstract techniques and expressions that were more appropriate to the specific contexts of my creative practice. By viewing each instrument “as a total configuration” (Nyman 1974:20) I expanded my sound-making potential and transcended the restrictive parameters of instrument technique and design that have steered my past practice in servitude of representational forms of music production.

In the 1940s, in parallel with abstract expressionist action painters such as Jackson Pollock who engaged with a new range of gestural and improvisational
techniques to liberate from constricting realist and representational traditions, John Cage and other experimental musicians began to deconstruct the conventions of music production. Experiments with prepared pianos led to the development of new approaches to sound generation on traditional instruments and the invention of new electronic and acoustic instruments and sound processing technologies that radically transformed contemporary instrumental, composition and performance practice. By 1975 (Smith Brindle 1975:154-7) a range of new woodwind techniques were in common usage. These included “unorthodox timbres and attack characteristics…breathy tone…flutter tongue and sung attack, squeaky sounds…the use of a multiplicity of unorthodox fingerings…varying the timbre, attack and speed or depth of vibrato…” (Ibid:156), multiphonics, quarter tones, singing while playing, and “a whole range of mechanical and ‘blowing’ sounds…which can be used effectively, especially with electronic amplification and manipulation” (ibid:157). This list provides a comprehensive summary of the various “abstract” techniques that emerged and evolved in my improvisation practice in response to the various collaborative contexts and philosophical perspectives that impacted on my work through the research.

More importantly though, the process of abstraction of my improvisation language involved the development of my capacity to shape and manipulate these abstract materials into coherent improvised narratives.

Initial recordings of the Expose Project reveal in my playing a predominance of conventional instrumental techniques and improvisational approaches punctuated by brief explorations of various abstract techniques. I had not yet developed the capacity for sustained coherent improvisation using these abstract ideas. As the work proceeded I developed familiarity and flexibility with these new sounds and techniques, and strategies emerged that facilitated their more extensive manipulation and application within the work. By the conclusion of the research, I was able to create extended interactive abstract narratives without
directly referencing conventional melodic, harmonic and rhythmic concepts and instrument techniques. The final Expose recordings demonstrate music making at this level of abstraction. Abstract techniques and concepts have evolved to form a coherent language with which sustained dynamic interactive improvisations are confidently created. While clearly informed by the conventional techniques and knowledge that remain hidden from clear view, this comprehensive abstract language simplified the interactive collaborative interface and facilitated deeper engagement with the essential energetic structures of the music. The music had become an abstraction of my past practice.

Limits and Layout

The data collected during this research, including over 20,000 words of reflective journaling and analysis notes and more than 15 hours of recorded material, presents a number of interesting research topics. For this investigation I limit my focus to the development of abstract musical expressions.

Chapter 1 discusses aspects and nuances of practice led research methodology relevant to this work, the process-based emergent nature of the project, and reflective journals and audio recordings that are my key data sources.

Chapter 2 aligns key stages in my performance career with Attali’s (1985) four codes of production to contextualize the emergence of free and abstract improvisation in my recent and current creative practice.

Chapter 3 presents a broad overview of the entire research period (November 2008-July 2011), discussing three distinct phases of the emergent research process.

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 I focus on my work in the Expose Project that was the principal vehicle during the final stage of the journey along the path to
abstraction. Chapter 4 describes three stages of development of my work within the project differentiated by my consistency with and commitment to abstract musical expression. In Chapter 5 I discuss how evolving recording methods influenced these emerging expressions. Chapter 6 investigates the relationship between each of the instruments I played in the Expose project and my evolving abstract improvisation conception, briefly discusses four abstract techniques and concepts that emerged through the work, and concludes with a more detailed view of the three most commonly played instruments within the project. Recorded examples illustrate these discussions.

In Chapter 7 I discuss how improvisation is integral to musical processes within Composing, examine several arguments that present various forms of contemporary music as examples of music produced in this new code, and describe how abstract improvisation within the Expose project emerged as a practical manifestation of music making as Composing.
CHAPTER 1 METHODOLOGY

“Practitioners think, read and write as well as look, listen and make.”
(Haseman cited in Mafe 2009:4)

“Research should not be seen as being in conflict with practitioners’
methods but an expansion of them.” Gray (2006:10)

Practice Led Research

Methodologically this project displays a number of typical practice-led research characteristics. In contrast to traditional problem-based research models, this research is practice-based, driven by my “enthusiasm for practice” (Haseman 2006:3). My “practice is the principal research activity” (ibid:7), the site where research is initiated and carried out, and new knowledge generated. The question that motivated this research emerged within my practice prior to any formal research activities, and the unfolding investigative processes were driven by that practice. Apart from injecting focus, momentum, and new philosophical perspectives, research procedures had minimal influence on the processes and outcomes of my practice.

Since the mid 1970’s practice led research has gained momentum and credibility as a research methodology that reflects the impact of “post-modern ideas (on)… most aspects of culture and society, (including) the way we relate, communicate and generate knowledge” (Gray 1996:9) within creative arts practice. As a post-modern research paradigm, practice led research deconstructs the positivist scientism of traditional research methodologies that minimize “the creativity and
sensibilities of the individual researcher” (Richardson 1994:517), and acknowledges instead the unique subjective “situational limitations” (ibid:518) of the practitioner as a legitimate site for research. Personal interpretation, experience, local knowledge, and respect for the creative process are core aspects of practice-led research that recognizes that despite not knowing everything, the researcher will “still have plenty to say … about the world as they perceive it” (ibid:518).

**Emergent Practice**

Decisions made early in this project reflect this post-modern view. Rather than re-searching existing resources and methods that reflect the work of other practitioners, I allowed new concepts and applications to emerge and evolve within the unique and very specific creative context of my practice. My investigation of microtonality exemplifies this emergent approach. A practical study of microtonality following conventional research pathways might typically include a theoretical review of pre-existing techniques and applications across a range of genres and traditions, and practical immersion in selected aspects of this externally sourced knowledge to develop technical capacities and achieve predetermined outcomes. Instead I adopted an emergent approach, founded on trust in my creative process and musical experience. With no concrete goals in mind, I developed fingering systems and technical exercises that allowed microtonality to emerge organically within my improvisations guided by my creative instinct and naturally accruing technical and aural facility. This approach reflects methods that use improvisation to develop musicianship and technique outlined by writers such as Mildred Portney-Chase in her book “Improvisation:
music from the inside out” (Chase 1988) and Stephen Nachmanovitch in “Free Play” (Nachmanovitch 1990).^4

**Research-in-Practice**

At the commencement of this study I viewed performance practice and research as separate activities. As a novice researcher I believed that research of my work and that of other practitioners and thinkers could inform but ultimately was not my practice. I struggled to find ways to situate research activities around practice, and at times resented research assignments that took me away from practice. Fortunately I was able to choose research topics for regular in-class presentations that were relevant to and informed my practice. I observed that the intellectual stimulation of deep engagement with philosophical, theoretical and analytical ideas impacted positively on my practical expression. After intensive research periods lasting several weeks, instead of feeling “out-of-practice” - a phrase that conveniently describes both the musician’s disconnection from their instrument through lack of practice and the creative researcher’s need to distance themselves from their practice so as to observe it - I often felt “in-practice”, with an enhanced connection to my creative voice and an uncompromised technical fluency. Creative concepts seemed to continue to develop and evolve sub-consciously during these periods of practical inactivity nourished by the intellectual stimulation of the research.

The positive impacts flowing from the various research activities that emerged within this practice/research environment allowed me to reconcile research activities within my practice. Research activities including reflective journaling,

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^4 This also aligns with observations made within my own teaching practice where beginner students regularly create energetic and complex improvisations driven by their natural technique and creative instincts at levels far beyond what they could achieve reading notated music.
reading, analysis, recording, and writing integrated seamlessly into my practice, enriched my work and lead to an expanded view of practice that includes “all activity an artist/creative practitioner undertakes within their profession and related cultural frameworks” (Mafe 2009:29).

The range of terms used to describe research in creative contexts demonstrates that “‘artistic’ methodology (is) tailored to the individual project” (Gray 2006:15). “Creative practice as research, performance as research, research through practice, studio research, practice as research…practice-led research” (Haseman 2006:3) and Haseman’s own “performative research” (ibid: 5) all express subtly nuanced variations of the relationship between practice and research within the work of the practitioner. These terms separate the two activities to different degrees and in my view often emphasize the research as the principal task and objective: practice exists to serve the research, and projects are often undertaken specifically to fulfill research requirements. None of these terms satisfactorily express the nuancing of the relationship between practice and research that existed in this research project. My newly developed perspective on research as integral to my ongoing emergent practice as an improvising musician contrasts with methodologies that situate research as a separate activity that observes, documents, informs and objectifies practice.

My research question emerged in late 2007 as a natural consequence of my evolving improvisation practice. Formal research was undertaken to focus and inform the conceptual and technical developments that were already taking place within that practice. And finally, I came to see research as integral to that practice. Perhaps “Research-in-Practice” more satisfactorily describes the dynamic relationship between practice and research that existed within this project.
Examining the Process

A typical exegesis-style research report illuminates paintings, sculptures, films, recordings or performances through an investigation of the contexts and processes that led to their creation. Although this project refers to recorded artifacts, my aim is to illuminate processes that unfolded within my practice over a specific time period rather than to objectify specific performances or artifacts. “Postcard(s),” as John Cage refers to them (Nyman 1974:10) act as historical markers along a creative continuum. They prove that a creative process occurred but can never re-present the totality of that process. By example, throughout this project my bass clarinet technique and improvisation conceptions continually evolved. No single recording can be upheld as the quintessential example of my work on this instrument. By comparing recordings, trends and developments can be observed and theorized, but the postcards themselves will remain snapshots that document moments in time, and highlight the fluid and transient nature of the creative process.

My improvisation practice is continually evolving in response to emergent situations and inspirations. Immersion in this intense and unpredictable process excites me as a practitioner. My intention then is to examine this “working of the work” (Peters 2009:14) rather than to tie myself to any one or several snapshots that can only represent a fraction of that process.

Arriving at the Thesis Topic

Selecting a specific topic for investigation in this thesis was a similarly emergent process. I began this research project with four potential areas of investigation related to my free improvisation practice. A study of the Gluisop and related technology would enhance my work in Heretics Brew and facilitate exploration of that instrument in other contexts. A practice led investigation of microtonality or extended techniques on various woodwind instruments would add new
vocabularies and expressive potentials to my free improvisation practice. An analysis of the music of the Wagilak songmen would inform my involvement in the CRB project. Early in 2009 the study of tone rows as material for improvisation emerged, adding a fifth potential topic to the list.

At different times throughout this project I investigated these topics within various performance and research contexts. Each impacted significantly on my improvisation practice, though by August 2010 I was still unclear as to the most appropriate thesis topic. Although the term “abstract” appears in my first journal entry in November 2008, it was not until the final months of 2010 that “abstract” improvisation emerged as the focus of this research, and the title for this thesis - “The path to abstraction” - was decided upon. Until that point I had been attempting to integrate abstract materials within my existing improvisation language. Theoretically illuminated by Attali’s (1985) view of Western music history, the path became clear through the work of the Expose project in early 2011. The end of the path was reached in June 2011 with a cohesive abstract improvisation practice liberated from the usage- and exchange-based agenda of the previous codes of production.

Data

Through the research period I kept a written reflective journal and made a series of solo and ensemble audio recordings. These constitute the data resources for this research.

Reflective Journal

A reflective Improvisation and Practice Journal was started in November 2008 to record activities, observations and speculations relating to my improvisation practice. At various stages through the research period I made regular entries that reflected on performances, practice sessions and recordings, and
documented new technical, conceptual and philosophical developments in my practice. This writing process helped to focus and steer my investigations and facilitated reflective reviews of past activities and developments. Although gaps exist, this excellent data resource provides insights into the key activities and unfolding theoretical, philosophical and practical processes of the research.

**Recording**

In November 2008 I began an audio journal of recordings of solo improvisations to document and reflect on the evolution of my work. Most of these improvisations were recorded directly into the “Garage Band” recording program on a MacBook laptop computer. Practice sessions became recording sessions that simulated performance conditions where I practiced improvising complete pieces rather than engaging in open ended unstructured investigations of selected materials and ideas. This method led to a more acute sense of compositional form and facilitated the emergence and development of various techniques and concepts within a performative context. Listening to recordings immediately after their making allowed for critical reflection and selective development of musical concepts and devices while memory of the content and creative process of the performance was still fresh in mind.

The Expose project that constitutes the significant practical investigation of this thesis was also documented with high quality recordings that have subsequently been produced into a series of 14 compact discs that provide an excellent reference resource for comparative analysis and observation of the evolution of my practice through the final stage of the research. The recording and listening process was also critical in this project. Recording helped to focus the performance, and the shared listening experience that followed was integral to the broader social component of the project, and created opportunities for shared musical and philosophical reflections on the work. The recording methods and technologies used are discussed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 2  AN EXPERIENTIAL UNDERSTANDING OF ATTALI’S CODES OF PRODUCTION

To contextualize this research and illuminate my current perspectives on creative music making, I overlay key stages in my career with Attali’s (1985) first three codes of music production, Sacrificing, Representing and Repeating, then align my recent and current practice with his fourth code, Composing, that predicted a revolution where “music (is) produced by each individual for himself, for pleasure outside of meaning, usage and exchange” (Attali 1985:137).

Music “creates a ritual order, then is represented as a simulacrum of order, (and) finally passes over to the side of Lent and is sold like a fish, compulsory nourishment.” (Ibid: 23)

Sacrificing 1971-1980

“Music creates order from disorder (noise) through the ritual sacrifice of free will to social organization” (ibid: 25)

My first notes on the saxophone at the age of twelve heralded more than just a career in the music industry, the economic and political positioning within the performance spectacle. Music also provided refuge from the social noise of my adolescence and a focus for my search for success, acceptance and belonging. I had discovered a private inner world to which I could retreat, unjudged and free to imagine and create. The rituals of disciplined practice ordered the noise of my youth with purpose and identity.
Jazz was my father’s music. He played the saxophone, led a swing band in Perth in the 1950’s, and listened to the masters of swing until his last days in 2009. Frank Sinatra, Woody Herman, Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Count Basie and Stan Getz were the soundtrack of my childhood. At the local level The Daly Wilson Big Band and Galapagos Duck from Sydney thrilled me with their energy and “groovy” 70’s style, and the Melbourne-based Brian Browne Quartet inspired with their freer fusions of jazz and rock. Several nights each week I could hear and see saxophonists Peter Martin and Graeme Lyall performing live on TV with the ABC Melbourne Showband. These sounds, and the teachings of my high school saxophone tutors Eddie Oxley, Bill Harrower, John Ellis and Mal Capewell, who were all working musicians in the Melbourne freelance scene, were appropriate guides to my entry into the commercial music industry.

In the 1970’s formalized jazz education in Melbourne was non-existent. As a saxophonist my only tertiary music study option was the Bachelor of Education (Music) at Melbourne State College, a visionary course established by Geoffrey D’Ombrain in 1974 that “focus(ed) on music as a creative medium… (and)… was characterized by improvisation workshops, electronic music composition, contemporary music studies, and collaboration with other arts areas” (D’Ombrain n.d.) including an innovative ethnomusicology course component. These studies introduced me to the philosophies and practices of experimental music, computer technology and indigenous music that were to dramatically influence my creative practice thirty years later. At the time, however, apart from occasional free improvisation experiments, my sights were set on developing skills to build a professional career in the jazz and commercial music industries. I was engaged in a process that Attali describes as the “normalization of the musician…of turning him into the producer of order” (1985:62-3) and the controller of dissonance.
Of particular significance is my relationship with Dr Peter Clinch, an internationally recognized classical saxophonist and inspiring teacher and mentor whose advice to “do it your own way” and “learn to play your instrument first, then you can play what ever music you want” still resonates in my performance and teaching practices.

**Representing 1981-1993**

“Music trapped in the commodity is no longer ritualistic” (Attali 1985:24)

Music in Attali’s *Representing* mode signifies order and harmony and acquires exchange value through commodification of the labor of the musician within the performance spectacle. Throughout this phase I focused on developing skills needed to participate in the commercial music industry. Two parallel streams of activity characterize these early years of my career.

One stream consists of engagements in commercial contexts such as theatres, recording and TV studios motivated by financial gain and the desire to participate in the culture of the professional music industry that I had aspired to in earlier years. I worked as a saxophonist, flautist and clarinetist across a broad range of stylistic contexts and accumulated an eclectic skill set that provided tools to deal with most performance situations I encountered. The hard work of my student years and continuing dedication to the acquisition of new skills and knowledge reaped commercial gain, acceptance and identity.

The second stream of activity flowing through this period was the pursuit of a creative voice through jazz and improvised music. Despite my interest in dissonance fostered by exposure to the philosophies and practices of experimentalists and free improvisers who grappled with capitalism’s grip on Western musical narrative, my view of creative music was colored by the desire for commercial success, peer recognition and representation through the
spectacle of the concert. Efforts to emulate the music and careers of innovative saxophonists including Michael Brecker, John Coltrane, Dave Liebman, Jan Garbarek, Ornette Coleman and David Sanborn led to an eclectic approach to improvising that equipped me for the demands of commercial saxophone playing as well as allowing me to participate in and develop more creatively-oriented projects.

The work of the band Third Floor Richard, formed in 1983 encapsulates this commercial/creative dichotomy with parallel aims to explore approaches to composition and improvisation within the contemporary jazz fusion landscape of the 1980s, and to create a marketable product for the music economy of the late twentieth century. Inspired by the music of the above mentioned saxophonists and guitarists Pat Metheny, Egberto Gismonti and John Scofield, the group performed around Melbourne between 1982 and 1990, and served as a vehicle for my developing conceptions and to project my creative identity into the Australian contemporary jazz scene. The 1990 recording “Two Years” documents the work of this group just prior to it disbanding as more commercially oriented career opportunities emerged to overwhelm these searches for artistic recognition.

**Repeating 1993-2008**

“Music and the musician essentially become either objects of consumption…or meaningless noise.” (Attali 1985:8)

In 1993, motivated by financial imperatives, I sidelined my creative practice and focused on the commodified repetitive spectacle of the theatre where increasingly sophisticated production values had reduced the role of the musician to that of the “virtuoso…capable of infinitely redoing takes that are perfectible with sound effects” (Attali 1985:106). I developed and refined my skills to ensure ongoing marketability within this industry of uniformity and anonymity, but
struggled to repress my own voice within music stripped of opportunities for individual expression.

During these years, the work of artists such as Hariprasad Chaurasia and Jan Garbarek provided a link to a spiritual aspect of music that was missing amongst the repetitive noise of the commercial spectacle, and helped maintain a thread of connection to my improvisation practice.

The new millennium brought new opportunities. Several engagements with the AAO, and opportunities to revisit the material of Third Floor Richard led to experiments with free improvisation as a way to simplify the music production process. Although still firmly rooted in the jazz tradition, this music was the core driver in a creative renaissance that drew on experimental music lessons from my student days and the accumulations of the previous thirty years of music making to propel my improvisation practice forward.

In 2008 a confluence of mounting creative frustrations within the repetitive theatre world, changing personal circumstances and inspiration from work with Heretics Brew and CRB created the momentum that propelled my practice into Attali’s fourth stage.

**Composing 2008**

“Doing solely for the sake of doing, without trying artificially to recreate the old codes…inventing the message at the same time as the language.”

*(Attali 1985:134)*

In Attali’s final mode of production, a “radical music” (Adorno 2007:41) emerges as a reaction to the preceding codes that “sold (the musician’s labour) like a fish” (Attali 1985:23) and where meaning and identity lay in the adherence to the constructed identities that turn the capitalist machine. To succeed in the
commercial music industry I developed levels of virtuosity that, in a cruel but enlightening twist, removed the challenges that had originally engaged me. Mastery of the idiom revealed the falseness of my motivations to participate in an industry that silenced my creative voice.

Jazz presented the converse dilemma where mastery remained elusive. As a young musician I loved the sounds and the look of jazz, and the liberation it represented. I was hooked by its spectacle. The few occasions when I have felt close to achieving the levels of improvised transcendence I imagined were possible within this music came only after intensive but unsustainable periods of immersion in its complex structures, idiomatic conventions and obsessive culture. This music was simply too hard and too culturally distanced for me to fully engage with in any deep and integrated sense.

The free improvisation practice that emerged in 2001 reawakened my creative voice silenced through years of immersion in the previous production codes. I began to experience the joy of making music in contexts that accepted the totality of my musical history unlimited by idiomatic predeterminations or extra-musical agenda. The creative renaissance I had anticipated in 1993, and that had been germinating since 2001, flowered with invitations in November 2007 and June 2008 to join Heretics Brew and CRB. While still conforming to the “conceptual imperialism” (Goehr 2007:245) that shapes the commercialized contemporary music industry, these ongoing projects demanded deep engagement with unfolding creative and collaborative processes, the invention of new languages and messages and injected the unpredictability of the improvisatory process into the commodifiable spectacular. They transformed how I related to and with music and led me to this research as a way to inform and energize my practical investigations of the new expressions emerging within my practice.
CHAPTER 3  THREE RESEARCH PHASES

The overarching form of this research project, which lasted between November 2008 and July 2011, can be divided into three distinct research phases. Phase 1, between November 2008 and February 2009, is marked by the decision to pursue formal research to energize, inform and focus my investigations of the new concepts that were emerging within my practice. Phase 2 essentially spans the 2009 calendar year. Marked by the commencement of formal research activities, this phase sees a general consolidation of these concepts, the emergence of several new areas of investigation, and application of this range of new improvisation strategies across a broad range of performance activities. Phase 3 (March 2010–July 2011) focuses on the Expose Project as the vehicle for the merging of these new concepts into a unified abstract improvisation language, delivering me to the conclusion of the research process at the end of the path to abstraction, and providing an experiential understanding of music production within Attali’s (1985) Composing code.

Phase 1  November 2008 – February 2009

The first brief yet critical phase of this study commenced with the decision to undertake formal research into these emerging aspects of my practice. In preparation for the entrance audition to this course I commenced a reflective Improvisation Practice and Performance Journal and an audio journal of recorded solo improvisations to use as tools for critical reflection and observation of conceptual and technical developments. These practices continued throughout the research period.
All the significant concepts and materials that shaped my work throughout the research were present in this first phase. Journal entries from this time describe a significant departure from my habitual goal-oriented traditional approaches to practicing.

“Practice as creation rather than preparation” (Journal entry February 25, 2009)

“Using practice time to explore and discover new techniques and effects is a new method for me. I have always been focused on specific developmental goals, rather than sitting with an instrument and allowing ideas to emerge and evolve, so will be seeking to apply this approach in practice more often.” (Journal entry November 22, 2008)

Solo improvisations recorded in late 2008 reveal the rapid development of the extended techniques and abstract improvisation conceptions that I continued to explore throughout this research. Multiphonics, circular breathing, mechanical noises such as key click and pops, breath and vocal sounds, tonguing techniques, attacks and vibratos, circular breathing, reed harmonics, rapid conversational lines and melodies that deconstruct and parody traditional saxophone styles are present in recorded improvisations that also utilize various compositional devices to develop themes and narrative structures.

Multilayering, a concept that by the conclusion of this research had evolved to become a core expression in my abstract improvisation language, is also present in these early solo recordings. It emerged from experiments on acoustic instruments to emulate the complex rhythmic structures of the Yidaki playing of the Wagilak songmen in CRB and the multidimensional electronic sound world of the Gluisop in Heretics Brew. Multilayering combines circular breathing with the range of extended techniques listed above to generate multilayered architectures that build textural density and dynamic momentum.
Track nov08 1.3 (1)\textsuperscript{5}, the third of these solos recorded in November 2008, exemplifies the early stages of this work, with examples of each of the techniques listed above.

**Phase 2  February 2009 – February 2010**

Phase Two essentially spans the 2009 academic year. Regular journal entries made from February to May document significant conceptual and technical development of the ideas that emerged in Phase One and the emergence of several new fields of investigation. A broad range of performance contexts and research assignments propelled these investigations through the year.

The month of March 2009 exemplifies the breadth of my practice through this period. In that month I performed adaptations of the music of Kurt Weil with the AAO, indigenous fusion with CRB, Indian-inspired acoustic jazz with Nandi, conventional big band music with the Daryl MacKenzie Jazz Orchestra, original jazz-based saxophone quartets with Saltwater Sax, improvised duets for bassoon and soprano saxophone with Joanne Cannon, free improvisations at the Make It Up Club and the blues with Paul Williamson’s Hammond Combo. Instruments played included soprano, alto and tenor saxophones, clarinet, bass clarinet, piccolo, concert flute and alto flute.

Rapid development of the extended techniques and abstract musical concepts took place across my range of woodwind instruments during these months. I continued to explore microtonality and quarter tone technique, multiphonics, multiphonics,

\textsuperscript{5} (1) indicates track number on the accompanying mp3 CD.
breath and vocal sounds, mechanical sounds such as key pops and rattles, circular breathing, various nonconventional trill effects, and developed further the multilayering technique that emerged in the first phase. The search for an improvisation language outside of tonality included investigations of scale and modal material from Slonimsky (Slonimsky 1947) and Messiaen (Street 1976), tone rows from Movement 3 of Alban Berg’s “Lyric Suite”, compositional considerations such as motivic development, timbre, velocity, range and volume, and some personal philosophical and emotional reflections that informed my performance preparation and creative choices.

I continued to record solo improvisations, and on two occasions in late February reviewed pieces in my journal directly following the recording process. These brief technical and musical explanations describe some concepts and extended techniques I applied in the pieces.

3rd piece (2) explores multi-layered composition combining a sustained first register “A” utilizing circular breathing with right hand vented timbre changes, key pops and clicks using low C, B and Bb keys, and other short notes (side keys and harmonic key) and a subtle multiphonic created when the G key is open, low Bb is fingered, and low C opened and closed rapidly. (Journal entry February 26, 2009)

Throughout the year a range of performance contexts provided different opportunities for developing and applying new concepts. Informal solo and ensemble improvisation and recording sessions provided opportunities to workshop, share and discuss emerging ideas. Small scale performances at contemporary music venues served as platforms to experiment with the application of these concepts in ensemble contexts. A series of electro-acoustic concerts with Heretics Brew and full scale professional performances and recordings with the AAO provided opportunities to present evolving improvisation concepts in large-scale concert venues. Performances in various commercial
contexts allowed me to observe positive impacts of these new approaches on my mainstream performance practice. The success of performances that drew on this new vocabulary of atonal materials and extended techniques reinforced my decision to immerse in these unconventional expressions, and represented a departure from the jazz-based conceptions that had underscored my improvisation practice for thirty years.

Formal research assignments began to influence my practice in a number of ways, and provided first hand experience of Smith and Dean's (Smith and Dean 2009) "Iterative Cyclic Web" that describes the inseparable relationship between research and practice in the creative arts. Books including "Free Play" (Nachmanovitch 1990) and “The Listening Book” (Mathieu 1991) introduced me to a range of ideas to adapt as improvisation exercises. Two research tasks proved influential to my practice. A class listening exercise inspired an analysis of Alban Berg’s serialist technique in the third movement of his string quartet Lyric Suite. This triggered an extensive practical investigation of tone rows as technical exercises and improvisation material, and collaboration with guitarist Ren Walters to explore improvisations based on Berg’s row. A research project that involved transcription and analysis of Manikay, traditional Australian indigenous music from South-East Arnhem Land, was motivated by my performance work in CRB. In a reflexive practice/research loop the knowledge generated through this research informed my performance work in the project, and my broader improvisation practice.

The “emergent practice” approach that surfaced in the first phase led to a series of decisions about how to explore these new concepts and materials. On several occasions I constructed detailed practice routines that would allow me to systematically develop skills across a range of concepts. However, this method that had successfully directed my practicing for thirty years now seemed irrelevant. I was more interested in responding immediately to my creative process, and on each occasion the routine was soon discarded in favor of
preparation for imminent performances and projects, or ideas that emerged spontaneously while practicing.

I applied this emergent method to the investigation of extended techniques and the development of technical facility with microtonality and tone rows. I chose to avoid pre-existing traditions, texts and methods, and allowed approaches to emerge from my practice that reflected my unique knowledge, experience and context. Recording, particularly of solo improvisations, was a significant facilitator of this process. As well as providing a valuable reference document, recording simulated a performance-style environment within which emerging ideas were contained and shaped as musical rather than technical concepts.

The search for balance between structured and emergent practice was mirrored in a search for balance between the maintenance of conventional instrumental facility and the development of new abstract skills. Regular performance work in conventional contexts such as theatre orchestras, big bands and recording studios demanded maintenance of conventional skills, and at various times I was required to refresh various instrumental and theoretical concepts to maintain various technical proficiencies. Practicing and improvising on various scales and modes from sources such as Slonimsky (Slonimsky 1947) and Messiaen (Street 1976) served to maintain and in some instances enhance my general instrumental technique and aural awareness. When required to develop improvisation facility on typical jazz chord progressions I reverted to the methods employed in the past but sensed a growing liberation with these materials.

Work with a range of instruments in various ensembles and projects provided a rich environment for the evolution and cross-fertilization of new ideas. Immersion in the Gluisop’s multi-dimensional sonic environment inspired investigation of my acoustic instruments as generators of sonic colors and textures rather than strings of notes. This ensuing development of abstract techniques on acoustic instruments in turn informed my work with the Gluisop in Heretics Brew, and transformed my work in the CRB project into evocative textural soundscapes and
abstract expressions of energy and power directly inspired by the cultural and environmental context of the project.

This broad range of activities undertaken through Phase 2 brought significant technical and conceptual developments and the consolidation of my identity as a free improviser. I felt however that it was time to narrow the focus of my practice onto fewer projects, to explore specific aspects of my practice in more depth, and to create some kind of identifiable marketable product that could be promoted and sold to festivals. In hindsight this desire for recognition and success reveals unrecognized musical and philosophical connections to the old codes that would be slowly dismantled throughout the final phase.

**Phase 3  March 2010-July 2011**

During this final research phase I continued to perform in a diverse range of contexts, particularly in the first six months of 2010, and was introduced to several key philosophical and historical perspectives on music and performance that triggered deep reflection on my purpose as a musician in both commercial and creative contexts, and steered my work away from the development of products that I had anticipated at the conclusion of the previous year.

Understanding my improvisation practice within the context of the “Beethoven Paradigm” (Goehr 2007:205) that “defined music as a fine art (and) provided the philosophical underpinning for the past two centuries of (Western) musical practice” (Taruskin in Goehr, 2007:vii) led to a deepening understanding of my philosophical alignment with the experimental musicians from the middle of the twentieth century whose attempts to deconstruct representational and repetitive performance constructs laid foundations for the emergence of Attali’s (1985) *Composing* code. And finally Attali’s view of the history of European music illuminated the trajectory of my career and provided a theoretical framework for understanding my evolving abstract improvisation practice.
The Expose Project, a duo collaboration with Melbourne sound artist David Tolley, began in March 2010 and soon became the principal platform for my research where these theoretical frameworks were crystallized in an improvisation practice that existed outside of the need for “communication with an audience, (and) usage by a consumer” (Attali 1985:142).

My work in this project is investigated in more depth in the following chapters. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the Expose Project that distinguishes three distinct developmental stages differentiated by my evolving consistency with and commitment to abstract musical expression. Chapter 5 discusses how evolving recording methods influenced these emerging expressions. Chapter 6 investigates the relationship between each of the instruments I played in the Expose project and my evolving abstract improvisation conception, briefly describes four abstract techniques that emerged, and concludes with a more detailed view of the three most commonly played instruments in the project.
CHAPTER 4 THE EXPOSE PROJECT

Between March 2010 and July 2011 David Tolley and I met on 18 occasions and recorded material that has been compiled by David onto 14 cds (Expose Volumes 1-14) containing 41 tracks (Expose 1-41). A minimal editing process removed extraneous preambles and postludes, and sections of music that either contained technological malfunctions or were determined by David to be unsuitable for publication.

Stage 1

The first three volumes, recorded on March 6, March 23 and June 3, 2010, document early attempts to find compatible expressions within the unfamiliar electronic structures created by David. Although I had been exploring various abstract concepts and techniques for over two years I had not yet identified the development of a totally abstract language as the focus of my practice and research. Free improvisation was still my focus, and I was engaged with developing techniques and concepts to inform that practice, including finding a balance between abstract and conventional ideas that would allow me to integrate microtonality, tone rows, and extended techniques into the jazz language that underpinned my work.

Stage 2

The tenor saxophone playing in Expose 7 (5) recorded on June 3 2010 represents a significant breakthrough in my capacity for sustained abstract expression, and heralds a second phase in the project where, inspired by
philosophical perspectives of thinkers such as Goehr (2007), Deleuze and Guattari (2004), Cage (2009) and Attali (1985) and the musical concepts that were evolving in my practice, abstraction became my goal. This followed two inspiring months that included a tour to Darwin and Ngukkur with CRB, performances with the AAO and Melbourne composer Anthony Pateras, and listening to performances by international saxophonists Charles Lloyd and Peter Brotzmann at the Melbourne International Jazz Festival that all provoked deep reflection on the purpose and direction of and commitment to my practice.

In late July I listened to the early recordings and observed that my conventional instrumental techniques and improvisation concepts did not integrate homogenously with David’s electronics. I heard a need for more immediate ensemble interaction, and a more comprehensive abstract approach that included viewing my instruments as sound generators and fully embracing the range of non-conventional sounds not utilized in conventional performance contexts.

Subsequent recordings through to February 26, 2011 (Expose 8-27) reflect the rapid evolution and integration of extended techniques and experimental ideas, including the use of found objects, vocal sounds and amplification to expand the sound-making potentials of my woodwind instruments and enhance my maturing instrumental techniques and vocabularies. The use of amplification to project quiet mechanical, breath and vocal sounds into the acoustic performance space also encouraged deeper investigation of abstract techniques and approaches.

David is constantly engaging with new technologies in a search for new expressions and greater interactivity. In a typically reflexive process, each new development in his expressive and interactive capacity inspired me to engage more deeply with my evolving language and the interactivity of the ensemble. At the same time, my new expressions exerted an influence on the direction and results of David’s investigations.
Philosophical and musical perspectives provided by writers such as Goehr (2007), Nyman (1974), Deleuze and Guattari (2004), and Attali (1985) informed the work through these months, provoked deep reflection on my motivations and purpose within this genre of musical expression, and provided frameworks to contextualize this practice within my career, the contemporary music industry and European cultural practices over the past two centuries.

Although abstraction was prioritized as an expression, I was still habitually bound to demonstrations of conventional virtuosity using the materials such as tone rows and quarter tones that I was studying. Expose 21 (9), recorded on November 2, demonstrates this point. Following on from two pieces that contain extensive abstract passages, this track is a sustained investigation of melodic construction using quarter tones. The journal entry from that day suggests that as “I had played through most of my current abstract vocabulary” I needed to resort to more conventional conceptions of instrument use and materials to sustain creative momentum. This reveals insights into my grappling with the balance between abstraction and convention, and a lingering connection to the old codes that question abstraction as a legitimate expression.

**Stage 3**

The work the following year, recorded between February and July 2011, was critical to the resolution of this dilemma. Expose 28-41 demonstrate a dynamically evolving musical language that integrates the comprehensive range of abstract techniques, concepts and philosophies that emerged through the research process, with only barely recognizable, fleeting, fragmented postmodern references to past stylistic conventions.
Playing at close range to the stereo recording microphone, investigated in more depth in the following chapter, was the catalyst for this final stage of conceptual development. This recording method facilitated full integration of extraneous mechanical, breath and reed sounds into my vocabulary as well as introducing the possibility of real-time gestural control of positioning within the recorded stereo image.

At the final recording sessions on June 30 and July 7 2011 (Exposure 38-41) our music reached a point where dynamic structures were created from nihilistic deconstructions of the conventions of tonality, melody, rhythm, harmony and instrumental technique accumulated through our past practices. We had arrived at the end of the path to abstraction.
CHAPTER 5  RECORDING CONFIGURATIONS

For many years David has been recording his improvisation work. He has compiled a vast body of work that documents his musical development and the collaborations he has explored. This process stems from his background as a painter and sculptor. In the visual arts, physical artifacts are produced that provide enduring documents of an artist's work and insights into the evolving processes complicit in its making. The ephemeral, intangible and un-scored nature of improvised music means that unless recordings are regularly made no such documentation exists.

Recording and amplification methods used throughout the project evolved through three distinct configurations. Each change facilitated deeper engagement with abstract musical concepts and more sensitive ensemble empathy. In the following section I discuss these configurations and provide diagrams to illustrate the basic setups.

First Configuration

During the first two sessions recorded on March 6 and 23, 2010 (Expose 1, & 3 and Expose 4, & 4) I sat approximately two meters in front a Sennheiser binaural stereo head microphone. David's stereo speaker system was placed at a similar distance to the left and right of the microphone so as to record the stereo spread of his sounds.
During these sessions my physical movements were contained within a small performance zone to maintain consistent balance on the recordings. The newness of the context also acted to inhibit any spontaneous physical performance gestures.

This set-up gave my recorded woodwind sounds a natural room ambience and placed them in the centre of the stereo sound field surrounded by David's stereo electronic sounds. However the volume and complexity of the electronics often overwhelmed my acoustic instruments and forced me to play at medium to high volumes. This limited my use of subtle pitch and timbral nuances and quiet breath sounds and mechanical noises.

At the second session (Expose 4, 4) I played the Gluisop amplified through a single powered speaker similarly centrally placed. Hearing the high levels of digital reverb I use on this instrument caused David to reconsider his own
application of these processors. For the third session on June 3 2010 (Expose 7, 5) David had removed the stereo function and several digital reverb effects from his sounds in an effort to create a more balanced ambience between his electronic and my acoustic sounds. He preferred the compactness and clarity of these un-effected mono sounds, and maintained the setup until April 2011.

**Second Configuration**

For all sessions between June 28, 2010 and February 26, 2011 (Expose 8 – 27) we positioned ourselves on either side of the stereo microphone to separate our instruments on the recording. Tracks recorded on June 28, 2010 (Expose 8, 9) position David in the left channel and me in the right. The remainder of tracks recorded through to February 26, 2011 (Expose 10 - 27) position David in the right channel with my woodwinds panned left.

![Diagram of second recording configuration](image)

**Figure 2: Diagram of second recording configuration**
At this fourth session (June 28, 2010), in response to these volume and balance issues and a growing desire to utilize the range of quiet abstract sounds I had been developing, I started using a simple amplification system consisting of a microphone and a single powered monitor to project these sounds into the acoustic sound space and provide an amplified presence to match that of David’s electronics. This development, combined with an expansion of the interactive capabilities of David’s computer system, facilitated more reflexive ensemble cohesion, a subtle shift in the ensemble hierarchy, and more extensive use of abstract concepts in my work. The following journal extract marks this pivotal development:

“This music marks an important consolidation of abstract conceptual developments. It is the most cohesive and organic music we have made. Our lines and textures ebbed and flowed like rising and falling tides, parallel flowing streams of thought. For the first time I felt like I was leading David, rather than following his cues. The amplification was a major contributor to this success. Accessing all these extraneous sounds allows me to move even further away from standard melodic playing, exploring instruments as pure sound sources.” (Journal entry July 23, 2010)

This system became the standard set up in this duo context for the remainder of 2010. It was also the catalyst for experiments with found objects such as the amplified plucked rubber band that is mixed in with a range of key pops and mechanical rattles and clicks on Expose 13 (6).

“Playing to the Head”

In April 2011 David suggested that I moved to within close range of the stereo microphone to further exploit the abstract shapes and unconventional sounds I was producing. He called this “Playing to the Head”. For this configuration David
reintroduced the full stereo capacity of his sounds to provide an expansive backdrop to contain my newly liberated sounds. Tracks 28-41 utilize this recording technique, and reveal a second significant advance in my abstract conception triggered by a new recording method.

Figure 3: Diagram of third recording configuration - "Playing to the Head"

This configuration gave me a new level of real time control over the volume, presence and stereo placement of my recorded sounds. Faint breath and reed sounds and key pops were played very close to the microphone to ensure that they were prominent in the recorded mix. For loud sounds I stepped back from the microphone to maintained recorded balance. An unforeseen consequence was the emergence of a range of physical performance gestures that expanded the static performance zones of the previous configurations by introducing a new level of physicality to the performances.
Exploiting the Stereo Field

As well as allowing these unconventional sounds to become core components in my evolving vocabulary, this method allowed me to use various gestural movements to shift my placement within the recorded stereo field, adding a fluid spatial dimension to my recorded sounds. I could also spread the various sounds of my instruments across the sound field, adding further scope to the multilayering technique I had developed. Subtle reed harmonics and tonguing noises projected through the bell of the instrument could be captured in one channel while breath hisses, lip buzzes and vocal noises were captured in the other. Expose 28 (10) demonstrates this effect. When recording Expose 30 (12) I exploited the physical length of the bass clarinet, positioning the instrument horizontally in front of the microphone to allow key clicks to spread across both channels.

Previous recording methods relied on the projection of my acoustic or amplified sounds into the physical performance space from a fixed position that would ensure satisfactory volume balance in the recorded ensemble. Recordings essentially documented the acoustic interactions that were occurring. Apart from using amplification or playing louder, I had little control of my volume and no control of my stereo positioning, resulting in comparatively static recorded images. This new recording process took the opposite view, handing me the responsibility to decide in the moment how and where I would be heard within the recorded sound field. I could use quiet sounds in new ways knowing that the recordings would reveal gestures and interactions not detectable in the acoustic performance space.

New physical gestures - New musical gestures

“Playing to the Head” also provided a specific physical performance focus that triggered a subtle psychological shift that liberated a range of physical and creative gestures normally suppressed during the recording process. I found
myself adopting a range of physical postures and movements including kneeling, sitting, stooping, gyrating, swaying, arching and stomping that paralleled musical and emotional expressions, reflexively energized and inspired the music, and lead to a deeply immersed creative experience that transcended traditional performance paradigms. Musical gestures including passages of rapid instrument swapping, playing two instruments simultaneously, and the use of found objects emerged and combined with my mature and now audible abstract language and allowed me to construct entire performances using only these abstract expressions. I had arrived at a place where my conventional musical languages served only as the source of fragmented deconstructions of past accumulations.

Exploiting the stereo microphone in this way facilitated an expansion of the contexts in which I can use the range of abstract techniques I have developed through this project, and consequently triggered a reinforcement of their place within my improvisation language. These techniques are now emerging more frequently in conventional settings as I apply this more fluid microphone technique.
CHAPTER 6 INSTRUMENT SELECTION AND ABSTRACTION

In this chapter I describe the final stage of my journey along the path to abstraction by examining the relationship between each of the instruments I played in the Expose project and my evolving abstract improvisation conception. Statistics drawn from the Expose recordings provide an overview of details such as recording dates, track durations and instrument selection trends. After a brief discussion of four abstractions that emerged in the work, I examine the three most often selected instruments to demonstrate the evolution of key abstract concepts and broader philosophical perspectives.

Instrument Selection

Through my career I have developed improvisation approaches on a range of woodwind instruments in response to a variety of contexts. Although I initially trained as an alto saxophone player, most of my jazz performance work has been as a tenor player, and I have favored soprano saxophone in more creative and original contexts. I have also developed technical and stylistic facility on various flutes and clarinets through my work as a woodwind player in commercial and theatre contexts. Motivated by a natural affinity with the flute and alto flute, improvisation approaches were developed on those instruments informed by jazz, Indian classical music and various other non-western traditions. Improvisatory connections to the clarinet and bass clarinet have only emerged in recent years, inspired by my work in projects such as CRB, Heretics Brew and this current research. The techniques and improvisational facilities I have
developed on these instruments broaden the timbral and textural palette of my multi-instrumental language.

In some improvisation contexts my setup includes a large range of instruments. For example, in CRB my standard set-up includes clarinet, bass clarinet, flute, piccolo, alto flute, soprano and tenor saxophones. This broad palette enables me to range freely through the evocative soundscapes created by the ensemble. In other free improvisation contexts I usually take fewer instruments. For consistency, I usually select the same instruments for a particular ensemble. The open-ended, process-based nature of the Expose project allowed various instrument preferences to emerge naturally within and throughout the work.

Selecting instruments for a particular session was a simple intuitive process. As I prepared to travel to a session, I selected instruments that I felt a connection to in that moment, and that would express my mood and energy on that day. I often chose instruments that I was practicing and working with in other performance projects. At other times I chose instruments that I had not played recently. During recordings, choices were made similarly as intuitive reflexive responses to the unfolding musical events and gestures.

Chart 1 (page 43) represents instrument selection on each of the 41 tracks recorded during the project. Colour coding clearly demonstrates how instrument selection and usage evolved over the course of the Expose project. Red (bass clarinet) and Aqua (tenor saxophone) are spread evenly throughout the 41 tracks. In the first twenty tracks Yellow (Gluisop), Greens (flutes) and Orange (straight soprano) are prominent. Light Blue (alto saxophone) is concentrated in the middle of the graph, while Dark Blue (clarinet) and Purple (curved soprano) are predominant in the last fifteen tracks of the project.
Table 1: Graph showing instrument selection on each Expose track
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The following table summarizes instrument selection throughout the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Colour on Chart 1</th>
<th>Number of Tracks</th>
<th>Number of Sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bass Clarinet</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenor Saxophone</td>
<td>Aqua</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curved Soprano Saxophone</td>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight Soprano Saxophone</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alto Saxophone</td>
<td>Light Blue</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarinet</td>
<td>Dark Blue</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found Objects</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gluisop</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alto Flute</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flute</td>
<td>Light Green</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Summary of instrument selection throughout the Expose Project

Bass clarinet (Red) was the most commonly and consistently selected instrument, recorded on 13 tracks during 11 sessions.

Tenor saxophone (Aqua) is played on 11 tracks during 10 sessions. After an intense period from June to October 2010 when it appeared on six tracks out of eight (Expose 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, and 14), tenor saxophone was used less frequently but at reasonably regular intervals (Expose 23, 25, 32, 38 and 40).
The straight soprano (Orange) was most commonly selected during the early recordings, played on 7 of the first 12 tracks then once on April 11, 2011 (Expose 30).

The curved soprano (Purple) emerged as a significant voice towards the end of the project, being played on 8 of the 14 tracks recorded at the final 6 sessions. This instrument presented a fresh gestural and timbral character that triggered deeper exploration and evolution of a number of key abstract concepts.

Use of alto saxophone (Light Blue) is concentrated between October 2010 and February 2011. It first appeared on track 15 (7 October, 2010), then on 6 of 9 tracks recorded in November 2010 and February 2011, and a single track in May 2011 (Expose 34). It featured exclusively on all three tracks recorded on November 2 2010.

Clarinet (Dark Blue) emerged in the later stages of the project, inspired by a series of professional engagements playing Ska and Klezmer music. It is played on six of the fourteen tracks recorded between February 26 and June 30 2011. Expose 26 and 36 feature clarinet exclusively, three tracks pair the clarinet with the curved soprano (Expose 28, 35 and 39), while Expose 37 adds bass clarinet to this same pairing.

Gluisop (Yellow) was played on two tracks at the second session (Expose 3, 4). Use of this instrument is discussed further on page 49.

Alto flute (Green) was played on two tracks on June 10 and October 28 2010 (Expose 6, 17), and concert flute (Light Green) once on June 10 2010 (Expose 5). Despite playing significant roles in my past improvisation practice and other projects during the course of this research, including investigations of tone row material in late 2009, and microtonality, multiphonics and other extended techniques for an AAO performance in 2010, these instruments played only minor roles in the Expose project. Their lack of acoustic presence combined with
my limited extended technical capacity and a stylistic conception influenced by several non-western traditions limited the effectiveness of these instruments in this abstract electronic context.

Figure 4 displays the number of instruments played on each Expose track.

![Graph showing number of instruments played on each Expose track](image)

**Figure 4: Graph showing number of instruments played on each Expose track**

On the majority of tracks (25 out of 41) I play just one instrument despite having several available. On 14 tracks I play two instruments. On six of the first ten tracks featuring two instruments I return to the original instrument towards the end of the piece (Expose 1, 7, 8, 15, 22, 24). Conscious use of this compositional device to recapitulate opening themes and textures indicates a desire to organize the work using compositional procedures. In latter pieces where instrument swapping is more frequent (Expose 28, 30, 39) this control of larger forms had given way to more spontaneously emerging structures.

The two tracks on which I play three instruments (Expose 34 and 37) were inspired by the “Playing to the Head” recording technique (see page 36), and reflect the sense of liberation from traditional performance and instrumental conventions that energized the work through this final stage of the project. While still concerned with constructing meaningful architectural forms my main focus in these final sessions was on spontaneous interactive gestures freed of the need
to display virtuosic instrumental technique or apply specific compositional materials.

Four Emergent Abstractions

Instrument Swapping

On most tracks with more than one instrument, each instrument is played for a substantial section of music, with instrument changes responding to and reflecting broad compositional developments. For example, Expose 7 (5) begins with tenor saxophone. I change to soprano at 5'54", returning to tenor at 9'00" for five more minutes.

Four tracks between April 11 and June 30 2011 (Expose 28, 30, 37 and 39) feature sections where two instruments are swapped repeatedly as part of a single compositional gesture. Expose 37 (14) is the most extreme example with 22 instrument swaps in 22 minutes, including 7 swaps in the first minute, and 8 swaps between 3:56 and 4:55. Chart 1 (page 43) clearly displays this development through the project.

This was a direct response to the “Playing to the Head" recording technique that facilitated the building of motivic dialogues between instruments. During the opening section of Expose 28 (10) the curved soprano and clarinet engage in a dialogue that highlights similarities and subtle differences between each instruments idiosyncratic gestural and abstract vocabulary. The section between 3'56" and 4'55" of Expose 37 (14) features a rapid exchange between curved soprano and bass clarinet including percussive sounds created by striking the bass clarinet’s support peg with a metal ruler.
**Double instruments**

The stereo potential of "Playing to the Head" also inspired playing two instruments simultaneously on two tracks, graphically indicated by two parallel colours on a single track in Chart 1. In the first example, Expose 37 (14), between 9’15” and 10’35”, I follow several stereo honks on curved soprano and clarinet with an intriguing duet of interweaving sustained notes and mumbling speech-like phrases utilizing voice, panning, breath sounds, tonguing and one-handed trills over a growing rumble of fragmented electronic percussion and bass. A high level of embouchure flexibility is required to execute this approach. Airstreams to two mouthpieces need to be maintained, and lower lip pressure to two reeds independently controlled to facilitate the interweaving of tones and breath sounds. Each instrument needs to be held one-handed. In this case I played the soprano with the regular left hand, using my right hand to hold the clarinet and manipulate the keys normally played by the left hand.

At the next session I explored this idea further. On Expose 39 (15), following a passage of instrument swapping (9’00”) between curved soprano and clarinet utilizing breath sounds, reed tonguing noises, honks, squeaks and nasal grunts, I combine the two instruments to create a series of phrases (9’28 – 10’14”) with flutter tonguing and breath sounds shifting back and forth across the stereo image. Fragile fluttering tones wet with spit emerge before a brief stereo exchange of dismembered honks.

**Found Objects**

On several recordings I incorporated found objects (colour Black in Chart 1, page 43) into my improvising again inspired by changes in recording method. During the first three and a half minutes of Expose 13 (6) a rubber band can be heard in the left channel creating dull thudding sounds similar to low note key pops on the tenor saxophone. The rubber band was hooked around the neck screw of the instrument, and stretched and plucked with fingers of the right hand while
producing breath and voice sounds and manipulating the keys of the instrument with the left hand.

Further explorations continued in 2011. On several tracks I incorporated a steel ruler to play percussively on the bass clarinet support peg (Expose 37, 14, 4'30"), to play bell-like sounds on a drinking glass (Expose 39, 15, 5'40"), or to scrape across the rim of the glass or the keys of the curved soprano (Expose 39, 15, 0'0")

Vocalizing

Various vocal grunts, sung tones, shouts, lip buzzes, hisses, tongue noises and breath sounds gradually integrated into my vocabulary to compliment the range of extended techniques and mechanical sounds that I was exploring. “Playing to the Head” gave these sounds a clear recorded presence, as demonstrated on Expose 28 (10), which provides a comprehensive example of this range of techniques fully integrated into my vocabulary.

Three Most Commonly Selected Instruments

This next section contains a more detailed examination of how my improvisation language and conception developed on the three most commonly selected instruments: soprano saxophone, bass clarinet and tenor saxophone. For this purpose I include the three different forms of soprano saxophone used in the project to illustrate my evolving approach to this instrument.

Soprano Saxophone

Soprano saxophone was the most commonly selected instrument, appearing on seventeen tracks in total in three different forms, straight, curved and Gluisop. This choice reflects my personal preference for and affinity with this instrument.
that dates back to the 1970’s when I was first inspired by the music of Wayne Shorter, Grover Washington Jnr., and Dave Leibman. Particular aspects of the sound of the instrument resonate powerfully for me and over the years I have developed improvisation approaches that exploit its timbral qualities and range to express particular harmonic and melodic dissonances, including quarter tones in this research project, that are less effective on the larger saxophones or the more pure-toned clarinet and flute. In addition, its high tessitura gives the instrument an effective presence amongst dense electronic sounds. For these reasons, and following on from my recent abstract electronic explorations with the Gluisop in Heretics Brew, I selected soprano saxophone for the early Expose sessions to provide a secure contemporary voice amongst David’s unfamiliar electronic expression.

*Straight Soprano*

I usually play a straight Selmer series III soprano with a Selmer S-80 “k” mouthpiece and Fibracell size 2½ reeds. This instrument is played on Expose 1 (3), 2, 7 (5), 8, 10, 11 and 12 recorded between March and August 2010 and on one track in April 2011 (Expose 30, 12).

*Gluisop*

The Gluisop is an inexpensive Chinese-built “Largo” curved soprano to which a number of electronic controllers have been added to manipulate computer based sound processing software. On this instrument I play a Guardala Studio model mouthpiece and Fibracell size 2½ reeds. Expose 3 and Expose 4 (4) recorded at the second session on March 21, 2010 feature this instrument with its electronic processing hardware attached. Gluisop was the only instrument played on both tracks at this session, motivated by desire to explore this instrument beyond the context of “Heretics Brew”. With the pairing of our two electronic interfaces and David’s extensive knowledge and experience of electronic music technology and process, this ensemble seemed to be an ideal platform for these
investigations. However after this session we decided to concentrate on developing our music around the juxtaposition of my acoustic instruments with David’s electronics. Hindsight illuminates this decision as pivotal to my research. I had not yet identified the development of abstract expressions as the primary focus of my work. My investigations were broadly aimed at developing a more extensive and mature free improvisation language. Expose 4 (4) reveals a high level of abstract saxophone playing inspired by engagement with the Gluisop and the surrounding electronic environment. This decision to work only with acoustic instruments in the Expose project encouraged the transfer of these abstract conceptions and techniques onto my acoustic instruments, and set the course for the final stages of the journey along the path to abstraction.

Soprano saxophone is absent from Expose tracks 13-27 recorded between August 10, 2010 and February 26, 2011, re-emerging on April 11, 2011 in the first sessions that incorporated the “Playing to the Head” recording technique (see page 36).

Curved Soprano

Expose 28 (10), 30 (12), 33, 35, 37 (14), 39 (15), and 41 (17), feature the “Largo” curved soprano with the electronic controllers removed, and with some La Voz cane reeds. One particular reed was particularly responsive and allowed me to play a range of extreme harmonics and resonant powerful multiphonics that added a new dimension to my abstract language. Expose 37 (14) contains an excellent example of these sounds. At 19'43" I begin a multiphonic that is punctuated by several high notes and pitch manipulations before dissolving to a super high harmonic at 20'10".

The curved soprano’s more typical saxophone shape generates for the player a different acoustic perception of the sound and a new set of postural gestures that inspire a different range of musical expressions compared to the straight soprano saxophone. Its compact shape seems to facilitate more accurate recording of
both its standard tone and the full range of mechanical and breath sounds compared to the straight soprano, which in my experience is problematic to record. On Expose 30 (12) I alternate between the two sopranos, exploiting these acoustic and gestural differences. Expose 41 (17), the final recording for this research project, provides an excellent demonstration of the range of sounds I developed on this curved instrument.

**Bass Clarinet**

I play a Buffet Prestige bass clarinet with a Selmer G mouthpiece and Fibracell size 4 reeds. These reeds add certain grainy distortions to the sound, particularly in the upper registers, that are appropriate in this context but unconventional in terms of traditional orchestral bass clarinet tone.

My bass clarinet technique and improvisation conception made significant advances at various times throughout this research due to intensive practice of a range of tone row exercises designed to develop fluency over the entire range of the instrument and introduce large interval movements and atonal melodic shapes into my language. Also, several periods of study of traditional Yidaki rhythmic patterns transcribed from recordings of the music of the Wagilak songmen informed the multilayering technique that was developing (see page 22) and lent a distinct Australian accent to my voice on this instrument.

These developments in technical facility and conceptions can be observed by comparing the bass clarinet playing on Expose 1 (3) recorded on March 3, 2010 with my work on Expose 16 (8) recorded on October 7, 2010. While Expose 1 contains abstract passages that use techniques developed throughout this research, melodic constructions reflect the free improvisation approaches that remained my focus at this stage in the research. Apart from some brief melodic statements that reflect the tone row work, Expose 16 (8) clearly demonstrates the indigenous influences integrated with a more sophisticated and evolved abstract conception.
Bass Clarinet Solo (7), recorded on August 5, 2010, is an important document, providing a pristine example of my bass clarinet conception at this time free of the interactive and acoustic constraints of the duo context. Pre-empting the “Playing to the Head” recording method that emerged eight months later, this close-miked recording (recorded directly into a Macbook computer using GarageBand software) reveals a mature integration of indigenous and abstract concepts. I explore complex note shaping techniques and multilayering processes that manipulate overtones, multiphonics and key clicks over independently developed melodies. Circular breathing is used extensively with over-blowing, double tonguing, vocalizing, and two-handed poly-rhythmic counterpoint deployed in fast trill-like passages to add accent and impetus. The extended final section contains fast, rapidly repeating, ascending sweeps of multiphonics built on overblown harmonics.

Expose 29 (11) recorded on April 11, 2011 succinctly represents my bass clarinet playing during the final phase of the project where, coinciding with “Playing to the Head”, I have abandoned clear melodic and technical references in favor of a more organic abstract sounds that include fragmented abstract melodies and multilayerings, key rattles, vocalizing and scratching the bell of the instrument with fingernails.

The physical length of the bass clarinet can be exploited when “Playing to the Head”. Through movements and gestures, the sounds emanating from tone holes and mechanisms along the instrument’s entire one meter length can be easily moved across the stereo image. By holding the instrument horizontally at close range to the stereo microphone, sounds from different parts of the mechanism can be placed in different areas of the recorded sound field. The opening three minutes of Expose 31 (13) effectively demonstrate the sonic depth that this technique creates, particularly at 2’45”. Key clicks from the instruments entire length span the stereo field, tonguing sounds projected
through the bell of the instrument are in the left channel, and sustained tones emanating from upper tone holes appear in the right channel.

These recordings document the results of the post-structuralist approach I have adopted to developing new improvisational capacities on the clarinet and bass clarinet in recent years. Rather than transfer of my pre-existing jazz saxophone language onto the clarinets as a way of developing instrumental facility I work with new materials that allow various natural potentials of these instruments to emerge. This aligns with Richardson’s (1994:518) view of the poststructuralist practitioner who, despite not knowing everything can "still have plenty to say about the world as they perceive it."

**Tenor Saxophone**

My tenor saxophone, a Selmer Mk VI tenor, built in 1960, with a modern Otto Link 8# metal mouthpiece and Fibracell reeds, is the instrument on which I have developed most of my jazz language and conception. The influences of jazz masters including Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Stan Getz, Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane, and more contemporary innovators such as Michael Brecker and Jan Garbarek are all present in my approach to this instrument through concepts of tone, use of various vibratos, and construction of melodic shapes.

My initial concerns that these jazz influences would be too dominant in the context of this project were allayed with the recording of Expose 7 (5). This session was preceded by several months of intensive work with various creative projects - including a weeklong tour to Darwin and Ngukkur for performances and workshops with CRB - that provided many opportunities for immersive investigation of abstract expressions and inspired a deeper commitment to the ongoing development of these materials as integral components of my language. The first five minutes of this track incorporates an extensive range of abstract materials into a logically developing, spacious improvisation. It marks the beginning of a process that, triggered by the use of amplification (see page 35),
explored the extensive development and integration of extended techniques and abstract expressions, including deconstructed references to various genres, and saw the introduction of found objects as sound sources. Expose 13 (6) features a rubber band that I stretched from the gooseneck screw of the tenor and plucked with one hand at close range to the microphone. I multilayer the resulting thudding and popping sounds with breath, voice, reed and mouth sounds and faint saxophone tones reinforced through the amplifier.

The other development apparent in these tracks is the level of interactivity made possible by David’s evolving computer-based setup that facilitated more instant reflexive responses and deeper level of dialogue. Our two parts merge more tightly and organically than on previous tracks as more subtle interactions become possible. Rapid passages are more fluent with more effective control of shape and direction.

Expose 40 (16), the final recorded tenor saxophone piece in this project, recorded on July 7, 2011, demonstrates a number of key outcomes from this project. All abstract techniques are present in various multilayered contexts. Multilayering has become the central aspect of my expression, facilitated by “Playing to the Head” which allows full use of the instrument as a polyphonic sound generator, and adds an immediate presence to instrument’s rich timbral characteristics at all volume levels. I create a range of textures and densities that interact and integrate with the electronics, and at different times assume foreground and background positions within the music. For comparison listen to the recorded tone of the tenor saxophone on Expose 7 (5) where the sound is amplified in the acoustic studio space to balance to the electronic sounds, but remains statically positioned within the recorded stereo image.
CHAPTER 7  DISCUSSION

“Doing solely for the sake of doing…inventing the message at the same

time as the language…playing for one’s own pleasure…pleasure in being

instead of having” (Attali 1985:134)

This discussion illuminates key aspects of music produced in Composing,

particularly Attali’s own inferences that improvisation is integral to musical

processes within this code of production. After examining several arguments that

present various forms of contemporary music as examples of music produced in

this new code, I demonstrate how abstract improvisation within the Expose

project emerged as my ultimate expression of Composing.

Improvising and Composing

Attali frequently alludes to and even directly states that improvisation is implicit to

music production within Composing. He predicts that forms of participatory

communal music making will emerge that are “largely improvisational”

(1985:140), and “for participation in collective play, in an ongoing quest for new,
immediate communication” (1985:141). To improvise, “to make up (a piece of

music…) as one goes along” (Collins English Dictionary 1993) implies that music

is created by the performer in the moment of its performance, as a personal

expression in a particular time and place, and as such is unrepeatable. In my

view this unrepeatability and immediacy of the act of improvisation represents a

true break from music produced in the Representing and Repeating codes.

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In her afterword to Attali’s book, Susan McClary acknowledges Attali’s view that “it is only if the individuals in society choose to reappropriate the means of producing art themselves that the infinite regress of Repetition…can be escaped” (McClary in Attali 1985:156). However she fails to address the common understanding of the act of composing as the creation of an enduring artifact for re-presentation and repetition, commodification and consumption within the old codes. In presenting the work of new composers as validation for Attali’s new code (ibid: 157), she overlooks the fact that these works are situated within the very political and economic models she claims they subvert. She fails to acknowledge the continuing dependence by composers on the old codes that support their careers, and the sanctified paradigm that exalts the composer and silences the musician and listener.

Similarly, discussions that position jazz (Prouty 2008) and other forms of contemporary music (Dean 2005; Prouty 2008) as examples of Composing fail to recognize the existence of these art forms within these same modernist constructs. My experiences within the jazz industry led me to a view of jazz improvisation that aligns with Adorno’s perspectives of jazz:

“The elements in jazz in which immediacy seems to be present, the seemingly improvisational moments…are added…to the standardized commodity character in order to mask it – without, however, gaining power over it for a second.” (Adorno 2002:473)

These views, expressed in 1936, hold currency in the contemporary jazz industry where, in an oversupplied market, virtuosity is commodified and hailed in the festival spectacular. Within the modernist meta-narrative of jazz, opportunities for experimentation are limited by restrictive stylistic conventions, prescriptive pedagogies and an inflexible performance culture. Performers re-present the product and listeners remain consumers, all silenced by the combined weights of the jazz tradition and the economics of the culture industry.
This is a common dilemma faced by many contemporary musicians who exist within the pluralist context of overlapping production codes, where desire for commercial success leads to commodification of work, the death of collective play and silencing of “new, immediate communication” (Attali 1985:141). This is particularly so for contemporary improvising musicians operating within a culture industry that starves the subversive of opportunity. The two projects that led me to this research face these questions. The manifested creative vision of Crossing Roper Bar is continually shaped by money: by the need to produce performance spectacles and recorded artifacts that justify the work to funding bodies, represent value to commercial sponsors, and fit the agenda of music and arts festivals. An uncompromising artistic stance situates Heretics Brew within Attali’s *Composing* code, but an ongoing search for recognition and acknowledgement in the form of funding and performance opportunities suggests that the old codes still shape the work, even as a driver of subversion.

**An Experiential Understanding of *Composing***

What then is the music that truly expresses the ideology of *Composing*? Within my dualistic musical world of overlapping codes, where is my purest expression of “doing solely for the sake of doing…inventing the message at the same time as the language…playing for one’s own pleasure…pleasure in being instead of having” (Attali 1985:134)?

Through this research, and the work of the Expose project in particular, I reached a point where abstract improvisation became the site for musical liberation from these old codes of musical production. As I explored ways to deconstruct the economic, political and musical agenda of the previous codes that had governed my music practice for over three decades, a purity and immediacy of expression emerged that was unconcerned with inference, reference, style, genre, usage, exchange, fees, clients, sponsors, correctness, virtuosity, or posterity. As past accumulations fell away, abstract expressions emerged to reflect my unique
musical, emotional, political and philosophical experiences and perspectives. Abstract improvisation encapsulated the very essence of Composing, and provided me with an experiential understanding of “music produced by each individual for himself, for pleasure outside of usage and exchange” (Attali 1985:137), and where true relationship through sounding is possible, free of the musical, economic and political implications that surround the production of performance spectacles and artifacts within the previous codes.

**Emergence of Abstraction**

At the commencement of this research, abstract expressions were emerging to extend and enhance my conventional improvisation language within projects situated within the old codes of music production and performance. The first journal entries made in November 2008 contain reflections and realizations that shaped this research. Entries through 2009 and 2010 focused on the techniques, materials and processes that dominated my practice, and reflected my investigations of theories and philosophies within the academic environment. Through these years I was searching for a language that struck a pluralist balance between emerging abstract expressions and my conventional exchange-based practice. I had neither formulated a mature philosophical context that would allow autonomous expression of this new work, nor developed the technical facility to allow its integration into my preexisting languages.

Over the 2010-11 summer, Attali’s political view of Western music history provided a contextual framework that validated and encouraged this new aspect of my practice. Harkening back to my discussion of the relationship between practice and research, this theoretical view of practice allowed me to understand abstraction as critical to my personal and musical liberation from the old production codes that had dominated my entire performance career. Through the final months of the project, out of the academy, less immersed in deep critical
analysis of practice, and philosophically energized by Attali’s views, these abstract concepts reached full expression.

**Expose Project as the Vehicle**

The Expose project was the principal vehicle for this final stage of my journey to abstraction. “Collective composition, without a predetermined program imposed upon the players, and *without commercialization* (my italics)” (Attali 1985:141) encapsulates the underlying philosophies of this project. From a shared starting point of emerging musical capacities and conceptions we set off on an exploration of the potentials of our relationships to sound and to each other. With no public performance agenda or stylistic codes to impact on creative decisions or shape product, the emotional and psychological connections to the old codes gradually fell away, leaving abstract expressions previously silenced to flourish in an environment of trust and acceptance where the joy of being in the doing became our purpose.

This project modeled the value of relationship in life and through music. David’s complete immersion in his art, endless acceptance and generosity of spirit allowed me to engage in my process free of negativity and judgment. His open invitation to engage in relationship on personal, philosophical, artistic and musical levels encouraged me to explore a new way of being with sound effortlessly from moment to moment with no need to try to produce particular results or demonstrate specific knowledge and skill. The music became a true manifestation of *Composing*, an engagement in relationship through sound, a playful expression of our personal and musical selves in a private ritual liberated from repetitive or representational systems that distribute work beyond the site of its creation, and where the artist engages in musical relationship for the sheer delight of creative personal expression.
“To compose is to stay repetition and the inherent death in it, … to locate liberation in the present…in one’s own enjoyment”(Attali 1985:143).
CONCLUSION

Summary of the Research

Through this research I have developed a new improvisation language that is liberated from the usage- and exchange-based agenda of the old codes of production, and that allows for more contextually sensitive contributions within a range of unconventional music making contexts. Various research activities informed and enhanced the work and led to a developed understanding of the inextricable link between research and practice. Most significant was the view of my evolving practice through the lens of Attali’s four codes of music production. Aligning my current practice to his Composing code provided the insights that inspired the final stage of my journey along the path to abstraction where abstract improvisation became my ultimate expression of this new code and redefined my understanding of music as relationship through sounding.

A number of practical and theoretical avenues for future investigation have emerged through this project.

Future Practice

Of primary practical interest is the ongoing work with David Tolley. The Expose Project has become a playground for engaging in joyous investigation of our relationship through sounding. I am interested in how this particular relationship will unfold into the future. Will the music continue to explore the outer reaches of musical convention, or turn back along the path to become a vehicle for integrating the abstract with the conventional?
Bringing other musicians in to the ensemble disturbs the delicate and specific nuances that have evolved, and challenges me to embrace other energetic and musical connections that draw on different aspects of my various accumulated languages and improvisational strategies.

Translating aspects of this new abstract language into other stylistic contexts also presents challenges including the development of applications for multilayering, multiphonics and microtonality within harmonic and tonal contexts. Further practical investigation of the improvisatory potentials of tone rows and other serialist methods, and the development of new rows that incorporate microtonal intervals will expand my aural and technical capacities and possibly provide an answer to why I always hear rows in a harmonic context and why free improvised music, no matter how abstract, seems to always contain a sense of tonal gravity.

**Future Theoretical Investigations**

The deep and intimate music making context of the Expose Project modeled the value of sustained collaborative exploration in relation to the development of unique expressions and languages. A number of theoretical perspectives can be applied the creative work within such ongoing creative spaces.

Deleuzean concepts of rhizomes, stratification and machinic assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 2004) can provide insights into how an individual’s improvisation language evolves in relation to specific collaborations, and how ensembles develop and evolve unique musical outcomes over time. Concepts of smooth and striated space can describe the levels of trust and empathy that exist within these ensemble contexts, and to gain understanding of how the transcendent moment is approached and attained within the improvisation process.
Transcultural discussions of the “new cultural spaces and genres growing out of the…connection(s) and divergence(s) between…diverse traditions” (Berry and Epstein 1999:1) can provide a lens through which to view the unique context-specific micro-cultures and languages that develop within improvising ensembles such as the Expose project, and the two collaborations that catalyzed this research project, Crossing Roper Bar and Heretics Brew.

**Closure**

There is still much work to be done developing new techniques, expanding my aural confidence and capacity, and widening my knowledge. I know however that one of the beauties of this practice is that there is no judgment. The work is about relationship to and with sound in whatever form that takes, and in whichever way I contribute in any single moment. The ego still drives a desire to integrate abstract concepts into my conventional practice that, although liberated significantly by this work, still exists to serve the old codes. This liberation manifests as a quiet confidence that I can create something meaningful out of nothing, and use my understanding of interferences from political and personal agenda to navigate safe passage through the contemporary paradigm of overlapping codes I continue to encounter in my travels along the path to and from abstraction.
WORKS CITED


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Hicks, Tony

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