

Metronome and Melodic Lines: Confluences of the word and the move in solo studio-based movement improvisatory practice

Hilary Elliott, University of Huddersfield

Abstract

This article introduces and analyses two approaches to experiencing and interpreting confluences of the spoken word and movement when training or performing solo movement improvisation. The first is *Metronome* – a training strategy invented by two of my earliest improvisation teachers, Peter Trotman and Andrew Morrish – in which there is a deliberate coming together of speaking and moving. The second is *Melodic Lines* – a training or loose performance score that I have developed – in which spoken language emerges from sensation. Sondra Fraleigh's comments on the 'fragmented "umms" and "ahhhs", pauses and detours' that she notes in everyday speech open a useful perspective on the way in which *Metronome* encourages uninhibited production of words in synchronicity with movement. A consideration of dance ethnographer Deidre Sklar's views on linguistic meaning – articulated in terms of the 'somatic reverberations' of words and her proposition that it is possible to 'bid words to participate in the somatic schema they represent' – frames my consideration of *Melodic Lines* as a strategy in which words are experienced as embodied knowledge. These approaches are further contextualized within the related improvisatory discourses of Keith Johnstone, Ruth Zaporah, Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay.

Keywords

Improvising language

somatic reverberations

phenomenological

sensation

Fragmented 'umms' and 'ahhhs'

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, I lived and worked in Melbourne, where I first encountered improvisation as a performance form through the work of Al Wunder, Peter Trotman and Andrew Morrish. I trained extensively with Wunder – dubbed 'Australia's grandfather of improvisation' – who had worked as a dancer and teacher with renowned choreographer Alwin Nikolais in New York before developing a distinctive approach to teaching improvisation as a performing art, first in the United States in the 1970s and then in Australia from the 1980s onwards. As well as delving into Wunder's Theatre of the Ordinary, I spent a year engaged in a significant weekly ritual, attending Peter Trotman's Monday-night improvisation classes in text and movement at Cecil Street Studio, 66 Cecil Street, Fitzroy – a suburb 2km from the city centre. Here – sometimes in the company of just Trotman and improvisation stalwart Noelle Rees-Hatton – the work honed in on the relation between the improvised word and the improvised move in playful, experimental, humorous and challenging ways. Underpinning all of Trotman's exercises – many invented on the spot – was an interest in learning 'how to effortlessly slip from one medium to another'; for skilled movers and dancers, this meant how to 'get good at language' (1998). Of equal importance, especially for those of us 'intoxicated by the power of language' and compelled, with Trotman, to 'find complexity and richness in language' (Ellis 2009: 7), was a desire to stay alert to, and begin to counter, the way

in which words 'have the ability to absorb our attention making us forgetful of our bodies' (Trotman 1998). As a dancer, an interest in being able to shift between the word and move had motivated me in my improvisational work for some time, but I was particularly keen to find ways in which language and movement could emerge synchronously in what Sondra Fraleigh calls 'organic wholes' – direct, clear and confident moments of expression (2004: 69).

Metronome was a regular fixture of the weekly experiments; Trotman notes that 'I've got a thousand permutations of that exercise' (Ellis 2009: 13). In its most basic form, a spontaneous movement deliberately accompanies a spontaneous word – or a spontaneous word deliberately accompanies each spontaneous movement – as the idea is to launch into both modalities simultaneously so that the improviser can begin to free herself from the impulse to over-consider either her words or her movement. As one of my notes from the time shows, this synchronicity was also a continual reminder that neither the word nor the move should be regarded as primary (an improviser may at times have a clearly felt impulse to begin in one mode, but the task is to try to inhabit and express both modes concurrently):

[g]ive the movement as much weight as the words (was throwing it away!)

Two versions – Fast Metronome and Alphabet Metronome discussed in detail later – were particularly efficacious in highlighting and eventually ridding me of a latent tendency to resort to 'fragmented "umms" and "ahhhs"' when attempting to spontaneously generate a stream of words whilst moving.

[n]ote to self: try to cut the 'umm' stuff

good - I felt as if I didn't throw away moves and I didn't do 'umms'

I found using sound starts the words...

Fraleigh characterizes the frequency of 'umms' and 'ahhhs' as well as pauses and detours in the everyday speech of 'a lot of people' that she knows as forms of apology – especially for women. These ruptures and breaks disrupt trains of thought and derail and undermine what the speaker wants to say (Fraleigh 2004: 69). I was not aware that I was (unconsciously) apologizing for what Hélène Cixous, cited by Fraleigh, characterizes as the 'rash' act of speaking aloud, but my notes from the time clearly indicate moments of hesitancy – 'umm' – perhaps some kind of self-censorship – 'ahhh' – at play when tasked with the immediate articulation of individual words, particularly when needing to do so quickly. What Metronome continually foregrounded, then, was a disruption to a smooth generation and flow of words that was a clear characteristic of my approach to instantly composed language. As discussed later in this paper, I also discovered that focusing on letters as sounds served as a fertile way to rapidly form words, by accessing language through its melodic and sonic qualities; a crucial finding in terms of cultivating the ability to bypass the propensity to stall or falter with 'umms' and 'ahhhs'. The requirement to speak and move simultaneously built into every iteration of the exercise – and the concomitant challenge to not make the word primary (regardless of how 'intoxicated' by language I was) – was also central to the exercise's success in producing quick-fire language without becoming 'forgetful' of my body.

The intimate space of sensual aliveness

Dance ethnographer Deidre Sklar's research offers a slightly different perspective on the relation between the word and the move as I relate it to instant composition, although there are commonalities with Trotman's desire to witness and experience word-use in improvisation that moves beyond 'very mundane, ordinary, daily language' into something that could be 'so much more' (Ellis 2009: 7). Sklar's work is concerned primarily – though not exclusively – with the written word and the ways in which 'writing and embodiment are never disconnected from each other or from larger sociocultural schema' (2009: 163). Her understanding that 'in the intimate space of sensual aliveness' words 'reverberate with somatic memory' is readily transferrable to a consideration of the emergence of the spoken word in the strategy of *Melodic Lines*, discussed in detail later (Sklar in Banes and Lepecki 2007: 44). Sklar acknowledges that it is, of course, possible to employ language as a mode of propositional thinking and symbolic representation without feeling what she calls the 'somatic reverberations of words' (Sklar in Banes and Lepecki 2007: 44) – revealing a disconnect between language as emerging from lived experience, through the sensate body, and language functioning quite conventionally as disembodied sign. It is also possible, however, to 'bid words to participate in the somatic schema they represent' (Sklar in Banes and Lepecki 2007: 44). Within the context of writing, 'bidding' words to participate in the somatic understandings that they carry transfigures them from disembodied semiotic signs to immediately felt, sensorial and sensory embodiments of knowledge and experience. Words thus bid 'continue to vibrate' (Sklar 2009: 160) with the lived significances, values and memories of the writer. Sklar gives the example of the word *ball*, which she can relate to as a series

of letters on a page that refer to an object she recognizes as a ball. She can also, however, approach *ball* in terms of the word's embodied schema. She can consciously 'summon what I saw or felt or remembered when I said the word':

... the dirtied pink Spalding (pronounced Spal-*deen*) we threw against apartment building walls in Brooklyn, its chalky texture, the exciting rebound of a 'good' ball, the thud of a 'dead' one, the friend I played with whose grandfather owned the grocery store where we stuck our hands into the brine of a barrel of sour pickles. (Sklar in Banes and Lepecki 2007: 44, original emphasis)

Approached in this way, the word *ball* becomes redolent with specific, personalized somatic memory, Sklar's part of the wider embodied schema known as *ball*. In the moment of writing, then, meaning is felt as 'rhythm, texture, shape, and vitality as well as symbol' (Sklar in Banes and Lepecki 2007: 44). *Ball* is re-animated and re-vitalized so that it is expressly re-imbued with its 'full sensory, somatic, phenomenological, vital and schematic load' (Sklar 2009: 160).

Adapting this process of re-animating the written word (and the process of writing) to the seeding and speaking of words in movement improvisation, I am taken by the notion of 'bidding' words to participate in the 'world of complex phenomenological linkages' that they carry (Sklar 2009: 159). This process echoes the approach to the word and the move in *Melodic Lines* in the sense that the improviser can choose to consciously generate a flow of language and movement through attending to what she 'saw or felt or remembered' when she previously said or experienced a word. I might find, for instance, that the word *orange* appears in a

moment of improvising (perhaps as a thought which I then verbalize). If I then stay with the word *orange* rather than moving onto another piece of content, I may find that a visual or kinaesthetic memory emerges. *I remember holding a large orange, watching its juice make mini puddles on the concrete pavement, the heat of intense sunshine blasting the skin on my arms.* I can then continue to improvise from and through this memory, drawing on the ‘full sensory, somatic, phenomenological, vital and schematic load’ of the word (my word) *orange*. Other memories might emerge, or fictional story ideas pop up; the word *orange* has opened its ‘complex phenomenological linkages’, offering the improviser a trove of potential material that can be moved and verbalized.

Metronome

Recounting the random provenance of this exercise, Trotman recalls that there was a piano in the church hall that he and Morrish were working in. They ‘started pressing a key and came up with the idea that one of us would have to say a word each time the key was pressed’ (Ellis 2009: 8). Since then, countless permutations of the idea have been invented and explored without a piano (or metronome), although an appreciation of temporal patterns, especially rhythm and duration, remains central to the exercise. It is over a decade since I first played with a variety of Metronome forms, all involving the word and the move and synchronicities between them, but it remains an approach that I draw on when I need to deliberately and consciously re-inhabit processes of generating language in tandem with movement, prioritizing neither word nor move but their unified emergence as ‘organic wholes’.

A straightforward iteration of Fast Metronome would involve launching into a stream of single words (by which I mean the improviser did not try to link them in any way) whilst spontaneously producing a movement with each word. Sometimes the directive would be to *use as much space as possible*, so the improviser might find themselves engaged in expansive travels or leaps across the space whilst languaging. A contrasting score might be to stay *on the spot*, but alter posture or work gesturally in concert with the words. These kinds of structural variations set very clear parameters for exploration whilst also, to borrow from Wunder, purposefully leaving ‘lots of space for student input and interpretation’ (2006: 12). With the primary objective being to create *fast*, correlations between the speed of word formation and the dynamic quality of the movements were frequently evident. In my case, a monosyllabic word would often be accompanied by a move that was sudden and staccato, whilst the discrete syllables of multisyllabic words would either be emphasized in tandem with distinct moments of movement or the final syllable would be spoken in the momentary stillness after finishing a move. The heightened register of worded delivery that seemed to be a consequence of working fast would simultaneously infuse posture, gesture or whole body movement with the vitality of the heightened verbal tone – and vice versa. The challenge was to inhabit both modalities equally but even when this was not successfully achieved at any given moment of moving/talking – evident to me when I ‘threw away’ some of my movements – the exercise encouraged and cultivated a generally equal attentiveness to speaking and moving and an ability to inhabit both modalities quite confidently. In this way, it was impossible during the exercise to become ‘forgetful’ of one’s body whilst speaking.

Beginning Fast Metronome could be a troubling experience, evoking what Cixous calls ‘the torture of beginning to speak aloud’:

[e]very woman has known the torture of beginning to speak aloud, heart beating as if to break, occasionally falling into loss of language, ground and language slipping out from under her, because for woman speaking – even just opening her mouth – in public is something rash, a transgression. (Cixous and Clément in Cixous 1986: 92)

The exercise simply doesn't work without abandoning conscious control of the emergence and articulation of both words and movement. As Keith Johnstone notes in the context of inventing spontaneous verse, 'if you're asked to improvise... you just have to abandon conscious control, and let the words come of their own accord' (1981: 104). If I am unable to do so, the result will likely be 'clunky, laboured text' accompanied, in the case of *Metronome*, by 'disconnected movement' (Trotman 1998). Cognizant of the significant challenge of launching into work in Fast mode (particularly if I was feeling languid), a useful approach was to randomly voice any combination of letters – 'p' and 'a' for instance – and allow a word to then come of its own accord (in this case, *paper, page, paint...*). Emphasizing an initial amalgam of letters in this way foregrounded the melodic and sonic qualities of language, the way words 'feel in the mouth or roll off the tongue' (Abram 1996: 75). It also had the efficacious effect of whittling away at my innate tendency to stall or falter with 'umms' and 'ahhhs' – the concentration on sound serving as a generative force so I didn't find myself stuck. These 'sound-shapes' (Abram 1996: 76) would rapidly transform into recognizable words, but what was also useful was that I wouldn't know what the completed word would be as I had given up consciously constructing it. If I begin spontaneously voicing the sound of 'May', for instance, the completed word could be 'Mabel', 'Maiden', 'Maybe' or 'Major'. I don't know what semantic sense is being

made until the sounds complete themselves or, as Ruth Zaporah phrases it, ‘the language languages’ me (1995: 160).

The other version of Metronome I most frequently return to now is bounded by the alphabet – the improviser says one word at a time and each word is obliged to start with the next letter of the alphabet. With each spontaneous word, there is a spontaneous movement – or as I launch into a movement, there appears a word.

[t]his is useful to remind me of letters of the alphabet I don’t often draw on physically + vocally filling the space with this

Favourite or habitual everyday words can appear, but surprising ones can also emerge, jostled free, perhaps, by the movements of the body (a point I pick up again when discussing Melodic Lines). There can also be a predisposition to link individual words into coherent segments of meaning, pointing to one of the ways in which the improviser ‘may feel reluctant to loosen’ their control of language (Trotman 1998):

[a]ll big cats demand early feeding...

Perhaps because of the necessity to follow the letters of the alphabet in order, our embedded tendency to create semantic meaning through employing a recognized system of syntactical and grammatical rules is particularly highlighted – and confronted – in Alphabet Metronome. Attempting to relinquish control ‘of the necessity of making sense’ (Trotman 1998) by randomizing language production can

therefore be both fun and infuriating, as the degree to which our propensity to ‘think in sentences’ comes to the fore (Goldberg 1986: 62).

[h]ysterical

Practise this!

As Natalie Goldberg notes in relation to writing, it is by ‘cracking open’ the syntax that we both think and write in that a new energy, indeed for her a fresh way of seeing the world, is opened up (1986: 62). Alphabet Metronome does include the possibility of manipulating the speed of either moving or talking by slowing down or speeding up one or the other or both. Doing so helps trouble established everyday temporal patterns and re-tunes the improviser to the rhythmic and melodic dimensions of speech as she moves. As in Fast Metronome, focusing attention on ‘the *taste* of a word’ (Abram 1996: 75, original emphasis) through accenting individual letters or syllables helps amplify their rhythmic and sonic qualities as they form themselves into wholes and builds up increased confidence – with a concomitant lessening of ‘umms’ and ‘ahhhs’ – in instant word composition.

In both these versions of Metronome, the improviser’s ability to generate language and movement simultaneously is challenged and enhanced. As with Johnstone, who identifies his job as getting the actors to ‘go where the verse takes them’, to encourage them not to care what they say, and to ‘go with the verse’ (1981: 105), the task in Metronome is to attempt to abandon what may be a deeply engrained desire to produce witty, clever or ‘good’ language – to control it in that way. Whereas Johnstone doesn’t explicitly pinpoint movement as a constituent part of his exercise on spontaneous verse, however, Metronome is grounded in the fact

of needing to move and speak as one enterprise. Its effectiveness as a generative and revelatory tool then lies in the improviser avoiding what Frost and Yarrow identify as ‘the reflex of trying to make [an improvisation] into something you think it *ought* to be, rather than letting it become what it *can* be’ (Frost and Yarrow, 2016: xvi, original emphasis).

Noticing sensation

Metronome demands that the improviser generates movement and language together – an enterprise that Trotman acknowledges can feel like ‘patting your head while rubbing your stomach’. It also focuses attention on, and begins to ameliorate, the ways in which words ‘seem to draw us away from our ability to focus on movement and sensation’ (1998). In *Melodic Lines*, the spoken word emerges from sensation – the improviser notices, watches and follows sensation before verbalization takes place – and the improviser then builds further moved and/or spoken content by allowing herself to experience and build on the reverberations and associations of the emergent word/s. As with Metronome, neither modality is primary, but there is a clearly felt sense of a different process unfolding in time, one that begins by attending to sensation and passes through ‘thinking in words’ (Sklar in Banes and Lepecki 2007: 44) before verbalization takes place.

The technique serves as a useful training companion to Metronome and a loose score in performance. It is also a useful approach for movers and dancers for whom language use in improvisation is an unfamiliar challenge but for whom launching into the word and the move simultaneously is perhaps too daunting. I also draw on *Melodic Lines* when I want to extend the individual words and phrases that unexpectedly pop up in Metronome to longer-form storytelling; to use the somatic

resonance of individual words as stepping stones to the larger stories they hint at, the embodied knowledge that Goldberg alludes to when she talks of the stories carried in writers' bodies 'waiting to be released' (1986: 38).

It is worth pointing out that noticing, watching and following sensation is a familiar pathway within many approaches to movement improvisation that do not segue into spoken language. Improvisers Tufnell and Crickmay, for instance, incorporate multiple useful prompts for following sensation and impulse in their rich assemblage of textual guides in *A Widening Field: journeys in body and imagination*:

[b]e still [...] rest

Sense your weight... let each part of your body breathe... listen

What do you feel?... Notice a particular sensation

Watch and follow as it rises into movement

awakening... impulse. (Tufnell and Crickmay 2004: 8)

These instructions function as a gentle frame for dropping into a moment-to-moment awareness of physical sensation. Deliberately slowing down, letting each movement 'take its own time through the body' encourages the improviser to 'feel the movement of breath... of thoughts and impulses... of dreams and memories within the body' (Tufnell and Crickmay 2004: 8).

At the other end of the dynamic register, the improviser might choose to:

Run... race... roar... expand

let the body fill up... fill out

stir up... shake out... rumple... jostle... disturb

loosen... shake up... whatever shape the
body holds. (Tufnell and Crickmay 2004:
11)

This is a series of encouragements to discover a shape-shifting momentum, to attune to the sensations of the body in a much speedier fashion. In both cases, the prompts are built on the premise that the body 'holds' 'thoughts and impulses' that can be jostled free by moving – slowly or fast – with a finely tuned awareness of each emergent sensation.

Melodic Lines progresses the attentiveness to sensation underscoring these kinds of prompts to include spoken language. Here words stem from the thoughts, impulses, dreams and memories that have been stirred up and disturbed by moving and the improviser aims to remain connected to the somatic reverberations and 'to bring to life the full and changing load of associations' as she speaks (Sklar 2009: 156).

Melodic Lines

A moment of movement:

[l]eaning with my left shoulder against the studio wall...
a favourite 'partner' of mine
walking my feet gingerly to the right
until I am on as extreme an angle as I can be

without toppling over
then resting head and left hand on wall
leaning further in
and walking my feet in an arc around me
what does this precarious line of weight loosen in and
from my body?

Waves of sensation accompany the leaning motion. I feel bone beneath skin where I press the head of my shoulder into the smooth wall. My legs, pelvis and torso are released, relaxed, and expansive as my feet repeatedly mark an arc on the floor. Leaning into the leaning, sensations generate further sensations.

Unexpectedly, the first two lines of a poem by Thomas Hardy come to awareness:

I leant upon a coppice gate
When frost was spectre-grey,

I learnt this entire poem, 'The Darkling Thrush', when I was at school and I can still consciously recall it, word for word. In the sense that the poem was part of my early schooling, a system that relied extensively on rote absorption, I 'know' and 'own' it; the language is 'internal' to who I am (Noë 2009: 125), though I am surprised that it calls itself forth in this particular moment of movement. Antonio Damasio notes that whatever 'plays in the nonverbal tracks of our minds is rapidly translated in words and sentences', such is 'the nature of the human, languaged creature' (1999: 185). In the context of this discussion, then, I surmise that a 'verbal translation' of a 'nonverbal narrative of consciousness' has taken place and, in the moment of improvising, I begin to directly engage with this verbal narrative

(Damasio 1999: 185). The words' full significance – what Sklar calls their 'phenomenological vitality' (2009: 167) – does not stem solely from school, though, but from the fact that I recited the poem at my father's funeral. It was one of his favourites (he was a Hardy scholar). The leaning action and accompanying sensations have given rise to 'pools of memory' (Sklar 2005: 14) that span several decades and point to complex, phenomenological linkages.

[a]nd winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.

I choose to verbalize these words, although another creative option would be to choose to keep them silent, influencing and steering any subsequent movement or action from within (an option I take up as the poem progresses). Both options enable me to explicitly 'bid' the words to 'participate in the somatic schema they represent' if, in the unfolding of the improvisation, I can summon 'what I saw or felt or remembered' when I previously said the words. The process of 'thinking in words' – itself prompted by attending to the sensations of leaning – then 'becomes a process of evoking their somatic reverberations' (Sklar in Banes and Lepecki 2007: 44). My initial choice to make the words audible and therefore present to those listening is tied to my remembrance and ownership of them as spoken language. Although I may have originally encountered them on the page, through reading, I suspect that my father recited them to me. At any event, I have a dim recollection of reciting the words myself in 6th Grade, age 11, and these memories are heavily overlaid by the more recent and emotionally piercing memory of stumbling through them at my father's funeral. As the improvisation progresses, though, I shift into pure movement.

I remain attuned to the language's somatic reverberations – in this way I am still operating with a clear verbal consciousness, thinking in the words of the poem – but I choose to 'bid' the words to influence and guide the emergent movement without speaking them out loud.

As I begin to re-recite these charged words in the improvisation, I remember faces looking up at me, as I had originally looked down on them from the small raised area; I remember trying not to look at the coffin on my immediate left; I remember Neil – whose name instantly evokes warmth and comfort – on my right, holding a piece of paper with the words on in case (ironically) I forgot them. These remembrances of past bodily postures and interactions underscore the re-recitation of the words in the improvisation and also infuse the spontaneous movement that emerges in tandem with the words with particular qualitative dynamics.

[t]he tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted night
Had sought their household fires.

In the improvisation, I emphasize the sibilant 's' sounds in 'stems', 'scored', 'sky', 'string', 'lyres', 'sought' and 'fires' – a stress that slows down my delivery and gives this constellation of words an added emphasis. The movement is informed by a re-membered sense of physical constriction – there isn't space to move in and there isn't 'space' or expansiveness inside me. The verbs 'scored' and 'haunted' encourage tensile movements of the arms and torso, but the moves are not elongated in space; flow is bound.

[t]he land's sharp features seemed to be
The century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy
The wind his death lament.

I enunciate a crisp 'c' in 'corpse', 'crypt', 'cloudy' and 'canopy'; the sharp, staccato pronunciation creating a blunt, harsh dynamic quality that matches the denotative dimension and subjective significance of the words. *A drop through an arabesque into a forward lunge with 'outleant', arms extending, as if feeling and shaping the word in space. Inhalation and exhalation of breath on 'crypt'. Fingers tremble. On 'wind', a slow spiral to the floor, a giving-in to gravity.*

[t]he ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

There are more verses to the poem, but at this point in the improvisation the intricate entwinement of the word and the move gave way to pure movement; the words, now unvoiced, internally orchestrating a period of slow and sustained moving.

It is worth pointing out that it may be unusual for entire chunks of pre-learnt text to spring forth within the context of movement improvisation, and Melodic Lines is not especially geared towards the retrieval of lengthy extant segments of

language. This Hardy example serves as a reminder, however, that whatever language is deeply connected to the improviser's individual experience of living – in whatever form that language has been ingested – may be unearthed with this technique. As Cecily Berry notes, words 'spring from many layers of consciousness: from the ordinary management of our everyday lives, to the unguarded expression of deep feeling. We must be ready for their shifts' (2000: 21).

A further frame of reference

At this point, I would like to briefly position Melodic Lines within the context of another improvisational methodology that explores linkages between sensation, movement and spoken text – Ruth Zaporah's Action Theatre. Doing so will bring the element of phenomenological resonance that is central to Melodic Lines into sharper focus. Zaporah writes frequently of noticing sensation:

[n]otice a sensation in your body and move into it. Or just start moving.

Whatever happens happens. Follow your movement. Listen to it.

Listen to it from the inside of it. Allow what you hear to cue you, lead you...

You're noticing designs the course [sic]. You don't have to create anything.

You are responding to what
you notice. (Zaporah 1995: 157)

Noticing sensations is a fundamental component of Zaporah's training, with a strong initial emphasis on not interpreting the sensory experiences and 'not talking to ourselves'. 'Our language mind' is to remain 'quiet' (Zaporah 1995: 181). Attending

to sensation then develops into moving into and with the 'feeling' that is triggered and from the feeling following the 'action' of movement. This 'wheel' of 'sensation-feeling-action', is at the heart of the development of moved and spoken material (Zaporah 1995: 186). Zaporah notes that language 'tends to take us away from moment-to-moment body experience', although she concedes that it 'doesn't have to' (1995: 181) and many of her exercises work with language as a consequence of working through the wheel of sensation-feeling-action. Importantly, Zaporah places more emphasis on 'the saying', rather than 'the said', steering her students away from getting 'caught in content' at the expense of the sounds, rhythms and 'feel of their mouths as it forms language' (1995: 160). More recently, the 'wheel' that begins with sensation has been re-calibrated as 'kinetics' to 'mood or feeling' to 'image'. The 'image' is something 'that can be described, something that can be spoken in the English language' (Zaporah 2013: 30).

Although I have never trained with Zaporah, Melodic Lines clearly shares an approach to language composition that is grounded in sensory experience. On this point, it is worth noting that Zaporah, like Trotman, Morrish and myself, first trained with Wunder; Zaporah dubbing him her 'one and only improvisation mentor' (1995: vii). Although not the focus of this article, Wunder's experiments in words and movements clearly laid the groundwork for the panoply of investigations that various improvisers have since conducted, including the trajectory of sensation-thinking in words-verbalization discussed here.

Returning to Melodic Lines, then, the improviser allows herself to get 'caught in content' whilst also remaining attuned to the melodic and prosodic dimensions of her speech. Indeed it is impossible to separate 'content' – understood here as 'the said' – from 'the saying', as the words themselves emerge redolent with lived

experience and significance. The individual words or phrases that emerge are an integral part of the improviser's embodied knowing, wrapped in phenomenological layers that can then be further shaped, developed and transformed in moving and/or speaking. In the Hardy example, for instance, the entire story of a daughter's relationship with her father shimmered as the background horizon out of which 'The Darkling Thrush' emerged and each phrase – 'the said' and 'the saying' – carried a 'full sensory, somatic, phenomenological, vital and schematic load' for me (Sklar 2009: 160). In this example, the audience were not aware of the full 'load' of autobiographical significance, nor, I suggest, did they need to be in order to experience the resonances and reverberations of the language and movement in their own ways. As a final note, it is worth pointing out that Melodic Lines does not then necessarily remain rooted in the autobiographical; ongoing material can be readily depersonalized. I may choose, for instance, to verbalize an entirely fabricated story about a daughter and a father – to construct brain fictions and fantasies with and from the emergent words – but my stepping-off point will be the personalized somatic resonances with which the individual words and phrases are imbued.

Concluding remarks

Metronome and Melodic Lines are offered here as fertile creative strategies for experiencing improvised language as intimately entwined with movement – either through the task of generating both simultaneously and regarding neither as a primary modality in Metronome, or by experiencing the way in which attending to sensation can awaken the complex resonances of the words that are internal to us in Melodic Lines, again giving equal weight to both modalities. Rather than taking the

improviser away from her 'moment-to-moment body experience' (Zaporah 1995: 181) or 'making us forgetful of our bodies' (Trotman 1998), these tools are designed to braid the immediacy of the kinetic and sensory realms with languaging and, in the case of Melodic Lines in particular, to reacquaint both improviser and watcher/listener with the phenomenological vitality of language. Perhaps the reader will test out Fast or Alphabet Metronome and find that for them, too, words begin to pop up more readily, more effortlessly, in tandem with movement, because of the necessity to move and speak as one or because, to paraphrase Johnstone, they simply trust to luck (1981: 104). Perhaps, too, the reader will find that their own inclination to pepper their improvisational speech with 'umms' and 'ahhhs' – or other manifestations of hesitation, inhibition or apology – will be assuaged by focusing on the sonic reverberations of letters as the generative force that encourages and entices words to come of their own accord. Practising Melodic Lines, the experience of following sensation into language and of bidding words to participate in the fulsome somatic schema that they represent might also result in a greater ease and confidence with spoken words; language now experienced as embodied knowledge, able to be re-understood as a richly layered corporeal phenomenon. I also offer both strategies as an enticement to further explore (in whatever way the improviser chooses) the complex stories that the improviser carries in her body – the ones that are waiting to be released.

References

Abram, David (1996), *The Spell Of The Sensuous*, New York: Vintage Books.

Banes, Sally and Lepecki, André (eds) (2007), *The Senses in Performance*, New York and London: Routledge.

Berry, Cicely (2000), *The Actor & The Text*, London: Virgin Books.

Cixous, Hélène (1986), 'Sorties: Out and out: Attacks/Ways out/forays', in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (eds), *The Newly Born Woman* (trans. Betsy Wing), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, pp. 63-132.

Damasio, Antonio (1999), *The Feeling of What Happens*, New York: Harcourt.

Ellis, Ann-Marie (2009), 'Talking with the text man', *Proximity*, 12:3, pp. 6–13.

Fraleigh, Sondra (2004), *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics In Motion*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Frost, Anthony and Yarrow, Ralph (2016), *Improvisation in Drama, Theatre And Performance: History, Practice, Theory*, 3rd ed., London: Palgrave.

Goldberg, Natalie (1986), *Writing Down the Bones*, Boston and London: Shambhala.

Johnstone, Keith (1981), *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*, London: Eyre Methuen.

Noë, Alva (2009), *Out Of Our Heads*, New York: Hill and Wang.

Sklar, Deidre (2007), 'Unearthing Kinesthesia: Groping among cross-cultural models of the senses in performance', in Sally Banes and André. Lepecki (eds), *The Senses in Performance*, New York and London: Routledge, pp. 38–46.

____ (2009), 'Reflecting on words and letters from the perspective of embodiment, with commentary on essays by Daphne Lei, Susan Phillips, and Sohini Ray', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 82:1, pp. 155–71.

Trotman, Peter (1998), 'Loosening your grip: Improvising with language and movement language', *Proximity*, 1:3, <http://proximity.slightly.net>. Accessed 14 April 2016.

Tufnell, Miranda and Crickmay, Chris (2004), *A Widening Field: Journeys in Body and Imagination*, Alton: Dance Books.

Wunder, Al (2006), *The Wonder of Improvisation*, Ascot, Victoria: Wunder Publishers.

Zaporah, Ruth (1995), *Action Theater: The Improvisation of Presence*, Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.

____ (2013), 'The imagination and the engineer: Ruth Zaporah and Nancy Stark Smith talk about improvisation', *Contact Quarterly*, 38:1, pp. 28–32.

Contributor details

Born in Adelaide, Australia, Hilary's early training was in ballet and contemporary dance. She performed with the Canberra Dance Theatre whilst studying Drama and English at ANU. In 1992, Hilary was awarded Australia's highly competitive Pilkington/Leeds University/Commonwealth Office Scholarship and she completed a Masters in Theatre Studies with Distinction at the University of Leeds in 1993. Whilst living and working in Melbourne, Hilary encountered improvisation as a performance form. Her immediate fascination with instant composition, particularly the interplay of moving and speaking, led her to study with Al Wunder, Peter Trotman and Andrew Morrish and to perform regularly as an improviser in Australia and overseas. She received her doctorate in solo performance improvisation in 2013 and is currently writing a book on Al Wunder as well as continuing to improvise, publish and present in a range of contexts.

Contact:

Drama Department, School of Music, Humanities and Media, University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH, UK.

E-mail: h.elliott@hud.ac.uk