Turon Lennon discuss Collaborative Practice:

Turon Lennon represents the collaborative work of JOHN FERGUSON and PAUL BELL. Exploring beyond traditional ideas, musicians perform pre-composed works, they explore spontaneity and the ephemeral nature of sound. As a guitarist and DJ they have spent four years extending their practice through free improvisation and live audio-visual experimentation. In exploring indeterminate and dysfunctional systems alongside more direct causal gestures, they embrace unpredictability as a strategy to probe, provoke and generate creative response.

We have diverse ‘performance ecologies’ which consist of, on the one hand, turntable, sampler, hardware effect processors, and laptop; and on the other hand, electric guitar, modified electronic-systems, hacked toys and other appropriated objects. Paul’s turntable-centric ecology deals exclusively with pre-existing audio-visual materials. Embracing collage as a creative strategy, Paul employs a hopscotch aesthetic at the turntable, placing these materials into the antithesis of recording, full of life and the reuse of recordings. Live is considered an instrument in its own right, that embraces both intentional and unintentional ambiguity are of equal importance to Paul’s ecology. When modified the function of the keypad can change dramatically depending on at which point in the programme the various switches are triggered. This indicates it is highly context related and that the area of skin placed in contact and can be controlled by pressure, so the amount of electricity that leaves the circuit and flows through the body depends on how one touches it, resulting in an unpredictably but tactile controller that greatly amplifies any variation in gesture. By flicking a switch John is able to ‘grab’ and tune loop points, producing fuzzy, spindly, pulsing, indeterminate rhythms and organically-evolving, punctuated gestures, the practice important for discovery. Through modification and redesign (‘Hacking’) it is possible to extend capability beyond pre-composed notions of usage and access inherent functionality that was previously masked or at least unheard. Circuit-bending or the art of the creative short circuit is an open ended practice grounded in the intuitive exploration of battery-powered electronic devices. Seeking out hidden potentials within the apparent fixity of pre-existing circuitry pries open a closed system (No user serviceable parts inside!) of commodity fetishisation, exposing a rich plethora of materials ready for creative re-articulation. Using trial and error to discover additional connections across a circuit; then adding switches or body contacts to be bridged with human skin facilitates the move from child’s ‘toy’ to ‘performative instrument’. For example the Speak and Spell, is a toy that is notorious for its ‘bendability’ and is much valued for its unpredictability within interaction that is very much predicated on being in the moment. Generally, in our performance ecologies both the proximity of objects to the body and the layout of equipment are paramount. Primary causation and sonorous intelligence are predicated on speed of access and the ability to reinterprete. The physicality of moving around an ecology where everything is reachable and able to be reconfigured at arms length allows for variant creative potential and is a defining feature of what we do. The ability to restructure is vital. ‘This isn’t working, what else might I do?’ Embracing this challenge can demand flexibility of response that is familiar to any improviser. Whether moving from an expression where there is direct correlation between input gesture and output sound to something more uncontrolled, or changing from textual accompaniment to something much more confrontational, the instrument(s) with which we engage must be highly tactile. For example in September 2005 we developed a piece called Fluid (see centre image). This involved pouring water between two large aluminium flower pots, the thin and highly resonant construction amplified the transfer of water allowing one to shape the sound, and in turn, elicit musical expression. The rules of the exchange were simple: take one step and pour. This one-for-one affordance was afforded no time to think, for once the transfer was complete the audience and the person who had just finished pouring was confronted with the challenge of catching the water before it hit the floor. The physical complexity of this interaction made it one moment repeatable, bringing a sense of discovery with every pour.

When improvising, we believe that we are not simply dealing with physical reflex. Gestures may arrive as a result of a surprise and feel alien to us only because our cognitive processes happen so fast that we are not aware of them until we emerge as somatic output. A performer on the receiving end may not realise that an emerging sound was unintentional, or that a gesture happened by accident, however, we will respond to it nonetheless. Practices that investigate discovery led processes through open-ended routines, bringing into the performance situation, forms such as the Sampling and Hack aesthetics that we both embrace, continue to provide new potentials for creative expression. In Tron Lennon music emerges from three way interaction, from the spontaneous communication between John and Paul, their individual interactions with their instruments, and the seemingly autonomous nature of their chosen materials. The specificity of their individual aesthetics provides a rich substratum for their collaborative practice, often leading to antagonistic modes of engagement. This is laid bare every time where dialogue can appear both cohesive and broken. Through improvisation and real-time music making, Tron Lennon therefore seek to uncover hidden and unintended potentials in seemingly fixed media, exposing instability, contradiction and new roles for the live musician.

1 A term used by John Bowers to describe the arena for activity created by a musician in his immediate surroundings of Music and Machines III, a two-day conference organised by the International Centre for Music Studies (ICMuS) and Culture Lab exploring the emerging/emergent relationships between music/sound art and machines under the impact of digital systems, 12 December – 14 December 2005, Newcastle University, England, http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ culturelab/everything100
2 A term coined by John Oswald in 1985 in an essay entitled Phanerophanes, or Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prequisite.
5 A technique that involves dropping a stylus on a vinyl record as it plays on a turntable.
7 An educational toy for children produced in the 1970s by Texas Instruments.