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Performing the Unexpected

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Performing the unexpected Improvisation and Artistic Creativity

Eseguire l'inatteso.
L'improvvisazione e la creatività artistica

ALESSANDRO BERTINETTO*

Abstract: In this paper I suggest that we look to improvisation in order to understand artistic creativity. Indeed, instead of being anti-artistic in nature, due to its supposed unpreparedness, inaccuracy, and repetitive monotony, improvisation in art exemplifies and 'fuels' artistic creativity as such.

I elucidate the relationship between improvisation and artistic creativity in four steps. I discuss the concept of creativity in general (I) and in reference to art (II). Then I focus on the properties and the phenomenology of improvisation (III). Finally, I explain why improvisation can be understood as an exemplifying instance of art creativity (IV).

Keywords: Improvisation, Creativity, Philosophy of Art, Rule-following, Artistic Value, Exemplarity & Originality.

Abstract: In questo articolo suggerisco di riflettere sull'improvvisazione per comprendere la creatività artistica. Infatti, lungi dall'aver una natura anti-artistica, a causa di una sua presunta impreparazione, inaccuratezza, monotona ripetitività, si può sostenere che l'improvvisazione esemplifichi la creatività artistica.

Spiegherò la relazione tra l'improvvisazione e la creatività artistica in quattro passaggi. Anzitutto discuterò il concetto di creatività, in generale (I) e in rapporto all'arte (II). Quindi metterò a fuoco le proprietà e la fenomenologia dell'improvvisazione (III). Infine spiegherò perché l'improvvisazione può essere intesa come istanza esemplificatrice della creatività artistica (IV).

Parole chiave: improvvisazione, creatività, filosofia dell'arte, seguire una regola, valore artistico, esemplarità e originalità.

I. Creativity and rules

It is often stressed that creativity is vital for human survival and flourishing. Creative actions enable human beings to cope with their natural and social environment, to solve problems by inventing efficient and valuable solutions that were unforeseeable before their application. Creative behaviour is the hallmark of intelligent life. We value it specially

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because it expresses ‘reflective freedom’, which is the capacity to find the ‘right’ way to act in a specific situation and/or to step back from a previously followed action routine.¹ In this sense creativity is not a prerogative of art. Anyway, as we will see, in the arts creativity is shown in a very special way. The importance of art in human life relies to a great extent on the way art experience is a product, a display, and a vehicle of creativity.²

Berys Gaut defines creativity as «the capacity to produce original and valuable items by *flair*».³ It does seem appropriated to term something as creative, in case it is judged as being original (i.e. the first in comparison with other actions or objects), as having value – because it offers a solution to a problem⁴ and has valuable effects (thus it can be held as exemplary⁵) –, and as being done with flair – because the production process is not carried on in a mechanical or in a purely random way and requires skill.⁶

The issue is nonetheless controversial. Explanations of this kind cannot provide the grounds or the causes that result in sufficient conditions for an act to be creative. There are indeed no recipes or sets of instructions for the attainment of creative achievements, because an outcome is creative only if it cannot be completely traced to previous conditions. Otherwise it would be predictable, not new and not creative.⁷ This amounts to saying that an explanation of creativity consisting in providing sufficient conditions for a creative achievement would eliminate creativity.⁸

As a matter of fact, Gaut’s criteria for creativity (originality, value, flair) do not enable one to be creative. They offer no recipes for creativity. They will at most allow to classifying (in retrospect) certain actions as creative. In other words, they serve as conceptual clarification of actions and the products thereof that one can judge as original, valuable and accomplished with flair, after they have been made.⁹ Due to the positive value usually assigned on these properties, this amounts to saying that ‘creative’ is a term often used as a criterion of value (or merit) of actions and the products thereof.¹⁰ In this «evaluation-added way», it is often

1 Cf. B. Gaut: «Creativity and Skill», in: M. Krausz, D. Dutton & K. Bardsley (eds.): *The Idea of Creativity* (= *IC*), Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2009, pp. 83-103.

2 See the papers included in: A. Bertinetto, A. Martinengo (eds.): *Re-thinking Creativity. Creativity between Art and Philosophy* (special issue of *Tropos*, anno IV, n° 2/2011) and A. Bertinetto, A. Martinengo (eds.): *Re-thinking Creativity. Histories and Theories* (special issue of *Tropos*, anno V, n° 1/2012 (forthcoming)).

3 B. Gaut: «Philosophy of Creativity», *Philosophy Compass*, n° 5/12, 2012, p. 1041.

4 Cf. L. Briskman: «Creative Product and Creative Process in Science and Art», in: *IC*, pp. 17-41, here p. 32.

5 Cf. Gaut: «Creativity and Skill», pp. 83-4; Cf. C. R. Hausman: «Criteria of Creativity», in: *IC*, p. 11.

6 Gaut: «Creativity and Skill», p. 86. Gaut says «purely» because he wants «to allow a role of serendipity in creation». Still, he adds, an accidental production must be the outcome of a «skillful exploitation of chance, rather than chance alone», in order to be creative.

7 Cf. Hausman: «Criteria of Creativity», p. 10.

8 J. Maitland («Creativity», *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, n° 34, 1976, pp. 397-409) terms this the paradox of creativity». Cf. also Briskman: «Creative Product and Creative Process», pp. 19-20.

9 D. Novitz: «Explanation of Creativity», in: B. Gaut and P. Livingston (eds.): *The Creation of Art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 174-91, here p. 177.

10 «To adjudge something to be ‘creative’ (...) is to bestow upon it an honorific title, to claim that it deserves to be highly valued (...)» (Briskman: «Creative Product and Creative Process», p. 17). Hence, creativity seems to be a kind of those concepts that Sibley called «*evaluation-added* property terms», that is, terms, like ‘tasty’ and ‘insipid’, that, «when they are applied to something, not only is a property being attributed to it but an indication is being given that the speaker has a favourable or unfavourable attitude to that property». F. Sibley: «Particularity, Art, and Evaluation», in: F. Sibley: *Approach to Aesthetics*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2007, p. 92.

used as a normative concept rather than as a descriptive one. A normative concept expresses a norm, i.e. it says what we have to do for a certain aim. Hence, an action or its outcome is judged as creative, if it is subject to the norm of creativity, i.e. if it has the (in Sibley's words)¹¹ «merit-constituting properties» of being original, valuable and skilfully made and, for this reasons, is regarded as an exemplar that other actions and products thereof should follow (I will come back to this issue in § II in reference to art).

Yet the determinate properties that are responsible for an action or an achievement being creative,¹² cannot be predicted in advance or generalized: they vary from case to case. Empirically, creative acts are realised and performed in an indefinitely multitude of different ways: there is no mechanism, «no one set of action-guiding principles, responsible for all of them».¹³ For this reason, a creative outcome is something unexpected and unforeseen, which is positively valued because it is skilfully achieved in spite of the risks of failure and has valuable effects of some kind. Although it can result from a long and accurate preparation, it has something surprising. Because of this, I will argue, creativity is intrinsically linked to improvisation.

Creative acts certainly depart from formulaic rules, i.e. from rigid recipes as to how accomplish a certain task. Otherwise the outcome would be predictable and not creative. This does not imply that they do not follow rules. In turn, following rules does not preclude creativity. An action can be described as an application of rules and nevertheless be understood as creative from a normative perspective, games of chess being a classical (Wittgensteinian) example.¹⁴ Chess players certainly follow the constitutive and the regulative rules of chess, i.e. the rules that constitute and define a game as chess and not, for instance, as draughts («a bishop moves along the diagonals of the board») and the rules that regulate special aspects of chess («when a player touches a piece, he must move this piece»). Still their moves are all the more efficacious, if they do not slavishly follow the basic manual constitutive and regulative rules as well as the general principles and maxims for a *good* game of chess («develop all your chess pieces, not just pawns, as quickly as possible»), but are able to 'read' the specific situation of the game, so as to choose, from the range of the allowed moves, not only one that is generally recommended, but the one which, in the *specific* case, is (or turns out to be) the 'right' one.¹⁵ The 'right', or successful, move is the one which, in the context of the specific game, makes things difficult for the contender, because he/she cannot anticipate, and counter, it, by means of following general principles. Because of its departing from more standard and expectable moves, the move at issue is a risky attempt. Still, if it proves successful, it shows that taking some (more or less calculated)

11 Ibid., p. 94.

12 Sibley calls them: «merit-responsible properties».

13 Cf. Novitz: «Explanation of Creativity», p. 178.

14 Cf. L. Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1953, § 197.

15 I have combined John Searle's distinction between «constitutive» and «regulative» rules, which David Novitz relates to the question of artistic creativity (see D. Novitz: «Rules, Creativity and Pictures», in: P. Lewis Alder-shot (ed.): *Wittgenstein, Aesthetics and Philosophy*, Ashgate, 2003, pp. 55-72, here p. 57), and Stanley Cavell's articulation of rules in «rules as defining», «rules as regulating», «principles», and «maxims» (S. Cavell: «Rules and Reasons», in: S. Cavell: *The Claim of Reason*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979, pp. 293-312, here p. 305).

risk is inherent to creative activities, due to the fact that creative activities are not governed by rigid routines, even though they follow rules.¹⁶

We have seen that judging an action or an object as creative has a positive normative ‘flavour’, because it means to appraise their special merit as new, exemplary valuable and accomplished with flair. Well, a chess move can be termed creative, if it displays (more or less context-relative) originality, exemplary effectiveness (‘Wow! *This* is how to play chess!’), and skill (elegance, time/energy-saving, willingness/ability to take risks). So it may be suggested that creativity has to do with the *application* of rules. Yet, the question arises as to *how* the relation between the rule and the act of following and applying the rule in the present case can and should be understood *if* the act is (to be) evaluated as creative. Chomsky’s distinction between *rule-based creativity* and *rule-changing creativity* is here paramount.¹⁷

1. According to the first kind of creativity, an almost infinite number of new outcomes can result from a finite set of rules: an almost indefinite number of chess moves can result from the rules of chess.
2. According to the second kind of creativity the accumulation of individual deviations from the rules can result in the generation of new rules. Therefore a routines-governed practice can be transformed in another routines-governed practice, due to the violation of one (or more) of the practice constituting rules, as epitomized by the (apocryphal?) story of the guy, who invented Rugby by picking up a football and running with it in the hands. Once a community acknowledged this action as the instance of a new rule, a new game was invented. A new game was instituted by means of violating the routines of an old game and establishing, in this way, new routines.¹⁸

The interesting thing is that in human practices these kinds of creativity are not mutually exclusive, but rather intertwined.

1) In human practices the application of a rule presupposes the rule, but it is not explained on the basis of that rule alone.¹⁹ The understanding and execution of a rule in a process that is governed by the rule is *not* itself governed by the rule. It amounts to saying that following the rule *can* require training of skills or insights as to *how* comply with the rule’s requirements, because the way a rule is applied in practical life cannot be determined by the rule itself and can vary from case to case. The way the constraints established by a rule is empirically followed cannot be set by the rule: the pertinence of the general rule to the single case cannot be generally established, but it is invented in every single occurrence of the rule. As Gilbert Ryle once observed, in thinking, speaking, acting, the general rule is applied «to just the present once-only situation».²⁰ Or, to put it in Hans-Georg Gadamer’s terms: in a general sense, no rule can govern its execution, because the application of the rule is guided by acts

16 See Gaut: «Creativity and Skill», p. 102. I will come back to the role of risk in creative and improvisational behavior in the following sections of the paper.

17 Cf. N. Chomsky: *Current issues in linguistic theory*, The Hague, Mouton, 1964. Chomsky’s distinction is adopted by E. Garroni: *Creatività*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2010. See D. Cecchi: «Stato d’eccezione e creatività. Riflessioni a partire da Carl Schmitt e Emilio Garroni», in: A. Bertinetto, A. Martinengo (eds.): *Re-thinking Creativity. Histories and Theories*, pp. 75-90.

18 Cf. Gaut: «Creativity and Skill», p. 101.

19 Cf. Garroni: *Creatività*, p. 106.

20 G. Ryle: «Improvisation», *Mind, New Series* N° 85, 1976, p. 77.

of interpretation in every case.²¹ Though the room for freedom in applying the rule varies to a great degree in the different spheres of human life as well as in every single case, and sometimes it is very limited, every single case is a *new* one and requires specific treatment. This allows for the possibility of multiple realizability of the rule in the single case and *some* of the ways the rule is accomplished can be creative. Yet the rule cannot determine the creative qualities of its applications. Therefore, the creativity of an action that follows the action's rules is surprising, unforeseeable, and unexpected.

2) From this ensues that the application of the rule *might* result in a *transformation* of the rule. The application *can* change the rule to various degrees and for different reasons. Applications of a rule may lead up to modify or change the rule, in order to solve problems generated by the rule in a concrete circumstance or to cope with previously unconsidered issues and goals. In this sense, for instance, normative laws are slightly modified, transformed or radically changed because they do not work anymore in the right way. Yet, applications of rules can produce a modification of the rule just for experimenting with new practices (as in the case of the invention of rugby). This amounts to saying that the free deviation from the rule *can* result in a new rule. In human practices rule-governed creativity presupposes the principle possibility of rule-changing and rule-establishing creativity.²²

As a matter of fact, rules giving norms for practical life arise in practical life and are established by inventive practices. In Robert Brandom's words: «[...] the capacity of individuals to produce novel performances in accord with a set of social practices makes possible novel social practices as well. For as the community becomes capable of novel responses (themselves subject to judgements of appropriateness), new social practices are generated.»²³ Rules are generated and established in the praxis. As famously stated by Wittgenstein, we «make up the rules as we go along».²⁴ In this sense creative processes are consistent with the common way human practices unfold.

Obviously, not every application of a rule changes the rule. Otherwise, we would just have no rules. For example, at first blush it would be odd to say that every use of a natural language changes its rules, because in such a situation persons could hardly understand

21 In *Truth and Method* (1960; Eng. Transl. New York: Seabury Press, 1975: Part II, Ch. II, § 2b) H.-G. Gadamer draws the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* to the Kantian concept of *reflexive judgment* in order to explain that the application of a rule or a law requires an interpretational act, which adapts the rule to the single case. The outcome of this is the variation of the rule, which *can* be 'inventive' in different degrees. To put it differently, the application of the rule suspends, or at least may suspend, the rule (see Cecchi: «Stato d'eccezione e creatività»).

22 Ibid., p. 124. According to M. Boden («Creativity: How Does It Work?», in: *IC*, pp. 240-242) three kinds of psychological creativity can be distinguished: combinational, exploratory and transformational creativity. Combinational creativity works by generating «unfamiliar (and interesting) combination of familiar ideas». Exploratory creativity uses «the existing stylistic rules or conventions (...) to generate novel structures (ideas), whose possibility may or may not have been realized before the exploration took place». Transformational creativity is a kind of exploratory creativity, in which the transformation of rules and conventions is more radical. On my opinion, combinational, exploratory and transformational creativity can be conceived as the psychological processes that lead to change the rules to the extent that new rules can be invented.

23 R. Brandom: «Freedom and Constraint by Norms», *American Philosophical Quarterly* n° 16, 1979, p. 179. Cf. G. Bertram: «Kreativität und Normativität», in: G. Abel (ed.): *Kreativität*, pp. 273-283; G. Bertram: «Improvisation und Normativität», in: G. Brandstetter, H.-F. Bormann, A. Matzke (eds.): *Improvvisieren*, Bielefeld, Transcript, 2010, pp. 21-40.

24 Cf. Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*, § 83.

each other and the used words would hardly count as a language in the common sense of 'language'. Nonetheless, languages do not work (exclusively) like mechanical routines. We are more or less creative using them. Intentional creative uses of language, like in poetry as well as in everyday life, exploit, in different ways and to different degrees, the possibility to follow linguistic rules in ways that depart from more ordinary and standard uses and may even disrupt them. Non-standard uses of languages that violate and/or subvert old ones are risky enterprises and they must often pay the price of incomprehension. Yet new uses, if and when acknowledged by linguistic communities, may become rules. For example, a metaphorical use of a word can establish itself as a secondary meaning of the word.

However, not every transformation of a practice or every unexpected or new application of a rule is creative in the aforementioned normative sense. In a creative process the application of the rule requires skill, cleverness, insight. In this case skills are not determined by rules or routines, but they help to apply the rule in efficacious and previously unexpected ways (like in the considered case of the 'right' move in a game of chess). Creativity requires not only novelty, but also value and flair. It is the result of experiential backgrounds, inspired spontaneity and a capacity for experimental exploration.²⁵ Moreover, only in rare cases the innovative move is inter-subjectively acknowledged in retrospect by a community and becomes exemplary of new actions and practices.

II. Creativity in art

All that I explained above is certainly not an exclusive prerogative of art but an important feature of human rational action in general. In any event, it is ordinarily stressed that *art* is a practice, i.e. a sphere of life in which creativity is particularly important. Indeed, artistic creativity can be regarded as a paradigmatic *exemplification* of creativity *tout court*.²⁶ Artworks show creativity *at work* and epitomize the problem of applying the notion of rule to creativity.

In general, we can say that what is specific to *artistic* creativity and what distinguishes for example artistic from scientific creativity is that in arts creativity is referred to artistic practices and their history, is about the relationship between artistic media, materials, procedures and structures, is strictly connected with the pleasures of imagination,²⁷ elicits aesthetic experiences. So, although the psychological and cognitive processes that are responsible for artistic creativity may not differ from the ones that are responsible for other kinds of creativity, in particular from scientific creativity, and although the precise definition of artistic creativity may encounter the same difficulties as those met by the definition of

25 Cf. Gaut: «Creativity and Skill», p. 94. As Jerrold Levinson says, «Creativity [...] is sometimes a matter of reconceiving or reinterpreting or reconstruing given constraints, and not always a matter of either remaining inventively within them or entirely abandoning them.» J. Levinson: «Elster on Artistic Creativity», in Levinson: *Contemplating Art*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2006, p. 74.

26 Following Gaut («Creativity and Imagination», p. 284), I mean by «paradigm» and «paradigmatic exemplification» «something to which we can fruitfully appeal in order to understand the phenomenon in question, or an aspect of that phenomenon. A paradigm in this sense is a heuristic notion, its application helping us better to understand the relevant phenomenon.»

27 The link between creativity and imagination is explored in Gaut: «Creativity and Imagination».

art and of aesthetic experience,²⁸ this does not block the possibility of regarding artistic creativity as a specific kind of creativity. One may even argue that art is a special field for exercising and implementing creativity, because in art creativity can be practiced for its own sake, i.e. for the sake of experiencing and of letting others experience the possibilities of human creativity, and not for other aims and purposes, as occurs, for example, in the case of scientific creativity. Hence artistic creativity is paradigmatic of creativity as such.

Like other kinds of creativity, creative artistic production requires not only rule-governed creativity. It requires the rule-changing and rule-generating creativity as well. Clearly, there always are formal and material constraints (traditional conventions, aesthetic styles, cultural backgrounds, technical problems and solutions) that govern the practice of producing a certain artwork (for example, constraints that govern whether a work belongs to an artistic category, a genre, a style etc.). However, the way to cope with and answer to the constraints is free, to the extent that the constraints may also be overstepped by and in their application. In other words, these constraints are not entirely rigid, for artists can revolutionize the artistic category, the genre, etc. in valuable ways.²⁹ As D. Novitz observed, «the artist's understanding of the significance of the rule allows for their alteration, and sometimes their radical transformation, in ways that need not afflict the trained sensibilities of their viewers, that can find social acceptance, or alternatively, that can deliberately cultivate shock and surprise».³⁰ So artists work within conventions and rules, while at the same time modifying them in and through their artworks: the way conventions are applied reshapes those conventions, which might thus be described as continuously in progress.³¹ In this sense art

28 I have dealt with these questions in A. Bertinetto: «Arte como desrealización», *Daimon, Revista de Filosofía*, nº 39, 2006, pp. 175-185 (eng. version: «Art as derealization», in *Imaginacija, čunost in umetnost / Zbornik referatov III. sredozemskega kongresa za estetiko* «Proceedings of the III. Mediterranean Aesthetik Kongress», 2007, pp. 22-27) and in A. Bertinetto: «Aesthetic Distance in the Performing Arts», in: I. Álvarez, F. Pérez-Carreño y H. J. Pérez (eds.): *Expression in the Performing Arts*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, pp. 218-234. I discussed the specific problems of the art of *music* in A. Bertinetto: *Il pensiero dei suoni*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 2012.

29 Some of these ways are the 'hybrid art forms', which through juxtaposition, synthesis and transformation combine traditional art forms, inventing new ones out of them. According to Jerrold Levinson, hybrid art forms «tend to be *symbols of creativity itself*», because «to create is typically to reorganize and recombine pre-existing materials into unprecedented wholes. The hybridization of art forms does precisely this, not at the level of single works and their components, but at the level of artistic categories and their antecedents». J. Levinson: «Hybrid Art Forms», in J. Levinson: *Music, Art and Metaphysics*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 34.

30 Novitz: «Rules, Creativity and Pictures», p. 61.

31 Cf. B. E. Benson: *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003. The idea of art as historical practice is defended by N. Carroll (in: *Beyond Aesthetics* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001; see in particular the chapters: «Art and Interaction», pp. 5-20 and «Art, Practice, and Narrative», pp. 63-75). Carroll rightly explains 1. that «one mark of a practice is that participants be able to self-consciously identify themselves as participating within the practice», and 2. that the practices of art evolve, develop and change by means of integrating the past and the present. Hence, if the practice changes, as the art practices change, the participants must «have the means to self-consciously identify themselves as partaking of the same practice through change and transition» (Carroll: *Beyond Aesthetics*, p. 67). However, while underlying the continuity of the historical practices of art, Carroll seems to diminish the innovative potential of art. In doing so, he does not a good service to the understanding of art as a *dynamical* reflective practice, due to which each artwork, every time it is perceived and interpreted, lets us understand ourselves and the world in *specific* and (potentially) surprising ways (for this notion see D. M. Feige: «Art as reflective practice», in: A. Bertinetto, F. Dorsch, C. Todd (eds.): *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, 2010, pp. 125-142). Moreover,

production shows the dialectical links between the kinds of creativity just considered: artists interact with the members of their cultural communities (whose scope can be extended to mankind as a whole) and work by using in innovative ways sets of culturally and creatively established norms that rule their practice; the ways they follow those norms can lead to changes in those norms; the new norms will govern the ways other artists will work and so on in an on-going inter-subjective (dialogical, collaborative, competitive) task.

Hence a tension between constraints and freedom from constraints is at work in the case of the production of the single artwork as well in its appreciation by means of the faculty of aesthetic judgement. According to a 'Kantian' way of considering beautiful art, «a work of art must not be produced in accordance with certain rules, but must itself be a rule».³² An artwork is a rule, because it is normatively exemplary for further art, and in at least two senses.

- 1) The rule embodied in the artwork is exemplary because it introduces a new artistic model, by means of skilfully exemplifying the way a (relatively) new work technique, or form, achieves valuable artistic results. Outstanding pioneer artworks, which initially are often disdained and condemned by public and critics, transform the conventions of art because they are the historically first items of an artistic genre, practice, or style; they are revolutionary artworks that become paradigmatic. They are creative because they transform old rules and generate new ones. They are cases of rule-changing creativity.

Claude Monet's *L'impression, soleil levant* (1872) is one of these exemplary artworks: somebody considers it as the first impressionistic painting and for the sake of the argument I will consider it as such.³³ It may be considered the model of the new genre of painting called «Impressionism», because it establishes a rule which is discernible in it – for example the rule expressed in Édouard Manet's precept: «One must be of one's time and paint what one sees».³⁴ As such, it became a model that embodies a rule, which has 'correct' and 'incorrect' applications. Renoir's *The Seine at Asnieres* (1878) is a correct application of the impressionistic canon. Conversely, who takes Giorgio De Chirico's *L'enigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno* (1910) as instance of impressionistic painting, is making a mistake. It is rather the model of another rule, the rule of the 'metaphysical painting', that speculates on realities unobtainable to explicit depiction.

- 2) The rule established in a successful, creative artwork is exemplary in a further, more general, sense. It is an example of creativity itself. An artwork, that slavishly imitate a creative artwork, having the same empirical «merit-responsible properties» is not a creative outcome. As imitation, it may certainly be appreciated for some

Carroll links the notion of art as historical practice with criticism toward the notion of aesthetic experience. As I argued elsewhere (Bertinetto: «Arte como desrealización»; eng. version: «Art as derealization») this criticism is based on a too restricted conception of aesthetic experience. Anyway, here I will not pursue this matter further.

32 P. Guyer: «Exemplary Originality: Genius, Universality, and Individuality», in: *The Creation of Art*, p. 126.

33 It is probably not, to say the truth, the first impressionistic painting, but it was the first impressionistic painting to be exhibited (in 1874) and it gave Impressionism its name.

34 É. Manet, in: W. Vaughan and Ch. Ackroyd (eds.): *Encyclopedia of Artists* (2000), Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 28.

of its qualities. It can be a very *good* imitation, but it cannot be appreciated as creative. The rule followed by two production processes that lead to different creative artworks is rather the same rule only in the general sense that both artworks share the same «merit-constituent properties» (originality, skill, value), which jointly are the normative conditions of a creative achievement.³⁵ Hence, an artwork B (say the *Renoir*) can adhere to the canon set by A (say Monet's *Impression*) and still be creative, if the empirical routines that were responsible for the production of both artworks differ, but their merit-constituent properties (originality, skill, value) are the same, although, maybe, to different degrees. The criterion for evaluating B as creative is not the way it adheres to the canon set by A, but rather the special, unforeseeable way it applies this canon in the particular case. In this sense, even if the *Renoir* does not introduce a new artistic model or precept, like the *Monet* and the *De Chirico*, it *is* creative, because it is valuable, skilfully made and original. This is a case of rules-based creativity.

Using the philosophical language introduced in the studies of creativity by Margaret Boden,³⁶ it can be said that the first kind of creative acts and products transforms a «conceptual space», i.e. a unified and organized cluster of ideas and techniques, which ruled a certain kind of activity (in this case: painting). In this sense, the *Monet* radically transformed the inherited generative principles of painting, because it overcome the constraints and conventions of previous organized systems of depiction, and established a new canon. As argued by Novitz,³⁷ this is but one kind of creativity. Otherwise we could hardly consider the second kind of activities and product as creative. We can hardly consider the *Renoir* as creative or, choosing an example from the history of music, we could not value Mozart's music as creative. For Mozart did not transformed a musical conceptual space, as later Schoenberg will do by inventing the dodecaphonic music. But to deny the creativity of Mozart's music is odd, and obviously so. Therefore, we have to enhance the notion of creativity, allowing for kinds of creativity that do not deal with «problem solving» and transformations of «conceptual spaces», but rather with re-combinational activities in accordance with given rules. Recombinations can have valuable and surprising results. For instance, Mozart's music is brilliant, to say the less, even if he «only elaborated and explored but never actually transformed the conceptual spaces that he had inherited from Joseph Haydn».³⁸

We can conclude the following: All artworks that are creative in the sense 1) («revolutionary artworks») that set new rules for an artistic practice, transforming its «conceptual space») are also creative in sense 2) (creative following of given rules), and only some of the artworks that are creative in sense 2) are also «revolutionary artworks». The *Monet* and the *De Chirico* are creative in the first as well as in the second sense, while the *Renoir* is creative in the second sense. Yet the main point is that in artistic practices, artists owe their

35 For this distinction set by Sibley see above § I.

36 M. Boden: *The Creative Mind Myths and Mechanisms*. Reading: Cardinal, 1992.

37 D. Novitz: «Creativity and constraints», *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, n° 77:1, pp. 67-82.

38 Novitz: «Creativity and constraints», p. 77. According to Novitz, the exploration of complex conceptual spaces is not necessary for creativity. On the contrary, it «may on occasions inhibit rather than encourage human creativity» (Ibid., p. 76).

creative achievements (including «revolutionary» ones) to the *specific* ways they cope with normative, aesthetic, technical constraints, by following the pre-compositional rules and the precepts of a certain artistic practice or genre (for example the precepts of pictorial realism, the canon of impressionism, the rules of a fugue, etc.) and/or the program idea as what to do (depicting a particular landscape in an expressive way, re-interpreting a well known symbolic image, playing on a certain tune...) and responding to the affordances of one or more media (oil on canvas, harmonic sound structures, video, etc.).³⁹ All these elements – included the pre-compositional rules, the precepts and the idea, that, taken together, work as a kind of ‘recipe’ (a model) – are ‘ingredients’ artists use in order to tackle the task of artistic production. The interesting point is that artists do not have at their disposal a clear pre-established empirical routine to follow in order to produce their works. The ‘recipe’ must be accommodated within the other ‘ingredients’. Therefore, the recipe’s application suspends the recipe (= the model, the rule) and empirically instances another, unexpected, rule, which – as unprecedented as it was at the moment of the production of the artwork – seems to be specific for the *single* artwork. In this sense, as famously stated by Luigi Pareyson,⁴⁰ creative artists invent the modalities of doing, i.e. the production rule, by doing, i.e. while producing the work. Consequently, one may argue, even if a) the artist follows technical rules and aesthetic precepts and even if b) the artwork may become exemplary for other artworks, the artwork’s specific empirical routine or production rule is creative only in the one single case. At the moment of the artwork production,⁴¹ the rule and its application cannot be distinguished, and the rule consequently collapses into the single artwork: it is, as it were, identical with it. A work following the very same empirical rule, using in the same way the ‘ingredients’ employed by a former creative artwork, will not be creative.

According to Pareyson, the rule is generated while generating the artwork, because the artwork conception and project are parts of the production of the individual work and they change, during the concrete making of the artwork, due to several factors: the empirical, material, situational, social conditions of the artistic work, the on-going process of self-evaluation of the partial production outcomes, the recalcitrance and the suggestions of the medium etc. Consequently, the success of the artistic undertaking cannot be evaluated by comparing the artwork or the artistic event with a plan arranged in advance or merely judging the way it makes use of well known techniques and styles. The *Renoir’s* value is not only due to its following the ‘impressionistic rule’ or the ‘landscape rule’, but rather by the *unprecedented, skilful and valuable ways* it follows those rules. It is not determined by the compliance with a canon as a standard of success. For the specific standard of success, i.e. of the perfection of the work, is established by the success itself of the work, which becomes its own rule. This may sound circular. But the circularity at issue is a *reflexive* one.

As Berys Gaut recently observed, «to be creative requires one to exercise an evaluative ability of the relevant kind. (...) Possessing an evaluative ability is one of the constraints

39 The artists themselves may invent the program idea and choose the artwork media; yet, independently from their creativity, they may also be asked by others, for example by a commissioner, to work on a certain idea in a particular medium.

40 See L. Pareyson: *Estetica. Teoria della formatività*, Milano, Bompiani, 1988. See also G.E Yoos: «A Work of Art as a Standard of Itself», in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, n° 26, 1967, pp. 81-89.

41 This ‘moment’ is not an instant: it covers the time period of the work production, from ideation to exhibition.

on the manner of making something that is essential to its being creative.»⁴² So the norm artists are guided by is the *ideal* of a ‘perfect’, creative, outcome, in virtue of which they are able to reflexively evaluate what they are doing, while doing it. They judge the results of their work while they are at work. This potentially continuous evaluation can result in a transformation of the evaluative aesthetic constraints that the artist accepted or established while planning or imagining the artwork. This ideal can prove to be right, i.e. creative, only if the *real* artwork generated under its guidance is valued and recognized as creative, while being judged, in retrospect, as the outcome of an action that followed a creative ideal plan, i.e. a plan that the artist was capable to evaluate and change accordingly to the specific situation(s) encountered during the production process. Hence, the evaluative ideal norm guiding the artist proves to be creative, only if it will motivate the production of a creative artwork, which, once produced, will be evaluated, by the producer as well as by the public, as really original and exemplary of creativity, and will maybe become a paradigmatic model for other artworks.⁴³

At this regard, and especially in connection with the issue of improvisation, the media of production deserve particular attention. In the creative artistic process the materials used are not only elements that must be arranged in order to conform to a pre-determined contents and forms (ideas, meanings, feelings, pre-composition rules, in one word: the ‘recipe’). We have not, as it were, two things: the well carved stone, the coloured surface, the structured sounds or words on the one side and, on the other side, the contents expressed and the pre-compositional forms. Artistic creativity does not work as a kind of translation of an already available content into a medium by means of following pre-established rules of production.⁴⁴ The achievement we value as creative in art is *that* specific arrangement of sounds, words, colours, physical movements etc. as manifesting *that* particular content, that could not exist otherwise.⁴⁵ Hence, artistic creativity cannot be conceived (only) in terms of problem solving, i.e. as to how to adjust a medium to a previously shaped idea. The specific medium has an autonomous constitutive role in the making of the artistic product. It is not a ‘vehicle’ under the complete artists’ control. On the contrary, it gives artists impulses, sometimes surprising ones, that they should be able to grasp and that may lead them to variously modify, in a more or less experimental way, the initial idea as well as the forms and techniques used (the ‘recipe’), before achieving the final product. Hence, artists can experience tensions and surprises in responding evaluatively to their own works.⁴⁶

At this point it may be useful to summarize the salient features of artistic creativity, before turning to improvisation.

42 B. Gaut: «Creativity and Rationality», *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, n° 70, 2012, pp. 259-270, here p. 67.

43 Thanks to Jerrold Levinson for pushing me on this point.

44 See G. Hagberg: «Against Creation as Translation», in G. Hagberg: *Art as Language*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1995, pp. 109-117.

45 Cf. J. Dewey: *Art as Experience* (1934), New York: Pedigree, 1980, pp. 53-54, 68.

46 Cf. E. Huovinen: «On Attributing Artistic Creativity», in: A. Bertinetto, A. Martinengo (eds.): *Re-thinking Creativity. Creativity between Art and Philosophy*, pp. 65-86. Cf. Novitz: «Creativity and constraints».

- a) The creative artwork is *unique*, like the rule that it follows while being produced.
- b) It is *original*, because it is to a great degree something new, unexpected, and somehow unpredictable. The precise outcome of an intentionally creative action can indeed hardly be determined in advance: creativity exceeds our skill to foresee the results of the fulfilment of a plan.⁴⁷ It is nonetheless an appropriate and non-accidental evaluative reaction to the circumstances of its production, in the context of which its originality can be stated. Therefore, artistic creativity can be judged only in retrospect.⁴⁸
- c) Moreover the creative artwork is *contingent*, and its production involves the risk of failure, because nothing – no plan, no rule, no recipe – assures its success. (The process of its production is not automatic).
- d) It is highly *valuable*, not in spite of, but exactly because its success is not sure and appears as a kind of *favour*.⁴⁹ The perfection of the artwork cannot be judged, during the production of the artwork, by comparison with a model of perfection (i.e. with a canon or a rule). Indeed, the rule of the artwork production is singular to the extent that, at the moment of its production, it coincides with the artwork.
- e) Finally, the artwork is *unrepeatable* and at the same time *exemplary*. It is unrepeatable because the empirical routine that led its production is creative only in the single case (a second case will be an imitative repetition), and it cannot be subsumed under a determining general rule.⁵⁰ It is exemplary not only because it is the standard of production of similar artworks, as in the case of revolutionary artworks which become paradigmatic of a genre, but mainly because the way it is produced – with flair – invites others to produce artworks while skilfully producing the rules of their production (in this sense, not only Schoenberg's, but also Mozart's music is exemplary of creativity): other artworks can imitate the «operative efficiency of the rule», as a way of doing which is invented and evaluated in the course of the work-production.⁵¹

For the reasons explained above, art creativity generally displays the way human beings act creatively in the context, and within the constraints, of their biological and social environment. Indeed it exemplifies the following. 1) Our actions are, on the one hand, embedded in social practices, natural situations and «conceptual spaces», which draw the lines at them, but, on the other hand, those practices, situations and «conceptual spaces»

47 D. Sparti: *Suoni inauditi*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2005, p. 167.

48 M. Rampley: «Creativity», *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, n° 38, 1998, p. 276.

49 Cf. I. Kant: *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790; Eng. Transl. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), § 5.

50 Yet, it may be objected that several artworks are 'replications' of the one creative idea embodied in a first artwork that becomes the model of the following artistic production of a certain artist. The replications are applications of a creative innovation that do not contribute anymore to innovate the artistic field in a creative way. Pollock, for example, invented the drip painting and applied this same technique to several works. Nonetheless, as Ekki Huovinen observes, replications, like the several *Pollocks*, may be taken as genuine documents of creativity. However, this has not to do with the method of dripping as art-historical innovation, but rather with the way the artist «keep himself motivated to use this method in his continuing work», and continues to distinguish the good from the unsuccessful ones (Huovinen: «On Attributing Artistic Creativity», p. 78).

51 Pareyson: *Estetica*, p. 141.

are modified by the same actions they govern, limit and constrain. 2) The success of our actions is often not determined by general mechanical routines, because following rules may imply the invention of rules in the single cases. For this reason they can fail; conversely, it is for exactly this reason that they are so valuable if they succeed. However, their success is never guaranteed. In this sense art makes us aware of the insecurity of our life and, in so doing, help us to control the anxiety generated by this insecurity.⁵² At the same time, it shows how very valuable is a kind of acting and making that, while manifesting freedom in action, invents its own rules while acting – and is for that reason original and exemplary.

III. Improvisation

The practice of improvisation can teach us something about this issue. Art, I have argued, is an exemplification of creativity in general; artistic improvisation, I will now suggest, is an exemplification of art creativity. Improvisation is often regarded as anti-artistic in nature, due to its supposed unpreparedness, inaccuracy, and repetitive monotony. However, improvisation does not mean only an action accomplished (or the process of accomplishing something) without preparation, accuracy and variety. Improvisation is also, and more importantly, the ability of doing something freely, by means of following, changing, inventing, and evaluating the action's rules in ways that are unexpected and surprising. In this sense, improvisation is an important feature of creativity. This holds true even in cases of non-improvisatory and non-real time creative production processes that require long investigations and corrections.

III.1. 'Logic' of improvisation

Improvisations in the arts are processes in which creation and performance coincide. They are a special kind of processes, in which the creative (inventive, ideational) activity and the performing activity occur at the same time, and are the one and same generative occurrence.

Hence *an improvisation is a process that unfolds while being invented*. But we must be careful. We want to distinguish between artistic improvisations and other non-mechanical activities, which are all more or less improvisational, in this general sense. Indeed, skiing, for instance, like other sport practices and everyday activities (like driving a car), is improvisational, because it is somehow spontaneous, although it makes use of learned automatisms. Moreover, if improvisation is defined as a generative process not completed in a work that subsists temporally or logically before the execution of the performing act, the playing of every game, for example a chess game or a video game, is improvisational, in this sense. Nonetheless, not every process in which the doing outshines the ending is an improvisation in the proper sense. Differently from practices like skiing, playing chess or driving a car, by listening or attending to an artistic improvisation (in music or theatre, for instance) we do not only experience the process-like character of on-going and developing actions that are ephemeral, irreversible, unrepeatable events and that, in addition, may be creative in various ways (one may, for instance, invent a new skiing-technique just while

52 Garroni: *Creatività*, p. 174.

skiing). We rather experience the unfolding of activities that are *intentionally* improvisational and creative, that is, we assist to the artists' exhibition of the generation, in the course of performance, of artistic items or events that are intended to be offered as such to the aesthetic appreciation and/or critical assessment of an audience.⁵³ In this sense, to perform a work of classical music, say a Beethoven's symphony, by following the work's indications, is not to improvise. In this case the generational process is closed before the performance of the work.⁵⁴ On the contrary, in improvisation, the focus of attention is the exhibited process of inventing while performing. The performing and the inventing process intentionally coincide and are simultaneously presented to the audience.⁵⁵

Improvisations are unrepeatable processes. They standardly do not result in works which can be executed over and over again and, in the cases of improvisational composition, as Davied Davies calls it,⁵⁶ that is, in compositions that uses improvisation as *means* for the production of repeatable artworks, repetitions are not improvisations anymore. In improvisation, the goal of the artistic production and the target of the aesthetic attention is the dynamical activity of inventing while performing here and now. It is an event, which cannot be repeated, for the very simple reason that *per definitionem* the repetition of an improvisation is not an improvisation. Improvisation is the generation of something – music, theatrical performance, dance – which is intended to endure only the time of the performance. It comes and goes and is perceived during its being invented, i.e. *in fieri*. It arises, is developed, while being aesthetically experienced, and then it disappears (though it can be kept in memory or stored by audio-visual media).

Unlike in composed works, in artistic improvisation the invention is performative and vice versa, the performance is creational. The creative process and its product occur at the same time.⁵⁷ So the creational process is the target of aesthetic attention. Indeed if aesthetic attention is directed to the performing act, it is necessarily directed also to the creative process, due to the fact that the two processes are one.⁵⁸ That is why the way in which

53 Cf. A. Bertinetto: «Improvvisazione e formatività», *Annuario filosofico*, n° 25/2009, Mursia, 2010, pp. 145-174, here pp. 145-147.

54 Nonetheless, good performers apply creatively the rule of the interpretation of the score. So, interpretation may be a creative process. And, unless the work is performed by a machine which follows an algorithm, one may say that, in this sense, every performance of a musical or dramatic artwork is creative and improvisational to some degree. However, we should avoid the risk to conflate improvisation and interpretation. I have dealt with this issue in reference to musical improvisation in A. Bertinetto: «Paganini Does Not Repeat. Musical Improvisation and the Type Token Ontology», *Teorema*, n° XXXI/3, 2012, pp. 105-126.

55 A case can be made for improvisation in non-performing arts. It seems that in non performing arts, like painting, architecture and sculpture, the product is the target of the aesthetic attention; moreover the distinction between creation and performance seems to be untenable. By arguing that improvisation is exemplary of artistic creativity as such, I implicitly suggest that we *can* solve this problem. An artwork of non-performing art is improvisational if, like in traditional Japanese painting, it is the outcome of a creational process, which occurred without interruptions, erasures, changes or corrections, and if the product is significant only by means of presenting itself as a manifestation of the unrepeatable process of its own production. However, here I cannot pursue this matter further.

56 D. Davies: *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*, Malden MA, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 150-160.

57 D. Spati: *Il corpo sonoro*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2007, p. 122.

58 Cf. R. K. Sawyer: «Improvisation and the Creative Process: Dewey, Collingwood, and the Aesthetics of Spontaneity», *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, n° 58, 2000: pp. 149-150; G. Hagberg: «Improvisation and ethical interaction», in: G. Hagberg (ed.): *Art and Ethical Criticism*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell 2008, p. 259.

an improvisational process will unfold is unforeseeable (*improviso* means properly: not foreseen) and surprising. Before being performed what will be performed is unknown and unknowable, because it will exist only through and thanks to the performance. Or better still: *it is* the performance. To summarize, improvisation can be defined as a process in which, intentionally, the invention is performed while 1. the performance is being invented, 2. the performative invention is being simultaneously offered to the public, and 3. it is being evaluated by the performers as well as by the public. A subset of other properties ensues from the coincidence of creational and performing process.

- a) *Irreversibility*: The creative process cannot be corrected after its end, as it were from the outside. Any correction of the creative process is part of the process.⁵⁹
- b) *Situationality*: Improvisation is a process that occurs here and now and vanishes while it is occurring.
- c) *Singularity*: There are not and cannot be two identical improvisations. The identity of two or more improvisational events is logically ruled out, because their concrete spatiotemporal conditions are parts of their beings. Copies, imitations, repetitions are by definition not improvisations.⁶⁰
- d) *Self-construction (autopoiesis) and self-reference*. In an improvisation process the subsequent acts affect and implement the significance of those acts that have been performed before. In the course of the improvisation continual *feedback loops* occur, in virtue of which what has already happened becomes the interpretative frame of the following actions. The subsequent actions retrospectively affect the meaning of what is already performed, because they offer a new context for their interpretation.⁶¹ Hence an improvisation is a self-referential and autopoietic event, because it is generated and unfolded, as it were, from the inside.⁶²

III.2. Phenomenology of improvisation

The features I have just outlined provide us with a logical frame for the definition of art improvisation as such and show why improvisation exemplifies art creativity. In § II I argued that creative artists, though beginning with an idea or a plan in mind, invent the concrete modalities of producing the artwork, *while* producing the artwork, because «the artwork emerge[s] with and according to a plan it develops for itself only in the process of its creation».⁶³ Artists' creative achievements are unforeseeable before the artworks are

59 One can give another direction to the process, but what is done is done. Erasures are not possible. Cf. G. Tomasi: «On the Spontaneity of Jazz Improvisation», in: M. Santi (ed.): *Improvisation. Between Technique and Spontaneity*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2010, pp. 77-102, here p. 85. Anyway, during the unfolding of the performance, the meaning of what has been already performed may (even radically) change by virtue of what follows. The past events cannot be changed, but they may be differently interpreted due to a new situation (or through a different evaluation of the old situation) that re-orientates our interpretation of them.

60 Sparti: *Il corpo sonoro*, p. 133.

61 G. Hagberg: «Jazz Improvisation: A Mimetic Art?», *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 2006, pp. 469-485; D. Sparti: *Suoni inauditi*; E. Fischer-Lichte: *Aesthetik des Performativen*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 2004.

62 In «Improvisation und Normativität», Georg Bertram elaborates on the normative aspects of this kind of self-reference.

63 E. Landgraf: *Improvisation as Art*, London, Continuum, 2011, p. 79.

produced, due, among other reasons, to the role played by the media they use. Improvised performances *display* these same traits, because in this case the creative process, the skilful and valuable invention of artistic items, *is* (presented as) the focus of aesthetic appreciation.

Empirically considered, however, no improvisation is really a *creatio ex nihilo*.⁶⁴ Like the other outcomes of artistic creativity in general, improvisations are never realized, as it were, in the pure state. There is always a background upon which improvisation will take place.⁶⁵ In an improvisation, pre-existing forms and shaped materials are worked out and re-shaped in new or different ways (are ‘interpreted’, ‘combined’, ‘transformed’). Explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious rules, conventions, precepts, instructions, abilities, habits, styles, patterns guide the improvisational performing process, which anyway occurs not only *in virtue of* these contextual constraints, but also *against* and *in spite of* them. The self-constructed freely-spontaneous ‘internal’ context of improvisation unfolds itself in the frame of this already available and readymade (‘external’) context which ‘governs’ and at the same time ‘fuels’ the ‘inventing while performing and *vice versa*’ process that subverts these constraints while it inventively feeds itself with them.

Hence the improvisational event, like every artistic creation, should be thought of as *dialectical*. It lives in the tension between the routine and the new. Its occurrence results from the clash between contrary elements: preparation and invention, planning and surprise, structure and process, legality and spontaneity.⁶⁶ The pure improvisational element is to be found in the second term of each of these oppositional concept-couples; but it can be realized empirically only through the encounter with its respective opposite.

Hence, improvised performances take place in and are dependent upon cultural practices. But they also transform and sometimes revolutionize the practices. And like the novelties introduced by creative artworks, in particular and rare cases improvised performances set new conventions, new rules, new codes for further performances. The creativity of art improvisation is in this sense a good combination of *rule-based* and *rule-changing creativity*.

Improvisation depends upon both constitutive and regulative rules: i.e. rules that constitute a certain practice (for example, the practice of melodically and rhythmically extemporizing on established sets of chords) and rules that regulate the development of the practice (for example, the practice according to which every musician of the Quintet plays *n*-chorus long solos and at the end dialogues with the drummer in the *break*). However, by means of applying the rules, improvisers alter them – in certain ‘revolutionary’ cases not only the regulative, but also the constitutive ones –, to the extent that they set new rules for further performances, and in this way they may transform the practice that sustained them and that they contribute to carry on.

Moreover, and even more importantly, improvisation shows on the scene how rules are invented, followed, applied, transformed, rejected. For example, in a musical group

64 Cf. L. B. Brown: «Musical Works, Improvisation, and the Principle of Continuity», *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, n° 54, 1996, pp. 353-369; L.B. Brown: «‘Feeling my way’: Jazz Improvisation and its Vicissitudes – A Plea for Imperfection», *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, n° 58, 2000, pp. 113-123; Tomasi: «On the Spontaneity of Jazz Improvisation».

65 Cf. C. Dahlhaus: «Was heißt Improvisation?», in: R. Brinkmann (ed.): *Improvisation und neue Musik*, Mainz-London-New York-Tokio, Schott, 1979, 9-23.

66 T. Gustavsen: «The Dialectical Eroticism of Improvisation», in: *Improvisation. Between technique and Spontaneity*, pp. 7-51.

improvisation, the performers begin with certain (maybe minimal) indications about what and how to play. For instance, they can decide to play a famous standard, *My Funny Valentine*, without stating the melody of the theme. Or they choose to avoid the reference to a standard or to sequences of chords and to follow only implicit conventions or indications based upon their musical practice and their reciprocal acquaintance, as in 'free' jazz. Anyway, whatever they play upon (a famous ballad, a sequence of chords, loose conventions), at a certain point, a somehow unexpected and unforeseeable empirical event – say, a syncopated rhythmic figure in 7/4 played by the bass – can be evaluated by the fellow performers in different ways. Each of these ways can direct the performance in very different, again somehow unexpected, directions. The pianist may accept the indication given by the bass and, also based on the many improvised performances they shared together, may choose to recognize it as exemplary of a rule to be followed. But he can also decide to ignore it, following his/her own previous ideas. Or he can modify the bassist's indication, accepting the rhythmic idea, but rejecting the suggested speed. Let's suppose that also the drummer follows the rhythmic pattern: then the feeling of the birth of a rule for the performance may be strengthened.⁶⁷ The rule is generated in virtue of the way a certain musical event, produced or not with the intention to instantiate and indicate a rule, is evaluated and recognized as creative of a rule and as exemplary of the rule it embodies and indicates. Hence, in improvisation self-evaluations and evaluations by fellow performers, which are produced and communicated in the course of performance, have a performative meaning. They contribute to indicate a certain event as generative and as exemplary of a rule. So, the rule is generated on the spot, in previously unforeseeable ways, and, in the same way, may be later altered or dismissed. Hence, in the course of performance rules are multiply created, followed, applied, transformed and rejected, in a more or less unexpected and surprising way and in a more or less skilful, successful and satisfying manner. And, at the end, central features of the performance, maybe precisely that rhythmic pattern, can be taken as a paradigmatic prescription for further performances.⁶⁸

The 'magic formula for success' in the improvisational creative process is often to be found in the capacity to combine the following of rules given by traditional practices, styles, techniques, with the transformation of these rules, that, by means of skilfully mixing the expected and the unexpected, can lead to the invention, and the following, of a new rule, instanced in the unrepeatable, but exemplary, improvisational event.⁶⁹ This mirrors how creativity can be experienced in everyday life and specifies how creativity is generally at work in art.

67 According to Novitz, in his *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1966, p. 5) Wittgenstein terms «feeling for the rules» the understanding of «the role that rules play within the 'culture of a period'» (See Novitz: «Rules, Creativity and Pictures», p. 61.). I see no reason to deny that we can have a feeling for the specific rules that are being followed, and sometimes generated, in the course of interactive processes, like the ones occurring in artistic improvisation or in a conversation.

68 Cf. Bertram: «Kreativität und Normativität»; Bertram: «Improvisation und Normativität»; Brandom: «Freedom and Constraint by Norms»; A. Bertinetto: «Improvisation: Zwischen Experiment und Experimentalität?», in: *Proceedings of the VIII. Kongress der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Ästhetik* (Experimentelle Ästhetik) (<http://www.dgae.de/kongress-akten-band-2.html>), 2012.

69 See Sparti: *Suoni inauditi*, pp. 191-194.

IV. Improvisation as exemplary of creativity

Like ordinary interactions in our everyday life, art improvisational processes must react to unforeseeable situations and draw new action paths. In doing this they can be more or less traditional or innovative. Consequently they can be more or less safe or risky. So, though making something risky does not entail, *per se*, acting creatively, the contrary holds true. Creative process involves risks.

In social, biological, and environmental situations that cannot be faced by applying tested patterns and techniques one must take the risk of trying something new. In artworks production and in artistic improvisation (but also in scientific and technological research) one may *intentionally* strive for creative achievements. In both cases, rejecting a well-known pattern of actions (say a well-learned movement routine in skiing or a more common rhythmic figure in 4/4 in playing bass) and trying something new (a different technique or a surprising rhythm in 7/4), aiming at any improvement, enhances the risk of failure, because one does not know exactly the consequences of his/her actions: they may simply be bad, undesired consequences. Still, the new movement routine or the unexpected rhythmic may be creative, if, after having accepted and overcome the risk of failure, they succeed in making something valuable in a skilfully way.

Hence, it seems correct to say that who creates is *forced* to improvise. As I explained above, creativity is as such a risky endeavour, because the 'recipe for creativity', i.e. the recipe for producing original, valuable and skilfully made items, does not exist. One cannot predict in advance whether his/her innovations will succeed and will be inter-subjectively appraised. Hence, creativity involves a certain degree of improvisation and improvisation, in turn, is paradigmatic of the exposure to risks involved in creative endeavours in everyday actions and especially in art. *Every* improvisational process involves as such a certain risk, because its outcome is always somehow adventurous and unpredictable. In *artistic* improvisation performers take *intentionally* a special kind of risks – *risks concerning the possible failure of an artistic representation*: the bass player of the previous example risks in doing what he does, because he is not sure that the rhythmic figure he proposes will succeed and will be taken as a valuable rule to be followed. This kind of *safe risk* (that nonetheless may surely have real negative consequences for the artist's life) *shows* how it is to act in risky situations. In this way, it shows as well that the ability to tackle risks is effectively part of the measure of success in everyday life as well as in the arts.

The readiness and the skill to take risks by undertaking problem finding-, rather than merely problem solving-, activities – those that invent the ways of acting while acting – are the core of artistic improvisation, because improvisers perform what they invent, without the possibility of correction. Like in the unfolding of the everyday life, corrections are part of what is being performed, i.e. of what is *now* occurring: *this* particular event, which is unrepeatable, thus unique and original, and which, if it is successful, is exemplary of creativity in action.

Therefore, artistic improvisation is paradigmatic for artistic creativity. This holds true not only in cases of improvisational compositions. It holds true even in case of artworks requiring long processes of incubation, refinement, and correction and of artworks resulting from manipulation of a medium in accordance with pre-compositionally fixed rules. As a

matter of fact creativity is improvisational, in the sense, explained above, that its outcomes are unforeseeable. They may take by surprise the beholders, but even the artist. For the artist is not simply following a 'recipe'. The artist modifies (or even rejects) the 'recipe', accordingly to the concrete situation and the concrete media that afford his/her reactions, in a more or less exploratory and experimental way and uses it, as it were, as one of the 'ingredients' of the artwork he is producing. Improvisers do the same in an explicit way. While reacting in real time to the concrete situation, they use – and, of course, they adapt and transform – 'recipes' of different kinds (sequence of chords, melodic formulas, songs, pattern of actions, dramatic plots, cultural conventions, aesthetic styles, performing tricks, etc.) as 'ingredients' of the improvised performance.

In sum, artistic improvisation may be understood as *exemplification of artistic creativity* in the Goodmanian sense of exemplification, according to which what a symbol exemplifies must apply to it.⁷⁰ Improvisation is a symbol of artistic creativity *in acto*, that puts on the stage the characteristic features of creative behaviour.⁷¹ It displays creativity, as the invention of the ways of doing something, by and while doing that something in concrete situations and responding to the affordances of a medium. As Edgar Landgraf writes, «improvisation demonstrates how a work of art can emerge from a (...) process that creates original, unpredictable, and unforeseen works or performances that go beyond what the participants in the process could have planned or otherwise envisioned in advance».⁷² In improvisation the outcomes of creative endeavours are displayed while they are being thought out, i.e. while decisions are made about following, changing and inventing rules, and making something that turns out to be, at least partially, original, valuable and accomplished with flair. As artistic creativity at work, improvisation shows *how* artistic creativity unfolds by shaping and reshaping procedures, traditions, styles, genres; by following and inventing rules of acting; by failing and succeeding; by accomplishing fairly – *if* it succeeds – something unexpected, valuable, unrepeatable, and exemplary. It shows that – in art, as in life – failures and mistakes can be turned into chances for unpredictable, original and exemplary achievements, or they can remain simple failures and mistakes.⁷³

70 N. Goodman: *Languages of Art* (1968), Indianapolis, Hackett, 1976, pp. 52-7.

71 Cf. Hagberg: «Jazz improvisation and ethical interaction», p. 259.

72 Landgraf: *Improvisation as Art*, p. 101.

73 This paper originated as a talk given at the XVI Colloquium 2010 in Evian, *Art* (12-17 July 2010), and, in a different version (which appeared with the title «*Improvisation and Artistic Creativity* in «Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics», vol. 3, 2011, pp. 81-103), at the 3th ESA Conference 2011 in Grenoble (April 2011). For helpful discussion and comments on earlier drafts I thank all the participants and especially: Georg Bertram, Robin Celikates, Christoph Ladou, David Lauer, Élise Marrou, Maria José Alcaraz, Anke Haarmann, Claire Pagès, Ingrid Vendrell Ferran, David Nowell-Smith, Catrin Misselhorn, Alberto Frigo, Alberto Martinengo, Jennifer McMahon, Salvador Rubio Marco, and the students who attended the 'Masterseminar' *Improvisation und Kreativität in menschlicher Praxis und Kunst* (summer semester 2012, Institut für Philosophie der FU Berlin). Special gratitude to Jerrold Levinson, Paolo Calvino, Andrew Huddleston, Davide Sparti, and two anonymous referees. The mistakes in this paper are obviously mine, not theirs. I also thank the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (research project FFI2011-23362) and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for providing generous financial support for my research.

