

# Improvisation as formal element in modern composition

Ivar Frounberg, professor  
The Norwegian Academy of Music, Oslo

# Disposition

- Historical framework
- 20th century composition
- Contemporary development
  - ▶ scandinavian aspect
  - ▶ personal experiences
  - ▶ reflections on improvisational categories
- Summary, questions and comments...

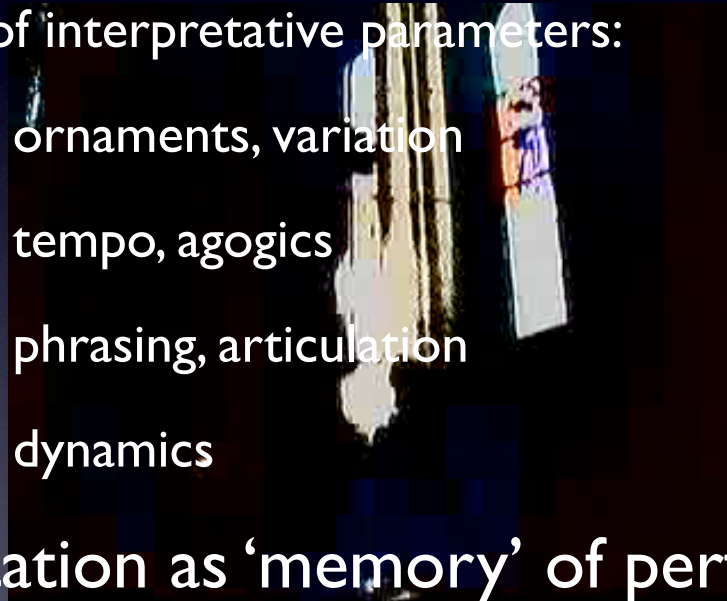


# Historical framework

- Erling Guldbrandsen on open form (2006)

- examples of interpretative parameters:

- ornaments, variation
- tempo, agogics
- phrasing, articulation
- dynamics



- The notation as ‘memory’ of performance
- Praxis: the general bass

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=S38KjqRR4I8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S38KjqRR4I8)

# Historical examples I

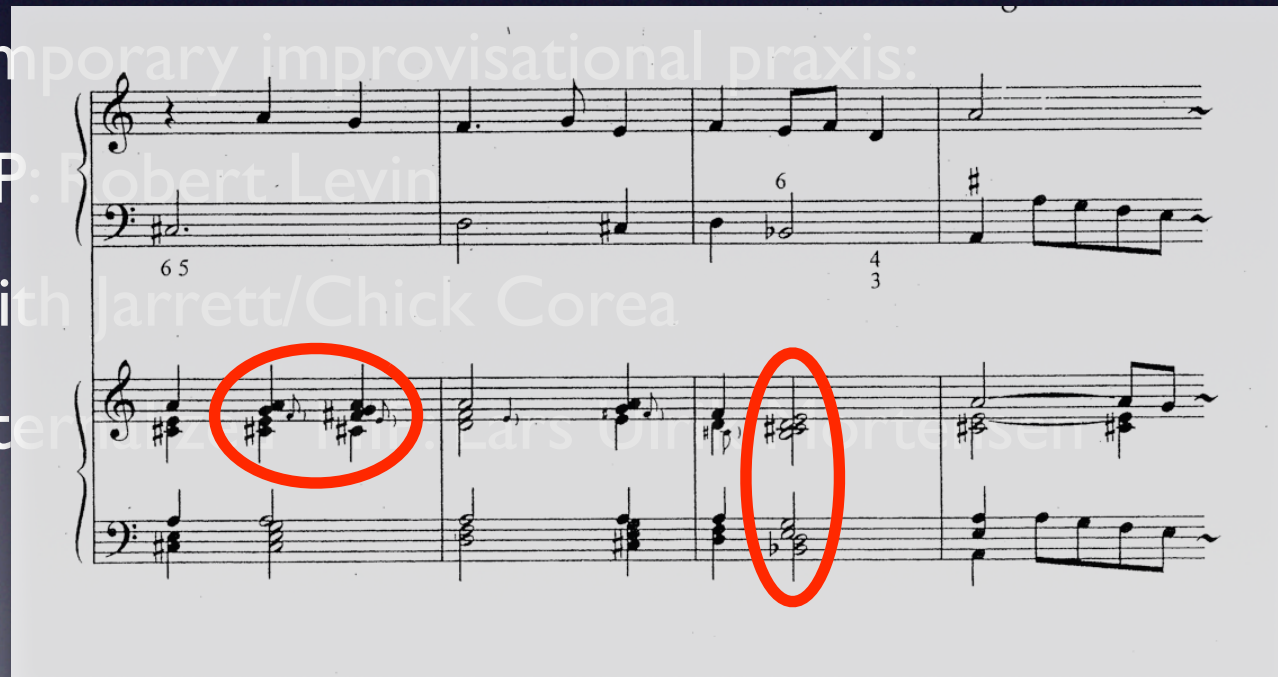
- Treatise on general bass praxis from the Biblioteca Corsiana:

- Contemporary improvisational praxis:

- HIP: Robert Levin

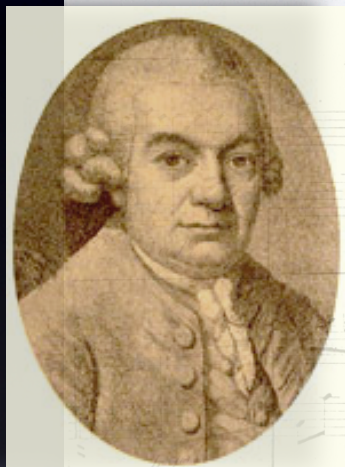
- Keith Jarrett/Chick Corea

- 'inter jazz' Lars Onsager





# Historical examples II



Open form from

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach

to

Friedrich Kuhlau

A musical score for a piece titled "Open form". The score is written on a grand staff with two staves per system. It consists of 12 measures, each labeled with a letter and a number (e.g., L. 12., C. 12., F. 12., G. 12., E. 12., L. 12., K. 12., L. 12., M. 12., R. 12., P. 12., G. 12., R. 12., S. 12., L. 12., U. 12.). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

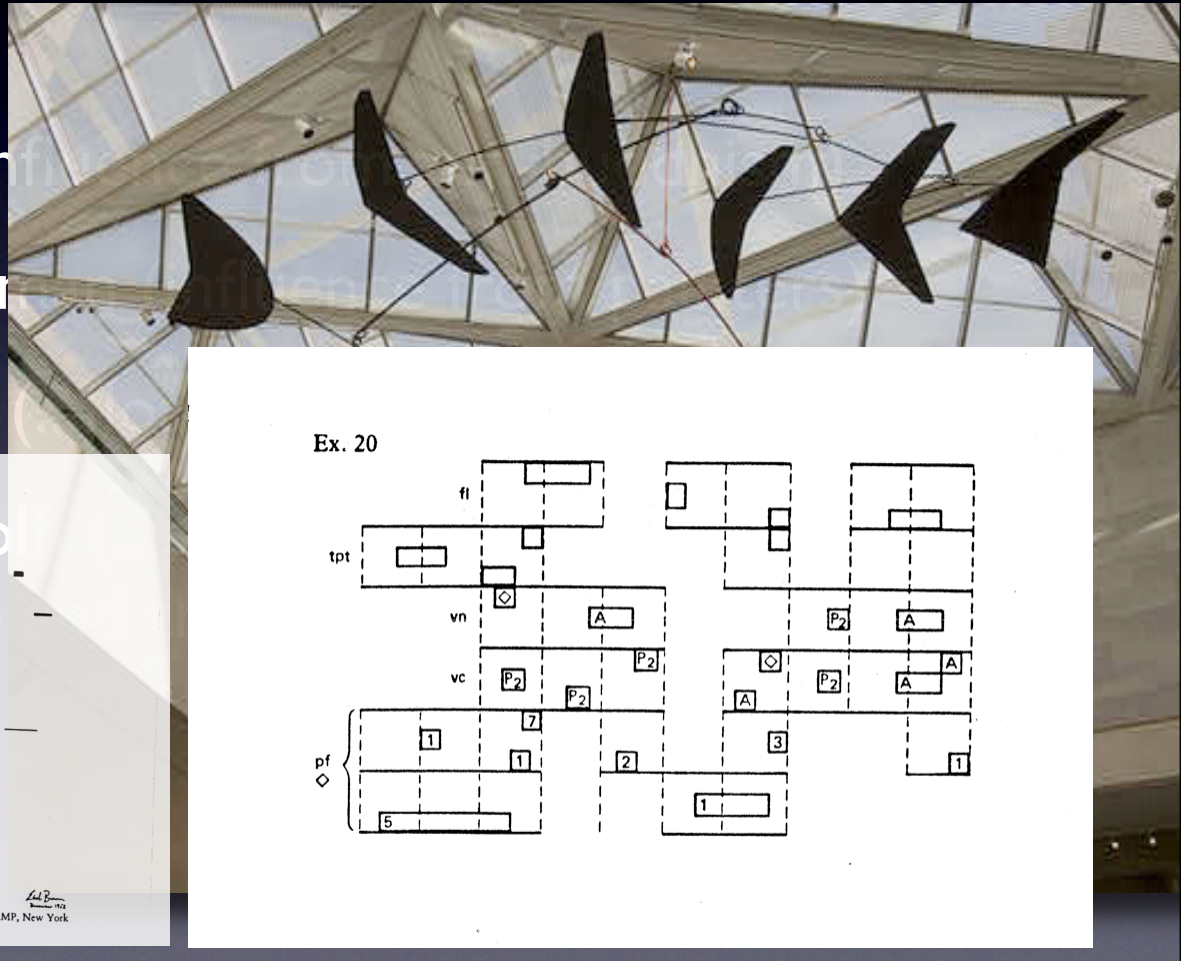
# 20th century composition

- Notation as ‘structural representation’:
  - ▶ determination of performance praxis
  - ▶ pre-requisit for the compositional process  
(from Girolamo Frescobaldi over  
Franz Schubert to Brian Ferneyhough)



# The New York Composers in the 1950s

- John Cage (influenced by chance)
- Morton Feldman (influenced by chance)
- Earle Brown (influenced by chance)
- Christian Wolff (collaborative)



# The Avantgarde in US

- The 'happening' as artistic expression

La Monte Young

*Composition 1960 #10*

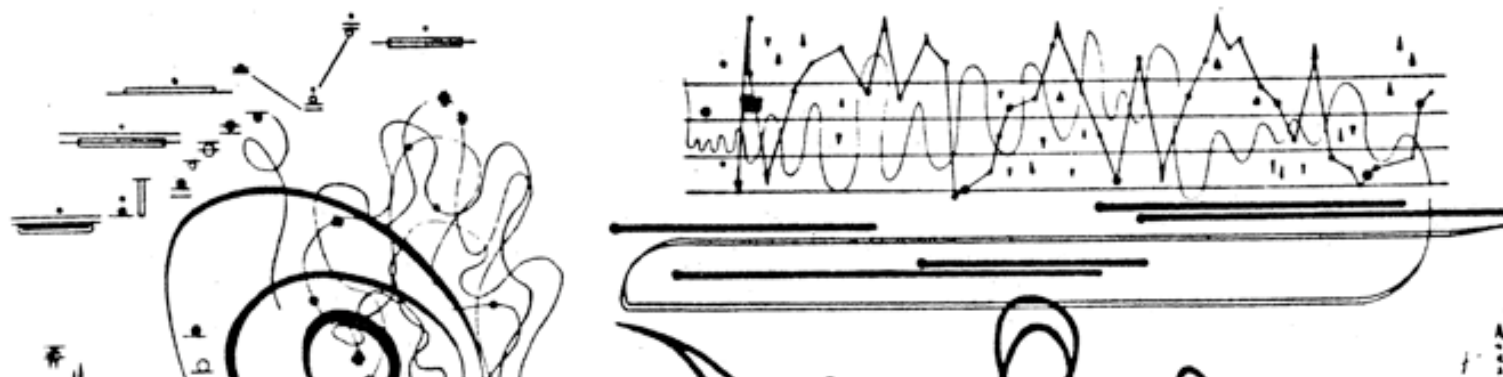
Draw a straight line and follow it.

October 1960



# after Darmstadt 1958

- Pierre Boulez: 3rd piano sonata (1956-57)  
referring to Stephane Mallarmés 'open book'
- Karlheinz Stockhausen: Klavierstück XI (1956)
- The polish composers (global form/open details)
  - Timeline notation: Krzysztof Penderecki
  - Repeated patterns: Witold Lutoslawsky



# **V<sub>b</sub>) piano piece for David Tudor 1**

(Tutto nell'orbita del pp, sempre)

1 MD  
MS

2 MS

3 MS (gliss.)

15"

30"

45"

1.9.1959



# from happening to text...

- The happening festivals in Copenhagen and Oslo 1962
- 
- Stockhausen: 'Intuitive' Music (1968)
- Cornelius Cardew: Treatise

für Ensemble

AUFWÄRTS

Spiele eine Schwingung im Rhythmus Deiner kleinsten Bestandteile

Spiele eine Schwingung im Rhythmus des Universums

Spiele alle Rhythmen, die Du zwischen  
dem Rhythmus Deiner kleinsten Bestandteile  
und dem Rhythmus des Universums  
heute unterscheiden kannst  
einen nach dem anderen  
und jeden so lange  
bis die Luft ihn weiterträgt

# Copenhagen 1969...

The Improvisation Group

- The Group for Alternative Music
- The Group for Intuitive Music



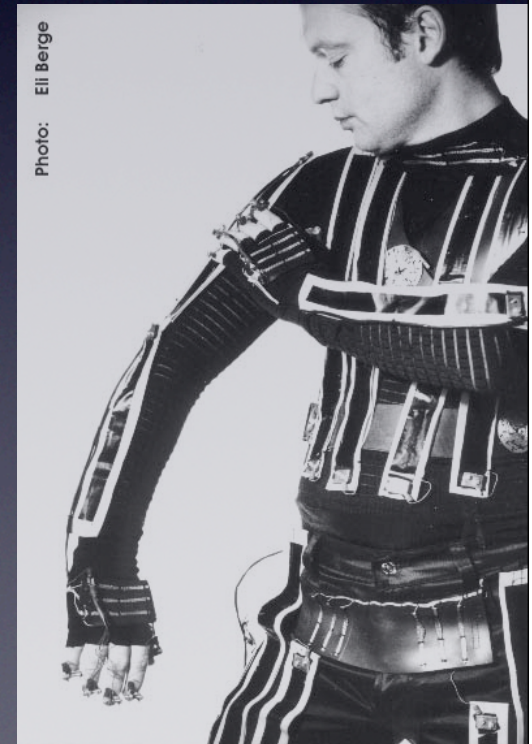
# The Computer as a Musical Instrument

## Interactive Music

- M (Joe Chadabe) MIDI-based
- HMSL (Mills College, US) MIDI-based
- George Lewis Customized programmes
- Bruno Spoerri Customized programmes
- The Next computer (IRCAM, Paris)
- Max => Max/MSP (from MIDI to sound)

# Interactive Music in Scandinavia in the late 80s

- Per Anders Nilsson (Gothenburg)
- Rolf Wallin (Oslo)
- Ivar Frounberg (Copenhagen)
- Magnus Lindberg (Helsinki/Paris)
- Kaija Saariaho (Paris)





# Personal experiences with computer-interaction

- *at the stillpoint of the turning world* (1988)
- *What did the Sirènes sing, as Ulyssis sailed by?* (1989)  
and *The Anatomy of a Point* (1994)
- div. instrument/computer pieces (1990s)
- *Logogriphe*s (2001)
- *Waves and Velocities* (2004-08)

# interaction vs. improvisation?

The consequences of the programme as an instrument:

- sound - rather than notes...
- play and listen - rather than reproduce and expect
- the 'instrument' includes the composition  
not composition for an instrument
- verbal instructions



# What's happening now? (I)

The role of the composer is in a transitionary state: getting back to the active performance...



Maja Rathkje

Eyvind Buene

Øyvind Torvund

Peter Tornquist



# What's happening now? (2)

The role of the performer is in a transitional state: from score-reading to playing without:

Point

Stipendiatprojects:

Else Olsen S,

Ellen Aagaard,

Victoria Johnson



Victoria Johnson



# What's happening now? (3)

New at the Norwegian Academy of Music:

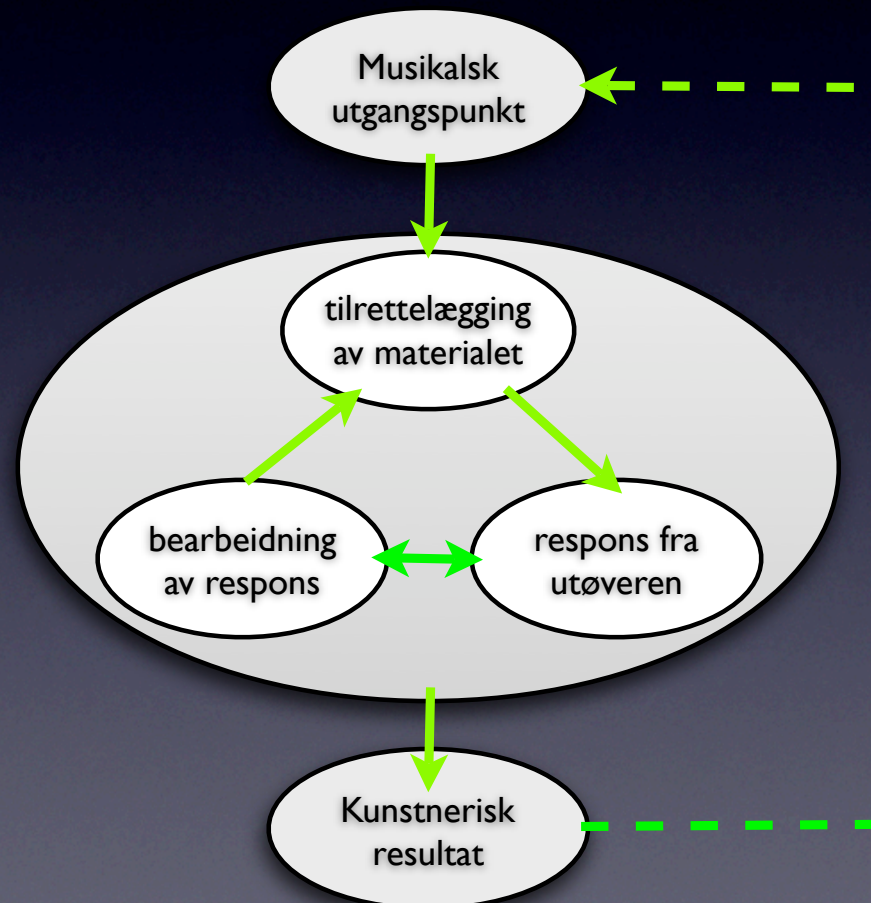
- Improvisational based contemporary music (Rolf Erik Nystrøm, Point)
- R&D-focus areas (FOU):

the creative music  
creativity and musical



# Peter Tornquist

Composition -  
Interaction -  
Improvisation





# Summary

## Improvisation related to composed music:

- interpretative measures (ornamentation, variation, tempo, agogic, etc.)
- 'open' notation (lacking parameters)
- free choice of notated modules
- rules for finding and performing music actions
- graphics (other than music notation)
- textbased (descriptive or abstract)
- computer interaction (programmed behaviour)
- aural delivery by the composer (the 'stage managing' composer)

Chadabe, Lewis, Spoerri, Frounberg, ao. Rathkje ao.

# Features to be discussed

- improvisation vs. open form?
- the nature of intuition? (free or calculated)
- free or historically informed aesthetics?
- 'music' or sound? (is music an artform?)

Thank You for your attention,  
do you have any questions?