

## Editorial

# Creating Momentum: Improvisation, Pedagogy, and Interconnectivity

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This edition of *CSI/ECI* offers a triple focus with regards to improvisation: pedagogy, transcultural connections, and dialogic disruption are rich avenues of inquiry explored by our contributors. They offer insightful analyses through a diversity of approaches. At the confluence of artistic and academic practices, whether in the form of case-studies, artist-based research, probing interviews, or in-depth literature reviews, this issue takes readers on a far-reaching exploration into the varied topography of improvisation studies.

The practice of improvisation, given its potential to inspire creative self-realization, naturally elicits the interest of educators. *CSI/ECI*'s 2007 special issue on Improvisation and Pedagogy focuses on musical improvisation as a powerful model for political, cultural, and ethical dialogue and action. Its relevance is further elucidated in this issue's articles and interviews.

Barbara Lange's "Teaching the ethics of improvised music" examines important challenges that continue to defy educators: on the one hand, the unwillingness to replicate traditional one-sided models of imparting knowledge, and on the other hand, opening channels to personal expression. Using an ethnographic approach to study the MECA Improvisation Ensemble, a student-run organization in Houston, Texas, Lange examines teaching techniques and power relations, revealing the ambiguity that exists in promoting non-hierarchical musical interactions in an instructor-led ensemble. Her observations over a five-year period document group dynamics and individual responses. These observations are a valuable account of the potential for collective improvisation to promote inclusiveness with regards to class, age, and ethnicity.

David Ross demonstrates how the study of improvisation can also provide insight into sports pedagogy. Through the lens of musical improvisation, he explores the merits of the Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) model. TGfU focuses on placing the student or athlete in a game situation where tactics, decision-making, and problem solving are critical. Ross shows that promoting understanding when teaching sports is similar to the context-dependent action, listening, and risk-taking that occur in collective improvisation. Analogical reasoning here is adeptly employed to highlight how salient features in the practice of improvisation can shed light on less visible dynamics in other domains.

Analogical thought is also very much at the core of Hafez Modirzadeh's article, "On the Convergence Liberation of Makam X." Acknowledging cosmic intersections, Modirzadeh sees improvisation as producing variances on form, creating a decentralizing, anti-hierarchical force that allows him to establish "aural archetypes" along various planes of inquiry (Persian modal structures, tetrachords, Ornette Coleman's "harmolodics", blues, etc.). The author's artist-based methodology challenges traditional modes of scholarship as it blurs the boundaries between academic and artistic realms. In an anthropological sense, Modirzadeh's article is an expansive exploration of human symbols. His term "Makam X" represents a fundamental acoustic phenomenon that operates along a continuum of musical and cultural traditions, a symbolic crossroad of unity.

Paul Watkins' study of the use of sampling in Hip Hop is also presented in terms of flow along a historical continuum. In this case, however, emphasis is placed on "dialogic disruption" as a means of creating a locus for critical practice. Watkins explores the dialogue created by the sound sampling of a 1955 Thelonious Monk version of "Black and Tan Fantasy" (Duke Ellington, Bubber Miley, 1927) as evidenced in the Wu Tang Clan song "Shame on a Nigga" from their album *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* released in 1993. He shows Monk's unique dissonant style to be a positive force for sustaining African American cultural momentum and, for the Wu-Tang Clan, an affirmation of freedom. As illustrated in this particular song, but also in his performance practice, Watkins points to sampling as one of the building blocks of Hip Hop music that rappers determinedly utilize in political ways. This audio production technique has become an essential tool for real time, culturally responsive action.

The interviews in this edition are also relevant to junctures among improvisation, dialogic disruption, and pedagogy.

Two of the interviews were initiated on-site at the 2011 Guelph Jazz Festival. We're extremely proud to present highlights of the recorded interview with Henry Threadgill, as well as an extended print version. In a notably compelling public conversation with Daniel Fischlin, Henry Threadgill swept from the infancy to the mature genius of

his practice. Gerry Hemingway, in an *in camera* interview with Ted Harms, spoke of his formative years in academia and his present teaching position at Lucerne University in Switzerland.

Both Threadgill and Hemingway situate their artistic practice in terms of the evolution of jazz and creative music, citing the influence of historical landmarks like the Civil Rights Movement, the AACM (Threadgill), and New Haven's legendary new music scene of the mid-70s (Hemingway). As educators, they passionately defend openness and freedom as essential components of creativity in pedagogical contexts. Their comments resonate with the debate evoked by Barbara Lange, grounding pedagogy in the co-creation of knowledge.

In a third interview, Grayson Cooke speaks with Rome-based sound and video artist Mike Cooper, exploring the concept of "collaborative composition" and its potential for audio-visual synergy.

In addition, we're happy to publish four reviews of important new work on improvisation: reflections on the philosophical implications of improvisation by Gary Peters, an inquiry into the significance of *John Cage's 4'33"* by Kyle Gann, an exploration of the theory and history of improvisation in dance by Danielle Goldman, and a collection of essays detailing the Berlin improvisation music scene after the fall of the wall.

Heartfelt thanks are due to the dedicated *CS/ECI* team: fellow editors Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble; reviews editor Rob Wallace; Managing Editors Michelle Peek and Brandon Carroll; Melissa Walker, Karl Coulthard, and Leslie Allin for their copyediting/proofreading expertise; and the invaluable support of Wayne Johnston and his staff at the University of Guelph library. We are also grateful to Thomas King for granting permission to display one of his photographs of Henry Threadgill for this issue's splash page.

We hope this edition of *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Études critiques en improvisation* will provide a thought-provoking conduit into an ever stimulating and expanding field of inquiry.