

Lex Non Scripta, Ars Non Scripta: Law Justice and Improvisation Conference
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McGill University

Keynote Address: Nicole Mitchell
Faculty of Law, McGill University

With Introductory Remarks by Ellen Waterman
University of Guelph

Introductory Remarks by Ellen Waterman

I hope everyone had a good lunch and after a stimulating morning session it's a pleasure to welcome you back to the afternoon of our Colloquium. My name's Ellen Waterman and I'm one of the executive members of the Improvisation, Community and Social Practice research project and when I'm having most pleasure, I'm a flutist.

It's my huge pleasure today to introduce my friend Nicole Mitchell this afternoon, who is a fellow flutist of an entirely taller order. As an influential creative flutist composer, improviser, band leader, teacher and arts advocate, Mitchell has made a significant impact on the world of improvised music, both on stage and behind the scenes, and in the community. Anthony Braxton calls Mitchell "the greatest flute player I have ever heard, bar none." It's no surprise that she has won accolades for her work, from *Downbeat* and from the *Jazz Journalist Association*, winning Jazz Flutist of the Year in 2008. And don't miss her concert tomorrow night, with the provocatively named trio *Truth or Dare*, with Shirazette Tinnin and Renee Baker at the Centro Gallego, which is just down the street. She's also going to give a free workshop on Saturday afternoon at one, at the Casa del Popolo.

Nicole Mitchell is a musician who has worked constantly as an advocate for women in creative music, for the wider tradition of great black music, and for the principle of empowering individuals to speak out. She has broken new ground for the instrument, creating a highly original voice on the whole range of flutes, for women in jazz in improvised music, for example she was the first woman leader to record for the famous, more than a half century old and obviously slow to catch up Delmark label, with her 'Black Earth Ensemble,' *Black Unstoppable*; and for women in great black music, as the first woman president of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. I think she is an entirely appropriate speaker to have at this conference. Please welcome Nicole Mitchell.

Keynote Address: Nicole Mitchell

First of all, I just want to give a big 'thanks' for the festival and for McGill University for putting this whole thing together and for Ellen for hosting me. And I'm

very excited to be here. [Is that a little better? I know my voice isn't the loudest.] I'm very, very happy to be back here. The first time I played, on this stage, actually, was in 2005. It's one of my favourite festivals. I think a festival run by musicians is really amazing, exciting thing. I actually wanted to—I'm just going to be, I'm going to go, I'm going to talk within my own style, which may not be so "academic" but hopefully you all can enjoy my thoughts and we can talk about them hopefully too. Throughout my talk, my style is that if you all have questions or thoughts that are coming up, I would like you to raise your hand and it can collaborate into discussion, which is maybe more of an improvisational way of doing this type of thing.

My work with the AACM, I definitely would like to talk about that, but first, I want to tell everyone happy June-teenth! Today is June 19th and in the U.S. what that represents is basically freedom day. This is the day in 1865 in Texas when troops came in to Galveston Texas and announced, through force, that yes, slavery is over. I thought that was actually a good thing to start with, because it's the idea of—well the law itself was created—the Emancipation Proclamation was written in 1863. It took 2 years for the word to really spread throughout the country, but also shows that we have our idea which is a law, but it also needs not only people to believe in it, but sometimes it needs to be supported and maybe enforced.

And so with this topic of *Law, Justice and Improvisation*, I want to speak of it in the context of African American history first of all, coming from the States, and just kind of play with some of these ideas and thoughts. For example, when I put in the same sentence 'law,' 'justice,' and 'black people,' at home, there's usually a kind of a feeling of uncomfortability and discontent. For example, the enslavement of black people was a legal system in the United States for over 200 years. I think all of us in this room agree that that was an unjust law. Most of us want to forget that even happened and to implement that, the police force—we really take this for granted—but the police was invented in the United States for the purpose of catching runaway slaves. Again, we have to think about these concepts and I just wanted to be a devil's advocate with the idea of law protecting... sometimes law can be something that implements injustice in these situations I'm describing. Another example from the 1900s through to the 1960s was segregation. This was a legal institution in the United States that physically separated people of colour from white people in a legal way. It was against the law for people to resist this idea.

There seems to be kind of a pendulum that swings between law and justice, the way I look at it. Legal change is usually inspired by human sacrifice, which comes from resistance. That thing that swings the pendulum is resistance, protest, fighting, and sometimes even war, in order to change law, to make it more just or to really protect more people. Just as hard as it is to put those terms, 'law' and 'black people,' together in the United States, it's very easy to put the name 'African American' and 'resistance,' because resistance of the law in the context of injustice are, historically, acts of liberation. For example, even though this might be seen as a natural negative, when black people were trying to escape slavery, they were resisting the law. When they were trying to learn how to read during slavery, that was breaking the law. They were breaking the law by getting

married to each other—that was against the law. Some of these laws were written, some were codes that were unwritten, but all of those things were punishable in an unbelievable way. So we think about Harriet Tubman, and white and black people that worked for the underground railroad—these people were breaking the law. We have to look at this idea of law and play with it. It's really something we use, it's really just a tool we can use for negative or positive things.

Now I might be saying or making the comment “okay, sometimes it's good to break the law,” but I'm not trying to incite a revolt or anything in this room, or say that laws are bad and we should have anarchy, or anything like that, but I just wanted to kind of bring to light some things we might take for granted sometimes. Because actually, when you look at the history of jazz music as well, you can kind of look at it as a history of breaking some laws. Basically, after slavery was abolished, black men really didn't have that many opportunities other than menial labour for work, and I say black men because it wasn't that many women that had the opportunity to actually go into this idea of being a travelling musician. There were some, but the majority of them were men, but I make that clear. This was a way they could control their own destiny: they could be leaders, they could make money, they could even have a little fame and really take their life into a really positive place of success through music. Music, in that sense, from the beginning, in American history, was a way of resisting and also a way of creating your own utopia in sound, where you couldn't have it in reality. Even though you might not have been able to be the head of some business or work for a corporation, music was an outlet.

In early jazz, it was against the law to drink alcohol, but jazz music was right there, thriving in that environment, in the illegal speakeasies. Actually in those days, people were breaking the law while they were listening to this sensual, swinging music. And actually, I was going to say that from that day on until now, we really can't separate jazz from counterculture. I think that's really where it started. No matter how many Cassandra Wilsons or Wynton Marsalises we have, jazz is still seen through a veil of mystery and naughtiness, per se... and also a resistance. From the beginning this music was kind of a resistance and you can look at it in the sense of breaking certain laws. It was against the law for black and white people to come together, but jazz again was bringing us together to socialize. Kid Ory and King Oliver, who were musicians, would invite white musicians to play in their band and they would invite white audiences to hear their music. This is something—they were really just trying to assert who they were as people and what they believed in, but they were also breaking the law. I'm dealing with this—I'm making it light, but another way we can say jazz broke the law is musically. Coming up with these notes in-between notes in the chromatic scale, bending notes, that was kind of breaking this concept of that chromatic scale and Western music and what was defined as music and saying “no, this is music too.” Just the idea of practicing your own culture if it's exposed to the mainstream, I think is kind of a certain resistance to whatever is established... and that establishment being considered law.

The idea of Bessie Smith singing loud and honest about her lyrics, about her lifestyle, about men, about sex, at a time of very, very strict religious culture in

Christianity, that was, in a sense, breaking some type of cultural laws. I'm just throwing these examples out. Another example would be Sidney Bechet playing the soprano saxophone in a way that classical saxophone had never been heard. All of these examples were the idea of breaking law, but honestly I think people were just trying to get their little bit of justice. They were trying to get their r-e-s-p-e-c-t that Aretha Franklin talked about. That's all they were really trying to do.

The law –its kind of a moveable thing. Okay, so I've made laws look bad, I've put a little bit of dirt on them, but we know they're neutral things and we use them, really, to create order for our community. We use them for a positive outcome, that's really the purpose of why we have our laws. We have to have an awareness of what these things are in order not to be punished by them. They're basically things that we create that we make ourselves accountable to, and in a sense we revere.

I just wanted to show that law can be both used to implement justice and it can be used to hinder justice. That human element really has to be there in order for it to be humane. I've also shown that there is a precarious historical relationship between the law and African American people, but I want to give a few positive examples of African American people and the law too. I guess my most magnificent example all of you know is Barack Obama using the political system to become president. I think that, for a lot of people of colour, restored their faith in the legal system. That "okay, maybe it can work for us, maybe we can achieve success" in a system where they're constantly being told that "no, you cannot achieve success," where their environment may be telling them that. That they could see Barack Obama, just the actual image, not necessarily what he's done or what he's doing, but the fact that he made it to that point made a huge statement throughout the United States for people of colour that "hey, anything really is possible for all of us." And this man is a professor of law. He really made a really strong statement by utilizing the system in a positive way.

Me being the president of the AACM, my main talk about an example of using law for force is going to be the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. This is an organization, a collective of musicians, that decided, "hey, we can create a non-profit organization that can benefit us as a collective, we can create our own type of smaller, insular, utopian-like society, within the outer society that can fulfil some of these needs that we're not getting as individuals and we can use the system in order to do that and to support that." Actually, the context of the AACM—we'll have to go back to 1965 when the organization was founded. I think a lot of you were already aware of the organization. The context was an environment, South Side Chicago, it's actually where my mother was born and raised, and she's of the same generation of a lot of the founders of the AACM, like Muhal Richard Abrams for example and just a few years, real close to Fred Anderson and Leroy Jenkins, who passed recently. This idea of starting a non-profit, or starting an institution, or institution-building didn't come out of just these musicians walking around and saying "oh, let's make a non-profit," but really the whole environment was really fertile for institution building and there were several institutions along with the AACM that came out of the same time period. For example, there was the DuSable Museum of African American History, Third World Press, which is the oldest

African American book publisher in the United States, ETA Creative Arts Theatre, and Muntu Dance Theatre, which is an African dance theatre. These are just examples outside of the AACM that, around the same time period, people came together and had the self-initiative to create these institutions.

The environment of the South Side in that time, of course, I was born shortly after that, so I was there, but it was a little different than it is now. I currently live in same environment years later, but back then, when I hear people talk, schools lacked resources, they were segregated, but the teachers told the students “it doesn’t matter that you don’t have all the books you need, or that maybe your desk is broken, or that maybe you’ve got to wear your coat in the room because the heat isn’t on, but you still can achieve anything that you wish to achieve. You have it in here [points to head] and you have it in here, [points to heart], you can do it.” I really think that made a huge difference. Also, the neighbourhoods that children lived in had parents that looked after all the kids in the neighbourhood. This was the environment of this time period during segregation and this is the environment that fostered these musicians coming up and creating the AACM. I just wanted to make that known because later I’ll contrast it to the same environment now and the relationship the AACM has to the community where it evolved from and how we question what is it that we can really do to make a positive impact as a collective of musicians who revere improvisation.

I talked a little bit about the environment and I also wanted to make a connection—during this time period, this is before there were magnet schools and integrated schools, so this is a little bit before the time Michelle Obama actually grew up, in the same area, and was able to get the opportunity to go to Whitney Young high school, which was one of the first Magnet schools in Chicago, which gave her the real tools to be able to go on to a very successful academic career as a young person. There was still that spirit of community and the AACM, as a group of musicians; they were also affected by certain taxes and policies in the city that limited their ability to perform... The cabaret tax, which if you had more than three people, the club owner had to pay a lot of extra money... and the fact that these clubs wanted to hear this same music that was already successful and not any new challenging music. The AACM, these musicians, they wanted to make their own projects and they wanted to get outside of, in a sense, the counterculture that was already invented and create their own, their own alternative culture, which was more focused on concert making, respect, integrity, raising the integrity of musicians out of this culture that had already been saturated with the concept of jazz, the negative overtones of being a jazz musician, and also because they considered themselves composers and they wanted to develop their music to the highest level. They also wanted to provide musical opportunities for young people, where the environment did not necessarily have music programs in the public schools and still to this day lacks arts programs in the schools. The main goals of these musicians were to foster development and growth and to create an intergenerational community where there was a lot of mentorship between elders and younger people and myself, I feel like that’s the strongest aspect of AACM to this day, is the idea of community and family between the musicians, and the fact that they can not learn from each other, but that older people can

learn from the youth and the youth can learn from the elders in a musical environment that you don't necessarily have, just playing, just trying to learn the music on your own, or necessarily in the academic environment—it's very different. Because there's a lot more playing together and there's a lot more personal relationships in the collective, it also created a society with an aesthetic toward originality and individuality.

I thought about the AACM—a lot of people ask what it's like from the inside—and I came up with this list of “unspoken laws” of the AACM. These are things that nobody has written down, or that you have to follow, or there will be a huge punishment if you don't follow them, but it's kind of just understood. For example, I would say number one: (not that these are even in order, but...) number one would be: don't judge someone else's expression. Basically, “oh, that's cool that you're doing that,” “oh, I'm going to come to your concert, that was great.” You really support the efforts and no one is really saying “that's not AACM,” or “what are you doing?” or “you need to do this.” There's not the type of critical judging of someone else's art, but just the real—more of a critique saying “are you creating?” “why aren't you doing anything?” “why don't you have a project?” “you need to do something.”

Different ideas—I guess number two would be that different ideas, originality, are cool. It's cool, they don't have to have any relationship. This whole room, if you were all musicians, if each person's thing is completely different, no matter if yours was just like smooth jazz or something, nobody's going to say “what are you doing that smooth jazz for? That's not AACM!” it's okay, no matter what it is. I think that there's kind of this preconceived notion about AACM that everything has to be pushing the envelope and challenging and strange and these terms that come at us. Actually, a lot of members do things that really would fit more into a traditional concept of jazz, but that's okay, everybody's got their own thing.

You forgive those that do wrong. I think that—this is number three—I've never seen a group of people more forgiving for mistakes or people doing things that might hurt someone else, like “oh man, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to do that,” and it's just forgotten and you just move on and there's not a lot of big consequences or backbiting or anything like that.

Develop yourself to your fullest musical potential. That's something that is, I think always in the forefront of people's minds.

Know the tradition and play beyond it, which is something that might not necessarily be known outside, that people in the AACM actually think and talk about that, but the elders have always—it's stressed on the young people. You've got to know the tradition, don't just do the outside stuff, or do your exploration and not explore all of it. They really encourage people to explore the full tradition as well as finding their own language.

A big one too—I have number six—is you have to be a leader in the music to be a leader in the organization. Those that take the leadership most in the organization, if they're not up there leading their own groups and really doing things musically, then nobody's going to vote for them. That's a really important thing, because really, in the end, it's all about the music, more than anything else.

Number seven: once in the family, always in the family. Some people have resigned from the organization, some people supposedly were kicked out of the organization before I was around, but everybody says “oh, he’s AACM, she’s AACM,” – it’s kind of like a branding. You’re in? You’re in and that’s it. So hopefully you don’t mind. Actually my husband quit the organization two years after he joined and people are still calling him AACM and he just can’t get away from it.

Number eight: if you aren’t getting what you want, give more. Instead of complaining about, “I’m not on this gig,” or “what is the AACM doing for me?” well, you better put some time in because the other rule here is:

...volunteering is key. Serve others, serve the organization. The organization from [its start] until this moment—it’s almost 45 years old. Almost, probably, 99% of the work is done volunteer, whether it’s teaching in school, whether it’s writing grants, whether it’s, sometimes, performing. A lot of it is done volunteer, which is a 70’s concept that somehow we’ve held on to all this time.

Number ten: if you play well, then members will listen to you. If you got these ideas, but you’re not on your form, forget it, they’re not going to listen.

If you want to get in to the organization, be around and be serious about your music. A lot of people [ask] “well, how come I’m not in the AACM?” or “nobody asked me to be in the AACM,” but if they weren’t around and coming to concerts and meeting people and playing with members, it just doesn’t happen.

The hardest workers get on the gig. I think I brought that up before...

This one is not necessarily a good thing, but I’m being honest: administrators are a rip-off. People do not like bringing someone in that’s being paid to do work for the organization because everybody’s doing volunteer work and for some reason it just won’t work for us, we’ve tried and tried and tried. And I think administrators are a good idea, but this is a reality of our unspoken law.

Everyone should be a leader—if you’re not, get up and try.

The better you play the more respect you get.

If you can’t get along with somebody, be quiet and play, it’s all worked out in the music. If you’re having interpersonal problems in the group, just work it out. I’ll see people doing duos—I’ll talk about some inter-organizational things, but in the Great Black Music Ensemble if two people are having an issue, they might end up doing an improvised duo in the concert, and at the end everything’s great and fine and they worked it all out musically.

Nineteen is love yourself. There’s always been a very strong focus on self-love, because how could you love other people if you don’t care about yourself.

Just overall, all the time, the mantra is be creative. Just keep creating, as much as possible. So that’s kind of the unspoken laws within the organization that keep us together, keep us moving forward.

I know that a lot of people wondered, “well, this is 2009, we know about all these famous people that are in their seventies now, or their sixties, but what is the AACM really doing now, in 2009, in Chicago? What’s the context? What are people really doing? I wanted to just say a few things to hopefully fulfil that curiosity, if it’s here. It’s

a very intergenerational collective, where now you have people from your twenties to your seventies, so it's a huge range of ages of people that are improvising together, that are performing each other's music, and organizing activities. So it's basically still a family. And active in Chicago's about thirty people that work for the organization and through these relationships, they've definitely grown over the years, and as friends, conversing, meeting, travelling, I think basically that the biggest, to me, the biggest strength and beauty is that intergenerational connection. The core of that is this large ensemble. Muhal Richard Abrams started an experimental band before the organization was even started and a continuation of that is the Great Black Music Ensemble. Great Black Music is a concept invented by the Art Ensemble of Chicago celebrating, in Sunrise terms, ancient to future in music. This ensemble serves a function to unify members and also to make it possible for people to experiment with their music. Everyone is invited to bring their compositions and to improvise in the ensemble and other people come in that aren't members, so it's a chance if people are interested in becoming a member they can come and play in the ensemble. We play regularly, twice a month, we rehearse once a week, so this is a very, it's almost like church in a way, it's a very regular event. I think it's really at the heart of the organization now, because it helps us to connect with each other and to get along.

Now, we also do concert series, we've done performances internationally, but it's very important for us to do concert series throughout Chicago and that's pretty obvious of being something that we would do, but I guess there's also questions about the AACM school. I think the AACM school's history has changed a lot over the years—we really just try to meet the needs of the musicians wanting to learn how to play an instrument – no matter what age people are, people from all over the city just come to learn an instrument. Now the organization is in an interesting place because at this moment, I have become the oldest person on the board. The board membership has completely shifted from an elder membership on the board to a younger board, which is a huge transition for the organization, but hopefully will ensure it going into the future. –and I didn't get that many interjections from you guys, [laughter] so I hope you're going to have some questions or thoughts when I finish.

I guess the big question that we're facing now as we have this new board and we're approaching our 45th anniversary is how do we—this goes back to the improvisation aspect of the topic—is with improvisation, how do we make a positive impact on our neighbouring community, which is basically a community in crisis? Now, I drew allusions to what the environment of the South Side Chicago was when the AACM was started, but that picture is kind of different now. Post integration. There is less diversity on the South Side of Chicago, actually, and when I talk about diversity I talk about economic diversity. Now you have—and I can speak on the neighbourhood that I live in, and I live on the corner of Pullman and Roseland, which is in what they call the Wild District, like the Wild Wild West? They call it the Wild District, for a reason. This concept that I know everyone is aware of, of violence and drugs in the black community—how can we as musicians or as improvisers or this 45 year-old organization make some type of positive impact on the community that's basically in crisis? I work in

the public schools, I do residencies in elementary schools in my neighbourhood and surrounding neighbourhoods, where I'm in the room with fourth graders that can't read, or I've got kids that are screaming and can't control themselves during class and the teachers completely have no idea how to control their class to be focused enough to really learn anything. What can we do as improvisers to somehow offer some developmental life skills?

This is a question that I don't want to say I have all the answers to because I think it's something that we, in this community, as people that address this concept of improvisation and social practice and the idea that it can be transformative, how can improvisation, at this time, make a difference in, like I said, in communities that are in crisis? Like I described the development of jazz in the past and how that music itself was meeting some need of people and through the career of music and even through participation in music it was creating what I was calling a resistance of a negative environment. How can music now do that? What I'm trying to do in my neighbourhood—there are no musical venues whatsoever, no cafés—there's basically liquor stores, Laundromats, a lot of churches, a public library, a park district building and maybe one or two restaurants, and a lot of dollar stores, in my neighbourhood—no places for people to congregate, for young people that's a safe environment to come together, no performance venues for a few miles, so in my neighbourhood there are houses, there's apartments, there are people—there's a little bit of a mixed income—but the social piece about where do you come together and listen to some music or talk over some coffee or exhale – how do we find ways of doing that? What I'm trying to do is, I'm creating a concert series in my park district and what I really want to do is actually bring together some women in the community to write some lyrics, some songs, addressing whatever it is that they feel is important, and then to have a performance where they perform and then a professional ensemble performs, but it's a place for people to come together and possibly a group of young musicians that I'm working with at a high school nearby. That's one model, but I think that because the improvised music scene is an economically depressed scene, that most improvisers don't have the money to say, open up a place, so that they could create this utopian environment that could transform their neighbourhood. So of course, we go back to this collective idea: we have to be able to come together as a collective of people to be able to do that, but even now with the economic climate of losing funding, like the arts funding going down, that's a serious challenge.

It's kind of like I'm leaving you guys with a question. How can we really address these problems? I can describe personal experiences, like for example, my husband teaches at a high school which was really one of the most famous high schools in Chicago for musicians coming out of there, a lot of famous jazz musicians; and DuSable high school: Captain Walter Dyett used to teach there and a lot of AACM founders came out of there, for example. At his school, during graduation a few weeks ago, there were some students sitting in a car outside of the school and some other boys ran up and started shooting into the car and one child was killed and the other one ran into the school and ended up being hospitalized. When people hear that story, why do they say “well, yeah, that's really too bad, that could've happened anywhere” or “that's Chicago” or

“well you can’t really get away from it?” That’s not okay. That’s not acceptable. We have laws against this, but are they being enforced? We have laws against drugs. When I was living two blocks from the University of Chicago there was someone dealing drugs in front of my house, next door, standing outside all day long. The police would drive by, they would stop and chat with the guy, but I thought that was against the law. You know what I’m saying? How do we address these things ourselves and resist the negative environment in order to create a more humane society? Is this possible? Can we do it? What are the different ideas of things we can come up with? This is what we as a new board are trying to question ourselves about, evaluate and try to come up with some ideas, but I wanted to bring it to you all as well, so that maybe we could talk about it or you have ideas or you can go to your own communities and try to address those types of things. So that’s my... statement... [Applause.] Does anybody have anything they wanted to say or questions?

Question and Answer Period

Question: Actually yeah, I was really struck by what you were describing—this whole—how to creatively address the kinds of problems you’ve encountered in your neighbourhood. I live in Chicago and I teach in the South suburbs down in Romeoville -

NM: okay!

Q: ...and one of the things that I find is—it’s not a terribly racially diverse school—and one of things I’ve really been noticing post-election is a lot of these middle-class republican white kids come in and they’ve got this “oh! Obama!

NM: It’s over now!

Q: ...Everything’s great now!” and they’re so unaware of the history and they’re so unaware of the realities that go on in other parts of their city. I guess, if I knew as little as they did, maybe that view would make sense to me too. And what I find that a lot of the African American students in my classes seem more or less to accept the same kind of view with I think, maybe, a lot more contextual evidence at their disposal, and so one of the things that I was really struck by was when you started out you said something to the effect of “nobody really wants to remember slavery” and I can totally understand that, but on the other hand it seems like that sort of violates one of the AACM rules, right? You know, know the tradition and go beyond it?

NM: Exactly.

Q: If you don’t know what the communities had to do to survive back then, then in a sense you’re deprived of a whole host of strategies now, right? So for instance one of the things I was thinking about when you were talking about spaces—why not the churches?

Why not take them over on Saturday nights? And again, this is sort of from the University that I teach at, it's a Catholic space and most of our performances go on at the chapel, which sounds really "oh my god, why would you want to go into a church..." but it's actually a really cool place. It really lends itself to that kind of subversion. So what do you think, would that work?

NM: I think it's a great idea. I actually had a hard time deciding for my concert series--called *Harambee*, which means "to bring people together"—deciding between the public library, which has a little performance space, which might also bring people to the library, the park district and there's probably, I can count probably 18 churches in the circumference of 6 blocks, or something, I mean it's crazy. Sometimes it'll be three churches, one after another, or all on the same block. I think the church idea is a great idea. One thing that's interesting to me too in the environment that I'm talking about or the neighbourhoods that I'm talking about—when there are cafés or little venues or restaurants, me and some of my friends have approached these places to do music, and they say "you do jazz and what else? You sing, or...? Jazz?" Nobody wants to hear that now, you know what I mean? It's an interesting thing. I think the church idea, I think it could be good, the only problem is the conservatism that sometimes happens in a lot of churches. When we're dealing with improvised music, I think there's definitely, there's an empathy with jazz, but what we're dealing with is more challenging music and improvised music, which I think that young people actually really embrace when they're exposed to it. Sometimes there's a conservatism, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't try and that doesn't mean that it's not an option because each one has a different set of people with different ideas and there's so many of them, why not? Why not try? I think it's a good option to try.

Question: I was fascinated by your list of points about your "normative system"

NM: Unwritten law!

Q: Yeah, because it has all of the attributes of other law in the sense that some are overlapping some are coherent, some necessarily aren't coherent, some might be just, and as you pointed out, some might even not be just or efficient or whatever. The question I want to ask is... you didn't tell us how it's enforced. You mentioned that at the outset, and take this as a compliment, but I don't really see you as the police.

NM: Well actually, those laws are not enforced in any "legal way." It's more in a club type of way. You know, where you're in a group of people and this is cool and this is not cool, then it's like a social pressure thing, it's more like that type of thing. Like, "you're not creating, what's wrong with you?" It's not enforced, like okay, you're going to be kicked out because you haven't composed anything in three years, it's not like that.

Q: The social pressure can still be quite strong though, right?

NM: Yeah, social pressure is basically how it is. That was a good question.

Question: Thank you so much for your presentation Nicole. I just want to pick up on David's point. What really struck me is what I suppose underrecognizes, is some ways unique about the AACM, is how it varies self-consciously and figured itself around using laws and rules in this way to create a better space within a less egalitarian space. You talked about that... and say George Lewis' account of the founding meeting, hours are spent purely establishing laws and rules. What are the monthly dues? What percentage of the band has to be AACM members, you know?

NM: Right.

Q: And then of course in the beginning, that point that laws can be used as forces of good or forces of evil, and then there are the unwritten laws. I'm wondering if there is any debate in the AACM about whether that could be one of the sources of the problem? Whether there should be a rejection in a wholesale way of attempting to use laws and rules, recognizing the sort of, ambivalent role they can play as forces of good and forces of evil.

NM: You say the rejection of the unwritten laws, or the rejection of the bylaws?

Q: Any and all of them. Is there any discourse that maybe the problem is with rules or laws per se? Not necessarily these ones, but just the notion of having an organization figure itself around perhaps a flexible set of rules or laws, but there are bylaws as you say.

NM: Yeah, and I didn't bring it up, but we do have bylaws. And actually, the question of problems, there being a problem with laws, has come up. The solution has been to revise the laws, not to throw them out. In order to stay relevant after so many years, which actually the last time our bylaws were revised was '93, so they're revised to be the current reality. We've never thought about throwing them out.

Q: So there's an ongoing commitment to really be rule-driven?

NM: I guess so. But those types of rules aren't on the music at all. They don't have anything to do with the music. The just more have to do with how an organization is run, and other roles you can take, because basically everyone is taking a double role. Everyone in the organization is a musician. We don't have people that are members that are really good at writing grants that don't play music. They have to play music and they just have to be good at writing grants too. If that's what the written rules are, I guess I should add that, because that's not written anywhere, but that's just a fact.

Question: I think just a related question around musicianship and what it might mean to you, where it's a young musician, or a young person in general, you might want to draw into what you're doing and thereby bring about that sort of social change. Where do you, as a group or as individuals situate the kind of technological changes that are happening with the youth around music making, whether it's [inaudible], or just generally a technological kind of approach to music-making. [Inaudible content.]

NM: I think that's kind of where we're headed. Now that... we have a lot of younger members that came in in 2005. That's really crucial to being relevant, to be relevant to even what you're talking about, to things that are happening musically outside of acoustic instrumentation. To this moment, we don't really have, just very few members that utilize the electronic music, but I think that's the directive—we're going to have to—I think we should be inclusive of that. Because now that there's more younger people involved that that pushes the weight near the way, because as a collective, if you're one person and you think this and everyone else thinks that, well it's not going to go that way.

Ellen Waterman: Well I think you're incredible. Thank you so much Nicole for giving us this insider view. [Applause.]