

Improvisation as a Way of Life

CDIN 50910, MUSI 45511, CMLT 51800, DVPR 50901, PHIL 50910

Arnold I. Davidson and George E. Lewis

Mondays 2:30 pm - 5:20 pm, JRL 207

This seminar is organized around the idea that the practice of improvisation is not at all limited to the artistic domain, but is a ubiquitous practice of everyday life, a primary method of exchange in any interaction. Improvisation is, in effect, a certain kind of orientation or attitude towards oneself, others, and the world, and this seminar aims at the exploration of new models of intelligibility, agency, expression, and social responsibility.

Requirements

Each person will be responsible for a seminar presentation on one of the week's readings. A 3-5 page discussion paper on the topic of your presentation should be available for all seminar participants to read in advance (by noon on the Friday before your presentation).

A final paper of approximately fifteen pages is also required.

No late papers and no incompletes.

Primary Readings

Week One: Introduction/Background

Blum, Stephen. "Recognizing Improvisation." In *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, edited by Bruno Nettl, with Melinda Russell, 27-45. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Pietropaolo, Domenico. "Improvisation in the Arts." In *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, edited by Timothy J. McGee, 1-28. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications and Western Michigan University, 2003.

Ryle, Gilbert. "Improvisation." *Mind, New Series*, Vol. 85, Issue 337 (January 1976): 69-83.

Smith, Hazel, and Roger Dean. "Introduction; Improvising the Definitions." In *Improvisation, Hypermedia, and the Arts since 1945*, 3-24, 25-46. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997.

Week Two: Self-Transformation and Spiritual Exercises

Davidson, Arnold I. "Introduction." In *Michel Foucault: The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College De France, 1981-82*, xix-xxx. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Foucault, Michel. "6 January 1982: First Hour; 6 January 1982: Second Hour." In

- Michel Foucault: The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College De France, 1981-82*, 1-24; 25-30. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Hadot, Pierre. "Philosophy as a Way of Life." In *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, edited by Arnold I. Davidson, 264-76. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995.
- . "Spiritual Exercises." In *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, edited by Arnold I. Davidson, 81-125. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995.
- Hadot, Pierre, and Arnold I. Davidson. "Philosophical Discourse as Spiritual Exercise." In *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*, 87-97: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- . "Philosophy as Life and as Quest for Wisdom." In *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*, 98-120: Stanford University Press, 2008.

Week Three: Ethics and Freedom

- Bailey, Derek. "Jazz; Free; Joseph Holbrooke; Limits and Freedom." In *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*, 48-58; 83-85; 86-93; 140-42. New York: Da Capo Press, 1993.
- Begbie, Jeremy. "Liberating Constraints." In *Theology, Music and Time (Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine)*, 204-45. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Foucault, Michel, translated by Robert Hurley and others. "What Is Enlightenment?" In *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One--Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 303-19. New York: The New Press, 1997.
- Mill, John Stuart. "Of Individuality, as One of the Elements of Well-Being." In *On Liberty*, edited by Gertrude Himmelfarb, 119-40. London: Penguin Books, 1974.

Week Four: Agency

- de Certeau, Michel. "Reading as Poaching." In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 165-76. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Deleuze, Gilles. "Nomadic Thought." In *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*, translated by Michael Taormina and edited by David Lapoujade, 252-61. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004.
- Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." In *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Three: Power*, edited by James D. Faubion, translated by Robert Hurley and others, 326-48. New York: The New Press, 2000.
- Velleman, J. David. "Acting." In *How We Get Along*, 9-33. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Week Five: Politics and Power

- Attali, Jacques, trans. Brian Massumi. "Composing." In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, 133-48. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989.
- Durant, Alan. "Improvisation in the Political Economy of Music." In *Music and the Politics of Culture*, edited by Christopher Norris, 252-82. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.
- Goldman, Danielle. "Bodies on the Line: Contact Improvisation and Techniques of Nonviolent Protest." In *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom*, 94-111. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- Greenblatt, Stephen J. "Improvisation and Power." In *Literature and Society*, edited by Edward Said, 57-99. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Week Six: Intelligibility

- Cavell, Stanley. "Excursus on Wittgenstein's Vision of Language." In *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, 168-90. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- . "Music Discomposed." In *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays*, 180-212. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Monson, Ingrid. "Music, Language, and Cultural Styles: Improvisation as Conversation." In *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, 73-96. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Silverstein, Michael. "The Improvisational Performance of Culture in Realtime Discursive Practice." In *Creativity in Performance*, edited by R. Keith Sawyer, 265-312. London: Ablex Publishing Group, 1997.

Week Seven: Creativity

- Berkowitz, Aaron. "Improvised Performance: Performers' Perspectives; Music and Language Cognition Compared II: Production." In *The Improvising Mind: Cognition and Creativity in the Musical Moment*, 121-44; 45-52. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Grant Jewell Rich. "Musical Improvisation: A Systems Approach." In *Creativity in Performance*, edited by R. Keith Sawyer, 41-66. London: Ablex Publishing Group, 1997.
- Sawyer, R. Keith. "Improvisation and the Creative Process: Dewey, Collingwood, and the Aesthetics of Spontaneity." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Spring 2000): 149-61.
- Schank, Roger C. "Creativity as a Mechanical Process." In *The Nature of Creativity: Contemporary Psychological Perspectives*, edited by Robert J. Sternberg, 220-38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Week Eight: Performances

- McGinn, Kathleen L., and Angela T. Keros. "Improvisation and the Logic of Exchange in Socially Embedded Transactions." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 47 (2002): 442-73.
- Richards, Paul. "Cultivation: Knowledge or Performance?" In *An Anthropological Critique of Development: The Growth of Ignorance*, edited by Mark Hobart, 61-78. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Schutz, Alfred. "Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationship." In *Collected Papers 2: Studies in Social Theory*, edited by Arvid Brodersen, 159-78. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964.
- Velleman, J. David. "Interacting." In *How We Get Along*, 50-87. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Week Nine: Spontaneity, Indeterminacy, Uncertainty

- Borgo, David. "Reverence for Uncertainty." In *Sync or Swarm: Improvising Music in a Complex Age*, 13-35. New York: Continuum, 2005.
- Boulez, Pierre, translated by David Noakes and Paul Jacobs. "Alea." *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Autumn-Winter 1964): 42-53.
- Cage, John. "Composition as Process 2: Indeterminacy." In *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage*, 35-40. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961.
- Rothenberg, David. "Chance Designs; Sound Changes." In *Sudden Music: Improvisation, Sound, Nature*, 1-24; 188-204. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002.
- Wolff, Janet. "The Aesthetics of Uncertainty." In *Groundless Beauty Feminism and the Aesthetics of Uncertainty*, 11-29. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Week Ten: Emotional Transduction

- Harrell, D. Fox. "Toward a Theory of Phantasmal Media: An Imaginative Cognition- and Computation-Based Approach to Digital Media." (2009), <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=610>, accessed September 21, 2010.
- Lewis, George E. "Too Many Notes: Computers, Complexity and Culture in Voyager." *Leonardo Music Journal*, Vol. 10 (2000): 33-39.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, translated by Bernard Frechtman. "A Sketch of a Phenomenological Theory." In *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, 50-94. New York: Philosophical Library, 1948.
- Suchman, Lucy A. "Figuring the Human in AI and Robotics; Demystifications and Reenchantments of the Humanlike Machine." In *Human-Machine Reconfigurations: Plans and Situated Actions, 2nd Edition*, 226-40; 241-58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.