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Psychogeographies: The Spectacle of Terrain and Aspect November 7-8, 2008

Interdisciplinary graduate student conference at the University of Guelph

A Major Collaborative Research Initiative of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

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## ImprovNotes

### Heble returns to active role

**Ajay Heble** resumed his role as project director of Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice (ICASP) on September 8. He has spent the summer recuperating from the heart attack he suffered on May 26.

**Ellen Waterman**, who has served as acting director since then, will begin her role as visiting scholar at the Centre for Research and Teaching at McGill University. (see *In Action*)

**Frédérique Arroyas** and **Daniel Fischlin**, ICASP management team members and co-investigators who are located at the University of Guelph, will share site co-ordination duties until Dr. Waterman's return.

### Summer Institute participants featured at Guelph Jazz Festival Colloquium

Participants in the inaugural Summer Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation were well-represented at the Guelph Jazz Festival Colloquium, which ran Sept. 3-5. The three keynote speakers also had close ties to the project.

Diaspora, Dispersal, Improvisation, and Imagination was the theme of the Colloquium, which is co-presented by the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice (ICASP) project and the Festival.

Eleven of the 18 participants presented papers and 5 presented at the Colloquium's first poster session. The presentations were based on the research proposals submitted by the participants when applying to the Summer Institute (SI).

Participants had spent the previous week honing their presentations at the SI. **Sally Booth**, University of Guelph, spoke at the first panel, "Improvising Cities: Civic Space and Collective Agency." Her topic, *Interrupted Cityscape: David*

Wojnarowicz, *Camouflage and Recognition*, dealt with public activities and restrictions of public space in New York in the early days of the AIDS crisis.

All speakers on “The Writing’s Off the Wall: Improvisation and Theories of Discourse” panel were SI participants. The participants and their topics were: **Cesar Villavicencia**, University of East Anglia, *The Discourse of Free Improvisation: A Rhetorical Perspective on Free Improvised Music*; **Peter Johnston**, York University, *Getting Music off the Page*; and, **Yvan Tétreault**, McGill University, *Witty Music*.

**Brent Mix**, Northwestern University, and **Mark Laver**, University of Toronto, both spoke on “The Great Divide?: Eurological and Afrological Perspectives on Improvisation” panel. Mix’s topic was *Idiom and Empire: The Historicity of Free Improvisation*; Laver’s was *America’s Classical Music: Jazz, Elitism, and the Meaning of Blackness*.

The two speakers on the “Free Improvisation, Education, and Cultural Dynamics” panel were **Melvin Backstrom**, McGill University, *Improvisation as Freedom? A Bourdieuan Critique of Creative Action* and **Simon Rose**, Middlesex University, *Articulating Perspectives on Free Improvisation of Creative Action*.

**Rob Wallace**, who joins ICASP at the University of Guelph as the 2008-2009 post-doctoral fellow, spoke on “*In a Troubled Key*”: *Langston Hughes in Performance* at the “Transcending Genre and Language” panel.

**François Mouillot**, University of Guelph, and **Lee Veeraraghavan**, University of Western Ontario, were the panelists for “Fostering Dissent, Building Communities”. Mouillot’s topic was *Resisting Poems: Expressions of Dissent and Hegemony in Modern Basque Bertsolaritza*; Veeraraghavan’s was *Improvised Hip Hop and Community Building among First Nations Youth*.

**Jeremy Brown**, University of Calgary, spoke on the Salvation Army Addiction Rehabilitation Project at the “Play What You Are: Improvisation and Affirmation” panel.

The poster presentations were by **Chris Cogburn**, of Austin, Tex., *Arts Presentation and Curation as a Form of Community Building: Cha’ak’ab Paaxil Festival de Improvisación Libre July 2008, Mérida, Yucatán, México*; **Karl Coulthard**, University of Guelph, *Reproducing Spontaneity: Representing and Recording Improvised Jazz Performance in Twentieth Century American Literature and Culture*; **Marielle Groven**, McGill University, *General Semantics of Standard and Spectromorphological Notation in Phone Sax for tenor saxophone and tape*, **Jennifer McManus**, McGill University, *Addiction and Agency: A new therapeutic model based on improvisation*; and, **Kristin Scarola**, New York University, *Ethnographic Methodology for the Artist-Scholar: Experiential Representation in a Decentered Improvising Community*.

**George Lipsitz**, Improvisation and Transcultural Understanding coordinator and co-investigator with ICASP, delivered the first keynote address: *Improvisation and Diaspora: Why New Orleans Matters*. He also participated in a panel discussion on “Rebuilding Community: New Orleans Perspective.”

*Jazz/Opera and the Staging of Race*, the second keynote, was co-delivered by Linda and Michael Hutcheon of the University of Toronto. **Dr. Linda Hutcheon** is member of the project’s advisory board and is a professor of English and comparative literature. **Dr. Michael Hutcheon** is a professor of medicine and deputy physician in chief for education at the Toronto Health Network. Together, they have published numerous articles and three books on the intersection of medical and cultural history.

Ethnomusicologist **Deborah Wong**, a keynote speaker and course facilitator of the SI, delivered the third keynote, *Improvisation in American Taiko*.

Other ICASP participants at the Colloquium were [Pat Case](#), [Ric Knowles](#), [Tracy McMullen](#), [Winfried Siemerling](#), [Alan Stanbridge](#), and [Ellen Waterman](#).

## **KidsAbility outreach project leads to festival performance**

The chimes trembled, the djembe set the pace, and the water pitcher took up the beat. When children from KidsAbility Guelph took the stage at the Guelph Jazz Festival Community Tent on Saturday, Sept. 6, the music they created with performers **Matana Roberts**, **Rich Marsella**, and **Rob Wallace** showed how compelling music can be created on the spot, using a variety of found instruments. It also demonstrated the underlying tenet of the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice (ICASP) research project – that improvised music can serve as a model for political, cultural, and ethical dialogue and action.

“Many of our youth struggle with verbal communication, so we are eager to give them opportunities to communicate in other ways. And communicate they did,” said **Megan Shirley**, therapeutic recreationist at KidsAbility. “They communicated with laughter, with beaming smiles, and with enthusiastic music making.”

The concert was the culmination of the “Play Who You Are” workshop series, presented by ICASP with its community partners KidsAbility Guelph and the Guelph Jazz Festival & Colloquium.

This was truly a community-based project. ICASP, KidsAbility, and the Guelph Jazz Festival worked together to present the programming to a group of 10-16-year-olds from KidsAbility, which caters to those with special needs due to developmental delays and/or physical disabilities.

“We spend a lot of time watching these kids struggle. It’s very rewarding to have this opportunity to watch them shine,” Shirley said.

“I think each child brought their unique voice to the project, and it was great to see how the musicality of the project evolved with each session, finally ending in a wonderful performance in the Jazz Tent on September 6,” said Canadian musician **Rich Marsella**, who facilitated the workshops with international guest artist, saxophonist Matana Roberts. “This was an incredibly positive experience for me. I hope that I am lucky enough to work with every participant again.”

Roberts has led creativity workshops within New York school and community groups, along with her performing career. **Rob Wallace**, 2008-2009 post-doctoral fellow with the ICASP project at the University of Guelph, joined in as a percussionist for the final workshop and concert.

“Many of the parents saw their children take steps they’ve never taken before,” Shirley added. “One participant, who took a turn conducting, has never volunteered to get up in front of a group before... Another parent commented about the change in self-confidence evident in one of the participants.”

“Our kids loved working with Rich when he led an introductory workshop in July,” said **Denise Watson**, program manager at KidsAbility. “We were very excited to see what would come out of the workshop series and concert.”

“The participants responded very positively to Matana,” Shirley said. “They seemed to transition under her leadership from being a group of individuals, to being a cohesive group.”

The workshops were instructive to the workshop leaders as well. “They demonstrated that improvisation needs to occur equally in the process of teaching music, as it does in the act of making it,” Marsella said. “Both Matana and myself

clearly had to adapt our standard approaches to working on musical material.”

“I had an absolute blast!” Roberts said, adding that she found the work heart warming and life affirming. The workshops are supported by a grant from the Artists and Community Collaboration program of the Canada Council for the Arts.

“Musical improvisation provides the freedom and opportunity to ‘say who you are’. These workshops will give youth a creative outlet in a supportive and collaborative environment,” said [Ajay Heble](#), ICASP project director.

“As an academic, I value the contribution that these workshops will make to the research we are conducting into improvised music as a model for social change. As artistic director of the Guelph Jazz Festival, I’m thrilled that the ‘Play Who You Are’ performance was part of our programming.”

## In Action

A monthly roundup of the activities of project participants, post-doctoral fellows, and students.

Research collaborator [Howard Becker](#) and **Robert R. Faulkner’s** book, *Do You Know ... ? The Jazz Repertoire in Action*, will be published next summer by the University of Chicago Press. The book addresses the question: how do a bunch of musicians who have never played together before and who have no written music in front of them manage to play for several hours before a paying audience without having any serious difficulties?

“We thought the answer was simple – ‘They all know the same tunes’ – but our field work taught us that in fact they don’t all know the same tunes,” Dr. Becker said. “ Sometimes they do, but quite often they don’t. What happens then?

“Faulkner and I are both musicians (he plays trumpet and I play piano) and the book is based on field work (observation on the stand, for the most part) and interviews in Amherst, Massachusetts and in San Francisco.”

[Sally Booth](#), a former graduate research assistant with the ICASP project, is chairing the organizing committee of "Psychogeographies: The Terrain of Spectacle and Affect" conference to be held Nov. 7-8 at the University of Guelph. Information on the event is available at: [www.uoguelph.ca/~psychgeo](http://www.uoguelph.ca/~psychgeo)

Research collaborator [David Brackett](#) will speak at the plenary session of the joint American Musicological Society/Society for Music Theory annual meeting, on Nov. 8, 2008, in Nashville, Tenn. Dr. Brackett will discuss *Popular Music and the Canon*. Information on the event is available at: [www.ams-net.org/nashville](http://www.ams-net.org/nashville)

In July, research collaborator [Cecil Foster](#) received the 2008 John Porter Tradition of Excellence Book Prize for his work, *Blackness and Modernity: The Colour of Humanity and the Quest for Freedom*. The award, presented annually by the Canadian Sociological Association, recognizes work that advances sociological knowledge in Canada. It was created in 1980 to honour John Porter, one of Canada’s most important sociologists.

Dr. Foster, a sociology professor at the University of Guelph, says the book is about “inclusiveness, recognition, and the triumph of the human spirit.” He is considered one of Canada’s leading intellectuals on issues of race, culture,

citizenship, and immigration.

If you find yourself in Toronto between now and October 11, check out the *1926, 1977, 2007* exhibit by **Joel Herman**, at Diaz Contemporary, 100 Niagara Street. Herman, who was a graduate research assistant on the ICASP project, graduated with his MFA from the University of Guelph.

Through appropriation and transformation, Herman's work functions by displacing and reconsidering a diverse array of historical and artistic elements. His work stems from the notion that how we remember the past is always in flux. It is these changing views and shifts in attitudes that are the subject of his work. The body of work that he is showing at Diaz Contemporary deals specifically with examples of geometric abstraction from Modernist art and design.

For instance, using a 1926 letter stencil designed by Josef Albers, Herman created a series of abstracted plastic stencils, reconfiguring the geometric components of the design. In appropriating past artistic works and ideas, Herman's aim is to consider this material not as part of a resolved historical moment, but as something more fluid.

In another project on view, Herman used charcoal collected from a bonfire on the site of Donald Judd's abused sculpture project in Muenster. With this charcoal, he produced a suite of ten drawings that recreate a series of prints also by Judd. In this way, the strategy of appropriation that Herman is engaged with is not purely a critique of authorship but a strategy to consider a more complex relationship to the past.

On Saturday, Oct. 4, **Eric Lewis** will participate in a discussion/roundtable/performance on improvisation and community, as part of POP Montreal. On Nov. 12, he is participating in a one-day conference on improvisation and ethics at Columbia University, New York, (under George Lewis' leadership.) Dr. Lewis is the McGill site coordinator, an executive committee member, management team member, and co-investigator on the project.

**Tracy McMullen** wraps up her post-doctorate fellowship at the University of Guelph in October and returns to Berkeley, Calif. In January, she will begin lecturing in the Music department and in the Gender and Women's Studies Department at UC Berkeley.

Research collaborator **Pauline Oliveros** and her colleagues **Leaf Miller**, **Zevin Polzin**, and **Zane Van Dusen**, participated in the thisAbility vs. Disability electronic art exhibit that runs until August 30 in Seoul, Korea. <http://bsjeon.net/thisAbility/en/pauline.html>

They presented the Adaptive Use Musical Instruments project, in which software allows users to play a virtual keyboard by turning their heads a little bit left and/or right to activate the keys sequentially. At this stage of development it is possible to invent scalar stepwise melodies. The software has been successfully tested at Rehab Programs Inc. School in Poughkeepsie N.Y., in a weekly drum class developed by musician and occupational therapist Miller with technical assistance and programming by Van Dusen and Polzin.

Research collaborator **Winfried Siemerling** spent the summer as a visiting professor at the John F. Kennedy Institute in Berlin, lecturing on Canadian culture. His most recent book, *The New North American Studies: Culture, Writing, and the Politics of Re/Cognition*, is being translated into French for publication by the University of Laval Press.

As part of research collaborator **Alan Stanbridge's** current SSHRC-supported research project, he traveled to Istanbul in August for ICCPR 2008, the Fifth International Conference on Cultural Policy Research, where he presented *Spaces and Places: Contemporary Music, Performance Venues, and Cultural Policy*.

"The Promotion of Live Music in the UK: A Historical, Cultural and Institutional Analysis" – a research project coordinated by **Professor Simon Frith** of the University of Edinburgh, and of which Dr. Stanbridge is a member of the Advisory Board – was recently awarded a £310,000 grant from the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

Dr. Stanbridge is also hard at work on two writing projects: his book for Routledge, entitled *Rhythm Changes: The Discourses of Jazz*; and the main entry on jazz for Volume III of *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*.

Research collaborator **Jason Stanyek** was one of 27 people chosen from a pool of 350 applicants to be a fellow at the Stanford Humanities Center for the 2008-2009 academic year. Dr. Stanyek's research project is "Around the World Goes Around: Performing Brazilian Music and Dance in the United States."

This fall, research collaborator **Jesse Stewart** begins a tenure-track position at Carleton University in Ottawa. He will teach composition and theory through the music department, part of the School for Studies in Art and Culture.

In January, Dr. Stewart successfully defended his thesis "Call and Recall: Hybridity, Mobility, and Dialogue Between Jazz and Hip Hop Cultures," at the University of Guelph.

**Ellen Waterman** will be visiting scholar at the Centre for Research and Teaching at McGill University. While there she will be writing a book: *Sounds Provocative: Experimental Music Performance in Canada*, based on SSHRC-funded research she has been conducting since 2003 at 11 music festivals across the country. She will also be convening a meeting of the Improvisation, Gender, and the Body research team as part of research for *Sounding the Body: Improvisation, Representation, and Subjectivity*, the book she will be co-authoring with **Julie Dawn Smith**, outreach coordinator, management team member, and co-investigator with the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice project. This will be one of the five books to be produced from the research project, which will be published by Wesleyan University Press.