

University of Guelph – College of Arts
Summer Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation
August 5-17, 2019

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Course: IMPR*6040 Summer Institute in Critical Studies in Improvisation (0.5 credit) may count toward an elective for the Critical Studies in Improvisation MA and PhD programs degree requirements.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

As a form of creative expression, improvisation can invite an attitude of critical awareness towards received knowledge and an ethic of deep empathy with alternative voices. As a framework for communication and interaction, it allows for group participation in the creation of new forms of knowledge, providing strong support for experiential learning and co-creation. As a model of social practice, improvisation can encourage us to see (and to hear) the world anew: it has much to teach us about vernacular cultures, about the situated knowledges of communities, and about our understanding of the spaces we inhabit, the places where we live, work, and play.

The Summer Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation, running for two weeks in August 2019, provides graduate students with the opportunity to work in a rich, collaborative environment fueled by the motivating interactions of leading practitioners and scholars in the field. Students will workshop and discuss their individual improvisation-themed research and creative projects, and engage actively, and across multiple platforms, with regional arts organizations, ongoing arts festivals, and artists, in a learner-centered environment of mutual support and knowledge-sharing.

In the first week of the Summer Institute, students will convene in the village of Coin-du-Banc for a practice- and workshop-based course of study in conjunction with the Musical Improvisation at Land's End / Coin-du-Banc en folie research-outreach initiative. Through being embedded in the village of Coin-du-Banc during this phase of the Institute, students will have the opportunity to interact closely with local residents and partner organizations, and to reflect on the role that improvisation can play in building and articulating community. Marianne Trudel, the noted Montreal-based pianist, composer, improviser and arranger, will lead the session. With its relatively unrestricted, practice-based approach, the first week of the Institute is designed to encourage experimentation, cocreative brainstorming, and a focus on applied improvisational skills development.

In the second week, lectures and workshops will be held at the Villa Frederick-James in nearby Percé; here, students will participate in a more structured academic program of study team-taught by several of the leading scholars in the field, including Jim Harley, Ajay Heble, Daniel Fischlin, and Frédérique Arroyas from the University of Guelph; Rebecca Caines, University of Regina; Ellen Waterman and Jesse Stewart from Carleton University; Kevin McNeilly, University of British Columbia; and Eric Lewis, McGill University. Students will participate in daily modules on important topics in the field, each led by one of the core instructors (see below for details about the planned modules). In addition, students will participate in research studio sessions that provide an opportunity for them to present and solicit input regarding their graduate research

projects.

Throughout the two weeks, supplementary workshops will be led by artists drawn from around the Gaspésie, including Kathy Kennedy (deep listening); John Michaud (painting, sculpture); and Robin Servant (sound processing and diffusion). Each student will also be asked to work, with the support of faculty mentors, on a project for colloquium presentation, and a scholarly essay, potentially for publication in a special issue of the journal *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Études critiques en improvisation*. Participants who are also entering students in the IMPR graduate program at the University of Guelph will also be asked to reflect on their experiences in the core *Commonplace Book* that is a foundational creative and evaluative tool in the new program.

EVALUATION:

Summer Institute colloquium presentation (worth 40% of total grade)

All Summer Institute participants (including students taking the course for credit, those auditing the course, and faculty mentors) are asked to take part in the planning and realization of collaborative colloquium presentations that will take place on Friday August 16, 2019, between 2pm and 5pm. The form and content of the presentations will depend to a considerable extent on the interests and proficiencies of the members of the group. Some summer institute participants may wish to create textual, theatrical, musical, filmic, kinaesthetic, and/or artistic responses to their experiences at the Summer Institute. Some may wish to present individually, others in groups. We will endeavour to weave all of these components together to showcase the interests and experiences of all participants.

Students are asked to include an evaluation of their colloquium presentation, suggesting a grade and providing a rationale for their self-evaluation. The self evaluations should be 2 to 3 typewritten pages. They are due August 20 2019, and should be submitted to the course coordinator via email (farroyas@uoguelph.ca).

Essay (worth 60% of total grade)

Summer institute participants who are taking the course for credit are asked to submit an essay that examines and/or theorizes some form of improvisatory arts practice in relation to their research interests. Essays should be roughly 4000 to 5000 words (16 to 20 double-spaced typewritten pages) plus a list of works cited.

Essays are due September 15, 2019, and should be submitted to the course coordinator via email (farroyas@uoguelph.ca). The grade will be determined by two IICSI faculty selected for their field of expertise.

Week 2 Seminars

Improvisation, Interdisciplinarity, Situated Knowledge(s) (Daniel Fischlin)

In this module, we will cover ideas that align improvisatory musicking and co-creative practices with emergent interdisciplinary models, with an examination of the ethics of engaging in heterodox approaches to the ecology of knowledges. Readings of key scholars would be aligned with specific cross-cultural improvisatory practices as productive sites that model how epistemic shifts can be enacted in interdisciplinary contexts. Core to the module will be an examination of situated knowledges that arise from improvisatory practices in specific sites around the globe.

Mapping the Ecology of Improvised Music Performance in Canada (Ellen Waterman)

Through a discussion of case studies of improvised music in the Canadian context, this module applies theories of ecology to research on improvisation. An ecological approach to improvisation asks us to consider both how people participate and what factors (of place, space, identity, ability, resources etc.) enable or constrain their participation. At stake are larger issues of diversity, inclusion, and decolonization that are at the centre of our national conversation today.

Improvising Identity: Jeanne Lee and Anti-Essentialist Singing (Eric Lewis)

Focusing on Jeanne Lee, we will discuss the ways in which black women singers have contested essentialist constructions of their identity via sung improvised performance, and more generally performed anti-essentialism. Students will learn methods for listening to performances as sites for identity contestation, as well as some of the challenges inherent in doing so.

Global Approaches to Socially-Engaged Improvisation (Rebecca Caines and Jesse Stewart)

This hybrid module will investigate socially-engaged and community-based models for art and social change, with a focus on improvisatory practices. Students will engage with key scholarly and artistic research techniques, models, theories and ethical frameworks in this area. The module will focus on a range of global case studies and will include applied creative exercises.

Human-Computer Interactivity (James Harley)

What does interactivity/improvisation mean in connection to machines? In this workshop, we will explore pioneering work by George Lewis, Robert Rowe and others, discussing issues of perception, learning, interaction, creativity. In the process, we will engage with the question of how concepts of place and space overlap with and are informed by these themes.

Improvising in a Silent Way (Ajay Heble)

This module will focus on the key pedagogical role played by silence in jazz and creative improvised music. What does it mean to study (and to practice) silence when making improvised music, and what are the social and pedagogical implications?

The Poetics of Listening (Kevin McNeilly)

Listening is more than creative practice; at its best, listening involves cultivating and embodying a carefully situated attentiveness to the co-presences of others (whether human or animal or material), an ecology of enmeshment that musicians, poets and thinkers (from Pauline Oliveros to Jean-Luc Nancy to Fred Moten) have variously characterized as "attendance," "opening," "closeness," or "study." In this two-hour module, participants will begin to develop and to experiment with a nascent openness to haptic and acoustic place.

Storytelling and Improvisation (Frederique Arroyas)

This module will deepen our understanding of and experience with storytelling, first as conduit

for self-expression and personal development and second by developing critical understanding of 'voice' and the role of listening. Students will participate in storytelling exercises using storyboarding and retelling techniques, allowing them to reflect on issues of relational dynamics, creativity, and collaboration. Examining the craft of various storytellers will also allow us to focus on the ways in which storytelling is often anchored in vernacular culture, offering a window into the spaces we inhabit.