Introduction

IMPROVISING AT THE NEXUS OF DISCURSIVE AND MATERIAL BODIES

Gillian Siddall and Ellen Waterman

Negotiated Moments: Improvisation, Sound, and Subjectivity tests the limits of the social and political efficacy of musical improvisation by bringing it home to where it lives: in our bodies. We argue that musical improvisation is ineluctably embodied; its creative and political force is manifested through sounds and gestures that are the traces of experience at once relational and contextual. Furthermore, we contend that any argument that posits improvisation as a model for ethical human relations must take into account both theories about the social construction of bodies and theories of prereflexive experience, contradictory though they may seem. Indeed, in this book we are most interested in improvisation as a negotiation (of power, of subjectivity) at the nexus of discursive and material bodies.

The diverse contributions explore sounding bodies through creative improvisation processes ranging from free improvisation to jazz and blues, from sound art to sound walking, from political street theater to telematic concerts, and from Japanese *taiko* drumming to Iranian classical music. Our contributors analyze live musical performances and recordings, critical and creative writing, and politically engaged community projects, locating their analyses not just in artistic outcomes and social effects but also in material bodies, however mediated. This critical strategy invites us to consider representations of the body through improvisation, how bodies (gendered, sexed, raced, classed, abled/disabled) are constructed through improvisational relationships, and how mediations of the body extend its reach while seemingly causing it to "disappear." A close analysis of embodied improvisation will help us critically assess claims about improvisation's efficacy by exploring

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

such claims as they are expressed through one of the most visceral and intimate levels of human experience: sound. Here, we explore sound's effects in terms of both signification and phenomenology.

Sound metaphors are always relational: We sound people out to get an idea of what they think or feel before we commit to a course of action; we make moral, intellectual, and emotional judgments (sounds good, sounds difficult, sounds scary); we express our anger or our strong opinions by sounding off or sounding out; we empathize with the friend who (perhaps over the phone or via the medium of text) is sounding tired or thoughtful or sad. Closely related to sound-as-metaphor is the physical act of hearing and its psychosocial complement listening: sound cannot be fully understood without considering the act of audition. "Hear me out" is a plea to be "sounded out." "Just listen to yourself" is a response to "sounding off." These common phrases demonstrate the extent to which we use sound as a signifier for our engagement with others and our world.

Sound is also a physical phenomenon: the materialities of air pressure and solid media such as strings or membranes vibrate the body through tactile impression. Sound penetrates and vibrates the body through and through. Sound is active: it travels, insinuates, reverberates, repeats, and fades away. Sound is sensual: it whispers and shouts, tickles your ear, and thumps in your chest. We embody, and are embodied through, sound. As Julie Dawn Smith writes, "Our experience of, and participation with, sound is inseparable from our experience of, and participation with, our body and the bodies of others. The resonances of sound waves register in the very fibres of each and every body in ways that confound the assumed discreteness of exterior and interior space" (2001, 32). Indeed, we agree with Smith's observation that "the invisible presence of sound" complicates representation because "it underscores the corporeal as a process of audition, (re)writing and transformation" (21). Such processes, closely tied as they are to improvisatory practices, are the subjects of this book.

In this interdisciplinary collection of essays, sounding the body is both metaphor and materiality. This book takes up the many ways that bodies can be understood as sounding, how the notion of transmitting and receiving sound occurs within bodies, between bodies, in real time, in virtual time, in memory, in history, and across space. We explore some of these themes in this introduction, which is organized in two sections. We begin by unpacking theories of improvisation and subjectivity in relation to theories of the body and embodiment to address questions of agency in improvisation. We then trace a number of crosscutting themes that organize the book and conclude with a brief meditation on the sensual nature of sounding bodies improvising.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

Improvising Subjectivity

Subjectivity is a complex negotiation of lived embodied experience and social forces that work to regulate behavior and therefore shape that experience. We agree with Elizabeth Grosz that "corporeality can be seen as the material condition of subjectivity" (1995, 103); we also recognize, however, that the material body is shaped by discourse. Karen Barad's essay on posthuman performativity argues "materiality is discursive (i.e., material phenomena are inseparable from the apparatuses of bodily production . . .), just as discursive practices are always already material (i.e., they are ongoing material (re)configurations of the world)" (2006, 25). What does improvisation add to these articulations of subjectivity? Improvisation is a form of knowledge creation through expressive practice: whether we are conscious of our bodies in the moment, or transported by what psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) famously calls "flow," in improvising we experience the immediate relationships between our bodies and others. Improvisation is also a form of recollection and repetition: we call on learned repertoires of sounds and gestures and mobilize them in the moment. We cannot escape from our enculturation and our histories; indeed, improvisation is often a means of narrating the past through the filter of the present moment.

Musical improvisation makes negotiations of (material and discursive) subjectivity audible, but that is not in itself a guarantee that improvisation is transformative. Scholars of critical improvisation studies differ in the degree of social efficacy they ascribe to improvisation,[1] and we are especially concerned with avoiding reductive liberation tropes. For Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, and George Lipsitz, musical improvisation enacts a politics of hope. "In its most fully realized forms, improvisation is the creation and development of new, unexpected, and productive cocreative relations among people. It teaches us to make 'a way' out of 'no way' by cultivating the capacity to discern hidden elements of possibility, hope, and promise in even the most discouraging circumstances" (Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz 2013, xii). For these authors, improvisation's "most fully realized forms" are often found in Afrodiasporic musics, particularly post–World War II jazz and creative improvisation broadly construed, and their politics are indexed to important struggles for human rights. But what does it mean for an improvisation to be "fully realized?" In the contributions to *Negotiated Moments* by Siddall and by Wong and Eidsheim (which we discuss in the second section of this introduction), improvisation occurs in the context of narratives that figure improvisational jazz and blues as the audible trace of trauma inflicted on female (black and same-sex) bodies. For these women, improvised music may serve

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

as a coping mechanism, providing at least a limited space for self-expression within a repressive environment, but it is also the soundtrack for violence, for repetitive cycles of hatred passed along generations. The bruised and battered bodies of these subjects trouble liberatory claims for improvisation: although "coping" may be one step toward liberation, it may also be an expression of faint hope in the face of an impossible situation. One of the aims of this book is to examine those improvisational moments that are skewed, incomplete, or compromised to bring bodies that are often silenced into audibility. We focus less on moments of improvisational liberation and more on processes of improvisational negotiation in which agency is understood to be hard won, highly contingent, and relational.

Dance scholar Danielle Goldman (2010) describes improvisation in terms of negotiating tight places, an image that has much in common with the idea of making "a way" out of "no way." She finds political potential in improvisation as "practices of freedom" defined and even enriched by the constraints under which they operate. Goldman's thinking is deeply informed by the late work of Michel Foucault. In his "Ethics of the Concern for Self" (1984), Foucault draws a distinction between definitive moments of liberation (as an end goal) and practices of freedom (that are necessary to continue the effects of liberation) (quoted in Goldman 2010, 4). Goldman cautions, however, that "there are times when no degree of improvisational skill is sufficient to extract oneself from a situation of duress" (142) whether that situation be a nasty fall in the dance studio or a violent attack in a church. Improvisation, she contends, is "a rigorous mode of making oneself ready for a range of potential situations. It is an incessant preparation, grounded in the present while open to the next moment's possible actions and constraints" (142). From this perspective, improvisation is somewhere between assertiveness training and a survival strategy because it rests on both the acquisition of technique and a quality of constant readiness. Improvisational agency, Goldman suggests, is hard won, though it can result in "exquisite moments" that reveal "bravery, and choice, and surprise, and trust" (141).

Tracy McMullen locates agency in her term "the improvisative." Riffing on philosopher Judith Butler's influential theory of performativity, described later, McMullen's idea of the improvisative offers some hope of individual agency in the self-aware, alert subject. She maintains, "to the extent that the subject can recognize his or her own incompletion, contingency and co-arising with the other, s/he can remain open to the productive nature of discourse, allowing new meanings to emerge" (see chapter 1). In McMullen's interview with Butler in chapter 1, Butler accepts the relational aspect of the improvisative but cautions against a too volitional theory of improvisation. Describing what hap-

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

pens when an actor responds to a gesture in an improvisational scene, Butler insists "my agency is determined or formed in part in that exchange; it doesn't well up from within me. It's not an expression of my conscious, deliberate choice" (chapter 1). McMullen and Butler remind us that improvisational agency is both contingent and relational.

Butler has indeed had a formative influence on discursive theories of subjectivity. Her theory of performativity is especially resonant for our project because of its relationship to performance and its musical idea of repetition. Take, for example, her influential theory of gender construction in which the gendered subject is called into being by performative language; observing that the child has a vagina, the doctor cries, "it's a girl!," thus hailing that child into the social laws pertaining to the feminine gender (J. Butler 2008). Butler draws on discourse theories (especially the work of Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida) to demonstrate both how subjects are constructed by discourse and how they perform subjectivity within a scene of constraint. Societal notions of gender are reinforced through the subject's unconscious repetition of performative words and actions: from pronouns to clothing and makeup to compliant behaviors.

Performativity offers a limited notion of agency both when the subject transgresses expected codes (for example, cross-dressing), or by the variation—the space for newness—that is bound to creep into repetition of such codes. Butler cautions that the subject's agency is strictly limited since transgressing dominant discursive formations (for example, heterosexuality) can provoke brutal responses from the state. Performativity is useful to a theory of improvisation as social practice precisely because the citation of social codes (performative speech and actions) reveals the workings of power.

In her book *Agency and Embodiment*, Carrie Noland extends performativity to the realm of gesture, a domain that she asserts is not coterminous with language because it is embodied and kinesthetic—sensed by the body and available to the conscious mind (2009, 10). She defines embodiment as "the process whereby collective behaviors and beliefs, acquired through acculturation, are rendered individual and 'lived' at the level of the body" (9). Agency is "the power to alter those acquired behaviors and beliefs for purposes that may be reactive (resistant) or collaborative (innovative) in kind" (9). Using the analogy of throwing like a girl,[2] and describing ways this set of socially conditioned gestures can be retrained, Noland argues that—unlike biological signifiers of gender (vagina, penis)—"gestural routines are particularly vulnerable to processes of de-skilling and re-skilling; these processes undermine the culturally regulated body-discourse relation and produce intense kinesthetic and affective experiences of dissonance. . . . In short, the moving,

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

trained, and trainable body is always a potential source of resistance to the meanings it is required to bear" (175). In our view, improvisation is the medium par excellence for the adaptable body that, however constrained, may enact potent moments of transgression and unpredictability through sonic and physical gestures that are often coterminous.

Take, for example, Clara Tomaz's articulation of learning how to speak again after mouth cancer surgery, described in chapter 10. A professional linguist, Tomaz knows numerous languages. After her surgery she underwent an intensive process of rehabilitation, learning how to speak again in English (a language secondary to her native Italian). This process involved entraining a whole new repertoire of gestures and sounds. "Having to work on each phoneme individually made me sensibly aware that language is an assemblage of sounds just as the body is an assemblage of organs" (quoted in chapter 10). Tomaz's experience of her body (taken with the adaptive experiences described by many people with disabilities) stretches our understanding of subjectivity to include not just repetition with a difference but the possibility of creating entirely new modes of speaking and acting in the world. To be sure, Tomaz is constrained by the laws of language (she wants to communicate in English), but she has also redefined what it means to speak (through new ways of forming consonants and vowels). By improvising new ways of embodying language, Tomaz refuses to be silenced and redefines fluency.

Noland's idea of gestural performativity invokes improvisational techniques of stylistic entrainment, code switching, adaptability, interoperability, close listening, and responsiveness that form the technical arsenal of any good musical improviser. Indeed, Tomaz turned to improvisation to make sense of her new adaptation. Her multimedia improvisational performance *Deviations and Straight Line* evokes her sense that "the sound I can produce as a human being is the expression of my personal consciousness. It makes all of my vibrations, emotions, perceptions and thoughts resound in the space around me" (quoted in chapter 10). Tomaz's evocative description brings us back to sound and sounding.

If, as Noland insists, embodied gesture obeys different laws than linguistic discourse does, what does the materiality of sound add to our understanding of improvisation and subjectivity? After all, in improvised musicking, sound and gesture are intimately related. In addition to the obvious gestures of breathing, blowing, fingering, and bowing, playing an instrument entails body movements that are seemingly unrelated to the production of sound (the clarinetist who employs deep knee bends at emphatic moments, for instance) and musicians in ensemble often unconsciously synchronize movements such as head bobbing or swaying in time to the music. Musical sound

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

also participates in the discursive realm, however, since style and genre codes convey very specific gestural and affective information. Musicologists have long ago shown that by virtue of its embeddedness in culture, music *is* representational.[3] Still, sound itself is without doubt a material substance that is, paradoxically, "mysteriously immaterial" (Connor 2005, 157). Although sound vibrations are intensely physical, sounds themselves are not easily perceived as objects. We are surrounded by sound, immersed in it, vibrated by it, but we cannot easily separate sound from our experience of it. As Steven Connor explains, "how something sounds is literally contingent, depending on what touches or comes into contact with it to generate the sound. We hear, as it were, the event of the thing, not the thing itself" (157). What sound adds to the vocabularies of language and gesture is its extreme contextuality.

Ethnomusicologist Harris Berger draws on phenomenology to explain this trickster quality of sound and our ability to shift our perception of it through stance. Berger defines stance as "the affective, stylistic, or valual quality with which a person engages with an element of her experience" (2009, xiv). He follows Maurice Merleau-Ponty's influential idea that the subject is formed through acts of perception that are both partial and mobile (Berger 2009, 57). We can shift the relationship of figure and ground as we experience our body's relationship to objects and to itself (my right hand holds a cup, my left hand touches my right hand holding the cup), but we can never experience either as complete. We know the world through our body's direct and mediated experiences of the world. Furthermore, Berger explains (following Husserl's *Fifth Meditation*) that our understanding of subjectivity is relational: "I understand the type 'subject' from my direct experience of being a body in the world (of having experiences of the world, of my body's own responsiveness to my intents), and in the pre-reflexive constitution of experience, I see the body of another person as another subject" (71).

Berger theorizes that our experience of another subject (like that of our own bodies) is always partial and "constrained and enabled by the vicissitudes of communication and understanding, expression and deceit" (2009, 71). Importantly, for our theory of improvisation and sounding bodies, such stance qualities are a form of social practice, involving "those complex qualities of social relationships that are crucial to the sophisticated interpretation of expressive culture, including but in no way limited to trust and suspicion, domination and resistance, familiarity and alienation" (72).

In listening to someone play music, then, our stance affects the degree to which we perceive the other as a subject and the attitude we take toward that subject. For example, while listening to an ensemble of freely improvising musicians, your stance will be affected by your understanding and sympathy (or

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

lack thereof) toward free-form musicking. Depending on your stance, you may experience the dense interlocking phrases, distinctive timbres of saxophone, bass, and drums, and fast tempo as liberatory or oppressive, virtuosic or chaotic. In his contribution to this book, Zachary Wallmark traces music critics' stances toward John Coltrane's saxophonic scream, which critics variously heard as hysterical noise or groundbreaking innovation. Such interpretations, he demonstrates, are not purely aesthetic but are instead imbricated with attitudes toward masculinity and race. Indeed, Berger warns, there is no guarantee that in any given situation the listener will "attend to the other as subject" (2009, 73) an idea borne out in any number of early ethnographic accounts of "exotic" music heard as "primitive" noise.[4] In this sense, Berger's phenomenology is not dissonant with discursive theories of subjectivity, for "both the significance given to stance and the interpretive processes by which the listener constitutes it in her experience are deeply informed by culture" (73). As Ellen Waterman and Deborah Wong demonstrate in their chapters, in intercultural improvisations, the stylistic and generic rules pertaining to diverse traditions deeply inform the stance of both musicians and listeners. If, as we assert, musical and sonic improvisations produce audible traces of subjectivity, these traces are seldom either direct or simple, or, for that matter, easily readable.

Of course, musical stance is further complicated by the fact that so much of our experience of music is heavily mediated. For example, musical improvisation may be recorded in concert or studio, edited in postproduction, distributed via any number of media, learned by another musician by ear, or transcribed in a score. The most spontaneous improvised solo may ultimately take on the fixed status of a composition, faithfully studied by jazz students. Improvisational performance, like all musicking, lives in the immediate experience of the listener, but the rhizophonic nature of recordings calls individual accounts of agency into question. Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut define rhizophonia as "the fundamentally fragmented yet proliferative condition of sound reproduction and recording" (2010, 19), and they argue that a relational interagency is demonstrated in recordings "where sounds and bodies are constantly dislocated, relocated, and co-located in temporary aural configurations" (19).[5] Our point is that improvised music's corporeality is far from limited to nodes of performance and audition; the sonic corpus is diffused across time, space, and media. It resonates in memory and readily mutates into new contexts, new meanings. Indeed, contributions to this book by Jason Robinson and Andrew Raffo Dewar explore aspects of dis/embodiment and hyperembodiment through real-time mediations of bodies across time and space.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

David Borgo, in his contribution, explores the puzzle of interagency, arguing that improvising with newer technologies can extend, but also complicate, our sense of individual authorship and control.

By gathering such disparate points of view on improvising and sounding bodies, we are deliberately refusing any singular theory about improvisational agency. Like the "exquisite moments" Goldman finds in improvisational dance, the diverse contributions to this book offer several examples of musical or sonic improvisations that change a stance, alter relationships between subjects and their social/cultural environments, and decenter power (at least in the improvisational moment). Our contributors also describe improvisational encounters in which sound overpowers and brutalizes subjects, marks the imposition of forced change, serves to consolidate hierarchies, or disperses bodies altogether. Contingent and mobile relationships in and through sounding bodies support the idea of interagency that emerges through resonance, through vibration. Throughout this collection of essays, improvisation is understood as a complex site of negotiation, and sound and music are heard as both the discursive signs and the embodied experiences of those negotiations.

Improvisation, Vibration, Resonance

Negotiated Moments is organized according to five sections: Listening, Place, and Space; Technology and Embodiment; Sensibility and Subjectivity; Gender, Trauma, and Memory; and Representation and Identity. Chapter 1, Tracy McMullen's interview with Judith Butler, precedes these five sections, standing on its own as a special challenge to think about subjectivity and agency in terms of discourse and corporeality. As already discussed, in the interview with Butler, McMullen posits her theory of the "improvisative" as a way to disrupt Butler's notion of the repetition compulsion of performativity. For McMullen, the improvisative opens up possibilities for creativity—for newness, both musically and socially. Butler, in turn, resists notions of agency, but not of possibilities for newness; for her, that newness comes accidentally and partially, when we unintentionally repeat with a difference. The tension between improvisatory agency and performative constraint identified by McMullen and Butler is a motif that appears in diverse variations throughout the five sections that make up this book. Taken as a whole, these essays remind us of what is gained when we foreground the body in critical considerations of and aesthetic responses to music and thinking about improvisation. Our ability to mobilize the political and social potential of improvisatory creative practices

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

necessarily stems from understanding the deeply situated, relational, and embodied contexts that shape those practices. In what follows, we discuss the themes that resonate and vibrate through and across the book's sections.

Listening, Place, and Space

It is axiomatic that musical improvisation is as much a process of listening as of sounding. In the two essays discussed here, listening occurs in direct relation to embodied experiences of place and space. In her essay on soundwalking, Andra McCartney invokes Luce Irigaray's conception of love as a form of listening that embraces the unknown in the other. Irigaray conceptualizes an ethical model of intersubjectivity that denies mastery over another: "I am listening to you: I encourage something unexpected to emerge, some becoming, some growth, some new dawn, perhaps" (1996, 116–17). For McCartney, this theory of love as listening offers a new model for soundwalking, a social and aesthetic practice that involves the cultivation of a heightened awareness of sound in the environment. Her commitment to intimate listening has led McCartney to alter her career-long practice of leading people on guided soundwalks and, instead, to develop a far more improvisational form that promotes individual awareness and invites dialogue. Soundwalking is thus more than an expressive practice; it becomes a way of articulating ethical relations among subjects moving through and experiencing space.

Like McCartney, performance studies scholar and artist Rebecca Caines also wishes to employ improvisation as a methodology for making community-based sound art as a means of helping people articulate their relationships to space and place. In partnership with John Campbell, a computer programmer, Caines designed an online sound mixer that enables communities in widely dispersed locations to share sound files and create soundscape pieces as a creative response to their experiences of site/space/place. Her ethnographic collaboration with communities in Australia, Northern Ireland, and Canada involved complex negotiations of institutional bureaucracies, the vicissitudes of technology, and divisions along class, age, and cultural lines. Improvisation became not only a methodological tool for collaboration but a practice of adaptation that allowed Caines and Campbell to listen and respond to the needs and desires of the communities with which they worked. Within this improvisational practice, listening is a way to promote ethical intersubjective relations that also registers how difference and power are themselves instrumental in sounding contexts.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

Technology and Embodiment

The essays in this section engage the possibilities of technological mediations of the body through improvisation from extensions of the body in time and space to the dispersal of bodies across networks and into larger social systems. They explore the persistence of embodiment as particular experience in technology (Hayles 1992).

Pauline Oliveros insists that "listening lies deep within the body and is as yet a mysterious process involving myriad time delays" (chapter 4). Her contribution to this volume traces her sixty years of improvising with audio technologies, from the variable-speed tape recorder she received as a present in the 1950s to her evolving Expanded Instrument System, which connects her performing body to digital instruments and networks. An archive of the musical examples she discusses is available online at http://www.improvcommunity.ca such that her essay encourages a full engagement of the senses, both visual and aural. Oliveros has an acute awareness of her body and of embodiment with technology. She delineates the connection she sees between the time delays that occur in the reel-to-reel tape recorders she improvised with in the 1960s (the delay between the record head and the playback head) and the embodied time delay inherent in humans producing and hearing sound. Oliveros advocates listening to the time/space between to integrate global attention with focused attention. "Balancing these two forms of attention," she declares, "is the dance of improvisation—opening to receive and focusing to a point" (chapter 4).

Jason Robinson deals with the issue of latency that occurs during telematic performances where musicians in different locations perform together in real time via sound and video sent across the Internet. The result of latency is a dislocation of sound from image that can be unsettling for players and audience. Latency is an issue that is best resolved, for some, by working toward achieving zero latency through improved technology and, for others, by adapting musical forms to compensate for sonic delays. For Robinson, latency is most productively negotiated through improvisation and expressive microtiming. His notion of the "networked body" describes the doubled experience of (dis)embodiment that marks a performance practice that, he argues, will open up a new musical paradigm and a new consciousness of embodied performance.

Andrew Raffo Dewar considers that the performing musician's body is fetishized, a concept he explores through technology developed by Zenph that extracts information from a recording in such a way that the moving keys of a Disclavier (digital piano) can replicate a piece of music exactly as originally played, in this case by jazz pianist Art Tatum. Live "reperformances" of Tatum's music have been staged with the digital piano standing in for the

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

dead musician, and Zenph has also released new recordings that feature the digital reperformance. Dewar concludes that the primacy of the body as wellspring of creativity may well be profoundly challenged by the advent of new digital technologies that reconfigure notions of liveness and embodiment.

David Borgo goes even further in challenging conventional notions of embodied creativity by looking beyond methodological individualism. Drawing on research in social psychology, neocybernetics, and social systems theory, he argues that the human being is neither a sufficient nor a necessary entry point into understanding social and communication systems. Far from a position of hermeneutic despair, however, Borgo argues that collective improvisation affords an opportunity to celebrate the ubiquity of agency in coaction, and that looking beyond traditional understandings of communication as a form of information exchange actually moves us closer to a performative understanding of, and engagement with, the world.

Sensibility and Subjectivity

In contrast to the fragmented, distributed, and diffused bodies discussed in the previous section, several contributions to this volume focus on ways material bodies engaged in improvisatory practices can effect a reorientation of identity and community. Sherrie Tucker and Tomie Hahn invoke the dynamic idea of stretching to articulate what happens when improvising bodies engage with each other in ways that accommodate difference and expand our understanding of both sensibility and subjectivity. Their chapters share similar collaborative formats: in each case the author solicited short contributions from a number of other writers and framed those contributions with her own insights. Tucker's chapter features the voices of seven artists who work with and through physical disabilities. Hahn's chapter has nine meditations by people who participated in her workshops on improvisation and movement in the context of a summer institute on improvisation as social practice.[6] These chapters express common themes about bodily interaction and awareness.

For Hahn, improvising community is facilitated by the literal stretching of industrial rubber pallet bands. Connected by the bands at ankles and elbows, feet and torsos, necks and knees, the participants in her banding workshop improvised together, moving vertiginously through space like some many-headed alien creature with a dozen arms and legs. As the participants' journal responses attest, banding highlights—indeed, makes visible—the complex dynamics of collaborative improvisation. As one of the participants writes of the experience: "Through the push and pull practice of engagement, we found a sensibility of process" (chapter 8).

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

Tucker (who was one of the banding participants) extrapolates from that activity a model for improvising across abilities. Her essay reminds us that often theories of the social function and effects of improvisation ignore differently abled bodies and make an assumption about the primacy of sound based on normative notions of hearing, vocalization, and language. She asks the provocative question: "What if experimental musical communities committed to explorations of difference in realms such as harmonics, time, timbre, and form, were equally avid about the differential variable in musicians' and audience members' modes of sensory and perceptual relationships to sound waves, as well as difference in mobility, range of motion, ratios of voluntary/involuntary mobility, multiple modes of cognitive processing and language?" (chapter 8). The artists responding to this question greatly expand our understanding of what it means to move, sound, touch, see, and be an expressive body in relation to other bodies.

One of the things that fascinates Hahn about the banding exercise is how quickly the participants achieve "flow," defined as a state of being where people are so immersed in what they are doing that they become unaware of anything else: a state of extreme attention that transcends technique (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 4). Csikszentmihalyi studied flow in the context of elite athletes and concert musicians, but flow does not depend on any particular bodily configuration. In Tucker's chapter, David Whalen, a visual artist with paraplegia, similarly describes the conditions under which he achieves this state while digitally painting and drawing using an adaptive instrument. The state of flow implies a highly integrated mind/body connection that can facilitate a reorientation of one's sense of self in relation to others and the environment.

Jesse Stewart invokes the notion of flow in his analysis of what happens when people interact with artist David Rokeby's *Very Nervous System*. *VNS* uses motion capture technology to create an environment in which a person's movements trigger sounds in three-dimensional space, although not always in predictable ways. As with the banding exercise, participants interacting with *VNS* appear to enter into a state of flow much more quickly than would normally be the case because their bodies are put into an immediate relationship with sound, movement, and space that does not depend on specialized skills as musicians or dancers. Stewart argues that *VNS* thus democratizes musical experience, albeit within an atmosphere of surveillance: it produces its effects by literally watching (and sounding) our every move, often producing an uncanny sense that the technology reacts *before* it receives a bodily stimulus.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

Gender, Trauma, and Memory

The four essays in this section bring literary analysis into contact with improvisational music by considering gendered narratives of trauma and memory. In writing about trauma and memory, Cathy Caruth identifies the paradox of the continual reexperiencing of an event that one cannot actually remember: "The final import of the psychoanalytic and historical analysis of trauma is to suggest that the inherent departure, within trauma, from the moment of its first occurrence, is also a means of passing out of the isolation imposed by the event: that the history of a trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another" (2007, 204). For Caruth, the dialogic process of attempting to heal from trauma involves a particular kind of listening: "by carrying that impossibility of knowing out of the empirical event itself, trauma opens up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, *of impossibility*" (204). Her articulation of listening to what is impossible to know resonates with conceptions of improvisation that foreground listening as partial and provisional but also open to new ways of thinking. It also resonates powerfully with ways scholars like George Lewis (1996) have conceptualized African American forms of improvised music such as jazz as embodying the traumatic memory of slavery.

For a number of our contributors, improvised music becomes a means of embodying and replaying such traumatic memories. In Nina Sun Eidsheim and Mandy-Suzanne Wong's essay, Ursa Corregidora, the eponymous heroine of Gayl Jones's novel, is characterized as dealing with her ancestral history of trauma through both deliberate and unconscious acts of memorialization. Ursa responds to her personal experiences of domestic abuse and the sexual violence experienced by each generation of women in her family (dating back to her enslaved grandmother) by singing the blues, an intentional act of memorialization, and unconsciously through the timbre of her voice, unaware that to others her very voice is marked by generational traumatic memory. Wong and Eidsheim assert that "to play music, especially to improvise, is in part to bring oneself under the influence of other bodies from the past. We perform memories, our own and those of others" (chapter 12). Riffing on Foucault, they coin the phrase "corporeal archaeology," which they define as an awareness of one's own improvising body as "a living, bleeding archive of other bodies, ideologies, and values" (chapter 12).

Smith and McNeilly also explore the connections among memory, history, and improvisation in their analysis of Octavia Butler's science fiction trilogy *Xenogenesis* and jazz musician Nicole Mitchell's musical reimagining of it. They argue that "Mitchell's music materially re-members . . . the atroci-

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

ties committed on black women's bodies" (chapter 14), responding to Butler's reference in *Xenogenesis* to well-known cases of black women's bodies being abused by medical science. Similarly, Gillian Siddall points to the explicit connection between trauma and improvisation in her analysis of Ann-Marie MacDonald's novel *Fall on Your Knees.* One of the most horrifying scenes in the novel is one in which a woman is severely beaten by her father in a passage that employs tropes of various musical styles to describe the brutality of the beating as well as the daughter's resistance to her father.

In these contributions, the trope of motherhood is key to the authors' conceptualizations of how memories live on in subjects across generations. As Kevin McNeilly and Julie Dawn Smith put it (invoking Julia Kristeva): "The mother subtends a concurrent existence of self and other—a paradox of 'being oneself and someone else at the same time' (Kristeva 1984, 223) and mediates mind and body" (chapter 14). Octavia Butler's narratives of interspecies survival assert motherhood as a central trope for the complexity of human identity and community and "trouble static notions of human subjectivity" (chapter 14). For Wong and Eidsheim, motherhood is the embodied trace of past trauma and resilience that lives on in the heroine's improvisational blues. In Siddall's analysis of *Fall on Your Knees*, Materia's relationship with her daughters is constrained and limited by her husband, but she and her daughter Frances in particular are connected by their improvisatory practices. Materia's improvised accompaniment to silent films allows her to define herself in the context of the call and response of community music-making—in concert with her audience. Frances employs a similarly improvisatory and ironic approach to her performances in a speakeasy, where her parodic stripteases denaturalize social categories of gender and sexuality. The figure of the mother in these chapters embodies notions central to improvisation—past and future, memory, creativity, and intersubjectivity.

As a counterpoise to these narratives of female gender and sexuality, Zachary Wallmark analyzes the critical reception to John Coltrane's saxophone playing and demonstrates how our precognitive reaction to sonic timbres can nevertheless invoke tropes of masculinity and race, as already noted. In his analysis of the saxophonic scream (an incredibly high-pitched, raw, and intense explosion of timbre first developed in the context of free jazz), Wallmark emphasizes a perceptual/cognitive approach that focuses on the degree to which the listener identifies with the sound. Citing recent research on the neurophysiology of audition, Wallmark locates a biological reason for the phenomenon of musical empathy—the perception that in listening to a sound we also participate in it. Our participation, however, is culturally conditioned. Coltrane's saxophonic scream was variously interpreted by music critics as the sound of

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

black masculine violence and rage or as a sign of the jazz icon's spirituality, a transcendent sound. Music critics' visceral, embodied interpretations of Coltrane's saxophonic scream turned on their reactions to the birth of free jazz in the context of the U.S. civil rights movement.

Representation and Identity

The three chapters in this final section of the book situate improvisation in terms of representations of national and ethnocultural identities. Illa Carrillo Rodríguez and Berenice Corti focus on improvisational responses to the official celebrations marking the two hundredth anniversary of Argentina's first independence movement against Spanish rule that troubled (classed and raced) narratives of nationalism. Deborah Wong explores the power relations found in gender and ethnic identities in Japanese taiko drumming, and Ellen Waterman analyzes an improvisational performance by the intercultural trio Safa through the filter of Canada's official policy of multiculturalism.

Carrillo Rodríguez and Corti return us to themes of trauma and memory, this time situated in the context of historical narratives employed in the service of nation-building. They argue that the government's bicentennial celebrations served to memorialize a national history that elided the violence done to thousands of Argentine citizens during the period of state terrorism in the 1970s and early 1980s, and they argue that various improvisational artistic responses to that imposed national narrative provide a powerful counternarrative borne out of collective memory. Carrillo Rodríguez and Corti also explore "dissonant iterations of motherhood" (chapter 17) in their discussion of the Madres, mothers publicly protesting their "disappeared" children in Buenos Aires during the 1970s. The improvisational techniques of the Madres were reconstituted by the theater group Fuerzabruta in a street parade during the Argentinian bicentennial that included the responses of thousands of people who encountered this powerful commemoration with improvisations of their own, described by the authors as performances of historically charged silence.

In an essay that traces the surprising historical links between Japanese taiko drumming and American jazz, which came into contact in Japan during World War II, Wong addresses the ways in which taiko solos are both racialized and gendered. Taiko is a communal drumming practice in which players step forward to perform "improvised" solos as part of composed pieces. Depending on the confidence of the soloist, such solos may indeed be spontaneous or they may be precomposed displays of virtuosity. Wong argues that early taiko solos emulated the hard-driving beats of African American (male) jazz drum solos and have been remasculinized over time in the North American context in a complicated response to the Western feminization of Asian

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

men. Her analysis of the gendered nature of improvised solos highlights the solo as a domain of gendered bodily anxiety.

Waterman similarly explores intercultural encounters in musical improvisation, this time through the work of Safa, an ensemble that brings Iranian classical music together with modal jazz and Latin American rhythms. Through her ethnography of a particular performance, she explores the musicians' negotiations of diverse musical styles, revealing their deep enculturation and the circulation of power involved in their elaboration. While the musicians' experience of collaboration is one of almost spiritual unity based on mutual respect and musical authenticity, members of an audience focus group interpreted the performance as a display of Canadian multicultural values that privilege the accommodation of difference within an (unacknowledged and hegemonic) norm. This dissonance invites Waterman to work out from her close reading of the performance to consider questions of selfhood and subjectivity in the context of the politically charged discourse on Canada's official policy of multiculturalism, a policy that is designed to simultaneously celebrate and contain difference.

An Erotics of Improvisation

As our summary of the contributors' diverse approaches to improvisation indicates, these essays open highly productive and crosscutting themes that reveal the intricacies of improvisational relationships through agency and interagency, body and bodies, self and selves, sounding and (other means of) sensing. One of our goals is to ensure that valences of bodies and embodiment that are not always heard in critical studies of improvisation resound in these essays: gendered and sexed bodies, differently abled bodies, and bodies that are imaginatively extended through technology.[7]

Perhaps not surprisingly in a book focused on bodies, an erotics of embodied improvisation pervades many of these essays, as they explore and assert the sensuality of musicking, of improvising bodies responding to other improvising bodies, to listeners, and to embodied histories. Sexual and/or sensual intimacy is figured in several of these essays as a profound connection that creates new, albeit partial and complex ways of being and knowing. For example, Smith and McNeilly capture this notion in their description of Nicole Mitchell's music: "Sense—as sensation and meaning—emerges in Mitchell's sound-world as a recombinant amalgam that [. . .] prod[s] us to question how and where our own bodies begin and end, how self and other interpenetrate, collaborate, dissolve, and (mis)comprehend, and how community can arise from cohesion and from misfires" (chapter 14). Smith

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

and McNeilly use the word *sense* to capture the integration of sensuality—bodies—and meaning in a way that also dissolves distinctions between others and ourselves. Improvisation here is understood as a highly intimate and sensual intermingling of bodies and ideas, a process more chaotic than volitional, and the result is unpredictable but undeniably new—the very DNA of sense altered in the "recombinant amalgam" of new meaning, new identity, and new community.

In embodied improvisations, subjectivities are formed and re-formed in the profound and unpredictable dissolution and recombination of identities, whereby misfires can lead to cohesion. There is no clear sense of individual agency here; indeed, there is a sense of loss, or at least of the fluidity of identity, but also of the capacity for individuals and communities to change based on their willingness to engage with others, embrace the intimate chaos, and recognize that meaning and sensuality cannot exist separately. It is, in its own way, a hopeful means of conceptualizing improvisation, but it is founded on the necessary unpredictability of human connection. Such an erotics of improvisation, we suggest, invites us to think about the social effects of improvisation differently: they result from the complex and unpredictable interchanges between bodies and meaning, sound and subjectivity. By paying close attention to improvisation as a site of negotiation among embodied, sensing subjects, we listen for the full spectrum of ideas that sound out, from clarion calls of freedom to sounds of struggle and cries of despair.

Notes

1. This book is an extension of a growing body of literature on critical studies in improvisation. We are particularly inspired by contributions from Fischlin and Heble (2004); Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz (2013); Heble and Wallace (2013); Monson (1996, 2008, 2009); Rustin and Tucker (2008); Smith (2004, 2008); and D. Wong (2004). See also the early prognostications for the efficacy of improvisation as a social practice made by Attali (1985). For a good cross-section of the emerging literature see the online journal *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Etudes critiques en improvisation* at http://www.criticalimprov.com.

2. Noland is referring to the famous essay by political philosopher Iris Marion Young (1980), who analyzed the constricted physical movements of women in urban, postindustrial society in phenomenological terms.

3. McClary's landmark book *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (2002), which stirred great controversy in academic music on its original publication in 1991, is now arguably orthodox.

4. See Bellman (1997) for a fascinating collection of essays that position "exotic" music, from the blues to Romany fiddling, as primitive and therefore a sign of Otherness to be exploited in Western art music.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest

5. In their article "Deadness," Stanyek and Piekut offer an intriguing analysis of duets recorded by live musicians who "collaborate" with an extant recording by a dead musician. Such recordings, they argue, trouble the ontology of deadness.

6. The Summer Institute on Critical Studies in Improvisation was organized by the research project Improvisation, Community and Social Practice (ICASP) and took place at the University of Guelph in 2011.

7. We are grateful to have been part of two large-scale multiyear grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada that enabled us to engage in sustained research on critical studies in improvisation within interdisciplinary teams and community partnerships. The International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (a partnered research institute across five Canadian universities) promotes the kind of performance- and community-based research that is profiled in many of the contributions to this book (http://improvisationinstitute.ca/).

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/581837/9780822374497-001.pdf
by guest