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Doing Spontaneity

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DOING SPONTANEITY

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A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Department of Communication Studies
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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

DOING SPONTANEITY

By

Nicolas J. Zaunbrecher

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

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in the field of Communication Studies

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

NICOLAS J. ZAUNBRECHER, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in COMMUNICATION STUDIES, presented on April 1, 2016, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: DOING SPONTANEITY

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Nathan Stucky

This dissertation considers the rhetorical use of the term "spontaneity" and action affiliated with it from the perspective of ethnomethodology, as a dynamic social practice emergent from concrete interactions among people. I first consider a variety of existing operationalizations of "spontaneity" in academic research from the perspective of what is ethnomethodologically accomplished by these operationalizations, i.e., what questions do they answer or attempt to answer? I then turn to a detailed rhetorical analysis of the term "spontaneity" as an ideograph in improvisational theatre, a social practice in which enactment of spontaneity is treated as criterial to identity and recognition of the practice. In this ideographic analysis, I consider both a set of popular improv method texts and a collection of interviews with improviers who relate narratives about their experiences or observations of spontaneity. I assess the rhetorical practices in these artifacts both through the operationalization framework I identify and from a critical perspective, asking how practices of spontaneity in improv relate to social structures and practices of privilege, oppression and power.

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Lauren, who drove me up to Carbondale for my very first day, and watched me write the last sentence of this dissertation, and a lot more in there too.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation identifies "spontaneity" as a term used with reference to a wide variety of

divergent concepts and practices which are nonetheless unified in English-language culture

through shared use of the term. The term "spontaneity" and its associations are also commonly

value-laden in cultural practices, and used to rhetorically constrain and justify applications and

structures of power. In the following pages, I view "spontaneity" through the lens of

ethnomethodology, with emphasis on the ways that the term "spontaneity" and concepts/values

associated with it are actually *used* in social rhetorical practices. In particular, I analyze the use

of "spontaneity" in the rhetoric of improvisational theatre, a practice where orientation to

"spontaneity" is foundational to practitioners' recognition of themselves as engaged in the

practice at all.

Sooooo….

What is spontaneity? And what difference does it make?

Well, kinda depends what you mean.

Spontaneity is extraordinary. The spark that lights off a revolution in thought or society

emerges spontaneously, out of nowhere, unpredictably. Perhaps it comes of an act of individual

or collective will, a profound choice that changes the world forever. Or perhaps it was

inevitable; the push of the material world or the press of history made it so it had to happen. But

if it was spontaneous, you definitely didn't see it coming, at least not in this particular place,

moment, or way. It surprises you. It means change. It means creation. It means uncharted

territory. It is thrilling. Life began spontaneously in some molecular brew. People spend their

lives seeking spontaneity, those rare opportunities to escape the strictures of society, or their own rut of habits, and let their true selves shine through. Scientific luminaries have their signature insights in sudden, spontaneous moments (usually after deep immersion in a subject of research). Legendary artists create their best work in the throes of spontaneous inspiration. Taoist spiritual masters seek to live every aspect of their lives spontaneously, finding and doing the good by letting things happen instead of forcing them. We crave spontaneity, and when recollecting our most fond memories, most people will emphasize the pleasure of life's spontaneous moments far in excess over what they remember as expected and deliberate. Spontaneity is special and precious.

Spontaneity is ordinary. It is so commonplace as to be pervasive and forgettable. Though we turn on the stove and wait expectantly, we are pleasantly surprised at the particular moment a pot of water spontaneously breaks into a boil. Plants spontaneously grow back after dying in the winter or being ripped up. After settling in, you whisk every day around the corners of your home without barking your shins, spontaneously, automatically, usually without even noticing how expertly you do it. We talk with strangers and loved ones and express ourselves, spontaneously ad libbing as we create everyday conversation together without knowing what we're going to do. We dance. We make choices, plenty of which are authentic and true to ourselves. We feel the spark of inspiration almost every day, however often constrained from/ignorant of how/choosing not to act on it. We live in society, connected with countless others in unfathomably intricate ways, and more or less manage to figure out how all to be together and move forward and live our lives. It's always happening all the time.

Overall, we like spontaneity, and we want more of it. Too much can be risky, of course; the free spirit's other side is the loose cannon. But on the whole, if you've got spontaneity you've got

something good. You're being yourself. Or what you should be. Or you're free to do what you want. Or you know what you need to do. Or at minimum, that you're touching that ethereal but invigorating liminal space where you don't know what's going to happen next. It seems like the privileged get to have all the fun, get to live spontaneously at the cost of restricting the spontaneity of others. On the other hand, some might say that anyone who has lived spontaneously, in any walk of life, is the one who is truly rich. We have a grudging, perverse admiration for the spontaneity we see in even heinous acts, if they are inspired and effective— just think of your favorite slick movie villains and what they can get away with. And then, when you think of it that way, there's a lot to be said for safety, predictability, and control; we might even argue that they form the social grounding that makes spontaneity possible, or gives spontaneity its value for those who value it. But certainly, spontaneity *is* valued, and we have all manner of rituals, practices, and attitudinal stances seeking to enable or enhance it. It is also dangerous, such that we have all sorts of laws, customs, and norms used to channel, restrict, or discredit what is considered spontaneous.

Spontaneity is slippery. All thrown together, this array of associations seems bewildering. The examples in turn involve free will and inevitable processes; preciousness and pervasiveness; control and letting go; individuals and societies; a status valued and prized but also feared, and in principle accessible to all. But in all of them we can recognize "spontaneity" as a background that makes perfect sense in connection with the example. Concepts of spontaneity connect with so many, and so varied, other instances and concepts that addressing a question of "what is spontaneity?" would seem perturbingly daunting at best. It implies that we should be able to recognize something coherent across all these instances of spontaneity, identify and describe it, and apply that description as an interpretive frame to events insofar as they do or do not, or to

what degree, exhibit this common "spontaneity." The question may not be overwhelming so much as meaningless. Spontaneity doesn't seem to work that way.

Considering just spontaneity in human behavior, two general cases immediately trouble any realist "what" account of spontaneity: Faking it and making it. People can pretend to be spontaneous, purposefully executing actions and behaviors with the intent of seeming spontaneous, where the perceived spontaneity of their actions is essential to how they want others to interpret it. The carefully prepared material to be casually tossed off by a public figure giving an off-the-cuff interview. The earnest playing along of the honoree who's been expecting a surprise birthday party. A "sudden" expression of overwhelming emotion to address a long-standing issue in a relationship. In all these cases, social actors deploy codes intended to be read as spontaneous, to reap benefits from having their behavior interpreted as such. To some degree they succeed, and their actions are treated as spontaneous by relevant others for all intents and purposes of the evaluational heuristic for spontaneity applied. There are prices for failure, to be seen as trying to affect spontaneity when knowingly being non-spontaneous—the public figure is subjected to media ridicule; the honoree's guests are disappointed; trust is undermined. All these cases "work" as they do because parties involved treat spontaneity as something real and valuable. But they also treat spontaneity as a communicative practice for organizing and evaluating meaning in social behavior. The *expression* of spontaneity is in many ways more important for social purposes than the "objective legitimacy" of behavior as spontaneous: "Couldn't you have at least pretended to be surprised?"

On the other hand, people can also deliberately plan to purposefully generate spontaneity. We set up parties, competitions, and political debates. You decide to walk down an unfamiliar street to see what you'll find. We get together with friends, without any plans but a definite

sense we all want something spontaneous to happen. To some degree these practices are successful—we "have a good time," "get an authentic look at the candidates," "discover something unexpected," "have a random adventure." Failures to produce intended spontaneity have prices: boredom, getting stuck in routines, loss of credibility. All these practices work by virtue of participants treating spontaneity as real and valuable and recognizable. But all also seem to contain a paradox—"spontaneous" behavior is done *on purpose*, deliberately channeling and contriving behavior to produce something desired in large part *because* it is less purposeful, deliberate, and contrived. Such practices treat spontaneity almost economically, initially sacrificing spontaneity to facilitate profiting in it later. Though *treated* as real, the value of spontaneity in such transactions is dependent upon, and the product of, participants' interpretive and evaluative practices for recognizing and distinguishing "spontaneous" experience and behavior. Participants don't necessarily have overlapping senses of spontaneity, and conflicts can arise: "That wasn't spontaneous, that was the same old thing we always do, in a different park."

In light of these considerations, I suggest that, rather than asking what spontaneity *is*, a more productive question might be "How is spontaneity *done*?" In other words, how do participants in a culture use spontaneity as an interpretive, evaluative, and performative principle for organizing their experiences, their relationships, and their actions? Or another way: How do people *use* spontaneity as a "method" for making their way through the world? This sort of question formulation does not imply a concrete, discoverable property of objective reality the way that "what is" does. Instead, spontaneity happens in specific social settings, and is "produced" through (or is a byproduct of) specific social actors' interactive engagements with each other,

their experiences, and their environment. Spontaneity takes the form of a way of understanding, and practices employed to recognizably invoke this way of understanding in oneself and others.

Ethnomethodology provides an effective theoretical lens through which to examine the question of spontaneity formulated in this way. Taken "on the whole," concepts of spontaneity are chaotic. Yet clearly it is a commonly-deployed concept that is mostly coherently usable in a variety of social situations. Ethnomethodology shifts away from viewing social orderliness as principles or pre-existing social structures to which actors in concrete social situations respond (with researchers able to analyze those responses). It instead reverses the direction of analysis, implicating social orderliness as emerging from concrete interactions in specific social situations. The "reality of social facts" is produced "as an accomplishment of actors' concerted work in making social facts observable and accountable to one another in their everyday lives" (Maynard and Clayman 387). Social members participating in a concrete situation are "from the outset embedded in contingently accomplished structures of social action consonant with their acting and reacting to one another in real time" (388).

In other words, individuals in a shared social situation engage in "embodied practices" (Eberle 290) of interaction and communication that sustain the social situation as "what it is," i.e., as something mutually recognizable as a shared situation by the participants involved, that allows for intelligible action to take place. James Heap identifies the problematic of ethnomethodology as considering how members of society "go about seeing, describing, explaining" and "making visible" the "order in the world in which they live" (89). Harold Garfinkel, ethnomethodology's founding theorist, describes social structures as "an achieved phenomenon of order" (6). The "phenomenon of order" that constitutes a structure does not exist prior to its actual production through the actions of social participants, and ethnomethodology's

"standing technical preoccupation in its studies is to find, collect, specify, and make instructably observable the local endogenous production and natural accountability of…society's most ordinary organizational things in the world" (6). The "objects" of analysis—i.e., social structures—are identical with the methods employed by social actors that embody these structures in concrete interaction (6-7). For "meaning"—i.e., shared structures—to exist in a situation, participants must draw on already-shared "methods" to "make their actions observable, tellable, reportable—or, in [Garfinkel's] famous wording—'accountable' [that is, "able to be account-ed of/for]" (Eberle 288). Thomas Eberle goes on to posit that from this view, "it is not actors that produce actions but rather actions that produce actors…[Actors are] identities that are constructed by situated actions." "Membership"—i.e., recognition as a participant in a social situation—is itself a method from which the order of a situation emerges, wherein other participants deploy methods implicating *acceptance* of each other as members, and "a member is who is accepted as a 'member' in interaction" (290).

Thus, ethnomethodology assumes an agency view of social participants. In opposition to "methodological schemes…of imputing algorithms (normative procedures) for a rational behavior that would determine the ways of performing life-world's actions" (Genev 297), ethnomethodology posits the establishment of order through actions that make structures recognizable for participants. This does not deny that "blind obedience"—the following of recognized social rules "without ratiocination"—does not occur, but rather, that such "blind obedience" is itself a method by which structures are sustained in interaction. Unreflexive rule-following "does not preclude the ability of reflexivity," and we cannot take any "existing order" for granted, for the "immanent reflexivity" of participants, even if latent in a particular situation, precludes researchers from "ignoring the power of re-ordering" possible at any time (Genev

297). The always-relevant possibility of reordering in turn precludes application of standing normative structures as a basis for interpreting situations. Instead, normativity, the "value" of particular actions in everyday-life settings, is sustained through "participants' own achievement" and "is neither prior to nor secondary to the 'causal world' since it belongs to the ways whereby practitioners make sense of their everyday settings" (281).

Produced normativity and order are ubiquitous. The raw, necessary fact of humans' existence as entities in social relation implies that actors cannot *not* act, even when a person is not in direct interaction with others. All behavior is action, and "*action is intrinsically meaningful, not because it is meaningful outside of any concrete situation, but because it is always embedded in a concrete situation*" (Peyrot 272. Unless identified otherwise, all emphasis in quotes is per the original throughout this dissertation). Peyrot summarizes:

> …everyday activities are the same as ("consist of" or "are identical with") methods for making those activities "*analyze-able*" and "*account-able.*" In other words, actions make themselves accountable, a feature achieved by their participation in an organization of activity. The "methods for making actions accountable" are the organizations of activity which make their constituent actions accountable as meaningful particulars. The situatedly accountable features of a particular action as a naturally occurring event result from its participation in this endogenous organization. Actions are intrinsically meaningful because they unavoidably participate in an organization of activity, not because there is an abstract, decontexted meaning which they have independent of their occurrence (272).

This claim is not merely definitional, identifying as "actions" a subset of observable behaviors that are situated with reference to an organization of activity, but goes much further and locates *all* observable behavior as "action," in that all observable behavior is necessarily situated in

organizations of activity. Mark Peyrot describes ethnomethodology as neither an "objective" nor "subjective" perspective, but instead a "relativistic" one (278). It is not subjective, for it does not view meaning as the product of individual consciousness, but is also not objective, if this "implies that the meaning or accountable features of actions exist independently of the organized occasions of their occurance." Instead, from the "relativistic" perspective of ethnomethodology, "the features of an action are dependent on its relations with the other actions with which it participates in a mutually constitutive organization of activity" (278).

Application of an ethnomethodological perspective to spontaneity denies a realist approach wherein spontaneity is treated as a describable property of behavior or experience, with this description then applicable to specific social interactions and/or reports of experience. Instead, spontaneity *per se* has no reality outside of concrete social action that appeals to shared methods of using "spontaneity" to describe, explain, recognize, and make visible (account-able) the behavior of oneself and others. The "structures" of spontaneity recognized and deployed in specific situations establish spontaneity as an "orderly" phenomenon, which is *accomplished* through specific interactions, contingent upon those actions, and subject to change as interactions progress or in different distinguishable settings. While subjective understandings of participants may be implicated in processes of accomplishment, an ethnomethodology view is concerned with the order established via action, i.e., observable behavior, and so methods of spontaneity are directly accessible to research. Such research consists of discovering, collecting, and, through description, specifying/making visible to others (potentially including the members participating in the setting considered) the concrete behaviors by which social participants recognize, interpret, and perform specific orders of spontaneity.

This does not require that "spontaneity" be explicitly employed as an organizing principle by observed participants. Spontaneity need not be "foregrounded" in behavior to be accessible to research. Indeed, one challenging aspect of applying an ethnomethodological perspective to spontaneity is that, in common shared enactments, *explicit awareness* of spontaneity makes action recognized as "less" spontaneous. In such settings, successful accomplishment of spontaneity demands a certain level of, at least, *behaving* as though participants do not *recognize* themselves as spontaneous, responding to shared, background orders of spontaneity in the manner of "blind obedience" described above. However, such "blind obedience," in these cases as in others, is itself a behavioral method of participant accomplishment. Researchers may recognize and account of spontaneity in such cases via "breaching" experiments. A researcher may hypothesize a shared structure of spontaneity emergent from a group's interactions, and visibly violate these expectations—for example, by acting in a way that is "clearly" not spontaneous with respect to the hypothesized order, and then claiming it as spontaneous. The hypothesis has merit if such a breach interrupts the ongoing flow of taken-for-granted practices and induces a state of "bewilderment" in which participants are prevented from acting without explicit accounting of their actions, often becoming "suspicious or angry, because the 'other' was no longer acting in accord with shared background expectancies and thus sensemaking and trust were no longer possible" (Rawls 280-81).

An ethnomethodological account of spontaneity does not deny the relevance of "realist" researches on the topic wherein a prior account of spontaneity is defined and applied to specific situations; many examples of this approach are surveyed in Chapter Two below. Ethnomethodology does not view such researches as unproductive or wrongheaded, but instead would seek to enfold them within its own perspective, asking researchers employing such

approaches to recognize their research work as itself ongoing social action contributing to practices of spontaneity in concrete settings. The settings involved certainly involve the practical accomplishment of their own research and published accounts, and may also contribute to ongoing development of practices of spontaneity in the settings they research (and/or other settings) to the degree that such research accounts impact the practical methods of spontaneity accomplishment in these settings. This impact may be direct (the "raw," immediate impact of research activity enfolded into the setting) or indirect (by participants having their own practices and accounts affected by their exposure to products of research).

While not explicitly ethnomethodological, another aligned perspective productive in theoretically grounding this view of spontaneity is Erving Goffman's "dramaturgical" perspective as expressed in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. This perspective views social participants as engaged in making a certain definition of a situation evident to others included in that situation, and sustaining this definition through their behavior. Various degrees of success and failure are possible, with consequences for both, and social actors also have practices for shifting situational definitions. Goffman himself uses the term "spontaneity" throughout his monograph, with much of the same conceptual slipperiness described above. At times it is treated as an objectively real quality of behavior (e.g., 50, 207, 216-17, 228); elsewhere as a "feeling" or impression experienced by participants in or observers of interaction (8, 200); still elsewhere as a real quality of behavior, but one that actors seek to make evident to other participants (49, 197); and in other cases as mimesis, with social actors deploying communicative codes meant to indicate "real" spontaneity, while recognizing themselves that they are not acting spontaneously in any "real" sense (30, 32, 181).

Despite this variety of uses, I believe Goffman's framework offers a valuable toolbox for considering spontaneity as a social practice. Asking how social actors "do" spontaneity (as opposed to "be" spontaneous) makes Goffman's distinction between "sincere" and "cynical" social performances (18-21) irrelevant. Both actors who seek to dissemble a dishonest spontaneity, and those who seek to make an honest spontaneity evident, will make use of the same dramaturgical framework based on social understandings and communicative codes (65-66). Goffman implicitly aligns spontaneity with the "ungovernable aspects" (7) of behavior—what audience impressions treat as "involuntary expressive behavior" (2). However, I below propose an example of a context—improvisational theatre—where spontaneity itself is purposefully expressed and recognized/treated as such by audiences.

This shift offers focus within the cacophony of spontaneity's conceptual deployment. Spontaneity, rather than being treated as an overarching principle, happens in concrete social, historical situations. Spontaneity takes on meaning contextually, in relation to frames of reference of the individuals involved and their shared cultural practices. We overcome the conceptual slipperiness of the broad view by rooting analysis of spontaneity in how participants "do"—recognize, evaluate, and perform—spontaneity in a particular socio-historical milieu, a discernable social group using spontaneity to organize their understandings and address their concerns. The way they do spontaneity may well imply their treating it as a real, objective property independent of the participants. Whether they are "correct" in this assessment is irrelevant from a "do" perspective—the concern is about how they accomplish the maintenance and deployment of what they treat as spontaneity.

In this dissertation, I offer an example of spontaneity considered from the perspective of how it is accomplished. First, I apply it to a variety of extant scholarship in which authors make

explicit use of spontaneity as a descriptive, interpretive, and/or evaluative concept, including explicit analysis of the term for their purposes. This survey includes analyses of spontaneity from religion, leisure studies, high-support-needs educational communication, psychology, psychodrama, psychoanalysis, cognitive philosophy, and research on organizations. In each of these divergent areas of research, I consider examples of literature making explicit conceptual use of spontaneity with respect to its field. This overview reveals and brings into focus three areas for productive consideration in assessing how spontaneity is "done" as a social practice: (1) spontaneity as ideographic, (2) spontaneity as exemplified in narrative, and (3) critical assessment of spontaneity as implicated in social power structures.

Second, I will apply these three areas to a cultural practice that explicitly aligns spontaneity with the practice's successful accomplishment: Improvisational theatre, or "improv" for short. I will consider how participants in this practice do spontaneity through analysis of two sets of artifacts. The first is a group of commonly-used improv method texts that offer interpretations of spontaneity and practices purporting to increase successful accomplishment of it. The second is a collection of narratives of spontaneity from improv performers who identify as affiliated with a specific improvisational theatre organization that has developed over the last seventeen years.

The existing conceptual literature on spontaneity offers a number of examples of the concept of spontaneity's deployment as a value-laden or descriptive term. It is operationalized in a wide variety of contexts, the literature for each of which usually does not cite or seem aware of the others. In Chapter Two, I assess how these divergent fields apply the concept in different ways, illuminating a set of questions that various deployments of spontaneity imply or address: Is it a quality of behavior, or of experience, or of some relationship between the two? Is it binary— either present or absent—or can it be divided into degrees of greater/lesser? If divisible, can it be

quantified? What is the relationship between spontaneity and non-spontaneity? What behaviors

and/or experiences are indicative of greater or lesser spontaneity? Is spontaneity treated as

simply descriptive, or is it a normatively positive quality? If positive, is it a potentiality, a

productive force, or a valued end in itself? Can it be increased in frequency and/or intensity in

an individual or group? Why would it be valuable to increase it? If it can be increased, how? Is

it always desirable, or only valuable in certain contexts? What makes a context more or less

appropriate? Are greater and lesser degrees of spontaneity due to inherent subject

characteristics, learned behavior patterns, or environmental/relationship characteristics? Is there

a distinction between individual and social spontaneity, and if so, what is the relationship

between them? How is it identified and recognized in individuals and groups?

In the sometimes quite complicated sets of answers and emphases this variety of

operationalizations gives to these questions, we see some of the many ways that the various

senses of spontaneity can be deployed in productive tension as an interpretive and often value-

laden concept. These questions mark the primary dimensions along which spontaneity can be

employed and assessed as an "ideograph" in social practice. Michael Calvin McGee defines an

ideograph as:

> an ordinary language term found in political discourse. It is a high-order abstraction
>
> representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative
>
> goal. It warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be
>
> perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and guides behavior and belief into channels easily
>
> recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable…Ideographs are culture-bound,
>
> though some terms are used in different signification across cultures. Each member of the
>
> community is socialized, conditioned, to the vocabulary of ideographs as a prerequisite for

"belonging" to the society. A degree of tolerance is usual, but people are expected to understand ideographs within a range of usage thought to be acceptable: The society will inflict penalties on those who use ideographs in heretical ways and on those who refuse to respond appropriately to claims on their behavior warranted through the agency of ideographs. (15-16)

While differing greatly in particular use, the ideographic relevance of spontaneity is clear across the various research contexts considered in Chapter Two. While not "political" in a traditional sense, the concept "spontaneity" is used in many social settings to organize and enforce behavior: religious belief and practices, teaching activity, therapeutic methods, relationships within organizations—all areas where substantial differentials of role and power influence interactions. Speaking in tongues and psychodrama techniques might certainly be considered antisocial in other settings, but are justified through their conceptual labeling as "spontaneous." Members of cultures where spontaneity serves ideographically learn to recognize and respond to social deployments of the concept. And while I see no clear examples of sanctioning against inappropriate applications of the concept of spontaneity, the settings considered in Chapter Two abound with rewarding members for accepted enactments of spontaneity, through encouragement and social inclusion and recognition.

Another significant theme in analyses of spontaneity is illustration through narrative or exemplary accounts of instances of enacted spontaneity. These can be accounts of experiencing spontaneity oneself or of recognizing it in others' behavior or experience. These concrete instances can inform researchers' analyses of spontaneity, or can result from the imposition of a spontaneity concept upon behavior or experience. In either case, narratives and examples help make clear what the writers mean by spontaneity or the lack thereof as they conduct their

assessments. The concretions of experience or behavior described operate metonymically,

providing ideal or paradigmatic instances of the writers' concepts of spontaneity or

aspects/components of them. Most of the perspectives considered in Chapter Two make use of

this exemplary/narrative device. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi offers narratives of persons who

manage to accomplish spontaneous "flow" experience in even the most constrained

circumstances, such as concentration camp prisoners and persons with highly mobility-limiting

physical disabilities. Hsu-Min Chiang and Mark Carter use examples of an autistic student

asking for cookies in various circumstances to illustrate different "levels" of spontaneity in an

operationalization they analyze (696). Daniel Wiener gives examples of both "good" and

"deficient" improvisation by clients in exercises used for assessment of interpersonal functioning

(60-65), while psychoanalyst Philip Ringstrom (2001a) narrates an account of his own

improvisational behaviors leading to breakthrough moments in interaction with a patient (730,

740-41). Several studies of organizational improvisation are based on detailed case studies of

corporate teams' discoveries "in the moment" of how to accomplish projected goals (e.g., Pina e

Cunha, Kamoche and Campos e Cunha; Pinnington, Morris and Pinnington; Viera da Cunha,

Kamoche, and Pina e Cunha).

A third significant theme I would like to consider in assessing operationalizations of

spontaneity is a critical perspective. This theme is not purposefully deployed for the most part in

research literature, but is certainly in the background of many cases, with asymmetrical power

relations, and valuations of spontaneity influencing valuation of practices. A critical perspective

on operationalizations of spontaneity would address issues about questions such as: Whose

perspective on spontaneity gets to be enforced in relationships, and how is it enforceable? How

do concepts of spontaneity intersect with individuals' concepts of identity and group

membership? What groups, persons, and actions does this intersection privilege or suppress, and how? How does the interpretation of behaviors as being genuinely and/or appropriately spontaneous affect the valuation of those behaviors, and how do these interpretive practices (and who applies them) impact power relations within and among groups? What social practices and organizations are related to cultures' "spontaneity heuristics," and how do these social features act to allow or deny access of individuals and groups to recognized effective performances of spontaneity?

While the examples considered in Chapter Two rarely explicitly addresses questions like these, they can be applied to examples of deployments of spontaneity to better understand how "spontaneity" acts as power in these settings. Among high-support-needs students (Carter 2002, 2003a and b; Chiang and Carter) and psychodrama participants (Kipper and Hundal, Kipper and Ritchie, Meares), clear asymmetric power relationships are inherent in the interactions involved, with educators and therapists regulating and policing "genuine" and "appropriate" enactments of spontaneity by individuals already marked as deficient in this valued quality of behavior. Participants in religious cultures where spontaneity is recognized as a relevant quality for praised and/or accepted practice are in a situation where expression of spirituality is channeled into sanctioned behaviors by members and authorities of their communities (e.g, Bland, Mahmood). If spontaneity is deployed as a valued principle in an organization, the hierarchy already in place will no doubt be involved in encouraging and sanctioning members' interpretations and enactments of that principle according to what is perceived as being in the interest of the organization's (and its backers') intended accomplishments (consider George and Brief; George and Jones; Pinnington, Morris and Pinnington). I do not seek here to analyze these cases in depth, only to point out that a critical view in these cases deepens our understanding of the

normative functions of spontaneity, going beyond the cultural understanding of the concept to address how this understanding organizes and impacts power relations within that culture. This is a third significant perspective in examining social concepts and enactments of spontaneity.

In Chapters Three, Four and Five, I will apply these three perspectives—analytic/ideographic, narrative, and critical—to spontaneity in the social practice of improvisational theatre. Improvisational theatre, informally "improv," is a performance method/genre wherein performers enact a theatrical-style performance without prior preparation of specific content. As a broad artistic practice, improv covers a vast array of performance types, but I will be primarily considering a particular tradition associated with performing to entertain an audience. This style is often comedy-focused and usually utilizes some form of rules or structures to organize and orient the generated content. It also generally hails from particular traditions of improv performance emerging from passed-down and experimented-with practices and principles usually traced back to teachers Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone.

This tradition provides a rich ground for assessing spontaneity as a social practice because spontaneity is explicitly a key element of accomplishing successful improv. Training methods specifically aim to increase spontaneity in performers, and spontaneity is purposefully deployed as an organizing value in methodology writings. In the contexts considered in Chapter Two, spontaneity is usually in the background of the actual social activity the writers consider. With the obvious exception of psychodrama, those involved are not explicitly seeking to generate spontaneity as such; rather, they seek some benefits and believe that spontaneity will facilitate attaining them, or else spontaneity is a concept imposed by the researchers as an interpretation of certain actions or patterns of behavior. Even psychodrama, while explicitly seeking to generate spontaneity, focuses its methods on therapeutic practices for persons treated as having low

capacities for spontaneity, and as such is more corrective than expressive. In contrast, the full-throated expression of spontaneity is central to improv. Performers and audiences of course want more than *only* spontaneity; both also want a show they enjoy, with high-quality performance skills and compelling content. But this is not enough by itself; the show must also be spontaneous. This is part of the promise of improv, and a cast that performs a skillful, compelling show, but one that is not "spontaneous," has failed or cheated themselves, and disappointed or defrauded their audience. Improv is a social practice where the generation of spontaneity is integral to the capacity to successfully accomplish the practice at all, not merely an effective means to other desired ends. As such, it ought to offer a much starker example of "spontaneity" deployed in social performance and interpretation than in settings where it is a smaller and more backgrounded part of the picture.

Chapters Three through Five apply the three perspectives identified above to appropriate concrete artifacts of improv practice. For the analytic/ideographic perspective, in Chapter Three I will undertake a deep analysis of the use and deployment of the term/concept "spontaneity" across a variety of improv methodology texts, written as aids to teaching effective improv for performers, beginners to veterans, aiming to become more skillful in this craft. In Chapter Four I will apply a critical perspective to these same texts. For the narrative perspective, in Chapter Five I will analyze performers' self-reports of experiencing or observing spontaneity in their own practice as performers. Within this assessment, I shall also address a critical perspective where appropriate, attempting to make explicit various ways that spontaneity is tacitly implicated in power structures and relationships among improv practitioners. I choose to concentrate on these two artifact sets because the methodology texts offer a concrete body of work detailing spontaneity theory on a broad scale, shared by the collegial community of improv practitioners at

large, while the narratives will offer concrete perspective on spontaneity theory as understood and enacted by a smaller improv community with its own distinct history and direct connections between practitioners.

In Chapters Three and Four, I focus on improv method and theory texts that make explicit use of the term "spontaneity" in their programs of training and aesthetics. I will assess their uses of the term in relation to the ideographic and analytical questions identified above. I will also seek to account for differences and relationships between various uses of "spontaneity" in improv theory, considering influences from past use and application on successive texts as improv practices have proceeded historically, as well as how those practices influenced and were influenced by prevailing theories of spontaneity as they developed. The founding texts of both Viola Spolin, in *Improvisation for the Theatre*, and Keith Johnstone, in *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*, devote extensive sections to spontaneity. Later texts making conceptual use of spontaneity include Johnstone's *Impro for Storytellers*, and the longform theory text *Truth in Comedy: The Manual of Improvisation* (Halpern, Close and Johnson). More recent texts continuing this methodological tradition include Mick Napier's *Improvise: Scene from the Inside Out* and Carol Hazenfield's *Acting on Impulse: The Art of Making Improv Theatre*, and most recently *The Improv Handbook* (Salinsky and Frances-White) and *Process: An Improvisor's Journey* (Scruggs and Gellman).

A number of other improv texts exist, but this set will ground my examination of improv's concepts of spontaneity. All are highly popular in the improv community; any improvier who has studied theory has likely been influenced by one or more of this set of texts. All are texts that offer a broad-based philosophy of improvisational theatre as opposed to simply listing or presenting various improv "games" or training exercises, like Abbott, Fox, or Gwinn. While the

examples of improv practices collected in such volumes can provide valuable additional illustration to an examination of spontaneity, they do not address spontaneity as an improvisational principle explicitly or in detail; instead, it is backgrounded to the descriptions of practices, and if mentioned at all, is assumed to be transparent in meaning to the reader. These eight central texts also largely focus on improv as a "performance product in and of itself" (Napier 1) rather than developing their theory with an eye toward applying improv skills and practices to other areas—especially common in improv books for scripted theatre performers (e.g., Atkins, Cassady, Diggles) and business professionals (e.g., Gee and Gee, Hough, or Koppett).

They also represent a somewhat parallel structure of both major "threads" of the development of improv methodology. The development of improv work descending from the respective early practices of Spolin and Johnstone intersects greatly, and the two traditions have borrowed from each other extensively in both theory and practice. Nonetheless, later writers on improv methodology tend to identify strongly with one or the other of these traditions, explicitly, or by dint of emphasizing examples from one line of descent. These later writers were also influenced through the process by which improv is learned almost entirely in a gradual turnover with later performers learning directly from working with earlier ones, and so on, with explicit textual methodology emerging only long after the establishment of practices. After the founding works, *Impro for Storytellers* and *Truth in Comedy*, both coming out in the 1990's, emerged from the Johnstone and Spolin traditions, respectively. In the mid 2000's, *Improvise* came from a Spolinesque (sometimes called "Chicago") tradition, while *Acting on Impulse* aligns itself with Johnstonian practices; the same is true with *Process* (with Spolin) and *The Improvisor's Handbook* (with Johnstone) in the late 2000's. The "other" improv tradition is almost never

treated antagonistically, but is overwhelmingly backgrounded or elided. So with this set of texts, we get roughly historically-parallel examples of two closely-related performance traditions, but with each having a strong identification as distinct in its association with its "lineage".

Chapters Three and Four offer an in-depth analysis of the explicit deployment of "spontaneity" as theory in the improv community's shared principle method texts. As a counterpoint to this textual analysis, and complementing it, in Chapter Five I consider examples of concrete narratives of spontaneity offered by members of a specific self-identified improv community, with its own traditions of practice, identity, and value (though certainly influenced in no small way by formal improv methodology). These narratives will come from members of an improv organization founded in 1998, in which I have performed and directed since 1999. Cult of the Stage Monkey (COSM) was founded in Lafayette, LA. Members of this original ensemble later formed other ensembles deriving their name from, and identifying with the community of the original; in order of founding these other ensembles were in Hattiesburg, MS; Chicago, IL; Washington, DC; Carbondale, IL; and San Diego, CA.

This organization provides a valuable ground for consideration of spontaneity in an improv community for several reasons. COSM consists of a large number of individuals with greatly variant experience with the group, but is small enough and has emerged recently enough that members have a largely personal sense of themselves as a community. Significant divisions in interaction among members are present, especially between the geographic branches, but all members have a general sense of themselves as participating in a larger community (which is also reinforced through practices such as occasional national conferences). It also provides a parallel example, on a smaller scale, of the longer traditions relating to Spolin and Johnstone from which formal improv methodology largely emerged: Early COSM members had little

knowledge of improv practices, and developed their form experimentally while only later influenced by theory. Finally, on the practical level, my own longtime experience with the group will facilitate access to participants and sometimes allow me to fill in relevant information or context derived from my own work with COSM. A narrative approach to the meaning of "spontaneity" for COSM will counterpoint the treatment it receives in formal method texts, by providing an example of a community that makes use of spontaneity as a social practice, but has not codified the concept in formal social artifacts of methodology or aesthetics.

To collect these narratives, I contacted members of COSM directly or through social media and request volunteers to proffer examples of their own experiences or observations of spontaneity in their performance work with the organization. Volunteers were given the option of offering narratives in writing, or through an audiorecorded personal or telephone interview. The guiding questions and a statement of focus for the interview were submitted to participants in advance. The guiding questions of these interviews are:

1.) Can you share a story or example of a time when you felt especially spontaneous when performing improv with Cult of the Stage Monkey?

2.) Can you share a story or example of a time when you observed performance by other members of COSM that seemed especially spontaneous to you?

3.) Can you share a story or example of a time you felt especially *non*-spontaneous when performing improv with COSM, or observed a performance by other members that seemed especially non-spontaneous to you?

4.) Can you share a story or examples of COSM ensemble practices that you believe especially encouraged spontaneity in yourself or other members?

5.) Can you share a story or examples of COSM ensemble practices that you believe especially inhibited spontaneity in yourself or other members?

6.) Can you can you share a story or examples of relationship dynamics and interpersonal behaviors among members of the ensemble that you believe especially encouraged spontaneity in yourself or other members?

7.) Can you share a story or examples of relationship dynamics and interpersonal behaviors among members of the ensemble that you believe especially inhibited spontaneity in yourself or other members?

Participants may answer any or all questions, as they like. I will be glad to expound upon or clarify questions as requested. However, I will not provide my own examples of spontaneity as a way of explaining "how" a participant might effectively answer a question—the whole point is to see what spontaneity "means," as expressed through narrative, to the participants, without my imposing a prior concept of what I am "looking for" when I ask about spontaneity. When it appears it may be productive, I will follow up on narratives and examples offered in response with additional questions to glean more detail or to expand or clarify background and context, and explore reasoning about "why" described experiences or observations are viewed as enacting spontaneity. I believe this set of questions adequately covers the range of issues addressed by ideographic operationalizations of spontaneity, as discussed above.

In comparing these narratives, I will look for "themes" of spontaneity along the following lines: What characteristics do performers associate with spontaneity? Are there divergent examples among narratives, and if so, how can it fit into a larger "social milieu" of spontaneity in this organization? What sorts of action or behavior are contrasted as especially non-spontaneous, and how do they relate to high spontaneity? What similarities and contestations can be found among interpretations of spontaneity-encouraging or -inhibiting practices and relationships? Do reported themes of spontaneity differ along lines of work with different branches of the organization, historical period of membership, or roles in the organization—and if so, what might account for it? All these questions boil down to a vague but encompassing overall question guiding inquiry into these narratives: "How do members of this group USE spontaneity to interpret and enact accomplishment of their craft?"

The two artifact sets of Chapters Three through Five give examples of operationalization and deployment of spontaneity in a concrete context, making them amenable to critical consideration. Where it appears relevant, I will assess these examples with an eye toward how spontaneity is implicated in power relationships. How is "spontaneity" recognized, indoctrinated, and enforced? How is it used to privilege or suppress various improv practices? How does enactment of spontaneity affect individual members' capacities to perform "good" or "acceptable" improv? Along what lines is spontaneity contested, and how do participants contest it? I will apply these questions to the methodological ideography of spontaneity with relation to the historical record, and to reports from COSM participants about how they perceive practices and relationships to have encouraged or inhibited spontaneity.

"Spontaneity" in general use is a broad and slippery concept, difficult to define from its various uses in such a way that it can be analyzed and studied without artificially imposing a prior account of spontaneity onto the analysis that privileges some uses and elides others. However, this difficulty can be overcome by narrowing the issue to analysis of spontaneity in concrete social settings, to see how this slippery concept is actually deployed by social actors invested in its use. Doing so, we can identify three significant aspects in spontaneity's use as an organizing social principle. The first is analytic/ideographic, a way for members of a social group to (often implicitly) make the vague concept of spontaneity coherent and approach a unified and shared (if to some degree contested) meaning. The second is narrative/exemplary: accounts of concrete recognized instances of spontaneity (or lack thereof) as a way of grasping the meaning of the concept, and expressing or explaining that meaning to others. The third is a critical perspective, which considers how the use of spontaneity in a concrete setting acts as a practice for organizing power—to enable/encourage or suppress certain actions, attitudes, or

behaviors by persons participating in that setting, or to facilitate or restrict access of persons to that setting, or their acceptance in it. I will apply these perspectives to the social practice of improvisational theatre, both in the abstract through its methodology texts and the concrete through accounts of spontaneity's use by members of a particular improv organization. This project will support a deeper understanding of spontaneity, by shifting its analysis from a broad, general conceptual use to consideration of particular use by members of a culture where it is valued and considered essential to the successful accomplishment of practices in that culture.

CHAPTER 2

MANY SPONTANEITIES

In this chapter, I analyze and compare existing conceptual literature on spontaneity in order to identify the issues addressed, and the techniques for doing so, by researchers who have undertaken such a project in their fields. This approach, at first glance, may seem at odds with an ethnomethodological account of spontaneity. Harold Garfinkel states in no uncertain terms that "EM is not in the business of interpreting signs. It is not an interpretive enterprise. Enacted local practices are not texts which symbolize 'meanings' or events. They are in detail identical with themselves, and…[in these witnessable details] constitute their own reality. They are studied in their unmediated details and not as signed enterprises" (8). Examining existing conceptual literature would seem to lead away from an ethnomethodological direction, as such scholarly production is all-but-necessarily "in the business of interpreting signs." Whether the research defines and imposes a concept of spontaneity on observed phenomena, or goes the opposite direction—developing a definition of spontaneity from observations or examples of its use—it nonetheless treats behavior as a sign of spontaneity. If we accept this view of ethnomethodology, it would seem that assessing existing analyses of spontaneity is a distraction—an ethnomethodological account would call for beginning with grounded observations of concrete behavior in a setting where members make explicit use of the term, or practices that the group recognizes as associated with the term.

However, I would argue that making such a hard division is problematic, and that the literature review that follows constitutes a useful initial approach to understanding spontaneity from an ethnomethodological view. First, practices of producing analytic research partake in the

concrete settings toward which they are oriented or from which they are derived. The actual

published research is an artifact produced in relation with concrete social activity. The very fact

that researchers choose to explicitly analyze "spontaneity" for their purposes is indicative that

spontaneity is recognized as a relevant produced order of phenomena by participants involved in

the activities the researchers address. The actual observed behavior is in the past, and cannot be

accessed directly, but analyses yet stand as artifacts of examples of concrete social action

wherein spontaneity is relevant to participants' shared understanding. At minimum, researchers'

own use of "spontaneity" as a target of analysis shows that it is an organizing principle

recognized *by researchers* as relevant to their own participation in the settings they consider.

Second, even to the extent that we treat such analytical literature as simply imposing prior

concepts of spontaneity upon behavior, the *practices* implicated in such literature are themselves

relevant to accounting for spontaneity as a social practice. The production and publication of

research is itself embodied, real-time behavior by participants in concrete social settings, though

the social action involved often plays out slowly over months or years. The behavior of

producing conceptual analyses of spontaneity is in itself a clear example of concrete social action

in which spontaneity is explicitly implicated as a method of understanding or making

recognizable. That is exactly what the researchers are explicitly seeking to accomplish through

this behavior. The body of work below may be approached ethnomethodologically by viewing it

through the lens of the question "how do conceptual analysts of spontaneity *do* their analytic

behavior?" Much, of course, is elided by the artifact of the publication; on the other hand, access

to such artifacts offer some concrete remnant of spontaneity-implicating behavior otherwise lost

to the past. Moreover, it seems reasonable to assume that these publications were intended to

influence the spontaneity-implicating practices of those who encountered them. To the extent

that readers actually reacted to their encounter with the literatures, and the relevant ripple effect of these responses on others, the publication artifacts remain implicated in real-time interactions that draw on methods of spontaneity.

James Heap supports this view in his account of descriptive validity in ethnomethodology. He describes ethnomethodology's "task" as "description of possible properties of courses of reasoning and action in society" (87). Any actual example of reasoning or action is a possible example, and falls within the scope of ethnomethodology (99). One problem with describing "action" is the indexicality (context-dependence) of behavior—specific, "literally describable" behaviors are dependent for "meaning" on their context. A second problem is reflexivity. For behavior to constitute "action" requires that participants to some extent *experience themselves* as "doing something," i.e., engaging in a (however tacitly) projected accomplishment. This experience is by definition inaccessible to the observer, who is dependent on context to account for "action"—and that context is in part produced by participants' inaccessible reflexive understandings (88-89). The upshot for my purposes is Heap's stipulation that description in ethnomethodology is "always being oriented to or through materials…observable things" that are "audio/visually available" and "can be read, seen, and/or heard again" (91), and that "the test of correctness or adequacy of description requires orienting to or through materials" (100). I refer collectively to such materials as "texts." Conceptual analysis of spontaneity texts are, like other forms of account-ing, "irremediably tied for their sensibility and coherence to the social settings that occasion them or within which they are situated, for they are, in innumerable ways, part of the very settings they describe" (89).

Heap greatly troubles the distinction between literal and interpretive description, but allows for a "principled distinction" whereby interpretive description means that "in describing some

action, reference is made to the actor's self-understanding of his/her action" (93). Self-understanding can be brought into the realm of the "literal" by keeping in mind the constraints of language and signs in making behavior recognizable "as something," i.e., as implicating "meaning." The conventions of signs and language offer "a range of possible interpretations of an action," a range that is "indefinite, but not infinite." Heap argues that "the criterial status of self-understanding is a permit to mean some particular thing or set of things, in and by an action, within the range of possible 'meanings' constituted in and by language. The fact that observers can share that language provides the possibility that they can warrant their interpretive descriptions as adequate, i.e., as describing one of the possibilities" (94). That the shared language of, at minimum, the research writers and their peer-reviewers allows for the shared recognition of conceptual analyses of spontaneity as such indicates that these participants are warranted in treating these analyses as possible valid descriptions of spontaneity.

Crudely speaking, behavior can be literally described, whereas "action" can only be interpretively described. What we *can* do, however, is offer literal description of *behavior that involves interpretation on the part of the actor*—which is exactly what conceptual analyses exemplify. A conceptual analysis is recognizable as such in part by virtue of the constraints of language that necessitate the implication of interpretive behaviors in the production of conceptual analysis. The above considerations allow for viewing conceptual analysis texts on spontaneity as falling within the scope of ethnomethodology, heeding Garfinkel's warning that "EM…is not an interpretive enterprise" (8).

My method for assembling this particular set of research artifacts was straightforward. In addition to a small set of sources with which I was already familiar, I simply did a broad search for the term "spontaneity" among peer-reviewed sources in Academic Search Premiere and

Project Muse. Separately, I also searched the term "improvisation" in these databases and included non-duplicated results from this search term in my pool of potential textual artifacts. While the two terms diverge somewhat, as in uses of "improvisation" that emphasize a "making do" within limited possibilities, it is very common for "improvisation" to refer to behavior that is understood as spontaneous to some extent. It also seems appropriate to include this search term because the terminology of "spontaneity" and "improvisation" *does* so clearly overlap in the case of improvisational theatre, my primary field of consideration in Chapters Three to Five below.

The great majority of results were examples where the respective terms were backgrounded, or where their meanings were treated as transparent and left unanalyzed. However, a number of disciplines included examples of research featuring explicit analysis of spontaneity and/or improvisation. Some of these examples propose definitions of spontaneity, while others seek to refine the concept with respect to related terms and concepts, and still others identify it as a feature of particular social settings and seek to describe it in those settings, or bring attention to its relevance. There is great variety, but all share the common feature of deliberate, explicit analysis of spontaneity and/or improvisation as used and/or usable concepts.

Overwhelmingly, these various subject areas do not appear to be in dialogue with each other; they do not cite each other and generally seem to have developed their accounts of spontaneity without influence by other disciplinary areas that take up the subject. This is sometimes true within disciplinary areas as well. This allows for a certain ability to treat each disciplinary area discretely, as a specific example of the operationalization of spontaneity, rather than treating them as a collective "pool" of shared-but-divergent examples of spontaneity. Individual areas will of course be influenced by "shared" cultural understandings of spontaneity in the "broader cultural milieu" that encompasses all these examples. However, this relative discreteness of

disciplinary areas offers an opportunity to better understand concrete applications of "spontaneity," showing how researchers in distinct disciplinary settings make use of the term/concept to address specific questions and concerns relevant to the discipline.

In the following, I assess examples of such operationalizing research on spontaneity in approximately eight distinct areas. Considering religious studies, I address examples of spontaneity as a normative property of behavior. This is contrasted with leisure studies, which is more concerned with spontaneity as a property of experience. I then turn toward more specific operationalizations of spontaneity, beginning with an account of "communicative spontaneity" as a desired end for high-support-needs students, who are interpellated as deficient in this desired behavioral form. In contrast, I then examine psychological testing efforts to develop a corroborable account of "normal" spontaneity across the general population. This is followed by analyses of the role and concept of spontaneity in two psychological-therapeutic practices, psychodrama and psychoanalysis. I then consider the conceptual concerns addressed by cognitive philosophy regarding spontaneity as a feature of "thought." Using behavioral psychology research on random number choice, I then connect spontaneity for this "cognitive self" with spontaneity as a socio-cultural practice, the social performance of a "spontaneity heuristic." Finally, I consider examples of "social spontaneity" wherein spontaneity is described or analyzed specifically with reference to groups or organizations. Moving through these different areas, I identify the specific issues explicitly or implicitly addressed by the research strategy of operationalizing spontaneity, illuminating connections and divergences among these various operationalizations. In my conclusion, I summarize the various issues that researchers may seek to resolve though the practice of operationalizing spontaneity.

Spontaneity as Action

"Action" in these cases implies an agent, some will-ing being; "spontaneity" can be a property of that agent's acts. "Event," in contrast, implies some sort of non-agential action. The distinction is particularly significant in that spontaneity with respect to acts has a normative dimension not present in the "spontaneity" of events. When connected to an agent, spontaneity can be a quality that creates inherent value in action, while when connected with events it has no inherent normative value, but is rather a descriptive property which may inhere in the event itself or in interpretations of it. The various possible senses of spontaneity I consider will quickly trouble this distinction, but it provides a useful starting point for examining them.

Philip Ivanhoe distinguishes between three senses of normative spontaneity. Actions representative of the first, "untutored" spontaneity, "must arise more from basic instincts and inclinations than any sort of training or reflection....Actions that display this quality...are thought to be motivated by deep, standing, innate dispositions" (4). Associating it with Daoist thought, Ivanhoe also (23) equates this form of spontaneity with a western sense, "proceeding 'entirely from natural impulse'," (1). This sort of spontaneity is called for in such invitations as "just act natural," or "just be yourself."

Acts in Ivanhoe's second category, cultivated spontaneity, "seem to flow or erupt out of the agent...with all the ease, confidence, peace, and comfort that is claimed for cases of untutored spontaneity" (8), but in fact arise "out of a sustained course of training" (9), becoming a sort of acquired "second nature" (8). Such acts, associated by Ivanhoe with Confucianist notions of spontaneity can be the course of conscious, deliberate training—the chef who can make breakfast without a second thought, the jazz musician who, after years of training, can "spontaneously" create new, original music on the spot. These acts can also represent subconscious enculturation;

while there may be nothing *inherently* "natural" about certain ways of behaving, our immersive experience with the patterns of our own endogenous culture tends to lead members to act "spontaneously" (in the cultivated sense) in accordance with impliedly appropriate behavior patterns. An example would be the automatic tendency in most cultures, *ceteris parebis*, to return a greeting upon being greeted (c.f. Heritage 106-8). We invoke this sense of spontaneity in such cases as encouraging another or oneself with, "c'mon, you know how to do this."

Ivanhoe identifies a third sense especially with Western thought. I here refer to it as "unconstrained" spontaneity, and it occurs "when we have the freedom to exercise and follow our will" (23); acts are spontaneous in this sense to the degree that they are done without necessity, constraint, or coercion. This is the sense ascribed to acts that are considered "spontaneous" in that they are done in a spirit of play, leisure, or creativity.

These three normative senses have in common that "all of them hold that spontaneity involves the absence of constraint or coercion and that it represents an important human good" (25). However, the form of constraint or coercion differs with respect to each sense. For untutored spontaneity, enculturation and other enforced tendencies of behavior contrary to the fundamental impulses of one's "true" being represent the constraint to be overcome. It is nearly the opposite for cultivated spontaneity; in this case, *inadequate* experience, learning, or enculturation represents the obstacle to spontaneous behavior. In the case of unconstrained spontaneity, it is precisely the overcoming or negation of some constraining influence upon our will that makes the action spontaneous as such.

For all three senses, spontaneity has significant extrinsic value for promoting effective and/or aesthetic action, but in all senses also appears to have significant intrinsic value regardless of the action's results. Ivanhoe offers as evidence of this last point that we tend to appreciate "even

foul things that are done in a skillful and spontaneous manner. For even as we consciously reject such actions, we are drawn to the fluid ease and comfort with which they are performed" (20). This is one reason people may admire talented, effective villains—though despising what they do, we appreciate a person who can accomplish challenging acts well and easily.

Note, however, another similarity across all these senses: In all cases, spontaneity is *worked towards*, something one makes efforts to accomplish. Ivanhoe describes how Daoist practitioners must "go back" to a state where untutored spontaneity is possible through a long process of shedding enculturated ways of behaving (5). One must exert effort to remove the various possible obstacles preventing acts of unconstrained spontaneity, and one must undergo a course of training and experience to be able to exhibit cultivated spontaneity. In no case does spontaneity "just happen"—it always comes to be as the result of some accomplished process. One might argue an exception in those acts of cultivated spontaneity made possible through unconscious enculturation.   However, in keeping with my ethnomethodological view, I would argue that learning to act in accordance with social behavior patterns without explicitly recognizing them as such is itself the result of sustained engagement in social interaction, and however unconscious, the learning is a practical accomplishment.

These points are paralleled by thought on the normative relevance of spontaneity in other religious traditions as well. Edith Scholl, surveying the use of the term in Christian thought, identifies it as a sort of extraordinary "willingness" whose "opposites are necessity, *necessitas*, and compulsion, *invitus*" (41), the exercise of which involves the possibility of making "wrong" choices (42). While sin undermines the possibility for freedom in willing beings, giving oneself up to conversion "may be looked upon as beginning a process of regaining our original spontaneity" (44). Supplication of one's will to the will of the divine might hardly sound like

"freedom;" but Ivanhoe too describes both untutored and cultivated spontaneities as involving "a sense of giving oneself up to or 'losing oneself'…being guided and carried along the proper path by forces greater than oneself" (16). The Christian tradition Scholl identifies intertwines elements of untutored and unconstrained spontaneity, a freely-undertaken process to regain an essential, "original" spontaneity.

The importance of spontaneity in a more concrete Christian setting is assessed by Dave Bland, considering the practices of one charismatic church with roots in Pentecostal traditions. In this community, enactment of "spontaneity" is considered an essential component of the services and group members' participation in them. Spontaneity "stands in opposition to form and ritual" and is treated as the characteristic "most indicative of a person's sincerity" (8). Innovative expression and emotional expression is privileged as indicative of spontaneity, in contrast to prepared expression—"that which springs forth from the lips at the spur of the moment is a more genuine expression of the heart than that which is planned in advance" (9). One practice especially associated with spontaneous expression is "speaking in tongues," paralinguistic expression that uses syllabic components of language; though not corresponding to any language, it "has meaning for the speaker…in the area of emotions" and signifies change, connection to God, joy and praise, and group distinction and cohesion (7-8). In this group, we see spontaneity expressed by certain conventional behaviors as conveying sincerity, with emotional expression opposed to ritualistic or planned action. Some ethnographic researchers see these expressions as themselves learned and instructed, and would consider them a form of cultivated spontaneity (6). The community's own account reads the phenomenon as more associated with untutored spontaneity, the product of giving oneself up to a higher power, a more natural way of being that expresses a more genuine self than is expressed through deliberated or

ritual behavior (7). Interestingly, Helen Berger documents a similar approach to the valuation of

spontaneity in group ritual among Witch and Neo-Pagan groups, which especially contrast

central bureaucracy and orthodoxy against the valued creativity and spontaneity in individual

group creation of ritual (55). Representatives of these groups also express concerns about

gradual deterioration of spontaneity as traditions are developed and formalized, and taught in that

form to children and new members (60-61).

Saba Mahmood argues that the experience of purposefully induced "spontaneous emotion" in

prayer for Muslim women "simultaneously problematizes the 'naturalness' of emotions as well

as the 'conventionality' of ritual action, calling into question any a priori distinction between

formal (conventional) behavior and spontaneous (intentional) conduct (828)." Mahmood's

accounts include practices by which women purposefully develop appropriate desires to

consistently pray "through the performance of seemingly unrelated deeds during the day" (831).

One must constantly renew these practices of ethical formation, for acting virtuously calls not

only for right action but also the right attitude and intention (838); maintenance of these attitudes

calls for vigilant "performances of conventional behavior that are aimed at the development and

formation of the self's spontaneous and effortless expressions" (844). In this account, we see

inseparable elements of both untutored and cultivated spontaneity—conventional practice is

needed to access natural, fundamental emotional expression.

In addition to these three normative senses of spontaneity, we might add a fourth non-

normative sense of spontaneity in action, corresponding simply to "unpredictability" of behavior.

It may be more appropriate to treat this sense as a form of spontaneity in events rather than acts;

events may involve actor-like figures such as people, but the spontaneity in them "just happens."

It is there not by virtue of coming to be via some process; rather, such events are called

"spontaneous" because their observers have inadequate understanding of the process by which the event came to be. A paradigm example of this form of spontaneity is the case of radioactive decay. The decay of any particular unstable particle is, apparently, random and cannot be predicted. Nonetheless, the regularity of half-life measurements indicates some structural order to the process. With respect to this process, individual events of particle decay are "spontaneous" in that they cannot be predicted prior to their occurrence. Any individual act of human behavior is the same to a certain extent; we may be able to create effective predictive models for the dispersion and prevalence of some human behavior, but often cannot predict individual instances from this model. And of course, far more sorts of behavior do not lend themselves to such modeling. This sense is related to the unconstrained sense in that it calls acts "spontaneous" when they lack direct causal antecedent—if we oppose causality to freedom, then lack of evident causality might be taken as evidence that an act is done "freely," though this fourth sense does not attach any normative valuation to this quality.

Of course, once we have the evidence of actual action, we can discern a variety of "causes" for acts. Consider a psychological experiment calling for "spontaneous" responses of subjects to some stimulus. These acts are spontaneous in that experimenters cannot predict them in advance, and indeed neither can their actors themselves, unless they know the nature of the relevant stimulus in advance, or have time to "deliberate" their response to it. These events are still assumed to have explanations which may be further sought after the fact, e.g., "why did you react that way?" Still, in these cases the actors' behaviors are treated as "spontaneous," where spontaneity is an interpretive frame imposed upon events, holding that the event could not have been predicted prior to its occurrence, or that the cause is unknown and perhaps unknowable. If we accept a property actually inhering in acts corresponding to this interpretive frame, this

implies a fourth, non-normative sense of spontaneity of acts, covering those acts which are simply "unplanned" or "unpredictable," without attaching any inherent valuation to this characteristic. As opposed to our three normative senses, this sort of spontaneity does not involve an overt process, it is not something that is worked toward; rather, it is "spontaneous" exactly by virtue of its lack of an evident process of development. Note that our behavior can be unpredictable to ourselves as well as others.

Spontaneity as Experience

At this point the complexity of the ontological question of spontaneity in action should be apparent. We have in play at least four different property-senses of "spontaneity," all of which are to some degree incompatible with each other. As one example of this incompatibility, let us consider spontaneity among students engaged in what Peter McLaren calls the "streetcorner state" of behavior, where students informally interact outside of the school where they spend the day, characterized by play and joking. McLaren unproblematically treats this mode of behavior as "spontaneous" in character, in opposition to the "formal, technical, mechanical…student state" (94), in which children are expected to conform to established, enforced norms of classroom behavior. Behavior in the streetcorner state can be seen as spontaneous in the untutored sense, in that the kids are acting expressively and from their "own inner resources" (94). But they are also acting in a cultivatedly spontaneous manner, by virtue of their long involvement in the cultural environment that supplies the tropes engaged in this state, and the prevalence of their deployment of archetypal character symbols (88). Also, the kids are acting "freely" insofar as the streetcorner state is not policed by authority's formal expectations. Thus, all of Ivanhoe's senses of spontaneity are in play in this state, in addition to the generic sense by

which actions are simply more un-planned/predictable (a greater variety of behavioral variables are in play than in McLaren's classrooms).

However, all of these senses of spontaneity, while they can clearly be simultaneously present, are in tension, being to a certain degree conceptually incompatible with each other. To the degree that one acts in a structure-cultivated manner, it would seem that the less one acts from one's own inner nature. Though these two can overlap, as sought by Mahmood's worshippers, it is hard to imagine they would do so entirely—what is "enculturation," after all, but the subsumption of one's personal impulses in favor of competence acting in a culturally supported manner? To the degree that one acts from one's own fundamental impulses, one does not act "freely" but rather in thrall to the calling of some inherent self. And to the degree that one acts "unconstrainedly," one does not act in accordance with cultural-structural exigency or with the dictates of one's "true," inherent self. Finally, to the degree that one acts with any of these normative senses of spontaneity, one does not act "unpredictably"—at least not in one's own experience! For the more one experiences oneself as acting spontaneously in any normative sense, the more one has an "explanation" for one's actions, i.e., the nature of one's true self, one's training or enculturation, the opportunity to exercise one's will.

I suggest that taking a turn to treating spontaneity as a property of experiences, rather than acts/events, may offer a foothold toward resolving this tangle of incompatible-yet-connected properties. McLaren parallels the *action* of the streetcorner state as "spontaneous" with the "flow" state of *experience* (94), in this latter following Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (McLaren 88, 109). The flow state—which Csikszentmihalyi equates to the experience of genuine *enjoyment* (as opposed to "pleasure", the mere "feeling of contentment one achieves whenever information in consciousness says that expectations set by biological programs or by social conditioning have

been met," 45)—is characterized by the experience of a challenging, skill-based activity with clear goals and timely feedback, in which the actor experiences deep but effortless involvement with the activity, a sense of control, a loss of sense of self followed by a strengthening of sense of self, and the distortion of the experience of time (49).

This description encompasses experiential equivalents of each of our four act-property senses of spontaneity. The importance of unpredictability is underscored especially by the experience as a "challenging" one. Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as occurring in the space between anxiety and boredom, between where a task is predictably either too easy or too difficult (74-5), that is, in a place where the outcome of effort is in meaningful doubt. Cultivated spontaneity's importance to the flow state is emphasized by the stress on the activity as skills-based, and incorporating feedback. Cultivated spontaneity is accomplished through development of skill, and it is the various forms of feedback that make such development accomplishable. These forms of feedback are with reference to "clear goals." This evidences the import of untutored spontaneity; an "appropriate" goal would be in keeping with one's true nature, and the better one "knows oneself," the clearer the goal can be. Both untutored and cultivated spontaneity can be seen at play in the process of "loss of sense of self followed by a strengthening of sense of self," depending on whether we treat each "self" as the "natural" or the "cultivated" self. Finally, deep but effortless involvement and a sense of control over the activity evince forms of unconstrained spontaneity; one feels free, as if exercising one's will, doing what one wants.

So, if we treat spontaneity as a property of experience strongly associated with the flow experience, this offers us an intelligible common ground in which we can treat this set of action-properties, individually incompatible with each other, as simultaneously experienced in

productive tension—each distinguishable from but mutually supportive of each other, rather than standing in contradictory relationships that need be conceptually "resolved."

Spontaneity as Ethnomethod

While the above view offers us coherence, we are still treating spontaneity as a property structure. Even assuming that some format can be constructed which allows reliable access to experience evaluable as spontaneous or nonspontaneous, any findings from the deployment of this format would be "not so much discoveries elicited by the deployment of the format, but versions of sociological phenomena organized through the efforts of researchers to meet the constraints of the format" (Benson and Hughes 122). Such a form of analysis, they argue, "sets the conditions for sociological description in advance so that we look at the phenomena through a grid that we impose upon them, *irrespective of whatever properties the phenomena might otherwise display*" (125).

That is, while the above synthesis offers us distinguishable and functionally-reconcilable properties, it still treats spontaneity as a fixed object, and fails to attend to spontaneity as a developing, historical phenomenon. It also fails to address what spontaneity *does*, as a social function and interpretive lens. In keeping with my ethnomethodological view of spontaneity, we might ask such questions as, "How and why do actors perform spontaneity?" "How is the perceived character of acts/events as in some way spontaneous used as a sense-making schema in social action and interpretation?" "How does one accomplish 'acting spontaneously,' and what are the context-sensitive social implications of such accomplishment?" My initial approach to answering these questions considers a variety of existing empirical "models" of spontaneity,

operationalizations of the general principals outlined above which may purposefully or tacitly recognize or emphasize different dimensions of spontaneity.

"Communicative Spontaneity": An Operationalization of Spontaneity Deficiency

Mark Carter and Greg Hotchkis have synthesized analyses of a dimension of behavior they call "communicative spontaneity" of particular concern to researchers of "individuals with high support needs" (168). Communicative spontaneity is considered a "critical aspect of functional communication…gives individuals greater control over their environment… reduces dependency on partners to anticipate communication" and is "recognized as a desirable goal for individuals with high support needs" (168). For the considered group at least, spontaneity is a normative concept, partaking of aspects of unconstrained spontaneity ("made by individuals of their own volition") and unpredictability ("not purposefully elicited," 169).

Many studies have treated communicative spontaneity as if it were an absolute property of behavior, evaluating it as "either spontaneous or not spontaneous" (169), where "the common characteristic of all definitions [is] the treatment of spontaneity or initiation as a binary variable such that communicative acts were either initiations or responses" (172). Carter and Hotchkis collect a variety of binary operational definitions of communicative spontaneity (170-71), and categorize them as drawing from four dimensions of interactive behavior: 1) "sequence of interaction"—whether the subject initiated the communication, 2) whether the communicative act included topic introduction, 3) the time between previous communication and response or new initiation, and 4) whether specified prompts are present or absent preceding considered communication (172).

In these binary conceptions, spontaneity is recognized in communicative behaviors that display what is understood as novelty, self-motivation, and relative lack of orienting antecedents. Various operational combinations of these behavioral dimensions give us a range of actions considered either "spontaneous" or not, depending on whether they meet observers' criteria. Carter and Hotchkis more generally associate "the process of developing spontaneity" in binary conceptualizations with "transfer of control from defined antecedents" (172). But they critique such models as lacking justification for choices to treat certain antecedents as indicative of either "initiated" or "reactive" behavior, and for inadequacy of their accounts in "determining exactly where control should be transferred" (173).

They offer, as an alternative, "continuum" models of spontaneity wherein "a level of spontaneity would be ascribed to a communicative behavior…judged in terms of the intrusiveness or obviousness of controlling stimuli" (173). In these cases, spontaneity is defined as "the degree to which an observer can discern controlling conditions" (174). While the goal of developing spontaneity would work toward a capacity for communication "controlled by less intrusive stimuli," it is recognized that "different levels of spontaneity may be appropriate in particular situations" and "that, ideally, an individual would be able to generate an appropriate communicative act to the full range of stimuli on the spontaneity continuum" (174). In other words, all else being equal, an increased capacity to communicate free from orienting stimuli is a positive thing, but the real goal is the ability to act with a range of degrees of spontaneity, depending on the appropriateness of spontaneity in given social circumstances.

In the continuum models Carter and Hotchkis consider, antecedents to communication are hierarchized by their perceived intrusiveness on subject experience. Communication is considered "most spontaneous" when undertaken in relation to "contextual or interoceptive cues"

(175) or "natural cues," "those that have a high probability of being present in the environment of an age-matched non-disabled peer and that are likely to occasion communication" (179)." Communication is "least spontaneous" when occasioned by "standard prompting strategies" such as physical guidance or modeling (174), or "direct prompts" by an interlocutor "specifying the content and/or form of the behavior required" (182). Intermediate levels of spontaneity are indicated by antecedents that (verbally or nonverbally) highlight contextual cues or prompt open-ended responses, without cuing a particular type of response as correct or more appropriate (175, 179-82). The considered dimensions comprising these general hierarchies can also be broken down by their perceived intrusiveness, with greater and lesser degrees of spontaneity assigned based on variables such as number, familiarity, and role of potential listeners; the setting-sensitive proximity and behavior of listeners; and the proximity, visibility, and density of possible environmental cues. Communication is judged to be more spontaneous with more listener options and with listeners who are less familiar, less proximal, or less engaged with the subject. Similarly, spontaneity is judged higher with more environmental cues and greater density of "irrelevant" cues, with cues that are less proximate and visible, and depending on the type of cue—actual objects most intrusive, representations less and language least (176-78).

While Carter and Hotchkis argue the superiority of a continuum model due to its greater coherence, explanatory power, and recognition of a wider range of variables (183), they also note several limitations. First, it does not account for multiple stimuli to which a subject may be acting in relation, nor address the desirability of being able to act with respect to a variety of cues at different levels of spontaneity (183). A second problem is the lack of normative accounts addressing the appropriateness of spontaneity in different circumstances; this data is as lacking for others as it is for individuals with high support needs, leaving researchers without a

normative group for comparison (184). Without a normative model for comparison, a continuum account simply identifies a range of spontaneities from greater to less, and asserts that, *ceteris parabis*, greater spontaneity is "better".

But that "all else being equal" is important, for all else rarely is. Carter elsewhere (2003a) notes that greater spontaneity is not always desirable, and that in some cases it may "indicate an inability to maintain appropriate social interaction" (150). In a friendly social interaction, for example, greater spontaneity would likely be desirable, but it could be disadvantageous in, e. g., a variety of interactions in professional settings. We generally would prefer that, say, law-enforcement officials or air-traffic controllers act in highly predictable and minimally spontaneous ways when carrying out their professional duties! We can identify a variety of particular situations calling for greater or lesser spontaneity, but no overarching account to organize our intuitions on the matter. Nor can we readily tease out such an account from analysis of role expectations. For example, while some aspects of being an effective doctor call for low levels of spontaneity (such as choosing what to examine or what procedures to follow in a given case), others, such as an effective "bedside manner", generally call for greater spontaneity. These aspects of acting in the role of doctor are not separable or independent from each other—the results of bedside manner interactions affect choices of procedures for handling a case, and expectations about and results of examinations affect a doctor's more "personal" interactions with any particular patient.

Appropriate levels of spontaneity may also change depending on the degree of spontaneity displayed by those with whom one interacts. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to "match" levels of spontaneity with interlocutors as a way of displaying equality or shared participation in a situation, whereas in others it may be more appropriate to purposefully display

more or less spontaneity than others. To some extent, this can be determined from the situation.

In a meeting among equal representatives in an organization, matching spontaneities would be

appropriate. When acknowledging and showing understanding of instructions given by an

authority, one would generally be expected to display lower levels of spontaneity than the

instructing figure. A motivational speaker would generally want to display more spontaneity

than their audience. But many cases are not so clear and must be determined in the process of

the interaction itself. Consider attempting to make friends with a reticent individual. You may

want to display higher degrees of spontaneity than the other as a way of inviting them towards

freer interaction. Or you may want to display lower levels of spontaneity than your

conversational partner, as a way of making them feel safer and more in control of the situation.

Or you may want to try to match the other's level of spontaneity in order to display equality and

balance between yourselves. There is no way to predetermine which strategy will be most

effective; the only way to know is to observe reactions to displays of spontaneity in the course of

interaction and progressively adjust accordingly. Often, over the course of an interaction it may

be most effective to display different relative degrees of spontaneity at different moments.

　　Empirical research of high-support need students supports arguments for the need to enact a

range of spontaneity in behavior. Carter (2003b) finds that with respect to requests, "more

spontaneous communicative acts were less likely to result in delivery of the requested item or

activity" (165). While at first glance this might indicate that more-spontaneous communication

is actually detrimental for this population, Carter goes on to note that the greater effectiveness of

less-spontaneous requests appears to be in large part due to the lower likelihood of partners

perceiving or anticipating more-spontaneous requests (165-66). This finding also appears related

to the coding definition for "delivery" of a requested item: a request was treated as having been

"delivered" upon only if the delivery occurs before the next coded communicative act by that student. Thus, requests are not treated as delivered upon if the delivery is delayed, even though the request may be acknowledged and acted upon later, or the student's partner may ask for clarification of the request prior to acting on it (164-65). This consideration illustrates the importance of capacity for a range of communicative spontaneity in Carter's subjects. On one hand, less-spontaneous requests were more effective at immediately acquiring requested items due to being responsive to partner expectations. On the other hand, these less-spontaneous requests were more effective because of the limited options presented by partner prompting and in the partner's relatively high level of control over the interaction. More-spontaneous requests may have a lower rate of immediate gratification, but have the virtues of being able to reference options not deliberately presented to the student and of inviting clarification by interlocutors, thus increasing both the range and precision of possible requests.

The "communicative spontaneity" of Carter and other researchers in his field is clearly a normative concept; that high-support needs individuals often lack a capacity for spontaneity is definitely marked as problematic, and increasing this capacity is unproblematically marked as desirable. The normative dimension of this concept draws from "unconstrained" senses of spontaneity, where greater unpredictability of subject's actions is taken as indicative of an increase in self-willed behavior and more-intrusive antecedents are seen as restricting free choice through their influence. However, the concept (at least in its "continuum" forms) not only calls for increasing "raw" capacity for spontaneity, but ties the value of greater raw capacity to the more general desirability of being able to enact a range of degrees of spontaneity with reference to appropriateness in different situations. This more nuanced consideration shows that this concept of "communicative spontaneity" also draws from "cultivated" senses of spontaneity, in

that subjects must also develop the learned capacity to effectively distinguish and enact the degree of spontaneity most appropriate in various recognizable social situations.

This operationalization of spontaneity is also treated entirely in behavioral terms. Researchers do not attempt any insight into cognitive or psychological processes as they relate to their subjects' capacities for or enactments of spontaneity. Instead, as noted above, the degree of "controlling" conditions discernable by observers marks an act as more or less spontaneous, with degree of spontaneity inverse to prevalence of controlling conditions. Spontaneity is thus treated as an observable event, though located in the actions of agential subjects. In concrete research situations where observers evaluate subjects' actions as more or less spontaneous (or, in binary conceptions, as spontaneous or not), observers look for behavior displaying characteristics operationalized as indicative of spontaneity. Behaviors indicative of greater degrees of spontaneity include: 1) the introduction of new topics or foci into a communicative interaction, 2) communication not preceded by an intrusive antecedent which orients immediately subsequent communicative choices, 3) communication apparently in response to "natural" cues (i.e., internal cues, or environmental cues not introduced into a setting with the intention of eliciting particular types of communicative act), and 4) communication that appears more targeted in a setting with a wider range of possible interlocutors and/or objects of communication. Certain linguistic features of communication in speech have also been associated with spontaneity, including lack of time to "edit" utterances, use of both verbal and nonverbal components in face-to-face interactions, smaller amounts of information per phrase or clause, as well as "fragmented syntax" and simpler grammar and vocabulary than written language (Chiang and Carter 695).

Though spontaneity in this context is operationalized in terms of observable behavior, subjects' psychological and cognitive situations are nonetheless relevant to researchers. It is essential to remember that this operationalization of spontaneity considers subjects who are marked as a population which overall has a substantially lower frequency of enactment of our listed behaviors than the population of communicating persons at large. While the value of particular displays of spontaneity depends on setting and situation, researchers' normative stance seems to be that, overall, a greater prevalence of more-spontaneous behavior is a positive tendency for a subject. The lower prevalence of such behavior displayed by the research population is thus ascribed to a lower *capacity* for such behavior, and in the process of seeking ways to increase prevalence of spontaneous behavior, researchers attempt to identify causes for this lower capacity.

Proposed causes can relate to characteristics inherent to subjects themselves or to environmental factors influencing them. One proposal is that decreased spontaneity is rooted in inherent characteristics of individuals with high support needs (including those with intellectual disability and autism), related to difficulties with selective attention and a decreased ability to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant stimuli, which "implicates the development of appropriate stimulus control, such as communicative spontaneity" (Carter 2002, 227). Softer versions of proposals for causation by inherent characteristics refer to symptoms often associated with high support needs. Carter (2002) identifies "learned helplessness" as a possible cause for decreased communicative spontaneity in this population, the decrease being an aspect of a general pattern of passivity that "develops when outcomes are independent of the individual's voluntary responses" (230). High-support-needs individuals are often "necessarily dependent on assistance from others;" the learned passivity stemming from this condition can persist as a

powerful habit even long after dependence has been reduced, and is "reflected in a lack of spontaneity or initiated behavior" (231).

A tendency toward "stimulus overselectivity" may also contribute toward decreased communicative spontaneity in this population. High-support-needs individuals tend to respond to a narrower range of available stimuli, which often "may make it difficult for individuals to identify the subtle, complex, and often multiple cues that are critical to social and communicative interaction" (Chiang and Carter 701). Spontaneity in communication may be inhibited in such cases because of difficulty attending to subtle co-stimuli in a social situation, the difficulty of attending to less-intrusive stimuli when more-intrusive ones are present, and the potential for increased intrusiveness of irrelevant stimuli (701). A proposed related phenomenon impacting communicative spontaneity is called "weak central coherence," which argues that "more spontaneous communication involves the evaluation and integration of many relatively subtle aspects of the stimulus environment, rather than attending to a single salient stimulus" and that high-support-needs individuals tend to have decreased capacity for this integrative ability (701).

Environmental factors proposed for decreased spontaneity particularly consider educational practices. Highly-structured teaching programs for high-support-needs individuals have been blamed for difficulties with communicative spontaneity, implicating the artificial relational circumstances of communication instruction in such programs (Chiang and Carter 698-99) and learned dependence on certain cues and prompts to initiate communication (Carter 2002, 228). However, Carter (2002) argues for the limited applicability of this charge, citing his own research observations of similar difficulties with communicative spontaneity in an instructional environment featuring a high preponderance of far more "natural" communicative interaction (229). An inverse position, instead of arguing that decreased spontaneity is *caused* by highly

structured teaching strategies, expresses concern about programs' "failure to systematically and actively program for spontaneity" (Carter 2002, 234). Carter connects this failure to the prevalence of binary conceptions of spontaneity, under which "spontaneity can simply be achieved by transferring stimulus control from the defined discriminative stimulus" (235). Adopting broader goals of increased range of spontaneity in communication and increased capacity to respond to less-intrusive communicative cues would imply an approach to spontaneity in education allowing for the development of "technology" for instruction of spontaneity itself (236). Some success with methods employing the continuum conception is reported, through such means as ensuring the availability of augmentative and alternative communication systems, and systematic reinforcement of more-spontaneous communication (Chiang and Carter 699) such as "out-of-routine requesting" and less-prompted question asking (Carter 2002, 235-36).

The concept of "communicative spontaneity" developed in this body of research offers one illustration of an operationalization of spontaneity. Spontaneity in this case is considered only with respect to communicative acts, and thus always takes place in interpersonal interaction (note it is never suggested that one cannot be spontaneous unless interacting, only that non-interactive behavior is outside this operationalization's scope). Spontaneity is analyzed in terms of communicative behaviors, and does not attempt to consider subject cognition or experience. While spontaneity can be treated as an absolute, present-or-not property of behavior, strong arguments are presented for the greater utility of treating it instead as a continuum wherein different communicative acts are treated as displaying greater or lesser degrees of spontaneity, based on the intrusiveness of orienting stimuli as discerned by observers. Spontaneity is considered valuable, indicative of greater independence and expressive ability, and aiding

subjects in accomplishing desired goals. However, spontaneity itself has only extrinsic value; greater spontaneity does not equal greater value, as different social situations call for different levels of spontaneity display. What is intrinsically valuable is *capacity* to enact a range of degrees of spontaneity and to discern the level of spontaneity most effective or appropriate in a concrete social situation. This capacity is considered something that can be learned, developed and increased. The population under consideration is marked as generally showing substantially decreased capacity for more-spontaneous communication, and so efforts to develop this capacity tend to focus on developing ability to communicate on the higher end of the spontaneity-degree continuum. This decreased capacity is attributed to causal influences rooted in both certain psychological characteristics typical of high-support-needs individuals and the impact of educational practices on these individuals.

This operationalization is arrived at from consideration of practical concerns for increasing certain behaviors in a population wherein these behaviors are typically exhibited far more rarely than they are in the "general population," i.e., the implicit "normal person" with respect to prevalence of and/or capacity for these behaviors. The researchers consider these behaviors to be valuable and learnable, and consider it problematic for individuals to display them rarely, and particularly problematic for an individual to be *unable* to display them more often. They identify a paradigm group as appearing to systematically tend toward inability to display "normal" levels of these behaviors, collectively called "individuals with high support needs" and orienting strongly towards individuals identified with intellectual disability or autism. These behaviors are collectively considered "communicative spontaneity" and initially their precise constitution is largely intuitive. However, since the goal is to increase their prevalence in a population,

researchers seek to identify clear behaviors indicative of "spontaneous" communication, so as to be able to reinforce them.

While still under development, the current operationalization of the concept "spontaneity" for these purposes is outlined above. This operationalization has been derived from observations of "spontaneity" in individuals considered deficient in this capacity. However, a significant concern of researchers is the lack of normative data on spontaneity, i.e.: what does "normal" spontaneity look like, the norm or ideal against which they compare their subjects? Apparently developed independent of the above account (I do not find either body of literature cited in the other), a contrasting operationalization of spontaneity has been developed by researchers and practitioners of psychology and psychological therapy, seeking to assess the "normal" character of spontaneity and the experience of highly-spontaneous individuals.

Operationalizing the "Normal" Experience of Spontaneity

Hannah Kellar et al. also treat spontaneity as normative. Seeking to codify work developed from that of psychologist J. L. Moreno, they attempt to go beyond efforts to loosely associate spontaneity with good mental health by developing a scale that seeks to accurately measure spontaneity as a personality trait. While some earlier efforts made assessments of spontaneity as a component of traits considered related, like playfulness or intuition, their research marks an effort to develop an instrument for measuring spontaneity specifically and independently (36). Their basic understanding is that behavior is spontaneous if it is novel and creative, immediate, adequate and appropriate, effortless, done with total involvement by the actor, and done non-impulsively (by agents in control of their actions) (37). In order to test the validity of their measurement construct, they tested for (and found as hypothesized) correspondence with other

personality traits considered related to or opposed to spontaneity. They considered their test to have higher validity if it corresponded positively with measures of self-actualization, playfulness, extroversion, and self-perceived creative capacity, and if it corresponded negatively with measures of depression and neuroticism (38-39, 43). In keeping with earlier versions of the instrument, the researchers found a small but consistent tendency for men to have higher spontaneity scores than women. As this did not appear to be an artifact of the measurement design, they hypothesize that it may result from cultural expectations encouraging greater risk taking in men than women (36-37, 44). Their reliability testing indicates fairly high reliability with this construct, and that the stability of the measured traits seems relatively high (44).

David Kipper goes further with his development of a measurement for spontaneity. He acknowledges the demonstrated therapeutic value of spontaneity in the psychodramatic tradition, but argues that the concept has not been subjected to investigation or clarification. He identifies the central characteristics of spontaneity in the classical theory as "energy that could not be conserved (nonaccumulated) but rather is spent on the spur of the moment in an all-or-nothing fashion" but which can be observed and developed, is "associated with healthy living…and inner discipline," and whose opposite is anxiety and a repetitive way of living (2000, 34). He proposes to initially investigate this theory by comparing it against the reported experience of psychodrama practitioners, a group trained to be highly spontaneous, whom it is reasonable to assume "represent, at the least, the average of the spontaneous individuals" (40). At issue is whether spontaneity is a readiness to act or an observable response to stimulus, the amount of spontaneity needed for good health, whether the opposite of spontaneity is pathology or a generic collection of nonspontaneous states, and whether spontaneity can be expressed while at rest or alone (34-37). He asks his participants about their experience of spontaneity in temporal relation

to action, the frequency and duration of their experience of both spontaneity and nonspontaneity, their degree of spontaneity as they age, and their experience of spontaneity in relation to the presence of others and when engaging in activities of low physical intensity (37-38).

His responses strongly indicate that, contrary to the classical theory, spontaneity is predominantly experienced *while* acting, not as a potential to act (38). Also, in a challenge to the "veridicality of the traditional notion that the more spontaneity the better the quality of one's life," a substantial majority of participants indicated that they typically felt spontaneous for less than an hour per day, and felt nonspontaneous for multiple hours per day, supporting the view that nonspontaneity can be perfectly healthy and should not be easily equated with pathology (40). Participants "overwhelmingly (83.6%) indicated…that they became more spontaneous with age and experience," supporting the classical theory that spontaneity can be learned and developed (41). The experience of an overwhelming majority also supported the traditional contentions that one could feel spontaneous while at rest or alone, though others' presence was generally seen as contributing to greater spontaneity (41-42). He suggests that the incongruity between theory and experience stems from artificial distinction of the internal preparatory phase for creative activity from the observable activity itself (42), and from the privileging of spontaneity as a mode of problem-solving against modes involving reasoning or memory (43). Nonspontaneity can positively include these latter modes as well as pathological states; while "inability to produce spontaneity frequently is related to pathology," it probably cannot be considered a sole criterion (44).

An interesting finding among his respondents was that quantitative experience of nonspontaneity correlated negatively with level of psychodramatic training, but spontaneity showed no correlation—less time spent feeling nonspontaneous did not correspond to more time

spent feeling spontaneous. Kipper takes this to mean that "spontaneity and nonspontaneity are not opposite qualities that may be viewed as two ends of one continuum" (41) and later develops this idea in collaboration with Jasdeep Hundal. They design an inventory system distinct from the PAS-II to measure spontaneity—the Spontaneity Assessment Inventory (SAI)—and administer it with a corresponding inventory for Spontaneity Deficit (SDI) (Kipper and Hundal 2005, 121). The SAI associates spontaneity with such feelings as "energized," "uninhibited," "in control," "happy," "alive," "do whatever, within limits," and "free to act, even outrageously" (Kipper and Shemer 128, 131). They administer both inventories as a way to explore the relationship between the two, especially whether the two are positive and negative ends of the same continuum, or "independent psychological states representing separate continua" (Kipper and Hundal 2005, 122). Both inventories are correlated against results from the FWBS, measuring well-being and emotional stability (124). The participants were psychology students from high school seniors to graduate students (121).

As expected, the SAI corresponded positively with the FWBS, and the SDI negatively (Kipper and Hundal 2005, 126). While the overall relation between the SAI and SDI indicated high spontaneity and nonspontaneity to be opposites, Kipper and Hundal found that when they broke scores down into ranked segments and compared equivalent segments, they could no longer find correlation between a participant's scores on each test, though an overall tendency remains for high scorers on the SAI to score lower on the SDI (125). They interpret these results to support a view of spontaneity in which, while "the two cannot coexist simultaneously in a given moment…the ability of a person to be spontaneous in one situation does not necessarily predict his or her being nonspontaneous in another situation and vice versa" (127). A spontaneous person is not one with a personality dimension such that they are always

spontaneous, but rather one "who is able to become spontaneous often, whenever appropriate, but who, in many situations, may act nonspontaneously" (127). Spontaneity and nonspontaneity, then, are not opposite ends of a continuum but rather two separate continua, wherein "the spontaneity continuum addresses various degrees of a state of mind associated with the readiness to act in a novel way, whereas the nonspontaneity continuum addresses a separate issue and represents various degrees of characteristics associated with routine behavior" (127).

Later studies support and clarify these findings. Andruella Christoforou and David Kipper clarify their concept of spontaneity as action not only free of constraints or premeditation, but also adequate and appropriate, and that it is a "driving energy," a "state of mind or a quality of readiness that sets the individual to respond...with unpremeditated openmindedness and readiness to respond to internal and external stimulations" (24). They reconfirmed Kipper and Hundal's findings about lack of inverse correlation of SAI and SDI scores except for the highest SAI scorers (32-33). They also found significant negative correlation between the SAI and a measure of anxiety as both a general personality trait and in response to particular situations; a positive correlation held for the SDI (26, 29). The same correlations—negative for SAI, positive for SDI—held for a measure of obsessive-compulsive behavior (30, 32). Finally, they showed strong positive correlations between SAI score and present temporal orientation—a tendency to focus "on the here and now"—and SDI scores with past temporal orientation; neither SAI nor SDI showed correlation with other temporal orientations, including future orientation (32).

A slightly modified version of the SAI (the SAI-R) was later introduced, deleting two items over translatability concerns and using a five-point Likert scale, so that respondents could indicate cases where they "might have difficulty characterizing their feelings as spontaneous or not" (Kipper and Shemer 129). Using a broader range of participants (134), the researchers

found that the SAI-R correlated to well-being similarly to the original SAI, and that SAI-R scores also correlated negatively with participants' experience of stress (132-33). Further research found the SAI-R to correlate positively and strongly with "perceived self-efficacy," a sense of confidence in one's coping ability across a range of challenging situations (Davelaar, Araujo and Kipper 123-24). It also correlated positively, though somewhat less significantly, with intrinsic motivation, a tendency to take action for its own experienced value instead of external rewards (120-22), and with self-esteem, "feeling of affection for oneself" (123-24).

They also raise the issue of how spontaneity can be "both a free-flowing energy and a controlling drive at the same time"—for it appears to be an "unpremeditated drive", but as a positive aspect of personality, assumes a certain degree of control of its adequacy (125). They argue that this can be explained by reconceptualizing spontaneity. Traditional views have treated spontaneity as both independent of and superior to intelligence and memory; in contrast, they argue that "adequacy of response" is both exterior to and inseparable from spontaneity:

Specifically, we suggest that there are three interrelated factors that govern one's response to a situation or people: (a) intellectual ability expressed through rational thinking and core beliefs; (b) past experience driven by memory; and (c) spontaneity. Accordingly, *the first two factors act as the mechanism that controls spontaneity*. They set the parameters that determine whether the expression of spontaneity is or is not adequate. They serve as a screen, or a tunnel that guides spontaneity to be expressed in a manner consistent with one's core beliefs and memories of relevant past experience. Thus, both intellectual ability and memory guide spontaneity toward appropriate or inappropriate response (125-26).

This interpretation appears supported by later research by David Kipper, Perine Davelaar and Stefanie Herst which finds significant correlation between spontaneity and "executive

functions," a "broad set of cognitive skills responsible for the planning, initiation, sequencing, and monitoring of complex goal-directed behavior" contributing to "the ability to ward off cognitive interferences and inhibit intrusive stimuli" (330-31). They consider the executive functions to represent a positive aspect of inhibition, and spontaneity was also found to correlate negatively with maladaptive forms of emotional inhibition "characterized by reduced expressiveness, unemotional language, and shyness" (332-33). They also argue for conceptualizing spontaneity "as an experiential state of mind rather than either energy or a skill," and specifically compare it to the flow state described by Csikszentmihalyi, but distinguish it temporally: the spontaneous state "exists prior to the onset of the creative act" whereas flow describes "one's feeling during the act itself" (330).

The most recent published research on this construct reinforces this view of the relation between spontaneity and creativity, finding significant positive correlation between them as aspects of personality (Kipper, Green and Prorak 45). The researchers also find a complex relationship between spontaneity and impulsivity. Though both are sometimes described as "acting without forethought," they are "completely different personality constructs" (42). Both also have positive and negative connotations. Spontaneity positively manifests as "overt behaviors characterized as honest, uninhibited, and free, and in accordance with one's natural tendency" or is considered negatively as "uncontrolled and uncensored response…expressed with disregard to social conventions and cultural mores" (39). Impulsivity's "positive facets refer to a risk-taking behavior driven by sensation and seeking novelty, adventure, and boldness," but it negatively refers to "uncontrolled and unpredictable behavior marked by acting without thinking, deliberation, or reflection" (41). However, the SAI treats spontaneity only as a positive concept (40), while a related measure of impulsivity includes both positive and negative

aspects. Indeed, they correlated negatively, "outward manifestations nonwithstanding," spontaneity correlating positively with creativity and impulsivity showing no correlation to creativity (48). But interestingly, the "sensation seeking" subscale of the impulsivity test, referring to "tendency to seek out novel experiences and a willingness to take risk to attain them" correlated positively with both spontaneity and creativity (49).

This body of research takes a different approach to spontaneity and reaches different conclusions about it than does the concept of communicative spontaneity analyzed above. It too treats spontaneity as normative; it is associated with good mental health *a priori*, and the validity of developed instruments of measurement is assessed in terms of positive correlation with other measurements indicative of good mental health and desired behavior, and negative correlations with measurements indicating poor health or undesired behavior. Researchers considered it evidence for the accurate character of their construct that tests attempting to measure it showed positive correlations with tests held to measure playfulness, extroversion, creativity, well-being, present-time orientation, and ability to respond effectively in novel or challenging situations. Negative correlation with tests of depression, neuroticism, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive behavior, past-time orientation, and stress is also taken as evidence for the accuracy of the PAS-II or SAI-R. Indeed, spontaneity is conceptualized only as a positive quality, with its negative meanings in more colloquial contexts instead associated with constructs like the negative aspects of impulsivity.

However, these negative correlates are not the opposite of spontaneity, such that they represent one end of a continuum having high spontaneity as its other end. Instead, spontaneity is treated as a positive continuum—low spontaneity, a little good; high spontaneity, a lot of good. Its opposite is "nonspontaneity"—not a minimal spontaneity, but a collection of behaviors or

feelings, both healthy and pathological, associated with routine. This concept, though treating spontaneity as a continuum, makes use of the binary concept of spontaneity, asserting that spontaneity and nonspontaneity cannot be experienced simultaneously. However, they are not simply complementarily opposites, i.e., the more of one the less of the other. They measure opposing but separate personality traits. In later testing of the SAI, correlative testing with the SDI was dropped, leaving a single-continuum concept like that of communicative spontaneity. However, the opposite of high communicative spontaneity is an undesired sort of behavior; researchers want students to move away from these undesired behaviors and toward behaviors on the higher end of the continuum. Traits opposite to spontaneity for psychodrama researchers are still often positive and desired; in fact, rational thinking, core beliefs, and memory, though all distinct from spontaneity, are held to orient spontaneity such that it can operate "appropriately," i.e., with desirable outcomes.

Psychological testing also measures a far different phenomenon than communicative spontaneity. The latter takes spontaneity to manifest in overt behavior in interaction with others. Spontaneity as measured by the SAI, however, is operationalized as an *experience* rather than a *behavior*. It is assessed by asking people to assess their own thoughts, feelings, and behavior; test-takers are considered reliable to assess and report on their own experience, in contrast to Carter's "high-support-needs individuals," whose communicative spontaneity is assessed by researchers interpreting their visible behaviors. Spontaneity in psychodrama is also associated with a much wider variety of behaviors than communicative spontaneity. It specifically acknowledges spontaneity when alone (not in communicative interaction) and when thinking (not displaying overt behavior), which are both outside the scope of communicative spontaneity. Though spontaneity is characterized as an experiential state preceding the "flow" state, the fact

that a preponderance of psychodrama practitioners reported feeling spontaneous while acting suggests that the states are not clearly distinct but overlap, with progressive feedback from a creative activity contributing to an ongoing spontaneity state which in turn contributes to further creative activity (c.f. Kipper 2006, 119-22).

Increasing Spontaneity as a Therapeutic Aim and Method

The PAS-II and SAI-R are considered valid across a sample of the "general population", in this case a set of persons who collectively represent an average distribution of spontaneity as an experiential tendency. Psychodramatic therapists have practiced with particular concern for individuals with lower spontaneity, but unlike the high-support-needs individuals considered by communicative spontaneity, they are not necessarily considered a paradigm model of those with difficulty displaying spontaneity. Instead, the test intends to represent an instrument measuring one against the average of individuals, and aid the practices of psychodramatists in helping individuals develop their capacity for spontaneity, which can be learned and increased just as communicative spontaneity can be "actively programmed" for. Kipper and Hundal (2003) specify that therapeutic theory "holds that spontaneity leads to creativity. Hence, the overall goal of the therapy is to train the protagonist to become more spontaneous" (142). They define psychodramatic treatment as "a therapeutic method based on the dramatization of human experiences by means of role-playing enactment under a variety of simulated conditions (concretized scenes)" (143). Role-playing and enactment is especially privileged, and often treated as better than verbal interaction in practice, though spontaneity can be experienced with rest and thought as well as emotion and action (Kipper 2005, 52).

The basic model of a psychodramatic session is a group enactment, mostly centering on a single person ("protagonist"), working with other group members who help facilitate the enactment of facets of the protagonist's life. The other group members focus on roles "related to the protagonist's presenting problem(s)," though they may indirectly gain personal insights from their portrayals (Kipper and Hundal 2003, 142). Sessions are organized into three progressive stages: warm-up (preparation for spontaneity), role-playing and enactment, and sharing and processing of the preceding experiences (142). Charmaine McVea and Don Reekie describe the purpose of the warm-up phase as "investigating the area of concern so that the client is energized and engaged in the process." Enactment explores possibilities and integration promotes "equilibrium, consolidation and embedding new roles into existing ways of being" (295-96). Spontaneity is a form of "role flexibility", "the freedom to mindfully generate and direct responses to meet a situation with vitality, creativity, originality, adequacy and flexibility," where "role" is "understood holistically as a person's specific way of being himself or herself in any given situation" (295). Kipper elsewhere (1998) clarifies that "productive (functional) roles" are transient—they "change constantly", and may disappear altogether (like situation-specific roles), or change slowly over time while persisting (like long relationships with others) (119). In contrast, "destructive (dysfunctional) roles…tend to lose their transient quality…They stubbornly remain functional, regardless of the changes that occur in the protagonist's internal and external circumstances" and a central aim of psychodramatic therapy is the dissolution or completion of such roles (119-20). Spontaneity, as active role flexibility, partakes of principles of untutored spontaneity, invoking a natural, essential, or authentic being that can nonetheless adapt its attitudes and behaviors to changing circumstances.

Some specific techniques identified as "primary" to psychodramatic therapy include "role reversal," "role-playing," and "doubling" (Kipper and Ritchie 14-15). In role-reversal, protagonists begin the enactment as themselves, but then switch roles with another person portraying the role of someone else—themselves, or another person present or absent from the session (15). In role-playing, the "actors remain in their own identity during the entire enactment without changing their identities" (15). In doubling, protagonists remain in their own identities while another person portrays the "persona" of the protagonist, "acting alongside as a double (15-17). Adaline Starr and Helene Weisz identify several other common techniques: "Future projection" asks the protagonist to enact an anticipated situation, while "mirror" and "behind-the-back" help protagonists see themselves as others see them, the first by having others perform the protagonist while she or he observes and reflects, the second by having the protagonist leave the group visibly but remain listening while the group talks candidly among themselves about that person (146-47). Bradley Anderson-Klontz, Tian Dayton, and Laura Anderson-Klontz also identify the "social atom", a visual representation of role relationships as currently experienced and anticipated/desired (116-17), and "regressive drama", a reenactment and reformation of past experience with the aim of coming to new perspectives or understandings of the present (118).

In psychodrama's therapeutic context, low levels of spontaneity are related to loss of ability to show flexibility in the way one acts as oneself in different situations, and inability to show effective adaptations in behavior when encountering new circumstances. Spontaneity is increased, allowing for greater adaptability and role flexibility, through embodied, enacted exercises in which a "protagonist" enacts unfamiliar roles or engages with new perspectives on his or her own role behaviors. The roles with which a protagonist engages—whether others, or embodiments of the protagonist's own roles—are themselves enacted by participants in the

therapy, whether a therapist or other members of a therapy group. These exercises tend strongly toward full-bodied activity and away from primarily verbal or cognitive activity. Though psychodramatic theory argues for equal legitimacy of spontaneity experienced while alone or when thinking, these dimensions of spontaneity seem largely minimized in therapeutic practice.

However, the concept of psychodramatic spontaneity, like communicative spontaneity, is still developing in relation to other concepts and practices, among them more cognitively oriented practices of psychological therapy. Thomas Treadwell and V. K. Kumar note that psychodramatists have incorporated techniques of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). They identify CBT with a more "directive" role for the therapist, but both practices emphasize "the 'discovery' process…the emphasis on the 'here and now,' role playing, and experimenting with new ways of thinking and behaving", and they hope that "the combination will facilitate the development of a new perspective—the perspective that psychodrama is primarily psychotherapy" (51-52). Kipper (2002) describes a specific adaptation of application of cognitive practices in psychodrama, the "cognitive double", a variation of traditional psychodramatic doubling, where the double's role is "more restricted, focusing on eliciting and clarifying cognitive contents," whereas the traditional double is "unrestricted, focusing on affective reactions…emotions and cognitions are inherently intertwined," but emotion is considered the broader category (96). Treadwell and Kumar associate psychodrama's conceptual terminology with theatre (e.g., "director," "protagonist") in contrast to "the usual psychotherapy terms of *therapist* and *patient* or *client*" (51), though a theatrical conceptual orientation has also appeared in other practices such as assessment of psychosocial functioning (Wiener).

From a psychodramatist's perspective, Lars Tauvon draws strong contrasts between psychodrama and psychoanalysis, a practice traditionally more explicitly aligned with

psychotherapy. In particular, psychoanalysis is associated with determinism, seeking to identify causes and origins for patients' behaviors and patterns of thinking, while Moreno's basic concept of spontaneity emphasizes "the momentary freedom to make new choices and to free ones creativity to find new solutions" (333-34). Another significant difference is in their senses of self, where psychoanalysis views the self as "a structure characterized by continuity and unity" wherein "the basic conflict is between the needs of the individual and the environment." In contrast, psychodrama's emphasis on interpersonal relations and roles views the self as "more polycentric and changeable. The self is thus described as a function of the actual situation and is ascribed a great potential for change. The basic difficulty for the individual is a lack of spontaneity and an insufficient role-repertoire" (337). A third difference is the treatment of bodily action and enactment—in psychotherapy both are purposefully minimized, while they are the essence of therapy in psychodrama (339-41, 348-49).

   Despite all these contrasts, recent thought has taken a turn toward the value of spontaneity in psychoanalytic practice. Philip Ringstrom (2001a) raises the issue of the importance of what he calls the "improvisational" in psychoanalytic therapy; though he does not reference psychodramatic literature, he borrows the "theatrical" conceptual theme used by psychodrama, drawing especially from the model of improvisational theatre. The "improvisational" is held in sharp contrast with the "classical" model of treatment, which is defined by a set of givens and a clear delineation of the therapist's role and how to act in accordance with this role (731-33), while being improvisational means "remaining open to the patient and unfettered by theoretical consideration" (734). Despite the "safety and predictability" supported by traditional technique, "improvisation potentiates the development of trust in a fashion that conventional technique is

not always capable of doing…it is not always either necessary or helpful that the analyst reflects at length about his reaction before sharing it" (742).

Russell Meares later argues that the therapeutic behavior Ringstrom advocates is better termed "spontaneity" than "improvisation." He argues the latter "has connotations of the makeshift, of the ramshackle, of flying by the seat of one's pants," while spontaneity carries meanings of self-contained causation or unconstrained will—"freedom is a central issue" (756). Meares identifies several dimensions of spontaneity in psychoanalysis. The first finds it in the relational interchange of therapist and patient "in conversational play in which both partners behave as two parts of a single system" (759). A psychoanalyst's choice to follow the nonlinear indications she or he finds as this relationship develops has significant potential for both benefit and risk (760); successful interventions are "based on his empathetic understanding of his patient's experience…empathy underpins an effective spontaneous response" (762). A second type is "truly 'self-contained' and represents an attempt on the part of the therapist to break free from the constraint, the entrapment imposed by the patient's form of relating" and is also both potentially beneficial and risky—therapists step out of their professional role and express as "a real person" (762-63). He also warns against "psuedospontaneity," expressions that may be spontaneous to the therapist but for the patient are "repetitions of the traumatic past" wherein the influence of the partners' interrelational dynamic acts with "a faint sense of coercion" such that "the expression is not freely made" and produces "a subtle form of alienation" between them. The same risk exists when "play and spontaneity are 'prescribed' [and] the therapist plays out the role of playing—like the child told to 'go out and play'" (764). For Meares, spontaneity is both interrelational and individual: "the therapeutic task is directed toward emergence of personal being, the therapist's goal…to foster a nonlinear form of mental activity that resembles the shape

of the stream of consciousness" and "the conversation in which spontaneity is evident is a state toward which therapy is directed" (765-66). While developing this communicative relationship with the patient, "the therapist tries, against the constraint of the intersubjective field, to maintain his or her own 'aliveness' and spontaneity" (766).

Ringstrom (2001b) replies that Meares's "substitution of his preferred word *spontaneity* ends up being virtually synonymous with how the rest of us [forum authors] are discussing improvisation" (802). However, he does agree with a distinction proposed by Alan Kindler:

Spontaneity refers to the subjective sense of freedom and lack of constraint associated with any action or response. This subjective quality of spontaneity defines and distinguishes it from improvisation, which embodies the idea of a cooperative effort at keeping the play, or creative conversation, going forward. Improvisation is based on the rules of engagement of the relationship and spontaneity refers to the subjective experience of the individual…Our improvisational facility and freedom in a particular relational context permits us to respond without preparation, and with a creative orientation toward form, procedure, or role…Both dimensions, the formal and the improvisational, are present in every interaction to varying degrees (Kindler 222-23).

Ringstrom (2010) agrees, adding:

Being spontaneous involves acting from a natural feeling, one expressed without constraint, effort or reflection, occurring through internal causes. Improvisation certainly involves spontaneity, but, more important, it plays off of and with patterns emergent in both parties…In being spontaneous, one can emote with nothing further coming from the other. Improvisation, however, requires playing with something that arises between two or more

people. Thus, working improvisationally involves ensemble work, wherein both parties play

off of and with one another's spontaneous gestures (239).

Their distinction between spontaneity and improvisation strongly approximates Meares's

distinction between individual spontaneity and interrelational spontaneity—"spontaneity" is an

individual subjective experience while "improvisation" is a necessarily social interaction.

Psychodrama concurs to the experiential nature of spontaneity, while its concept of "creativity"

roughly corresponds to psychoanalysis's "improvisation." Though one need not be in direct

interaction to behave creatively, creative action creates products, physical and/or informational,

that then enter into the social milieu and can influence future creative acts and experiences of

spontaneity by others. Though it acknowledges spontaneity when alone, psychodrama is

oriented on a relational model of self, while psychoanalysis orients on the individual and unified

self. As such, psychoanalysis gives far more attention to processes of "nonembodied,"

nonenacted experience and cognition, and thus finds a useful distinction between individual

mental experiences of spontaneity and social enactments (improvisation) associated with that

experience. If we accept this analysis, psychoanalysis's distinction holds that one can act as

"individually spontaneous" through mental or cognitive behavior as well as "socially

spontaneous" in interactive, role-related behavior.

Cognitive Spontaneity and the Social Self

A reasonable paradigm of non-embodied, "individual" spontaneous action would probably be

thinking or a similar purposeful cognitive activity. Galen Strawson, however, argues that this

sort of "self-contained," cognitive spontaneity is largely illusory—if spontaneity is "connected in

some constitutive way with action: voluntary, intentional, and indeed free action" (227), than

none of the contents of our experienced consciousness is in that sense spontaneous. Considering a variety of proposed cases for actional modes of thought including attention, following a sequence of reasoning, choice and decision, imagination, and belief-formation, Strawson concludes that the role of action in cognition is limited to the "*prefatory*", "*catalytic*", or "acts of *priming*" (231), what he calls "mental ballistics." Cognition itself is instead the product of "waiting, seeing if anything happens, waiting for content to come to mind…Mental action in thinking is restricted to the fostering of conditions hospitable to contents' coming to mind" (232-34). Such ballistic activity can be successful because "human minds are powerfully governed by deep, natural, non-agentive principles of operation" (248). Only in the sense of following these principles such that their control of thought is ideally "as involuntary as the spontaneous, effortless control with which we normally maintain balance and mastery of our limbs in walking or running" (254) can there be "any spontaneity in reason, thought or judgment" (251). Spontaneity in thought is thereby involuntary. Significantly, in the sense of voluntary and free action, "one cannot be spontaneous…if one is trying or intending to be. The project is self-defeating" (250).

If so, then entreaties to practitioners or recipients of therapy to "develop" their capacity for free and self-generated thought are incoherent; any "self" is involved only below the level of conscious cognitive experience. However, Andrei Buckareff responds that Strawson's analysis treats the process of thought too narrowly, as if it proceeds from its own momentum once oriented, leaving the individual an observer to the cognition. In contrast, Buckareff calls attention to the "causally sustaining role" of mental experience in cognition. Intention does not merely initiate action, but "must play a guiding role, with the agent controlling his behavior via the intention, remaining responsive to feedback in the execution of the action" (85). Thinking is

not different in kind from an overt, embodied action like driving—though many components of driving may be habitual and automatic, the complex action is throughout "caused and causally sustained by a proximal intention I formed when I commenced driving." Reasoning and other cognitive processes are like this: one "must be aware of what is going on, sensitive to information that comes to mind as I continue to reason about some problem or how to act" (86).

If free, self-generated action can both initiate and sustain complex individual actions, we get a picture of spontaneity that closer resembles psychodramatic models wherein spontaneity and creativity overlap and feedback into each other. But the voluntary, free character of spontaneous acts is also identified with "intentionality," calling for a coherent and unified self as in psychoanalysis. This has an important implication for cognitive spontaneous action. Like embodied action, it must be sustained by some intentionality cohering a complex action out of a series of other activities (both voluntary and not). This intentionality serves to coherently orient the various actions involved upon some projected accomplishment.

As the complex activity of driving is directed toward a projected destination, complex cognitive action also attempts to "get somewhere." This model of cognitive spontaneity is highly similar to the view proposed above by Davelaar, Araujo and Kipper wherein spontaneity is guided and channeled by reasoning and memory, which make "appropriate" responses possible as such. For something to be constituted as a cognitive accomplishment, it must be established with respect to *social* phenomena such as reason and/or memory. One can only evaluate if cognitive efforts are succeeding by virtue of models and practices of reasoning, feeling, choosing and so on gleaned from social experience. And the outcome of a cognitive process can only be understood as an accomplishment because that outcome has some relevance in its introduction to a social milieu. This means that even the most minimally embodied,

exclusively "cognitive" spontaneous acts are still a form of "improvisation" in the psychoanalytic sense of a progressive development of interrelational meanings and behaviors enacted between multiple persons.

Social Enactment of Spontaneity

Thus, even in its least "communicative" form, spontaneity operates as a social, interpersonal, dialogical phenomenon. The experience of spontaneity depends on recognition of what can be considered spontaneous, as does the enactment of spontaneous behavior. What's more, because spontaneity is considered desirable (if potentially inappropriate or risky), people will often want their own behavior to be recognized as spontaneous. Michael Kubovy and Joseph Psotka report revealing results on the social enactment of spontaneity through experiments on spontaneous number choice. When asked to "give the first number that comes to mind between 0 and 9," an overwhelming preponderance of respondents (28.3%) name 7 (291-92). However, it does not appear more than other single-digit numbers when the requested range is from 6-15 (292). Its appearance is dramatically reduced when included in the 0-9 request as an example of a typical response (293), or when the range is given as 70-79 (294). They suggest that "7 might predominate because it appears to be the most 'appropriate' response to the request for a spontaneous choice" (292). It is not an "automatic" response, and decreases greatly when marked as typical. 7 also decreases if "designed to…appear obvious and easily explicable;" as "spontaneity implies freedom from obvious causality, we expect respondents who seek to appear to comply with the request for the first response that comes to mind to shun a trite response" (293). They conclude that:

The experimenter's request is essentially a request for a spontaneous response, and the subject is placed in a paradoxical situation—only if he does not try to comply can he comply. But then his might not *appear* to be in compliance because of its commonness or obviousness. So, if he wishes to appear to comply, the subject must carefully select his response and thus fail to comply. We believe that this is what subjects do (294).

Kubovy later argues that for a response to carry the impression of spontaneity, "the most appropriate heuristic rule…would be to choose the response which is the least related to external stimuli or constraints" (359). A "spontaneous" number may come from short-term memory if it has been subtly made available by "priming": e.g., the request for "the first one-digit number that comes to mind" yields a substantial increase in responses of "1" almost directly at the expense of "7" (360). However, if the number is distinctively mentioned in the request (e.g., "one-digit number like 7"), that number "is rejected even though it is in short-term memory because the experimenter would appear to have caused the response" (363). In the limited scopes of response considered by these experiments, either spontaneous or non-spontaneous mental processes can lead to the response, and if either a digit is unavailable in short-term memory, or if it is but has an obvious causal antecedent, then subjects appeal to the "apparent spontaneity heuristic," which involves "norms of impression management…which enable us to seem spontaneous when we are not" (363-64). The limited scope of possible responses in digit choice makes for stark results of the use of the spontaneity heuristic in that case: Kubovy and Psotka argue that 7 seems clearly the "oddest" digit, as 2/4/6/8 and 3/6/9 form groups, while 0 and 1 are endpoints and 5 a clear midpoint (294).

In keeping with my ethnomethodological viewpoint, I agree that it is meaningless to describe individuals as "being spontaneous" by purposeful choice, or by embodying some property

through their actions. What they can do is *perform* a "spontaneity heuristic," a way of making

their actions recognizable as spontaneous in a concrete social situation wherein they are called

upon to act spontaneously. Researchers of communicative spontaneity, psychodramatic

practitioners and researchers, and Bland's charismatic congregation are all social groups who

have developed detailed concepts of spontaneity and ways of evaluating the behavior of others as

spontaneous or not, with implications for those evaluations. Though spontaneity is enacted

socially within their operationalization schemas, these schemas all treat spontaneity as an

individual quality, whether experience or behavior. Another conceptual operationalization of

spontaneity, which treats it explicitly as a social phenomenon, is called "organizational

spontaneity."

Jennifer George and Arthur Brief treat organizational spontaneity as "extra-role behaviors

that are performed voluntarily and that contribute to organizational effectiveness" and identify

five sorts of such behavior: helping co-workers, protecting the organization, making constructive

suggestions, developing oneself, and spreading goodwill (311). They distinguish this facet of

organizational behavior from "citizenship behavior" and "prosocial behavior," in that

organizational spontaneity includes only functional actions with respect to organizational ends,

does not include role-prescribed behaviors, and includes only "active" behaviors (313). These

behaviors correspond strongly with "high positive mood states" described in terms like "*active,*

elated, enthusiastic, excited, peppy, and *strong,*" in opposition to, e.g., "*drowsy, dull, sleepy* and

sluggish" (315-17). Mood can influence levels of organizational spontaneity at the level of

individual affect, prevailing moods in a primary work group, and environmental influences (317-

23).

In addition to the psychological influence of mood, organizational structures and contexts can affect organizational spontaneity at various levels. Individuals have more opportunities and inducements to perform organizational spontaneity behavior with higher skill levels and sense of their own skills, with broader role definition, better interpersonal relationships, and greater willingness to ask for help (George and Jones 158-60). Individuals are also affected by group norms encouraging innovation and creativity, high interdependence among group members, and goals not demanding highly role-prescribed behavior (161-63). Less mechanistic organization structures, an organizational culture valuing innovation over predictability, inducements for self development, and reward systems not tied to role-prescribed behavior are all organization features that can promote organizational spontaneity (164-66). Finally, organizations tend to become more similar as they interact, and imitate each other's effective practices, so organizations finding success with organizational spontaneity will promote it at the interorganizational level (167-68).

Though performed in the context of organizational activity, organizational spontaneity is still a matter of individual action (George and Jones 156). A similar concept (though not referencing work on organizational spontaneity), called "organizational improvisation," treats spontaneous behavior more as a matter of the group at large. The social structure of an "improvisational" organization process model "consists of a minimal set of behavioral norms and communicative codes respected by all players during a collective performance" drawing from "technical structures" consisting of "shared grammars or templates [i.e., ways of expressing and/or interpreting meaning], which are reinterpreted to create new meanings" (Pinnington, Morris and Pinnington 14). Performances of improvisation can also be facilitated and constrained by the relational structure among participants, including organizational and economic hierarchies,

organizational expectations of employee dispositions, and accepted positions expressible within those expectations (22-26). While improvisation is still treated as a matter of individual action, it is the social context that facilitates the very possibility of "organizational improvisation":

> Individuals are central to the structure and process of improvisation because their performances are enacted and embodied. Participants rely on their subjective differences in order to innovate and create anew; and, conversely, they rely on a degree of homogeneity in order to work cooperatively. The participants in the improvisation are situated within a context that offers liberties and constraints on their action (27-28).

Organizational improvisation, as a purposeful process, is most often occasioned by increasing degrees of "turbulance"—changing, unexpected, or unpredictable occurances or environment, whether the result of outside events or internal drive for change (Pina e Cunha, Kamoche and Campos e Cunha 36). Improvisation as a process "can be described as discovery-driven action aiming to explore unknown or unexpected opportunities or to neutralize unforseen threats" and is facilitated by "a minimal structure mostly resulting from explicit and irrevocable goals and deadlines," "a small set of working rules," and "simple and flexible resources" (36-37). It is also facilitated in "experimental cultures," those that "promote action and learning by doing—as opposed to reflection and planning—as a way of understanding and dealing with reality" (37).

Based on grounded field observations, researchers argue that organizational spontaneity is most emergent when a task is perceived as important by members, occurs in an environment of neither very high or low turbulence and organizational structure, and is confronted with simpler resources (Viera da Cunha, Ken Kamoche, and Pina e Cunha 579-81). Improvisation was more successful when group perception of a task and its importance was highly cohesive, and when

tasks were clearer and less complex (581-82); successful improvisations led to more efficacious future action and higher group cohesion (583-85). Organizational improvisation calls for a leadership style where the leader "needs to be able to make a synthesis among apparently conflicting or dissonant styles, such as planning and acting behaviors, directive and permissive styles, providing guidelines, rules, and procedures, while allowing individual discretion for goal attainment" (Pina e Cunha, Kamoche and Campos e Cunha 39). Successful improvisational leadership is based in the skill of "simultaneous integration of apparently contradictory behaviors, values, and beliefs in the process of leading a group" (39). Despite the importance of the leader in the group's relational structure, it is only one role among many playable in a group enacting organizational improvisation. The degree of improvisation in a task is not dependent only on individual behaviors; rather, organizational improvisation is considered with respect to the group at large, even as some individuals may act with a low degree of improvisation.

While researchers of organizational spontaneity and organizational improvisation have focused their interest on profit-oriented business or product-development settings, similar claims for the value of an "improvisational" approach can be found in discussions of public administration. Susan Fitzpatrick particularly associates "improvisational" approaches which "call upon memory and learned skills" with the "imagination" required to "invent variations on the spot" (652). Improvisation, as organizational action, partakes of the imaginary to "resist the 'given' nature of institutions" (644). Swan Hua Xu also invokes the "imaginary" as an approach to the spontaneous in public administration, drawing the concept of spontaneity from Taoist writer Zhuangzi. Spontaneous action is contrary to "instrumentally rational action" instead being "action that responds to situations, changes in environment based on one's instinct or even unconsciousness. [It] is not led by pre-identified purpose and is not bound by pre-existing rules

or judgmental thinking; it focuses on the process rather than the end" (284). Put into practice in public administration, this attitude toward action implies that governance should orient toward "facilitating" rather than leading or presenting public good (286) and that leadership within administration structure should be deemphasized in favor of co-participation among a community working toward "the art of just, rather than heroic, leadership" (287).

These various accounts of spontaneity in organizations provide examples of how a "spontaneity heuristic" can be identified by or deployed among group members in concrete social settings, wherein spontaneity is marked as a desirable trait for the organization itself and not just for its individual members. Where spontaneous number choice gives an example of performing a generic "spontaneity" when called for, spontaneity in organizations marks certain attitudes, and the desires and behaviors they are supposed to generate, as valuable. These valued behaviors contribute to organizations' efficiency or the accomplishment of goals. They are not necessarily beneficial for individuals within the organization, nor are these behaviors ends in themselves. Instead, certain attitudes are identified with the positively-marked concept of "spontaneity," and the display of behaviors associated with these attitudes is privileged as an effective "performance" of spontaneity.

The Use of Spontaneity As an Analytic Concept

Employed in the context of explicit scholarly analysis, spontaneity as a social practice largely takes the form of a *term* used by researchers. The term's "meaning" (in the sense of definition, relevance, or both) is the object of researchers' inquiries, and it seems reasonable to assume that among the "projected accomplishments" implicated in the practice of such inquiry is the establishment of the term's definition and/or relevance. In accounting of the general practice of

producing conceptual analyses of spontaneity, a key guiding question would thus be, "To what questions of definition or relevance is researchers' use of the term 'spontaneity' oriented?" Asked another way, "What issues related to the use of the term 'spontaneity' do researchers raise or attempt to resolve in their writings about it?" Or again, "What questions do analyses of spontaneity concepts seek to answer?"

The questions that guide these analyses reveal the parameters of the projected practical accomplishments implicated in researchers' analytic behavior. The different fields make sometimes widely divergent uses of the term, framing its relevance in terms of concrete concerns for the field in question. But this slate of examples provides insight into the various issues of spontaneity *treated as relevant* for the purpose of researchers. The synthesis above gives a number of examples of how such issues are tacitly implicated across these divergent fields, even as different fields give greater emphasis or focus to some issues over others. Many of the relations between these issues across different fields are discussed above; my purpose is not to resolve these issues but simply to identify them *as* relevant issues to practices of analyzing and accounting of spontaneity.

One such issue is the ontological status of spontaneity as a property. Is it a property inhering in observable behavior, and thus (at least in principle) "literally describable" in Heap's terms? Or it instead a property of persons' experiences, and thus only interpretively describable? Accounts such as Ivanhoe's "untutored" or "cultivated" spontaneity, Carter's "communicative spontaneity," or George and Jones's "organizational spontaneity" would align with the first category. The second category would include accounts such as Ivanhoe's "unconstrained" spontaneity, Csikszentmihalyi's "flow experience" and the "cognitive spontaneity" debated by Strawson and Buckareff. Many accounts also posit the spontaneity property as inhering in some

relationship between behavior and experience (e.g, psychodramatic and psychoanalytic accounts, Mahmood's prayer practices, or Kubovy and Psotka's number-choice experiments). An ethnomethodological view would of course reject any realist account that treated spontaneity as an *actual* property of anything, independent of the way it is used by social participants. However, when viewing spontaneity as ethnomethod, the fact that participants commonly *treat* spontaneity as a real property of behavior and/or experience is highly relevant to any account of the concrete use of "spontaneity" as an analytic term.

A second issue concerns whether spontaneity is binary or gradable. Are behaviors/experiences of spontaneity all-or-nothing, with the spontaneity-property treated as either simply present or absent? Or does spontaneity occur in degrees of greater and lesser? The first view includes accounts like the binary models critiqued by Carter and Hotchkis, Strawson's model of mental action that leads to his rejection of cognitive spontaneity, and in the Flow experience. The second includes Carter and Hotchkis's continuum models and the spontaneity measurement tools developed by Kipper and collaborators. Many other areas do not clearly address this issue.

Acceptance of a continuum account also raises the issue of the relationship between spontaneity and non-spontaneity: are they opposite ends of a continuum, as in Carter and Hotchkis, or related but distinct and separable continua, as in Kipper and Hundal's SAI? These two models also raise the question of quantifiability in continuum accounts. Kipper and Hundal's measurement tools suggest a holistic view of spontaneity as a general pool of behaviors/experiences, numerically scalable based on subject self-reports. In contrast, Carter and Hotchkis's continuum is broken down into tiered categories, with greater and lesser degrees of

spontaneity only evaluable by coding specific behaviors and comparing between tiers, without any smooth quantifiability possible for "overall" subject behavior.

Whether the account is binary or continuum, the question of present/absent or greater/lesser spontaneity leads to the issue of grounding a basis for making such evaluations. This issue asks for descriptive guidelines of what behaviors and/or experiences are indicative of greater or lesser spontaneity. In ethnomethodological terms, what conventions of sign and language do analysts treat as bounding the flexible-but-finite range of shared meaning that makes recognition of spontaneity as a social order possible in their contexts? The reviewed literature above uses a variety of tactics addressing this issue—typologies of behaviors, exemplary narratives, general accounts of activity patterns such as "role flexibility," characteristics of the reported experience of subjects, correspondence with other behavioral/experiential characteristics treated as relationally affiliated with or opposed to spontaneity, etc. This issue is central to the projected accomplishments of spontaneity-analysis as a social practice; every item reviewed above addresses this question to some degree.

The question of spontaneity's value-status is also at issue. Some accounts treat spontaneity as only descriptive, associated with unpredictability, but do not assign any value to this property, as in the above numeral-choice experiments. However, most of the accounts above treat spontaneity as a normatively-positive property whereby behavior/experience, all else being equal, is "better" by virtue of being spontaneous. If we treat spontaneity as normatively positive, this raises the issue of *why* it is so. Is it intrinsically valuable as an end in itself? Ivanhoe's typology offers a useful categorization of bases for treating spontaneity as intrinsically valuable, as does Csikszentmihalyi's association of it with flow experience. Spontaneity can also be treated as extrinsically valuable, a productive force valuable not in and of itself, but because it

supports the accomplishment of other valued ends. Examples of such ends supported extrinsically by spontaneity include good mental health or role flexibility in psychotherapeutic applications, increased independence for high-support-needs individuals in Carter, or increased organizational efficacy for writers like George and Jones, Fitzpatrick, or Xu. Finally, spontaneity can be seen as valuable by treating it as a *potentiality*, neither valuable in itself nor extrinsically leading toward other ends. In this view, spontaneity's value is derived from role in setting the conditions that make other desired ends *possible*, without necessarily directly leading to them, as in some psychodramatic accounts of creativity or the desired religious attitudes described in Mahmood or Scholl.

Especially in accounts that treat spontaneity as normatively valuable, the issue whether spontaneity can be increased in frequency and/or intensity is relevant. Accounts like Strawson's would see this as an incoherent fool's errand, but almost all other accounts above conclude or even presuppose that spontaneity can be increased. The related question of why it would be valuable to increase it is answerable in terms of the normative account of its value, as just discussed. This naturally leads to the issue of *how* to increase it; answers to this question range greatly with the researchers' particular applications. Some accounts are very broad, like "the shedding of enculturated learning" or "the practice of enculturated skills" for Ivanhoe's untutored and cultivated spontaneities respectively, or the increased awareness and orientation toward flow experience of Csikszentmihalyi. Other accounts suggest general types of behavior or mental attitude but not specific activities, such as accounts of organizational spontaneity or Ringstrom and Meares's approaches for improved improvisational relationship between psychoanalysts and patients. Still others offer specific activities aimed at increasing spontaneity,

such as examples of psychodramatic techniques, or the cultivation of spontaneous prayerful attitudes through daily tasks described by Mahmood.

Accounts that do not treat spontaneity as intrinsically valuable may raise the issue of the context-dependence of spontaneity's value. If spontaneity is not valuable in and of itself, in what contexts is it of normatively positive value, and are there contexts where it may be normatively negative? If so, what determines which contexts are positive or negative? Carter's assessments of communicative spontaneity address this issue most explicitly, but its relevance can also be seen in examples like Kipper's emphasis on "ability to become spontaneous" as indicative of mental well-being for psychodramatic practitioners, or Meares's cautions about the role of spontaneity in psychoanalytic practices.

To the degree that frequency and/or intensity of spontaneity is gradable, and increasing it (at least in certain contexts) is considered valuable, the issue is raised of what accounts for greater or lesser degrees of spontaneity. One possibility is the inherent subject characteristics of individuals; some persons are treated as "naturally" more or less capable of spontaneity than others, by virtue of fundamental qualities of personality or experiential/cognitive capacities. This possibility is especially considered in Chiang and Carter's account of high-support-needs individuals, as well as at the level of general human cognitive characteristics in Strawson's critique of cognitive spontaneity.

A second possibility, relevant in most of the accounts above, is that greater or lesser degrees of spontaneity can be accounted for in terms of learned behavior patterns, which can both promote and inhibit spontaneity. In Ivanhoe, "untutored" spontaneity is inhibited by the learning of enculturated patterns of behavior; in contrast, the learning of such behaviors is critical to the development of "cultivated" spontaneity. Chiang and Carter give more credence to this

dimension; it is also highly relevant in psychodrama, which identifies unhealthy, repetitive behavior patterns as stymying spontaneity, while advancing active-participation therapeutic techniques intended to increase spontaneity through practice.

Concrete environmental characteristics may also affect spontaneity levels, as with the availability of communicative tools to Carter's subjects, the influence of environment on employee mood considered by George and Brief, or the spontaneity-promoting effect ascribed to working with "simple and flexible resources" by Pina e Cunha, Kamoche and Campos e Cunha. A subcategory of environmental characteristics relevant to many researchers above is the influence of relationship characteristics among involved individuals. Examples of relationship features treated as inhibiting spontaneity include the highly-structured teaching techniques critiqued by Chiang and Carter, the professional formality of the therapist-patient relationship in psychoanalysis, or the centralization of public-administration authority criticized by Xu. On the other side of the coin, the mutually-supportive protagonist-focused contributions of a psychodrama group, the "shared structural expectations" of Pinnington, Morris and Pinnington, and the "experimental cultures" of organizations that promote action by learning and doing instead of reflection and planning (Pina e Cunha, Kamoche and Campos e Cunha) are all examples of relationship characteristics that promote or encourage spontaneity among participants.

A final issue concerns the distinction between spontaneity for individuals and spontaneity among groups of participants in shared social activity. Is spontaneity a quality only of individuals, of groups, or of both? Carter and Hotchkis's analyses connect spontaneity with specific individual behaviors, and thus treat it as individual, as do Kipper and collaborators in measuring spontaneity as an individual personality trait. On the other extreme, writers on

"organizational improvisation" understand it specifically as a trait of a group. Many take some middle ground. "Organizational spontaneity" is understood in terms of individual behaviors, but with that behavior located in a concrete interactive organizational setting. Psychodrama treats spontaneity as individual experience and capacity for behavioral flexibility, but locates its practical relevance in situations of interpersonal interaction. This issue is perhaps most visible in the discussion involving Ringstrom, Meares, and Kindler, where the debate over the appropriate use of the terms "spontaneity" and "improvisation" in psychoanalysis hinges on exactly this question.

If a distinction is made between individual and social spontaneity, this raises the question of the relationship between them. It may be simply additive, as in George and Brief, with group spontaneity simply a matter of collected individual acts of spontaneity. More complex relationships are also suggested in some cases, such as Davelaar, Araujo and Kipper's account of the relationship between individual spontaneity and the social phenomena of rationality and memory, or the individual number-choice responses filtered through the performance of a social "spontaneity heuristic" in Kubovy and Psotka's experiments. Depending on the relationship advanced, spontaneity may be identified and recognized differently in individuals and groups.

In conclusion, the following questions summarize the issues at stake to some degree or another in analyses of spontaneity; researchers' address of these issues indicates the scope of projected accomplishment implicated in their analytic action. Is spontaneity a quality of behavior, or of experience, or of some relationship between the two? Is it binary—either present or absent—or can it be divided into degrees of greater/lesser? If divisible, can it be quantified? What is the relationship between spontaneity and non-spontaneity? What behaviors and/or experiences are indicative of greater or lesser spontaneity? Is spontaneity treated as simply

descriptive, or is it a normatively positive quality? If positive, is it a potentiality, a productive force, or a valued end in itself? Can it be increased in frequency and/or intensity in an individual or group? Why would it be valuable to increase it? If it can be increased, how? Is it always desirable, or only valuable in certain contexts? What makes a context more or less appropriate? Are greater and lesser degrees of spontaneity due to inherent subject characteristics, learned behavior patterns, or environmental/relationship characteristics? Is there a distinction between individual and social spontaneity, and if so, what is the relationship between them? How is it identified and recognized in individuals and groups?

While certainly not exhaustive of potential issues related to accounts of spontaneity, I take the above list to summarize a number of the key issues relevant to practices of accounting for spontaneity as an achieved phenomenon of social order. In the following chapter, this set of questions will guide my rhetorical analysis of the term "spontaneity" in methodological writings on improvisational theatre. Specifically, they form the dimensions along which I consider improv writers' uses of the term as an "ideograph," a heavily value-laden but loosely-defined term, the meaning and relevance of which is a matter of contestation within the cultural communities where it is recognized and used.

CHAPTER 3

SPONTANEITY AS AN IDEOGRAPH IN IMPROV METHOD

In this chapter, I assess the rhetoric of "spontaneity" as an "ideograph" in the culture of

improvisational theatre practitioners, with particular reference to a set of improv-training

methodology books which have had substantial influence on the ideals and practices of members

of this culture. In his foundational essay on the concept, Michael Calvin McGee defines

"ideograph" as:

> an ordinary language term found in political discourse. It is a high-order abstraction
>
> representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative
>
> goal. It warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be
>
> perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and guides behavior and belief into channels easily
>
> recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable…Ideographs are culture-bound,
>
> though some terms are used in different signification across cultures. Each member of the
>
> community is socialized, conditioned, to the vocabulary of ideographs as a prerequisite for
>
> "belonging" to the society. A degree of tolerance is usual, but people are expected to
>
> understand ideographs within a range of usage thought to be acceptable: The society will
>
> inflict penalties on those who use ideographs in heretical ways and on those who refuse to
>
> respond appropriately to claims on their behavior warranted through the agency of
>
> ideographs. (15-16)

Some briefer formulations by later writers employing the term may be helpful in establishing

an initial formulation for my purposes. Hugh Miller describes ideographs as "guid[ing] behavior

and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable, or

not…ideography invokes coherent patterns and recognizable formulations. There is a sense in which ideographic patterns regulate power and weave the texture of reality" (469-70). Jeffrey Bridger calls them "words or short phrases that represent an orientation to an abstract ideology" which "serve as a kind of ultimate justification for specific actions;" when used, "we assume that their meaning is self-evident and channel behavior accordingly" (357). David Coogan treats ideographs as not "arguments," but "ideological icebergs: the visible bump of what lies beneath," i.e., inscribable, culturally-recognizable symbols of commitment to organizations of power and normativity in a society (670). Below, I examine in depth how the term "spontaneity" also operates in this way in the rhetorical practices of groups recognizing the term as indicative of value-orientation.

An ideograph operating in a culture has both "diachronic" and "synchronic" dimensions relevant to any analysis of it. Tracylee Clarke defines the diachronic structure of an ideograph as representing "the full range and history of its usage for a particular culture" (51); Brent Saindon expands this understanding to include all possible "meanings of the ideograph available to the present situation, which functionally means the totality of all previous meanings conferred upon a particular ideograph over time" (94). In contrast, the synchronic structure of an ideograph addresses "the relationship between the ideograph and the other ideographs operating in society" (Saindon 94), or more specifically, "how an ideograph is used in relationship to other cultural ideographs in a specific situation or particular circumstance" (Clarke 51). Broadly speaking, the diachronic dimension of an ideograph is the collective history of all uses of the ideograph recognized within the culture where it is used, while the synchronic dimension is the particular purposes for which an ideograph is deployed in a concrete event of social activity.

The default understanding for ideographs tends to view their use as being in the service of entrenched dominant power structures in a culture. Saindon argues that McGee's concern is with ideographs as a form of "myth" that "constructs subject positions and controls populations. [They] are not just symbolic resources for the world making practices of humans, but tools of securing certain narratives of structural inequality" (93). From this perspective, ideographs serve to reinforce dominant ideologies by establishing cultural "unity" on the terms of social discourse for matters to which the ideographs in question relate. However, many commentators have assessed ideographs as a field for social contestation on equal footing with their role in reinforcing structures of inequality. Clarke notes that "when an ideograph is broken down and used in particular situations, its abstract nature can set up a situation that allows for multiple interpretations and diverse actions to be taken. If those actions conflict…then contention is created, and those involved are divided not unified" (60).

Ideographs act as fields for ideological social contestation in the interplay between their diachronic and synchronic dimensions—their ranges of recognized uses, and the contraction, expansion, or variation of these ranges asserted by members of culture in their concrete uses of ideographs in particular situations. Disagreements over acceptable uses of ideographs are not merely inevitable, they are integral to the process of establishing "meaning" for an ideograph. However, disagreement is not with respect to "truth," i.e., a "correct" or "accurate" characterization of the ideograph (though discourses of contestation may certainly be framed in these terms, as terms like "truth" or "correctness" are themselves ideographs with important synchronic relationships to others!). McGee asserts that "Ideographs can *not* be used to establish or test truth, and vice versa," for "truth," in its "ideal metaphysical senses, is a consideration irrelevant to accurate characterization" of ideographs (9). Instead, "disagreements about an

ideograph are not discrepancies over its formal properties but its formative power to contain our commitments" (Coogan 671). Saindon argues that ideographic discourses "do not emerge ex nihilo, but rather from a dense web of competing interpretations" (102). Contestation over ideographs is not a matter of rhetorical response by marginalized persons or groups against a standing dominant ideology. Instead, the reverse is the case—dominant ideology emerges as one highly-visible effort to impose unity where unity is absent, and thus, in discourses of contestation, whether engaged in from a "dominant" or "marginalized" perspective, "ideological claims are a product of dissensus, not consensus" (108).

Researchers using ideographic analysis offer a number of examples of such ideographic contestation in concrete rhetorical discourses. Saindon includes an extended analysis of the term "equality" in the deployment and reception of Peter Singer's ethics on animal rights (95-106). Miller explores the synchronic relevance of the concepts "free will" and "determinism" to the ideograph of the "individual." Bridger assesses the centrality of ideographic concepts of "community" with respect to debates over land use and zoning regulations in Lancaster County, PA. Clarke examines divergent uses of the concept "tribal sovereignty" in debates over an arrangement to store spent nuclear waste on the Skull Valley Goshute Reservation in Utah. While most ideographic analysis is focused on broad conceptual terms like those above, other researchers have also considered examples of more specific, concrete cultural artifacts as objects of ideographic contestation. Robert Branham gives an historical overview of the use of the song "America" ("Of Thee I Sing") as an ideograph to both support and undermine dominant ideologies of power in the U.S, while Janis Edwards and Carol Winkler examine the use of the iconic Iwo Jima flag-raising image in political cartoons as an example of a visual image, rather than a term, that functions ideographically. Michael Altimore demonstrates the power of

ideographs to act toward excluding subdiscourses in contestation over issues, showing how science journalists writing about recombinant DNA overwhelmingly elide "philosophical" and "political" discourses of morals and power structures in favor of "technical" discourses about the safety and possibilities of R-DNA experimentation. Through the set of methodology texts examined below, I offer a detailed example of "spontaneity" as used in rhetorical ideographic practices for improvisational theatre, showing these same features of diachronic history and synchronic association over a contested, value-laden term.

The above examples of contested ideographs tend to focus on the synchronic dimensions of their subjects. However, the diachronic dimension is also critical in holding such discourses together. The efficacy of ideographs as cultural tools is derived from their simultaneous ambiguity and universal recognition in a culture as relevant and carrying justifactory power. Even as conflicts over the meaning and appropriate use of ideographs play out, the ideograph continues to unify the society where such conflict occurs; indeed, they make the particular points of contestation in question possible. Saindon describes the process of public discourse as not a simple dynamic of a dominant ideology against countervailant marginalized voices, but instead "a dispersed, multiplicitous public sphere containing a cacophony of vernacular voices: they strive for social cohesion, but in relation to voices of conceptual extension, conceptual distinction, and outright dissent." But within this cacophony, we can identify specific "multiple, vernacular publics: temporary social groups brought together over a common concern, and that compete with…other public discourses for increased cultural attention" (110). In these cases, we see the unification function of ideographs at work even in dissensus.

In her analysis of the public debate over nuclear waste storage on the Skull Valley Goshute Reservation, Clarke summarizes that "those involved in this controversy are united by

sovereignty as an ideograph and separated by disagreement as to its particular meaning." The

disagreement is a product of both the legal ambiguity of the term (diachronic dimension) and the

competing agendas of involved persons and groups (synchronic dimension). Nonetheless, the

abstract ideograph "act[s] to unify, creating a harmony among its users" (59). The use of

"harmony" in its literal musical sense is instructive here: It does not mean "agreement" but

rather "concord," and literally refers to multiple voices, producing different notes, that

nonetheless unify as a coherent chord. In the same way, ideographs serve to unify elements of

Saindon's "cacophony of vernacular voices" in particular situations , not through agreement as

such with each other, but rather through their shared allegiance to the importance of certain

ideographs, which unifies disparate voices into a coherent discourse. Below, I discuss in detail

how "spontaneity" operates similarly in improvisational theatre rhetoric as a unifying ideograph

even as uses, synchronic associations, and advocated practices diverge widely among

methodologists.

A contemporary example might be current discourse over voter ID laws recently enacted by

legislatures in a number of U.S. States, many of which have been challenged in the courts.

These laws require certain limited forms of photo ID as a requirement to vote in-person at a

polling site. Supporters of such legislation rely primarily on the argument that such laws are

good for society through their function of safeguarding the "integrity" of elections by preventing

in-person voting fraud. Opponents of these laws tend to focus on the concern of

disenfranchisement of legitimate voters who, though voting entirely legally, will be prevented

from voting as a result of lack of appropriate ID. The discourse of both supporters and

opponents of these laws, however, is bound together by mutual, largely unquestioned respect for

the key ideograph (or "God" term, as McGee calls them, 7) "democracy." The disagreement is

over interpretation, with voter ID supporters synchronically affiliating "democracy" more strongly with "securing the integrity of valid elections," and opponents affiliating "democracy" more strongly with the "enfranchisement and access to election participation of legitimate voters," both with solid diachronic historic bases for their associations.

The mutual recognition and acceptance of "democracy" as a shared ideal of U.S. culture is what makes the terms of dissent possible with respect to this particular issue wherein multiple competing synchronic associations operate in relation to a higher-order ideograph uniting them. The same sort of dynamic can be seen in dissent over the meaning of concrete cultural ideographic artifacts. The song "America" (Branham) and the iconic Iwo-Jima flag-raising image (Edwards and Winkler) have both been used as ideographs to rhetorically uphold dominant power structures. Both have also been parodied and caricatured to rhetorically interrogate or protest such power structures. But both sides of the ideographic use of these artifacts are effective due to the shared attitude of discourse participants in recognizing and respecting these artifacts *as* important value-laden cultural symbols. Attempts to undermine the dominant-ideology synchronic associations of these symbols still uphold their importance as symbols; otherwise, parodies of them would not be recognizable as parodies. The only way to truly undermine their actual relevance of the symbols (instead of merely seeking to change their synchronic associations) would be to ignore them. But even such active ignoring is itself a rhetorical response that acknowledges the power of the symbols as something important enough to be worth ignoring.

This consideration, of the relevance of "ignoring" or "being silent" with respect to ideographs, relates to a third key dimension of ideography later introduced by McGee: ideographs' "influence." Saindon describes this dimension as being added in McGee's later

theoretical shift to "discourse fragments;" it considers how, when introduced into discourse, "the fragment gains attention through its cultural prominence (circulation and repetition)" (95). The introduction of this dimension acknowledges the unpredictable effects of ideograph usage. The efficacy of rhetoric in this view is no longer evaluated as a cause-and-effect relation between a speaker's rhetorical actions and the ability of those actions to directly impact the actions of others. Instead, "influence" designates "the ability of a fragment to receive attention from other textual fragments circulating in the culture. The measure of success is not compliance, but citation, whether that occurs in assent, response, or extension of a fragment's meaning" (95-96).

This consideration of the "reception and appropriation of the fragment" offers an evolutionary view of ideographic operation: "Fragments that matter will be remembered and 'structured into our experience'…Rather than the ideograph representing dominant social interests, a fragment begs to be engaged, denied, or transformed" (104-05). This view is more amenable to treatments of ideographs as supporting discourse of dissention or contestation, for "this aspect of a fragment (its ability to insinuate itself in a multitude of different contexts)…requires a de-emphasis on the intent of the speaker in favor of tracing multiple, often contradictory, effects of discourse" (106-07). To account for the continued relevance of power implications in a society viewed through this lens of fragmented discourse, Saindon introduces the term "ideographic fragment." Ideographic fragments "serve as a medium of exchange between speaking subjects. Their respective familiarity with certain terms and conditioned respect for a term's value (though empty in itself) creates a magnetic relationship between the 'ideographic fragment' and other fragments circulating in the culture." Like a "sound bite," an ideographic fragment's influence is "no longer determined by the truth it posits, but instead performed through its repetition or iteration." The "path of least resistance" for promulgation of

ideographic fragments is to "gain attention in popular culture by attaching to something familiar and desired, then attempt to mutate the significance of the term, changing its association with other fragments" (109).

In sum, an ideograph is a term with a poorly defined meaning but widely recognized in a society as value-laden, related to normativity, and functioning as justification for the exercise of power and/or expressive behavior. Members of a society collectively recognize ideographs as highly relevant to claims involving morality or other forms of value, even as members disagree over the meaning or appropriate application of invoked ideographs. In this way, shared ideographs help to unify a society by providing a rhetorical "common ground" that coheres dissenting voices into frameworks from which participants can establish what disagreements are "about." The "meaning" of an ideograph is not established with respect to "truth," but rather with respect to the ideograph's efficacy in influencing behavior. Analysis of particular ideographs considers three dimensions: 1) the diachronic, including the totality of historical uses of an ideograph; 2) the synchronic, addressing relationships with other ideographs, either tacitly implied or explicitly evoked, in specific social actions and settings; and 3) their influence, taking into account the actual outcomes and changed prominence of ideographs resulting from their deployment in concrete social action. In the following sections, I show how the rhetorical concept of the ideograph can be understood within an ethnomethodological framework and be deployed as practices among a group that treats "spontaneity" as ideographic.

Ideography from an Ethnomethodological Perspective

Though originating from and employed primarily as a concept of rhetorical analysis, the principles of ideography share many important affinities with an ethnomethodological

worldview. Such a worldview would reverse the traditional direction of analysis, but largely retains the relevance and character of elements identified with ideographic theory. Most research explicitly addressing ideographs does view them as "signs" of underlying social order, as in Coogan's "ideological iceberg" account above. An ethnomethodology perspective, of course, would instead view ideographs as "methods" emergent from concrete social interaction. Their role in upholding dominant normativity and organizations of power is largely due to practices of "blind obedience" as described in Chapter One, reflected in claims like Bridger's that "we assume that [ideographs'] meaning is self-evident and [will] channel behavior accordingly" (357). Ethnomethodologically speaking, such "blind obedience" that allows for predictable response to the use of ideographs does not implicate social participants as mere dupes to the ideology underlying ideographs they encounter. Instead, this "blind obedience" emerges as a *method* whereby social participants make their actions intelligible, and can recognize the actions of others as intelligible, in social interactions where ideographs are implicated. "Blind obedience" is thus viewed not as a *result* of automatic responses to ideographs, but rather as a concrete method by which the association of "dominant" accounts of an ideograph's "meaning" are reinforced in particular social-historical moments.

Such methods are by definition subconscious, for recognizing oneself as acting in blind obedience constitutes an immediate "breach" of blind obedience as a social method implicitly emerging from concrete interactions. But they are no less *methods* because they are subconscious—their subconscious character is integral to effective accomplishment of methods of blind obedience. As such, *any* explicit rhetorical deployment of an ideograph constitutes a breach of the methods of blind obedience by which dominant meanings are reinforced, and it is these breaches that allow rhetorical analysts to account of the emergent social structures

implicated in concrete use of ideographs. Through disruption of the method of blind obedience to dominant meanings for ideographs, explicit deployment of an ideograph for the purpose of upholding dominant power structures is every bit as much a breach of the default, subconscious methods that make responses predictable and intelligible, as are deployments that explicitly seek to undermine, change, or interrogate the meanings of that same ideograph.

The synchronic dimension of ideographs is thus heavily emphasized when considering them ethnomethodologically, as this dimension is focused on the concrete use of ideographs through observable behavior in specific social situations. Ethnomethodology's focus, though, is on the "how" of synchronic ideograph use—i.e., the concrete behavioral methods whereby social actors reinforce, question, muddle, change, expand, etc., the relations among ideographs. This includes not only explicit behaviors of ideograph use, like parodies or justifications for moral views, but also "negative" behavioral methods like silence and "blind obedience" to the "automatic" associations with higher-order ideographs that cohere participants in events of explicit ideographic dissent. The diachronic dimension of ideography remains important, however. The "totality of historical uses" of an ideograph bounds "the range of possible 'meanings' constituted in and by language" for that ideograph, the "indefinite, but not infinite" range of possible interpretations for actions that makes recognition and intelligibility possible (c.f. Heap 94). The explicit use of an ideograph already breaches the methods of blind obedience implicated in reinforcing that ideograph, but such explicit deployments must themselves fall within the ideograph's diachronic range of recognized use, lest a participant's use of an ideograph breach the recognized methods *for* use of that ideograph, inducing "bewilderment" instead of intelligible synchronic action. Such breaches, of course, accrete to the ideograph's diachronic dimension and may over time change or expand the range of recognized methods for

synchronic action relating to the ideograph, and thus the dimension of "influence" also remains relevant from an ethnomethodological perspective. As discussed below, "spontaneity" in improv practices shares a special relationship with methods of blind obedience, in that successful enactments of spontaneity to a certain degree require unawareness of their success. Thus, the explicit deployment of "spontaneity" by methodological writers operates as the sort of "breach" described above, offering a point of access to the synchronic ideographic practices of "spontaneity" in improv while remaining bounded by the limits of recognition established by its diachronic history.

Like action (i.e., "purposeful" behavior) generally in ethnomethodology, ideographs are culture-bound. However, ethnomethodology would tend to view cultures less as "writ large" and more in terms of concrete social situations involving "the operation of a certain cognitive style that is shared" among participants, representing a "finite province of meaning" that allows recognition by participants of both intelligibility and breaching with respect to a particular ideograph (Eberle 291). An ethnomethodological "culture" of shared recognition methods for an ideograph will tend toward high levels of "blind obedience" behavior in their intracultural interactions, and greater explicit deployment of the ideograph in their interactions with other ethnomethodological cultures, i.e., others who do not share the same implicit "cognitive style" that allows for shared methods of intelligibility and breaching. The "vagueness" of an ideograph in culture "writ large" derives from the widespread currency of a shared term across many groups who have different "methods" for making use of that same term intelligible and breachable.

Heather Stassen and Benjamin Bates write that although ideographic "terms appear vague at the surface, members of a community will be able to understand the ideograph's exact nuances

and subtleties as understood within that community" (1). Such an "ideographic community" would form a "culture" in an ethnomethodological sense with respect to a specific ideograph, though of course members of that community have countless other social roles, positionalities, and senses of themselves that may be relevant in any concrete action involving the ideograph in question. Where relevant in the following, I will use the term "ideographic community" to refer to this ethnomethodological sense of "culture" as established through shared practices of intelligibility. This will distinguish the term where necessary from "culture" in the "writ large" sense, which is shared by Saindon's "multiple vernacular publics," i.e., multiple, distinguishable ideographic communities whose members are also implicated in countless other social orders. This culture writ large provides fields for methods of "higher-order" ideographic action that coheres ideographic dissensus between and within ideographic communities. Because of this expansive process, ideographs do indeed become "vaguer" the more we view culture in the broad sense, even as members of specific ideographic communities have extremely high shared levels of tacit understanding that allow for their ideograph to be largely "taken-for-granted" and dealt with through methods of blind obedience within the community. While "spontaneity" is a highly vague ideograph in culture writ large, in the ideographic community of improv practitioners it takes on a much more concrete practical character, taking on criterial relevance and allowing far more to be taken for granted about its relevance to related community practices.

Improvisational Theatre as an Ideographic Community and the Rhetoric of Spontaneity

As an ideographic community within a larger culture is defined ethnomethodologically by its shared practices of ideograph recognition, so too can it be defined in terms of shared activities, the performance of which reinforce allegiance to certain ideographs. A cultural group that views

itself as cohered through shared engagement in a particular recognized form of activity will have its own key ideographs or "God" terms relating to that activity, i.e., high-order ideographs that cohere the group *as* an ideographic community by virtue of members' shared engagement with an ideographically-associated activity. In such cases, the key ideographs will be those that members associate with giving the activity normative relevance. A group united by participation in a voter-registration drive, for example, cannot help but be united by shared positively-normative associations with the ideograph "democracy"—otherwise the performance of voter-registration-drive behavior would not be account-able as a normative activity associable with ideographs. Other ideographic associations are of course possible—the group may be registering voters for "fun," perhaps, instead of to advance democracy. But this orientation to a different key ideograph changes the very nature of the activity, and how participants account of and evaluate it. If registering voters ceases to be "fun," a group orienting to this ideograph will likely cease the activity, while a group orienting to "democracy" as a key ideograph will likely marshal along. Conversely, a group orienting to "democracy" will likely stop registering voters if they come to see the activity as detrimental to democracy (perhaps viewing it as legitimizing a corrupt electoral system), regardless of how much "fun" they are having.

In this way, activities that are highly similar in the observable behaviors that perform them can nonetheless take on quite different characters in different ideographic communities within a culture. But if a shared activity is experienced as normative by participants, it must tacitly or explicitly appeal to *some* "God" term or terms used as practices to account-for that activity's normativity and allow for shared intelligibility among participants. In some cases, however, this centrality of key ideographs can be taken a step further. Adherence to a normative orientation toward an ideograph may not merely be a practice of justificatory accountability for an activity,

but may be experienced and treated in practices as definitional of the activity itself. That is, allegiance to the relevance of certain ideographs may instantiate in practices as essential to recognition of an activity *as* the activity it is recognized to be. The activity cannot be what-it-is without at least tacit allegiance to a normative order produced through ideographic practices. For example, runners in a foot race must at least tacitly affiliate their activity with an ideograph like "competition." Practices of positive-normative orientation to "competition" are prerequisite for members' activity to be recognizable among themselves *as* racing. Participants may observably be running as fast as they can along the same route, but without this ideographic orientation to "competition," such behavior cannot be seen as endogenously productive of the meaning of "racing." To be racing and not merely running fast with others, one must experience oneself as being in "competition," and, at least insofar as the activity of racing goes, must have normatively-positive associations with this ideograph, for the race *qua* race would not be possible at all without this orientation. Heap describes such activities as the "most pervasive contexture of indexicality and reflexivity," in which "the actor's self-understanding of his/her activity is to some degree criterial for the identity of practices" (102).

I argue that improvisational theatre ("improv") is another such activity, with the ideograph "spontaneity" as criterial. The successful accomplishment of improv as such, even if of "poor" quality, implicates an orientation toward spontaneity as an ideograph, for without spontaneity, a performance is not improv but something else, as running in a group without a sense of competition is not a race. As I did in broad overview in Chapter Two with scholarly analyses of spontaneity, I will below do in detail with "spontaneity" as a term in improv, through the artifact of a set of methodology texts for practitioners produced over the course of about 40 years, with attention to the dimensions of analysis described at the end of Chapter Two.

Improv principles and practices have been applied to a wide variety of different purposes. Besides those discussed in Chapter Two above, improv has also been used as a method for developing scripted performances (Scholte), for social activism (e.g., Boal, Park-Fuller), and for education, of groups as diverse as actors, preschoolers (Lobman), health-and-wellness students (Boria, Welch, and Vargas), grouped children with various disabilities (Bernstein), classroom teachers themselves (Coppens, Wright), business teams (Gesell), trial lawyers (Lubet and Hankinson), counselors (Tromski and Doston), and social workers (Walter). However, the texts on which I will focus belong to a tradition focused on improv as "a performance product in and of itself" (Napier 1), a theatrical approach primarily oriented to entertaining an audience.

Modern theatrical improv traces its roots to *commedia dell'arte* (Schmitt 68-70, Seham 9), a style most popular from the mid 16th to 17th centuries, utilizing general plotlines without specific dialogue, stock character archetypes, and *lazzi*, bits of comic business that could be dropped into a variety of performance situations (for detailed examples and analyses of practices, see e.g. Anderson, Brockett 144-49, McGill, Pietropaolo, Tylus). The jumping-off point for contemporary improv is generally ascribed to the Compass Theatre in Chicago in the 1950's (see Coleman, Patinkin, Seham, and Sweet for detailed historical accounts). The Compass's early work included many "scenario plays," with their structure of a plot outline without scripted dialogue drawn directly from commedia, though they did not use stock characters and covered a wider array of genres (Coleman 88, 104). They also performed open improvised scenes based on audience suggestions. In 1960, a number of Compass alumni founded Second City in Chicago; Viola Spolin, mother of director Paul Sills, trained the original cast using the performance "games" she had developed and would later collect into *Improvisation for the Theatre*, the first time she had used them to teach adults. Second City has operated since 1960, with many branch

theaters and travelling casts, and serves as a major training ground for improviers, though its productions are primarily scripted work developed through improv rather than improv itself (Patinkin).

Without knowledge of Spolin's work, Keith Johnstone (*Impro* and *Impro for Storytellers*) also developed an improvisational theatre praxis through his work as a children's teacher and director in the U.K. He founded Theatresports in Calgary, Alberta in 1978, which has since spread through Canada, much of Europe, Australia and New Zealand, as well as into the U.S. The organization is highly decentralized and local details can vary greatly, but the shared format is a competitive show where teams of improviers compete at performing games (similar to Spolin's, but with greater emphasis on audience suggestions and behavioral rules), with a group of "judges" (other improviers) evaluating and nudging along the action (Foreman and Martini). Carol Hazenfield (*Acting on Impulse*), and Tom Salinsky and Deborah Frances-White (*The Improv Handbook*) are also affiliated with Theatresports branches in the U.S. and U.K. respectively.

Meanwhile, "longform" improv was developing in Chicago, and was made central at the ImprovOlympic (later IO) in the form of the "Harold" under the organization of Charna Halpern and Del Close (*Truth in Comedy*). Longform, rather than the atomistic style of scenes and games in improv, is instead an arrangement of connected scenes, but with far less structure than a scenario play, generally not prefiguring plots or characters. A wide variety of longforms have since been developed at IO and by other improv companies (Kozlowski 71-89). Mary Scruggs and Michael Gellman's *Process* works toward a half hour scene in a single space in real time. Mick Napier (*Improvise*) worked with both Second City and IO before founding the Annoyance, another influential improv theatre and training center in Chicago.

Through these many influences and others, improv has taken on a wide variety of forms and practices, but its practitioners are held together as a community recognizing itself as engaged in a shared activity. The wide variety of improv practices are unified through an allegiance to some sense of "spontaneity" as prerequisite for performers to be able to do improv, as such, at all. Improv has a long history of promulgation primarily through direct teaching and experience, and this factor has likely been far more influential on the whole than methodology writings. But of course, it also highly diffuse and difficult to trace, and so I take the set of texts discussed below as a helpful entry point into the ideographic rhetoric of spontaneity for improv, on the same ethnomethodological basis as the conceptual scholarship on spontaneity in Chapter Two.

In assessing the rhetoric of spontaneity in the following eight texts I will be considering the analytic dimensions emergent from Ch. 2. Based on authors' analysis, treatment, association, and illustration of the term "spontaneity," I assess each author on how their use of the term explicitly or tacitly answers the issues raised in each guiding question, as best as can be based on the textual evidence available. Is spontaneity, as a fundamental component of improv, treated as a matter of improviers' performance behavior, the experiences they have while performing, or some relation between these aspects? Is spontaneity absolutely present or absent in a moment, or is the spontaneity of an improv performance treated as a matter of degree? How are binaries or degrees of spontaneity assessed by improvisers, i.e., what behaviors and/or experiences indicate greater or lesser spontaneity in improv? Is spontaneity always treated as normative for improv, or can it be simply descriptive? When explicitly normative, why is it valued? Does spontaneity's value take the form of a potentiality, a productive means, or an end in itself? Is spontaneity universally valuable, or seen as potentially problematic in some contexts? What attitudes or practices are seen as able to increase prevalence or intensity of spontaneity in a

performer and/or ensemble? How are individuals and groups affected in their capacity

for/prevalence of spontaneity by their inherent subject characteristics, their learned behavior

patterns, and the environmental/relational characteristics of an improv situation? Is there a

distinction between spontaneity for individual performers and spontaneity for an ensemble, and

if so, what is the relationship posited or implied between them? How do individual performers

and ensembles make their improv perfomances visible, recognizable, and account-able as

spontaneous?

In addition to addressing these analytic dimensions, I also assess the authors' synchronic

associations with spontaneity, the other ideographs and concepts with which spontaneity is

associated, whether by positive affiliation or by negative contrast. The texts are presented below

in their publication order, with the exception of Keith Johnstone, whose two books are closely

related in their accounts and are discussed together. Where potentially relevant, I also note

where previous methodological accounts of spontaneity may have influenced successive texts.

Viola Spolin

In *Improvisation for the Theatre*, Viola Spolin addresses spontaneity as a foundational

principle extensively, explicitly defining the term in her glossary as " a moment of explosion; a

free moment of self-expression; an off-balance moment; the gateway to your intuition; the

moment when, in full sensory attention, you don't think, you *act*!" (370). She also explicitly

defines the term "spontaneous selection" as "selecting that which is appropriate to the problem

without calculation; a spontaneous choice of alternatives at a moment of crisis; since theater is a

series of crises, spontaneous selection should be working all the time; selecting out of the

'explosion' that which is *immediately* useful; insight" (370). She elsewhere analyzes the term's

relevance for her in detail, using it to collectively consider seven factors as "aspects of spontaneity": games, approval/disapproval, group expression, audience, theater techniques, carrying the learning process into daily life, and physicalization (4-17).

Acceptance of the "rules" is central to her concept of the "game." Games are essentially characterized by successful "playing," which she uses to link the core activities of traditional games and dramatic acting, citing her teacher Neva Boyd's work on play, where she writes that both create "a condition in which *strain* and *conflict* are dissolved and potentialities are released in the spontaneous effort to meet the demands of the situation" (qtd. in Spolin, 5). The "demands of the situation" in a game are established by the rules, which in turn facilitate play activity: "acceptance of all the imposed limitations creates the playing, out of which the game appears, or as in theater, the scene" (6). Games focus action and attention among a group of players; effective games are "highly social" and have "a problem that needs solving" within them. The problem gives an "objective point" with which individuals become involved, but for the game to be truly played, "there must be group agreement on the rules of the game and group interaction moving toward the objective" (5). The focus and action directed toward the game's objective "provokes spontaneity. In this spontaneity, personal freedom is released, and the total person, physically, intellectually, and intuitively, is awakened," allowing "the student to transcend himself or herself…explore, adventure, and face all dangers unafraid" (6). In turn, "the energy released to solve the problem, being restricted by the rules and bound by group decision, creates an explosion—or spontaneity" and "everything is torn apart, rearranged, unblocked" (6). Spontaneity produces both special experiential conditions and special types of action.

Both approval and disapproval inhibit playing, for the "first step toward playing is feeling personal freedom" (6). Freedom leads to both "experiencing" and "self-awareness (self-identity)

and self-expression" (7). But freedom is limited by social practices of approval/disapproval, through both fear of disapproval and submission to the approval of authority. Reacting to approval/disapproval "results in a serious (almost total) loss of personal experiencing…in the attempt to live through (or avoid living through) the eyes of others, self-identity is obscured, our bodies become misshapen, natural grace is gone, and learning is affected" (7). She places heavy emphasis on the teacher's actions and attitudes to facilitate true playing and direct experience. Teachers should engage in "constant self-surveillance" to avoid "words which shut doors, have emotional content or implication, attack the student-actor's personality, or keep a student slavishly dependent on a teacher's judgment." They should also remember that they "cannot truly judge good or bad for another, for *there is no absolutely right or wrong way to solve a problem*" (8). Approval works as more insidiously authoritarian, and more difficult to recognize as such, for students seek it to gain a better sense of themselves as progressing, but "it remains progress on the teacher's terms, not the student's" (8); thus, the teacher takes on a burden of "accepting simultaneously a student's right to equality in approaching a problem and [her or his] lack of experience" (9). By way of navigating this dilemma, Spolin reminds teachers that judgment "limits our own experiencing as well as students', for in judging, we keep ourselves from a fresh moment of experience and rarely go beyond what we already know" (8). The best policy for both teachers and students, then, is to do away with the "dependencies" of each for the other, and instead focus on the rules of the games—"the problems within the *subject matter* will teach both of them"—and teachers will be cued by attending to "the fact that *the needs of the theater are the real master*…the teacher too must accept *the rules of the game*" (9).

The relationship between individual and group is essential to productive performance for Spolin. She condemns a dominating attitude for any group member, and advocates for a group

relationship of "individuals working interdependently to complete a given project with full individual participation and personal contribution" (9). Each person should give their fullest to the act of performance; differences in ability and experience are to be expected, but the teacher is cued to "see that each student is participating freely at every moment," considering not the visibility of contributions but rather whether "a student is participating to the limit of his or her powers and using abilities to the fullest extent" (10). Shared agreement and group involvement in shared activity create the conditions for "harmony," in contrast to competitiveness. Any sense that a group member "has to be better than someone else" replaces participation and leads to "compulsive action," which Spolin associates with activities like fighting for status by criticizing others, defensive attitudes, detailed explanation of choices, bragging, blaming others, apathy, and boredom (11). "Contest and extension," on the other hand—competitiveness of the group with the shared activity, rather than among the group—"gives both release and tension in such a way as to keep the player intact while playing" (11). Play is sustained and progresses as "each individual strives to solve consecutively more complicated problems" and the group members work "harmoniously together with others to enhance the group effort or project" (11-12). It is important that the group's goals evolve out of activity rather than be "superimposed" on it. Desirable goals in this schema appear "easily and naturally," coming from "growth rather than forcing," and in these cases success is not seen as an end-result but in the engagement with the process itself. "Process comes before end-result" in Spolin's ethic of group activity, but they ultimately collapse in a group's engagement with a shared, natural goal: "The end-result, performance or whatever, will be no different from the process that achieved the result" (12).

The relationship of performers to audience is also key. Spolin criticizes attitudes toward audiences regarding them as "either a cluster of Peeping Toms to be tolerated by actors and

directors or as a many-headed monster sitting in judgment" (13). She implores companies to remember that their every effort at creating theatre is for the audience, calling them "guests, fellow players," whose shared experiences "make the performance meaningful" (13). From this perspective, performers experience "complete release and freedom," understanding the audience "not as judges or censors or even as delighted friends but as a group with whom an experience is being shared…each one with a right to a thoughtful and meaningful experience" (13-14).

Theater techniques are the "methods" by which performance is done, but Spolin rejects a splintered view of distinct skills in performers' repertoires, emphasizing the central principle that "*the techniques of the theatre are the techniques of communicating.* The actuality of the communication is far more important than the method used" (14). Instead, techniques should come "from the total self." Theatre games provide a structure that can support a "direct, dynamic awareness of an acting experience [such] that experiencing and techniques are spontaneously wedded, freeing the student" (15).

She advocates "carrying the learning process into daily life;" instead of "homework" on theatre training—even script memorization—workshop training should be done in such a way that it is "absorbed, and carried out again (inside the self) to daily living." Theatre practice should lead to the ability to make "direct and fresh contact with the created environment," which in turn produces "recognition, direct and fresh contact with the outside world as well" (15). Students should have a deepening "involvement" with their "phenomenal world" and experience it "more personally" (15). She describes "experiencing" as "the only actual homework and, once begun, like ripples on water is endless and penetrating in its variations…The world provides the material for the theater" (15-16).

Considering Spolin's concept in terms of the dimensions of analysis I posit for spontaneity, the answers to guiding questions is seldom tidy. For her, spontaneity appears to be a quality of both behavior and experience. The experiential qualities are given primacy, for it is out of the spontaneous experience of performers involved with the "game" guiding them that spontaneous action appears. The "explosion" is experienced as engagement of individual intuition that, hopefully, is also expressed in a way sharable by other participants, both performers and audience. As she presents it, spontaneity seems to be binary—the moment of personal freedom and choice, the connection with the intuitive, is either present, or something inhibits it, and it is not. She does not appear to posit degrees of lesser or greater spontaneity; though the capacity for it can be developed, at the moment of experience and action spontaneity is all or nothing.

Spontaneity certainly has normative value in her account; indeed, it is the central value by which the success of the performers is evaluated. It is not a potentiality but rather a valued end in itself—for Spolin, true spontaneity is by definition unqualifiedly good merely by virtue of being experienced, though it also has the productive value of leading to the sorts of performance action she seeks. Its normative qualities heavily emphasize Philip Ivanhoe's unconstrained form of value for spontaneity. The term "freedom" is strongly and repeatedly associated with it, as in "free moment of self-awareness," "personal freedom," "participating freely" in shared game-play, and experiencing "release and freedom" through relating to the audience as co-participants. The "fundamental self" of untutored spontaneity seems important as well; she often invokes individuals' "intuition" and "personal experience." But the self she advocates acting from is ideally expansive, and independent of the influence of social gaze and the approval/disapproval practices it wields, so even this fundamental self is idealized in terms of its unconstrained freedom.

Spontaneity goes beyond the individual, though, and can be experienced and enacted collectively, through a group's focus on the "game": An understood agreement on context and purpose for action, and on shared willingness of each to give their all to "solving the problem" posed by the context and purpose. Her emphasis on "carrying the learning process into daily life" suggests an expansive sense for the value of spontaneity; indeed, she gives no account of caution or appropriate limitation on spontaneity. It is treated as a fundamental good, here explored through performance.

Performance is Spolin's vehicle through which individuals and groups can become aware of and enhance their capacities for spontaneity. She does not seem to see spontaneity as limited by inherent subject characteristics, opening her book: "Everyone can act. Everyone can improvise." Nor is spontaneity in improvisational performance limited by environment. Spolin never seems to suggest that any particular physical location or setup enhances or inhibits spontaneity, and the techniques of improv are by necessity largely minimalist. Instead, spontaneity is limited by learned behavior patterns and relationship characteristics. In particular, learned behaviors related to desire for approval, and to avoid disapproval, lead to self-inhibition of spontaneity by performers, due to performers' views of relationships between themselves and teachers, audience, and each other. This self-inhibition can be released, and individual and collective spontaneity enhanced, through the teacher's attitudes and practices, and by the attitudes performers take toward each other and the audience. In all cases, the emphasis is on the game. The performers seek not to control or impress one another in advancing their own contribution, but instead aim to collectively work together, each to their fullest ability, to accomplish a shared objective. The audience is treated as neither judge nor privileged viewer, but as co-participants in this process—indeed, vital ones, whose presence "make the performance

meaningful." Teachers are implored to eliminate habits of approval/disapproval, while balancing this with the value of their authority in nudging performers toward more spontaneity-enhancing avenues. They can do so best by also avoiding practices that control or impress, and giving their focus to the collective agreement of the game. The use of authority should orient to whether each player is working to their fullest, and whether the players are working together and remaining focused on their purpose. Spolin's work was the first systematic improv methodology, written after long years spent primarily teaching her practices to children. A second thread of methodology, also explicitly analyzing the term "spontaneity," was not long after initiated in the U. K. by Keith Johnstone, another writer who started as a children's teacher, but whose methodology is far more explicitly directed at adults.

Keith Johnstone

In his foundational improv text *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*, Keith Johnstone also dedicates a full chapter with the title "Spontaneity." His first associations for the term are with "imagination" and "creativity," citing examples of creativity tests, where subjects are evaluated on tasks like finishing a picture from a squiggle, or coming up with a use for a common object. Those who come up with a common use, or just add another squiggle, are classified as "unimaginative" or "uncreative," while those who make more complicated or bizarre choices are seen as the opposite (75-76). However, he swiftly moves to trouble the approach to categorization along these axes, arguing that instead of "showing people to be creative, or uncreative…the tests are recording different activities. The person who adds a timid squiggle may be trying to reveal as little as possible about himself" (76). The theme of imagination and creativity being stifled and hidden as a result of social training, rather than lack of innate ability,

is central throughout the chapter. He especially pins the basis of this phenomenon on educational practices/attitudes, social attitudes about what art is, and beliefs about what are "acceptable" ideas to express.

He decries attitudes in education that "encourage children to be *unimaginative,*" citing examples of students shunned or insulted by their teachers for questioning textbook rules or producing drawings that were not "correct" (76-77). He goes on to point out that "intelligence is proportional to population, but talent appears not to be related" (76), going on to cite the ways in which the European-descended inhabitants of his city "flounder" in their attempts to be original, while the great art of the region was produced by natives. Native peoples are also described as able to produce art on request, while "Nordic" art would require visiting a gallery to see. He states that "most children can operate in a creative way until they're eleven or twelve, when suddenly they lose their spontaneity, and produce imitations of 'adult art'," and that a similar phenomenon occurs when indigenous artists begin to produce work for whites, or when "primitive painters" in Western culture seek formal education in their art (77). In Johnstone's view, to remain an artist means going against one's education, and suggests that instead of the artist as a "wild and aberrant figure," we might view artists as those "constitutionally unable to conform" to educational demands. He also suggests that, in terms of creativity, it might lead to better teaching if, instead of thinking of children as "immature adults," we think of adults as "atrophied children." He points out that many "well-adjusted" adults are "bitter, uncreative, frightened, unimaginative, and rather hostile," and that instead of assuming this is innate to their characters, or that it is what being an adult means, "we might consider them as people damaged by their education and upbringing" (78).

Johnstone attributes the sudden "loss" of creativity at the onset of adolescence to changing adult attitudes toward children wherein their creative works open then up for criticism, and adolescents are compelled to create work that supports them appearing "sensitive" or "witty" or "tough" or "intelligent," or whatever image they seek to project. The notion of "creating" art is important to this phenomenon, as Johnstone critiques the social attitude viewing the artist as creator rather than "transmitter." He writes that "we have an idea that art is self-expression—which historically is *weird*. An artist used to be seen as a medium through which something else operated" (78). Indigenous attitudes toward art see the resulting product as deriving from the medium or the inspiration, not the character of the artist, but "once we believe that art is self-expression, then the individual can be criticised not only for his skill or lack of skill, but simply for being what he is" (79). He contrasts the "transmitter" belief with his own teachers' efforts to get him to 'reject and discriminate" in his creative choices, in an effort to work out the "best" choice, the one "anyone would have made who had thought long enough" (79). He argues that instead, imagination should be as effortless as ordinary perception, where sensory stimulus is dealt with automatically and unproblematically, only turning to "thinking" when it appears our perception may be in error and we need to analyze its accuracy. He argues that imagination is the same, effortless "unless we think it might be 'wrong', which is what our education encourages us to believe. Then we experience ourselves as 'imagining', as 'thinking up an idea', but what we're really doing is faking up the sort of imagination we think we ought to have" (80). He points out that people are routinely highly creative in such everyday activities as imagining while reading, rationalizing and maintaining prejudices, and reacting in embarrassing situations; while these reactions may often be unsatisfactory to others, they don't have to be "thought up," and "spr[i]ng to mind quite automatically" (81).

Johnstone states that "at school any spontaneous act was likely to get me into trouble" and that "whatever came into my mind first should be rejected in favour of better ideas," initial ideas being unsatisfactory because they may be thought of as psychotic, obscene, or unoriginal (82). He goes on to strongly criticize these categories as bases for treating ideas as unacceptable. He views sanity not as an objective psychological state, but as a way people learn to behave out of fear of rejection, for "being classified insane is to be shut out of the group in very complete way" (83). He notes that people often think they're a bit "crazier" than average, understanding their own sanity as a "performance," but not the energy expended by others to maintain their own versions of this performance. Sanity, he argues, has nothing to do with how you think, but is instead "a matter of presenting yourself as *safe*" (83). He gives examples of bizarre behavior accepted because it was how the person "always" acted, citing a study concluding that it is "when someone's behaviour was perceived as 'unpredictable' that the community rejected them" (83). He tells students that "sanity is a matter of interaction, rather than of one's mental processes" and recommends a "guru" who "reassure[s] by example" and "gives permission" to students to "allow forbidden thoughts into their consciousness." Without this example of "living proof that…the imagination will not destroy you," students will "go on *pretending* to be dull" (84). He notes especially that laughter is a practice for controlling people: "You suppress unwanted laughter or you start controlling it. We suppress our spontaneous impulses, we censor our imaginations, we learn to present ourselves as 'ordinary', and we destroy our talent—then no one laughs at us" (84). But what evokes laughter is often exactly what makes for good theatre, and we turn to theatre to see "mad" thoughts expressed, while in everyday life we instinctively understand that "mad thoughts are those which other people find unacceptable, and train us not to talk about" (84-85).

Obscenity, too, is a form of unacceptable expression we are trained not to talk about, and a basis for self-censorship. In counter to general notions of obscenity that associate it with sexuality or vulgar language, Johnstone emphasizes the *relativity* of obscenity, pointing out that society provides many spaces for acceptable obscene expression—festivals, office parties, friend or peer groups with a certain relationship, etc (85). The classroom is not one of these spaces; yet, he highlights the hypocrisy of teachers' obscene storytelling in the lounge followed by punishing students for the same sort of expression. For teachers of performance, he advocates for avoiding any notion of obscenity in criticizing student expression, instead allowing the students "to behave as *they* want to behave." The class is best "seen as a party, rather than a formal teacher-pupil set up," and students should "speak and act with the same freedom they have outside of school." Performances should not *seek* to be "obscene," but performers should "be aware of the ideas that are occurring to them," and not self-censor over social notions of acceptable expression for a space (87).

He cites the desire for "originality" as a third basis for self-censorship of expression. Performers want to be "thought clever," and "believe they know exactly what originality is, just as critics are always sure they can recognize things that are avant-garde" (87). Johnstone asks that a performer "realise that the more obvious he is, the more original…[and] the more himself he appears" (87-88). When people are *asked* to give an original idea it throws them into chaos, but if they just "said the first thing that came into their head, there'd be no problem" (88). "An artist who is inspired is being *obvious*" instead of "weighing one idea against another." What is an "obvious" choice varies with persons and situations, but it is the direction toward which spontaneity moves, while "striving after originality takes you far away from your true self, and makes your work mediocre" (88).

Johnstone offers examples of these principles in practice through on-the-spot word generation, showing students rejecting their first ideas due to the reasons above, and noting that "normally the mind doesn't know that it's rejecting the first answers" unless the process is interrupted by pointing out the student's hesitation (90). But students don't need to hesitate, and will seem more "inventive" by accepting the first idea: If asked to pick up an object without thinking, "my hand is very likely to pick up something I don't want…but the audience will be delighted" (90-91). He especially advocates the general principle of saying "yes" to the imaginative ideas of other performers, warning against saying "no" as way of controlling the scene. Although "no" develops conflict, which is valuable to storytelling, "it's important that we don't exploit the *actors'* conflicts," for even in an argument, "the actors should still be *co-operating*, and coolly developing the action…[the actor's] first skill lies in releasing his partner's imagination." Performers who practice saying "yes" to others "learn how their 'normal' procedures destroy other people's talent" and gradually come to "understand that all the weapons they were using against other people they also use inwardly, against themselves" (93).

He calls "anything an actor does" an offer, which can be accepted ("yes") or blocked ("no"). Blocking is "anything that prevents the action from developing, or that wipes out the partner's premise;" disagreeing or resisting is not blocking as long as it accepts the situation and moves action along (97). He writes that "scenes spontaneously generate themselves if both actors offer and accept alternately…something no 'normal' person would do," and further, that instead of "thinking up" an offer, actors should "assume that one has already been made" to get the action rolling (99). He describes embrace of this practice as appearing "supernatural…you are suddenly in contact with people who are unbounded, whose imagination seems to function without limit" (100). In summation, Johnstone reinforces the link between spontaneity and

imagination. Though "reading about spontaneity won't make you more spontaneous," practicing his exercises about offers, accepting and blocking will help students understand his central points: "(1) that we struggle against our imaginations, especially when we *try* to be imaginative; (2) that we are not responsible for the content of our imaginations; and (3) that we are not, as we are taught to think, our 'personalities', but that the imagination is our true self" (105).

Johnstone expands on his concept with another chapter titled "Spontaneity" in his later *Impro for Storytellers*. He repeats many of the same themes from *Impro*, especially giving examples of the many ways that fear of revealing one's "self" leads to suppression of the imagination, through fear of psychotic thought or the desire to be "original." He expands on the role and practices of the improvisation teacher, starting by pointing out that "if you're going to teach spontaneity, you'll have to become spontaneous yourself;" instead of placing the burden of incentive on students, "the incentive has to be generated, or increased by the attitude of the teacher" (55). This is done through "progressive desensitization" of students through exposure to "dangerous ideas," normalizing such ideas and thus making them safe for expression (56). When introducing exercises, he advocates first encouraging students to "do it wrong," so they can recognize when they are self-censoring "accidentally" (56), as well as for the teacher to "correct errors as they occur" rather than to "explain games exhausively—which implies that errors should not be made" (60). Teachers should also pointedly "accept…responsibility for the students' failures," which makes them appear more confident and reduces student fears of being judged (60), and to posit some games as "advanced" (whether they are or not), where students are predicted to fail but "it'll be fun anyway," as a way to encourage volunteerism in participation (62).

He emphasizes the relationship between scene partners, encouraging evaluation of scenes for both parties in terms of whether their partner is enjoying working with them. Rather than trying to "win" the scene by being in control, performers should be responsive to their partners, and prepared to be changed through their interaction—"Instead of telling actors that they must be good listeners (which is confusing), we should say, 'Be altered by what's said'"(59). For individual performers, he pushes the attitude of "being average," noting that "'trying harder' can't make you spontaneous." In contrast, teaching approaches that encourage social displays of "trying" do not aid learning and carry "the risk that that 'thinking' may become a 'forced activity', never again to be experienced as effortless" (64). He argues that "we only try when we don't trust the forces within us," whereas "being average" opens up potential because it "allows automatic processes to take over" (65).

It is important to remember that "average" does not mean "dull." As a method for generating content, Johnstone strongly advocates taking risks, for excitement is maximized as the odds of failure increase—though making it harder should never be used as a practice to justify failure for those uncomfortable with it (67-68). To be "average" means to be "obvious," which means "being your own person, not somebody else's, and it lets the spectators see you as courageous and brilliant, because they would be terrified to function so effortlessly" (71). "Dullness" is instead a technique, "a set of procedures for ensuring that nothing untoward happens" (68), and can be reversed, but this needs to fall toward the obvious rather than the "original," for "being 'original' and being 'stupid' are often identical" (69), both being techniques that constitute "avoidance of the obvious" and stymies creativity (70). If performers are obvious (i.e., "your own person"), then "things will happen. 'Stupidity' and 'cleverness' are devices that stop things

from happening" (70). "Original" ideas are great, but should be generated through the obvious, for "you mustn't use 'originality' to deny the audience things that you have promised them" (72).

He closes with returned focus on imagination as central to spontaneity, and the importance of allowing it to operate freely for a performer, lamenting the "narrow range of approved ideas" that most perfectly sane people avoid out of fear of "crazy thinking," a shame because "it's their behaviour that classifies people as insane, not their thinking" (72). Imagination runs up against the created "social-self that would shield us against the onslaughts of other people…If we can perfect this, we'll hardly ever get laughed at against our will, but the imagination will be our enemy—because it refuses to present us as…whatever else we're pretending to be" (72). If teachers reassure and protect students, coaxing them into "forbidden areas," then "a seething mass of lunatic thoughts will emerge that aren't dull in the least. The teacher has to establish such 'craziness' as a mark of sanity" (73), thereby reversing the association involved in maintenance of the "social self." Laughter is helpful in making "forbidden ideas" acceptable, and Johnstone says "The best trick I know for releasing the imagination is to persuade the students that their imaginations have nothing to do with them" (73). Instead, he encourages students to think of imagination as having a will of its own, that they should accept no responsibility for it, and to detach the self—the "I"—from it, for creativity is not self-expression, but rather "the acceptance of gifts from an unknown source" (73). However, this view of the imagination is meant as but a temporary safety net to encourage free expression of it, for "ultimately students have to accept that the imagination *is* the true self" (73, emphasis added).

Johnstone's account of spontaneity provides many illuminating parallels and contrasts with Spolin's account when considered in terms of our ideographic dimensions. Spontaneity, as in Spolin's account, is also a relationship between experience and behavior. But where Spolin

gives primacy to the experiential side, Johnstone emphasizes behavior. He assesses successful (and unsuccessful) occurrences of spontaneity by considering the products of action, especially artistic or performance products, but also activities like conversation. The experiential side is important—a "spontaneous" act is one that proceeds from the imagination, unfiltered through desire for a certain social interpretation by others. But the student need not be *aware* of this experiential state; action that proceeds from such a state is spontaneous in Johnstone's account regardless of what the student experiences about it, whereas in Spolin the experience of "freedom" and "intuition" is central. Johnstone evaluates spontaneity in terms of acts and responses that he deems untainted by fears of evaluations of psychosis and/or obscenity, or by desire to be "original."

This may in part be an artifact of a key difference in their writing styles. Spolin writes very abstractly and pointedly eschews even simple examples, writing that while examples are "sometimes helpful, the reverse is more often true, for the student is bound to give back what has already been experienced" (39). In contrast, Johnstone relies heavily on examples and descriptions of what he considers both spontaneous and non-spontaneous behavior. This major stylistic difference reinforces their emphases in the behavior-experience relationship. Spolin wishes to avoid evaluating particular "solutions" as better or worse ways of playing a game ("there is no absolutely right or wrong solution to a problem"), leading her to shy from describing and interpreting particular occasions of game-play as spontaneous or not. Avoiding particular instances, she instead gives extensive account of the experiential and relational characteristics that she sees as promoting spontaneity. Johnstone's embrace of examples to illustrate his account of spontaneity naturally leads him in the direction of giving primacy to observable behavior. Though leaving much leeway for differences between individual social

actors, Johnstone is far less reserved than Spolin about judging certain actions and responses as genuinely spontaneous or not.

He uses several metrics in doing so. Most are expressed negatively, as the *absence* of something spontaneity-inhibiting, rather than in positive accounts of overt behavior; in the absence of inhibitions on spontaneity, *whatever* behavior emerges is essentially by definition spontaneous. But in evaluating what is observable, he privileges especially behavior that is free of hesitation, where people act on their first impulse. He also privileges behavior that expresses (or at least seems comfortable with expressing) common social notions of psychosis or obscenity. He is leery of any behavior that appears to affect "dullness" (a person's conforming to their perception of social notions of being "ordinary"). But he also condemns behavior that exhibits "trying", especially in the sense of striving for "originality" or "cleverness." This is the mirror image of the injunction against being purposefully dull: a person is still acting in reaction to their perception of society's notions of ordinariness, but then *tries* to violate them (which Johnstone argues usually fails or produces an "inappropriate", i.e., ineffective, response to the situation). Instead of dullness or cleverness, Johnstone give primacy to "obviousness." Whereas being "ordinary" means conforming behavior to perceived social norms, being "obvious" means acting as a transmitter of what appears when an individual's imagination is operating without inhibition.

An individual's imagination is labeled "the true self." Spontaneity is thus imbued as a quality of individual's actions, exhibited when those actions reflect an individual's unfettered imagination. Spontaneity in groups, for Johnstone, reflects less a collective experience of shared focus and purpose, as in Spolin, and more of a shared commitment of group members to helping each other access and express their individual imaginations. Whether by notions of obscenity,

psychosis, ordinariness, originality, or our characterization of self as we want it interpreted, it is other people that inhibit the imagination, through an individual's fear of their judgment and/or seeking of their approval. Self-censoring usually blocks the expression of imagination before it is ever conveyed, but group behavior (especially in the performance activities on which Johnstone focuses) can also stymie expression of imagination, through behaviors like the denial of ideas expressed, or the blocking of action as a way of "being in control"—the overt, social equivalents of individual self-censorship techniques. Groups can mutually assist the free expression of imagination through behaviors that "accept" (say "yes" to) whatever is expressed by others.

The markers that Johnstone lays down for evaluating spontaneity suggest a larger and more involved role for an authority ("guru" in his terms) seeking to unlock this quality in students than we find in Spolin. He advocates the guru as a model for the students, who "gives permission" to access and express uninhibited imagination. The guru should also model spontaneity ("you'll have to become spontaneous yourself"). As such, the role of the guru's interpretation and evaluation of expression has a much larger scope than Spolin's "authority." The focus for Spolin is on the "game"—are the students engaged fully with addressing the "problem that needs solving?" A great deal of the authority's input is determined by the shared activity itself. Johnstone describes a number of activities used as instructional devices, but the focus for the guru is on students' expression of imagination in a very general way, given far more emphasis than engagement in the activity. Because spontaneous behavior is defined mostly in negative terms (lack of inhibition), the guru must quash inhibition as inhibition quashes spontaneity, as well as modeling an example of such uninhibited expression. This means considering what will be recognized as inhibiting notions of psychosis, obscenity, ordinariness, originality, etc., and

rewarding behavior perceived to be uninfluenced by their inhibiting effects, while encouraging

changes to behavior that does exhibit these inhibiting affects. The guru must make judgment

calls about whether a student is being "obvious," and respond accordingly. Thus, despite

Johnstone's extensive concern about approval/disapproval in establishing inhibition in the first

place, his relational practices suggest a much more prominent role for it than in Spolin, where the

authority may choose the activities used to focus experience/behavior, but thereafter should

evaluate only in terms of responsiveness to the shared activity itself.

In a sense, Johnstone's account of spontaneity shares Spolin's binary concept—at the

moment of experience and action, either the imagination is being expressed uninhibited or it is

not. However, the array of different inhibiting factors he assesses suggests somewhat more of a

scale of greater/lesser spontaneity, as some factors may weigh more or less heavily than others.

No ready quantification on this scale is possible; only a general sense of degree to which the

imagination is operating without constraint. Greater/lesser degrees of spontaneity are more

applicable to individuals' overall behavior over time than to any given moment. An individual's

degree of capacity for expression of spontaneity is primarily affected by learned behavior

patterns. Inherent subject characteristics do not appear to be given credence as affecting

spontaneity, given Johnstone's accounts of the natural expression of full spontaneity exhibited by

children until inhibited by social education. Learned behavior patterns of self-censorship

established through this education reduce capacity for spontaneous expression (though not

capacity for spontaneity itself, which is in principle unlimited for everyone). Presumably, new

behavior patterns which reduce self-censorship can also be learned. While environmental and

relational characteristics of a situation have significant power to reinforce or disrupt these

learned behavior patterns, it is the influence of the learned patterns themselves that affects capacity for spontaneous expression.

Spontaneity for Johnstone is a normatively positive quality—he refers to inhibited adults as "atrophied children," positively associates the term with creativity and cooperation, and he negatively associates it against insecurity, control, and conflict. The positive value of spontaneity in his account seems primarily a potentiality—the unlimited potential of the imagination against the pressures oppressing it. When this potentiality is expressed, it becomes a productive force that he claims supports healthier mental states, and more honest and amicable social interaction. Spontaneity is not so much valued as an end in itself—there is, after all, an inexhaustible latent wellspring of it in each individual—as it is valued for what it can do when given unfettered expression. While considered inhibition has its uses—one should remember whether one can swim before diving into a river to help somebody—the performance context that is Johnstone's particular focus has little use for it, outside of practical concerns for performers' shared safety.

The value of this potentiality aligns with Ivanhoe's concepts of untutored and unconstrained spontaneity. If the imagination is the "true self," and spontaneity the expression of imagination, than a person acting spontaneously is acting in accordance with some fundamental self, and thus aligns with the values of Ivanhoe's untutored variety. However, his heavy emphasis on the many forms of limitation imposed on expression of imagination implies spontaneity's value as reflecting the lack of these constraints on expression, aligning with Ivanhoe's unconstrained form of spontaneity. There appears to be little role for cultivated spontaneity in his concept; indeed, the cultivation of automatic social responses is seen as precisely the main culprit in inhibiting spontaneity. While one can cultivate behavior patterns that tend toward greater

degrees of spontaneity, this is seen as a shedding of acquired constraints rather than the direct development of a spontaneous nature, which exists innately in everyone.

In sum, Spolin and Johnstone's accounts of spontaneity diverge along several important axes that set the terms for accounts of spontaneity by later improv methodology writers. Spontaneity for Spolin is primarily instantiated in experience, while Johnstone emphasizes behavioral expression. Both concepts can be seen as aligned with the values of untutored and unconstrained spontaneity, but Spolin's emphasis falls on the unconstrained side—to act "freely" is good in itself—while removal of constraint in Johnstone is only important insofar as enabling access to the untutored self of the imagination. For Spolin, spontaneity is a valued end in itself, while for Johnstone it is a potentiality that can emerge as a productive force. Spontaneity can be directly experienced on a group level for Spolin, while for Johnstone it is primarily an individual affair, though a group's practices can assist individuals' openness to it. Finally, in terms of practices oriented to enhancing spontaneity for improviers, Spolin emphasizes deep involvement with a defined activity/problem ("game"), whereas Johnstone's practicum activities are not ends in themselves but means for recognizing self-inhibition and reducing it in expression. Despite these many divergences, both writers share a sense of spontaneity that focuses on moment-to-moment behavior and experience, a consideration that remains central throughout improv methodology. However, the next major development in improv practices was toward "long-form" improv, a practice for generating extended improvisational performances, with many instances of "moment-to-moment" spontaneity connected through shared elements of theme, world, and narrative.

Halpern, Close, Johnson and Long-form Improvisation

Charna Halpern, Del Close and Kim Johnson offer the earliest methodology of long-form improv in *Truth in Comedy*. Long-form can be understood as the extended exploration/development of a theme, world, and/or narrative though improvisation, often through multiple scenes and returning over time to the same characters, settings, and/or events to develop and heighten them in relation to each other. Many forms are possible, but their end-goal in this text is the production of "Harold," a specific form developed at I.O. Improvisational Theatre, based in Chicago. The Harold opens with an audience suggestion, which is used as the basis for a "pattern game" to explore themes emergent from the suggestion. The cast then perform three unrelated scenes (focused on a relationship between characters, a concrete environment/setting, and an event of significance to the characters) inspired by the initial pattern game. The cast then performs a "game" inspired by themes emerging from the first three scenes. The cast then returns to the first three scenes, developing them further (often moving forward in time) and perhaps establishing indirect connections between them and/or the first game. Another game is then played, further developing themes from what has come before. Finally, a third set of scenes attempts to connect the previous scenes, games, and themes as thoroughly as possible (133-42).

This goal for their method leads to a very different approach from Spolin and Johnstone. The former two methodologists were concerned with more discrete moments of improvisation, and with performers' focus on their shared problem/activity or on responsiveness to their imaginations, respectively. In contrast, Halpern et al. are concerned with the generation of content at the level of a full-scale show for an audience. In Spolin and Johnstone, spontaneity is a quality of experience and/or behavior for the performers involved; in Halpern et al.,

spontaneity takes on much more the character of a *method* for performance, one for the effective generation of successful content.

In navigating this shift, they move away from explicit deployment of the term "spontaneity." Whereas Spolin and Johnstone both devote whole sections titled by the term, and go to pains to elucidate their visions of it, the concept is dealt with far more indirectly in Halpern et al. They use the term "spontaneity" only twice, both times in a highly abstract way. Quoting Chris Farley, they describe the Harold as "something that is created slowly, out of the moment. It's spontaneous and magic" (20). They also compare the techniques of chess and ping pong; in the former, players must carefully anticipate and concentrate on moving their own plans forward, while in the latter, players must be constantly prepared to act not with a planned agenda, but in reaction to the needs of the moment, as the ball bounces. They conclude, "Improv is much closer to ping pong than it is to chess. Actors create an improv scene in the same spontaneous way" (71). Nonetheless, comparison with more explicit deployments of "spontaneity" reveals that it is still a key principle in their methodology. But unlike Spolin and Johnstone, who ask us to engage directly with the concept, spontaneity is approached indirectly, to be understood though a cluster of related terms, through specific performance examples ascribed as displaying spontaneity or its lack, and through the activities recommended to enhance it.

The use of a cluster of related terms is analogous to the approach used (especially by Kipper and his various collaborators) in quantifying spontaneity as a dimension of personality. As discussed in Chapter Two, their quantitative analysis correlates spontaneity with associated terms such as playfulness, extroversion, creativity, well-being, present-time orientation, and ability to respond effectively in novel or challenging situations. They also quantify spontaneity in contrast to both healthy and pathological behaviors/experiences associated with routinized behavior, as

well as in opposition to measures of depression, neuroticism, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive behavior, past-time orientation, and stress. Spontaneity is to a certain degree evaluated situationally; they judge spontaneity in part as an *effective* response in a context.

Halpern et al. also treat spontaneity as efficacious; its engagement by performers leads to a better improv product. While making no effort to quantify it, they use a similar cluster of terms to make its meaning clearer by association. As seen in the two examples where they use the term itself, spontaneity is positively correlated with "magic" and negatively with planning and anticipation. Other expressions associated with successful improv (which they would interpret as spontaneous by definition) include "making it up as you go along" and "honest discovery, observation, and reaction" (14). The notion of "honesty" is very important, thus the "Truth" of the title and their central claim that "*The truth is funny*" (15). Placing "trust" in others is key to shared spontaneity with a group, and to "let go" and trust others is "a wonderful, liberating experience" (16). As in Johnstone, "trying" is seen as a recipe for failure, and a performer should instead seek to be "sincere and honest…relaxed and natural" (23), for the best comedy is based on "exposing our own personalities" (16).

Improviers should "listen" deeply to both the verbal language and expressive subtext of other performers, and "avoid preconceived notions" of what is happening in a scene, instead adapting their responses appropriately as the scene is built in conjunction with their stage partners (64). Hesitation is not treated as *prima facie* suspect as in Johnstone, for taking time to offer a "carefully considered response" is likely to lead to a "more intelligent" response than the "knee-jerk" one that may emerge without consideration—taking the time to see how one's co-performers are affected allows one to respond from a more "honest and emotional" state, which is seen as more effective and thus more spontaneous (63). Instant response is not necessarily

more spontaneous. Instead, it is critical to be "in the moment" and to act "moment to moment;" performers should "follow the scene along, but they shouldn't try to control it" (73). Ideally, performers will cultivate a capacity for simultaneous action and reflection that aids their ability to "keep an open mind" and drop their own ideas about the direction of a scene in favor of agreement with what is communicated and established (82), and to make "active [as opposed to passive] choices" that move action forward (84). This calls for attention and response to the "now" of the scene, avoiding shifts of reference to memories of the past, possibilities of the future, or to events offstage, except insofar as they have an immediate impact on the actual action of the scenic moment (88).

Improviers are enjoined to be open to their "subconscious" or "unconscious" choices—to "trust their inner voices" and allow "the unconscious mind" to lead them "down the right path" (91). This is not to imply "correct" choices in performance which are best accessed by the subconscious. Indeed, they repeatedly emphasize that "there are no mistakes" in improv (43), for anything established can be "justified" (i.e., made sense of in terms of the reality created by the performers), and this justification process is a major source of delight for the audience. Rather than a way of accessing "correct" responses, the subconscious is best seen as overcoming a performer's "ego" that "hangs onto preconceived notions" in favor of openness to possibility (91). In making choices, performers should seek to "*discover*, rather than invent" (104). Readers are reminded that "it is impossible for the *character* an actor is playing to get stuck;" it is the actor, not the character, that is stuck, and since the character shares the being of its performer, "the player must reveal *himself* in this person…all they need to do is react honestly" (113). Improviers should trust their "instinct" and "impulse" (121), which, cultivated against the control-oriented ego, will tend to lead in more successful directions on stage.

This cluster of associations gives a clearer sense of the meaning of spontaneity for Halpern et al. We can understand the role of "spontaneity" in their text especially through positive affiliation of terms and phrases such as "honesty," "trust," "letting go," "exposing one's self," "being in the moment," having an "open mind," the operation of the "subconscious" or "unconscious" in the form of the "inner voice," trusting one's "instinct" or "impulse," and "discovery." The meaning of spontaneity is also elucidated through its *contrast* against a number of terms and phrases, especially "planning," "trying" (particularly "trying" to be funny), "preconceived notions," "control," "passivity," "ego," and "inventing."

Several specific activities are also described as exercises for enhancing various aspects of spontaneity. The "pattern game" is a simple group activity of fast word/phrase association by a group from a suggestion offered as stimulus, used for "discovery and exploration" of the many possibilities associable with an initial jumping-off point, and commonly used as the first step of a Harold (29-34). In the "ad game," a group must come up with all the elements of an advertising campaign for an imaginary product or service; the focus is on enthusiastic agreement with every idea that is expressed, followed by immediately moving on to the next element while building on ideas already accepted (52-54). The principle of "agreement" is central to their account of both effective spontaneity and improv technique in general; in discussing improv "rules" and when "breaking" them is acceptable, they repeatedly state that "the only rule that can *never* be broken is the rule of agreement" (35, 47). "One-word story" asks a group to tell a coherent story in which each performer in turn may contribute only a single word at a time. The focus is on careful listening, not planning contributions in advance, and immediate ("reflexive") response. Players should seek to meet the "in-the-moment" needs of the sentence and story rather than trying to control of the story's direction or making a "larger" contribution at the expense of

coherence or forward progress—contributions of "the," "to," "of," and other so-called "minor" articles and prepositions are just as central to the success of the game as more prominent nouns and verbs (75-76). Many other exercises are offered throughout the text, but these examples seem most directly related to the principles the writers associate with spontaneity.

Applying our analytic/ideographic dimensions to the role of spontaneity in Halpern et al.'s methodology suggests yet another account distinct from the work of Spolin and Johnstone (neither of whom are cited as having direct influence on their concepts). As in Johnstone, spontaneity seems to be a quality of both behavior and experience, but behavior is emphasized, again in part due to the method of using many specific examples. The methodology is developed with a much more specific goal—a multidimensional, comparatively long, spontaneous theatrical performance—and their account of spontaneity is developed through behavioral patterns intended to facilitate this goal. However, assessment of one's own experience seems key to the successful deployment and development of these practices. Many of the cluster of terms they use around spontaneity invoke internal experience: "open mind," "sub/unconscious," "inner voice," "instinct/impulse," as well as against "preconceived notions" and "ego." But the goal is to allow these principles to be expressed in behavior: being "in the moment" when making choices, "exposing the self," "honesty, "discovery," and in opposition to "trying," "control," and "inventing."

Spontaneity does not appear to have a binary quality for them, as it is less assessed in terms of individual moments than in terms of overall patterns of behavior and experience. As such, it exists in degrees, though quantifying such degrees seems impossible except in very broad, subjective terms of how successful an improvier is in performance. Spontaneity for them is a normatively positive quality. However, it is primarily a productive force rather than an end in

itself as in Spolin, or a potentiality as in Johnstone. In a sense, it is latent as a potential in one's "self" or "subconscious," but is ultimately purposed as a productive force for successful improv performance, not as its own *raison d'etre*. Its value is strongly connected with Ivanhoe's "cultivated" sense of spontaneity: Successful Harold skills are learned and developed, becoming more "natural" with practice. The invocation of "self" and "subconscious" certainly suggests an important role for untutored spontaneity, but the focus is more on using the resource of the self to facilitate effective improv performance behaviors. The overcoming of constraints does not seem to play an important role in the value they connect with spontaneity, except implicitly the constraint of less-developed skill.

With their tight attention to improv performance practices, Halpern et al. do not explore the desirability of spontaneity in contexts—in improv it seems unequivocally good, but other contexts are simply not addressed (with the exception of their analogy of ping pong vs. chess, where we can guess that spontaneity is thought unlikely to lead to success in the latter) . Greater or lesser degrees of spontaneity do not appear to be related to inherent subject characteristics. They never seem to posit that some people will be naturally better improviers than others. Indeed, they repeatedly emphasize that improvisation is hardly something only "trained actors and comics" can do. Instead, "we all do it every day" (9). If, "strictly speaking, improvisation is making it up as you go along" then "this definition makes all of us expert improvisers. We all go through life every day without a script, responding to our environment, making it up as we go along" (14). Rather than invoke the inherent capacity for spontaneity in everybody, as do Spolin and Johnstone, Halpern et al. go a step further and declare that we always already act from a place of spontaneity in our everyday doings, with their account aimed at using it to accomplish the specific purpose of improv for an audience. Greater degrees of spontaneity for this purpose

are posited in connection with learned behaviors, i.e., learning the skills for improv that they outline.

While environmental factors do not appear posited as affecting spontaneity, relational characteristics are highly significant. While increasing individual capacity for spontaneity is certainly important, the performance product that their system aims toward is a *group* production—the Harold player is "part of a team" (117). As such, the practices they invoke to increase spontaneity are directed toward social, rather than individual spontaneity. Though spontaneity is indicated as an individual quality through some of the aspects of experience they connect with it, actual recognition of it is done with respect to social interaction, the working together with other improvers. Social spontaneity in such a pair or group is especially recognized in practices of *agreement*. This central principle parallels Johnstone's "acceptance"—both explicitly connect it with "saying yes"—but at another level parallels Spolin's "focus" with respect to "games."

Halpern et al. make use of the agreement principle on two levels: agreement with scene partners and agreement with the scene itself. At the first level, players are enjoined to agree with the reality established by all participants in the scene. Whatever one performer treats as "true" in the world of the scene should be agreed to by all participants as a shared reality. In addition to agreement on the reality of the scene, performers should also "agree to accept each other's initiations" (47), that is, to follow along with each other's indications about the direction they want to take the action of the scene. Denial of reality or initiation "ends the progression of the scene" (48). Players are also strongly discouraged from asking questions, as this "places the burden" of creation on others—instead, they should make and express assumptions that

contribute to the reality/action (57-58). Conflict between *characters* is not problematic as long as the *performers* agree to the reality and direction of the scene (49).

At the second level, Halpern et al., like Spolin, invoke the concept of "games," but operationalize the term quite differently. Spolin recognizes games as explicit frameworks for focus in creating action, a "problem" to be "solved" in any number of creative ways, as long as players adhere to the game's "rules." While Halpern et al. do offer exercises in this model that could potentially be used in performance, they generally do not speak of "games" as pre-established, explicit rule structures. Instead, many are "invented on the spot" or found in recognized tropes like "one-upsmanship" or unusual speech patterns. Players attend to the information and action established to "discover" the scene's game, or "structure of the scene" (59). This game takes on the form of a "pattern" that players agree to as a basis for moving action forward—"Find your game, and you've found your scene" (87). Players are enjoined to "agree" to the discovered pattern that emerges, as well as to the reality established by each other. The scene's "game," the recognized, shared pattern of action, encompasses agreement with each other's individual initiations, providing a clear direction for the entire group. In an idealized situation, the performers achieve a "group mind" whose members, though not actually sharing thoughts, "have a very strong sense of the group as an entity of its own, and connects with its feelings and requirements. There is an empathy among the individuals involved, almost an instinct. The members exist to serve the needs of the group" (92).

So agreement takes place between individuals who accept and make use of what is established by each other, as in Johnstone's practice of encouraging the full expression of imagination in others. But this level of agreement is encompassed by shared agreement to a "game," not explicitly deployed as in Spolin, but "found" in the ongoing action of the scene, and

potentially subject to refinement or reconfiguration as the action moves forward, driven by the pattern discovered. This account of agreement constitutes the hallmark for recognition of social spontaneity in Halpern et al.'s methodology. It also offers something of a synthesis of Spolin and Johnstone's divergent accounts of group spontaneity, with performers employing both agreement with others and agreement on a focus for action, emphasizing either as they seek to meet the needs of the performance. Nonetheless, the methodology of *Truth in Comedy* leans much more toward the Spolin tradition, with its emphasis on spontaneity as generated through overt practices, as opposed to Johnstone's more interior emphasis on shedding inculturation as a basis for supporting spontaneous behavior. In contrast, Carol Hazenfield takes Johnstone's emphasis a step further, offering a methodology centered on not only shedding inculturated blocks to spontaneous behavior, but on direct engagement with interior experience as a central practice for generating spontaneity.

Carol Hazenfield

In *Acting on Impulse: The Art of Making Improv Theater*, Carol Hazenfield critiques the predominant strain in improv training of an "outside-in" model of cultivating attitudes and practices, as espoused in the above systems. She describes such systems as built around the premise of "follow these rules, behave in this way, and these results will occur" (11). In contrast, she describes her methodology as "*inside out*," an "experiential" method "based on behaving truthfully in any given situation. You'll learn to follow your impulses as they occur, without filtering them through a set of improv rules or games. When you improvise instinctually, from your own unique experience, you can be effective in *every* scene" (11-12).

She thus gives great credence to making improv performance work from impulse rather than principle. At the same time, the particular performance product she aims toward is relatively highly structured. Though her practices work just as well for individual scenes, she is much more focused on long-form improv. However, her idea of long-form is very different from the Harold described above. The Harold is highly structured in terms of its *arrangement* of content, but not in the content itself, which is meant to be as broad-ranging as possible. In contrast, the arrangement of a show in Hazenfield is much less structured, but the content itself adheres to a much more rigid pattern, described as "protagonist-centered storytelling." In this narrative structure, performers "1. Establish the protagonist, 2. Define the journey (which involves posing a question to which we want to know the answer), 3. Raise the stakes and develop the scene, 4. Answer the question definitively, and 5. Show how the protagonist has been changed" (92). Hazenfield's vision of long-form is far more narrative-centered than the Harold; in the latter, narrative is present but ultimately subsumed to the exploration of themes and ideas. In Hazenfield, the reverse is true: she explores the use of themes, especially in connection with "genres" of theatre (171-78), but they are ultimately used as a means of supporting the prevailing narrative of the protagonist's journey.

Like Halpern et al., Hazenfield uses the specific term "spontaneity" only a handful of times, but deploys it more purposefully. Interestingly, she appears to have a more ambivalent relationship with the term than earlier methodologists, and it is not always couched in a positive context. Early on, she decries the limitation that a "throwaway theatre" mentality brings to improv, with low standards by the audience, who "expect to laugh, go home, and forget about it" (9). She criticizes improv performers who respond "What's wrong with improv the way is? We make people laugh and we're being spontaneous," asking "*But is that all there is?...*It's no

wonder improv is the poor relation to theater. We're not challenging each other or the audience" (9-10). Shortly thereafter she equates spontaneity with illogical behavior, writing that many people "find themselves frustrated when they improvise. Their partners in scenes often act illogically (i.e., spontaneously) and these folks are at a loss to respond" (12).

On the other hand, she also writes that "No written play can match the edge and spontaneity of an improv show" (9) and that students rely on improv teachers to "establish an atmosphere full of trust, excellence and spontaneity" (209). Inveighing performers to be comfortable with not knowing information in a scene, she writes "you may find that you look forward to those electric moments of being off-balance, because they bring excitement and spontaneity to the stage" (80). Most powerfully, immediately after laying out her vision of improv as a practice that can match the emotional and narrative depth of scripted theatre, she writes "This journey requires attention and practice; powerful spontaneous theater is created through commitment, experimentation, and risk" (11). Clearly spontaneity also has significant positive value for her.

I believe a reasonable interpretation of this ambivalence with spontaneity may be that she views the ideograph as being used to justify lower-quality improv work, where as long as performers are being "spontaneous," the needs of the art form are met. Her equation of spontaneity with illogical behavior appears to parallel Johnstone's injunctions against "being original" or "cleverness," or Halpern et al.'s warnings against "invention" as opposed to "discovery." Again, the notion of spontaneity is in these cases used to justify choices that undermine the story or fellow players. But she also praises spontaneity highly, and we may view her methodology as an attempt to *reclaim* the concept of spontaneity as a positive, productive force in improv against interpretations which she sees as weakening or limiting the craft.

In doing so, she employs a number of terms and concepts she connects with spontaneity, much as the notion of spontaneity is elucidated in Halpern et al. She makes a definite body/mind distinction, writing that "traditional improv classes focus on mental skills: how to empty your mind and be flexible in your thinking." In contrast, her methodology "emphasizes listening to your inner life, following your body, and reacting emotionally…you learn to listen with your whole self, respond from your gut instincts" (4-5). She later associates mind with "the brain": "Your brain is not as smart as you think it is…[it] will get in the way more than it will help," at least as far as improv goes (12). The "conscious mind" has uses—keeping safe, reading, learning from others—but, "Other than that, SHUT IT DOWN…The experience you have during an interaction is far more important, and more real, than your analysis of it. The first process is the act of *being*, and it involves your whole self; the second is the act of *thinking* and involves only your mind" (13).

Concepts of honesty, instinct, and selfness are all closely linked with spontaneity and with each other. "To play truthfully on stage, you must follow your instincts as fully as possible. And those instincts are inextricably intertwined with your *self*—your personality, your body, your family, and little bits of every experience you ever had" (17). In the process of "learning to speak a character's truth, trust your instincts. Improviser's instincts are usually correct." However, players must "distinguish between a genuine instinct and a protective mechanism." She explains this difference anecdotally, in a case where the "most truthful choice was for the character to be vulnerable," but the player does not want to do that and gets angry instead, then claims that "that was where the character led them." Encouraged to try again and express vulnerability, "usually the improviser can see which was the truer impulse, and which was just a fight-or-flight response" (25).

"The body" is a crucial ideal linked with spontaneity. She idealizes spontaneous "body" in the image of the wild, sexy, nasty, pleasure-craving centaur thundering through the woods. Again critiquing rule-based "outside-in" methods, she writes, "Some people think we have to trick ourselves into primitive behavior, because our social training is so strong it will always kick in unless we do an end run around it. I don't believe that. We don't have to trick our minds; we have to unleash our bodies" (28). To "improvise from your impulses, following your heart and body," will produce far more immediate and gripping narrative than the brain could create. The audience too is brought into the analysis—"To incite the audience on a gut level, we've got to improvise from our guts" (28). She enjoins performers to "let your body lead" and deeply attend to its responses and gestures; "following these gut-level impulses kicks improv scenes into high gear…Follow your body—it knows what it's doing…It only occupies the here and now" and thus "is likely the only part of you that is always connected to the moment at hand. Let it be your guide" (29). The expansive expressiveness of the body is strongly related with "freedom": "Our bodies carry all the joy and heartache and humor and pathos we've ever experienced. The body knows what it means to be human. If we free ourselves we can lead the audience on a merry chase through the woods…When we improvise from our bodies, hearts, and minds, we free the audience as well as ourselves" (36). Interestingly, in this last sentence, she appears to bring "mind" back into the fold of productive categories for improv, but never really elucidates her meaning.

Indeed, she immediately jumps to elaboration of "heart," an aspect she places alongside "body." She equates heart with emotion, and emotion is held up as crucial for deep audience investment: *We don't go to the theater to see life as it is. We go to the theatre to see life as we wish it could be.*" She believes we wish "people would be more honest in real life…we could be

more open about our emotions…we long to see the effect we have on others, and to show their effect on us" (38). To see these things expressed on stage is her idea of powerful improv. But "what prevents us from doing this? Our *brains*." Brains want "to choose a prudent, low-risk course of action" which impedes "vigorous improvising." When judging and choosing "an emotion, you aren't listening to or connecting with your fellow players," and moreover, "it interferes with the natural rhythms of stimulus/response," which is "the reason life on stage so rarely resembles life in *life*." This is a consequence of social training: "As adults, we know the potential consequences for of revealing our emotions. We know it's a risk to love, to trust, to fear or to betray…That's why it's doubly riveting" to see improviers following their imaginations and hearts (38).

The importance of the "stimulus-response cycles" she mentions above is developed from the claim that "Everything that happens on stage should happen for a reason." The expression of these cycles is "simply a matter of responding to stimuli truthfully." "Truthful" response involves acting "instinctually," which will "bypass the conscious mind, and you'll find that your responses are truer to the character and to the moment" (67). While any choice of action can work and be justified, the "best" choice—i.e., the "truthful," "instinctive" one—is "*whichever one was predicated on the moment before*" (68). This truthful response is set against "performing"—"Once we stop *performing* we can start *responding*" (69). She elaborates by contrasting "being truly affected by your partner, and *adopting an affect*," where the former involves feeling "off-guard" and "surprised," while the latter means "staying safe and comfortable and *choosing* a response" (70); the first is presumably "responding" and the second "performing."

Accomplishing such truthful responses means improviers must "be willing to relinquish control—to our partners, to the story and to our emotions." When performers "give up control…we understand that our only responsibility is to give and take truthfully, and let fate decide the rest" (70). In a striking contrast with Halpern et al., who emphasize listening and waiting for one's partner to complete their action before responding, Hazenfield encourages interrupting. For one thing, it a very ordinary and common part of real-life interaction, but more importantly, "at the moment you feel the urge to interrupt, you are at the peak of the stimulus-response cycle;" something "makes you want to respond *right now*" (72). Acting immediately when "compelled to do so" will "catch our partners off guard" and "give our interactions the quality of real, unpredictable interchanges." This is not just a consideration that makes positive use of interruption, but is "true for all your impulses" in improv—"Act on them *the second they hit you*" (72). The "most interesting moments" on stage are those where "players let their guard down and reveal something about themselves;" the revealing of self is often accompanied by "relaxation" of the body, a "signal that the improviser has stopped feeling self-conscious" (73). But truthful responsiveness is *learned*—"It's a skill you build over time; courage is required," as is understanding that you may often look foolish. But "if you're fixated on looking intelligent or cool, you will never realize your true potential as an improviser." To "respond truthfully" means being "connected" to self as well as partner (81).

Working in this way is not simply a matter of shedding sources of inhibition, but is a skill learned and developed through experience. Both "self-criticism" and "rampaging ego" are "growth-blocking" behaviors that stymie the experiential learning process (197-200). Critique has value; "It's important to identify what needs to be changed, and to work to change it." But this practice should not be a form of self-punishment. Instead, performers should "mentally

stand away" from their work and "look at it as an entity separate from *you*. In particular, separate your personality or character from the work" (199). Artistic growth happens "almost imperceptibly" and an improvier goes through levels of "unconscious incompetence," "conscious incompetence," and "conscious competence," with the ultimate goal of working toward "unconscious competence." In this idealized state, "you are no longer using your conscious mind to make choices, but are making them instinctually…Unconscious competence arrives unbidden. The more you think, or try, the less likely you will be to reach this stage. This is the phase of letting go. It involves dropping all your conscious efforts, and trusting that what you know will be expressed outwardly if you just stay out of the way" (202). She notes that growth is generally uneven in different areas of skill, and also that all improv skills ultimately contribute to each other, reminding her readers that "*sometimes the next big leap that needs to be taken is not the one we choose for ourselves*" (203).

The terms and concepts that seem most aligned with spontaneity in Hazenfield include "truthfulness," acting from one's "true" or "whole" "self," acting from the "body" and/or "heart," reacting "emotionally" or at a "gut-level," "honesty," "instinct," "impulse," "freedom," "responding," "being affected," feeling "off-guard," being "in the moment," "giving up control," and "unconscious competence." Spontaneity is also conceptually aligned against the "conscious mind," the "brain," "trying," "thinking," "judging" and "choosing," "performing," and "self-consciousness."

Applying our conceptual dimensions to Hazenfield's account, spontaneity appears to instantiate in a relationship between experience and behavior, in this case with fairly equal emphasis given to both sides. Spontaneity originates in the experience of "reacting truthfully" from your "whole self," and Hazenfield indicates that improviers have an intuitive ability, which

can be sharpened, to know when they are having this experience. But the experience must also be outwardly expressed, and not held back or self-censored; the expression of the experience of instinctive impulse is just as important as the impulse itself. She does not give a clear indication of whether spontaneity should be considered binary or divisible, but her account of the stages of learning in particular suggests a non-binary spontaneity, linked more to experiential/behavioral tendencies than specific moments, though this spontaneity is certainly not quantifiable.

Greater degrees of spontaneity are indicated by unhesitating action and immediate response. Though she does highly advocate silence as a powerful improv technique (18-19), this silence is not a moment for choosing a powerful response as in Halpern et al. Improviers should still react immediately; silence should be meaningful, not a pause in the *action* but only of language. "Honest" emotional expression is indicative of greater spontaneity. The most spontaneous choice in a situation is based on "the moment before," rather than trying to move the scene in a certain direction, or even following emergent patterns as in Halpern et al. Committed emotional reaction is seen as "risky," and showing "courage" in expressing it is seen as more spontaneous. As in Johnstone, it is often clearer when someone is *not* being spontaneous. This is often assessed internally; the expression of spontaneous experience is characterized by a lack of "judging" or "choosing" among responses, and by a lack of "self-consciousness" regarding how people want to appear to others. This less-spontaneous experience is expressed in improv through behaviors like overly-vague or overly-complicated offers; controlling the scene; forcing the work of moving the scene forward onto others; hesitation; pretending (i.e., "performing) rather than "being truly affected;" and the breaking of "natural stimulus-response cycles."

Hazenfield's sense of spontaneity seems that its presence is unequivocally good in improv, despite her criticisms, which seem to be examples of "inappropriate" uses of the term which she

sees as having crept into improv culture. While not appropriate in every context—Hazenfield acknowledges the risk of full emotional expression in everyday life, and the importance of the "conscious mind" in keeping us safe—in improv, full spontaneity in her sense is what players should strive for. The value of spontaneity for her appears to be as an end in itself—it is precisely being spontaneous that *makes* for good improv. Its value as a productive force in creating a successful performance is secondary to its inherent value in that performance. Hazenfield does not see spontaneity as some internal potential wellspring, as in Johnstone's "imagination;" instead, it is something that happens to performers, and which they must *learn* to recognize and express.

The importance of learning spontaneity suggests an important role for Ivanhoe's "cultivated" form of spontaneity in her account. Immediate, honest emotional response is a learned skill. The state of "unconscious competence" she idealizes is also a hallmark of cultivated spontaneity, a "second nature" in Ivanhoe's terms that is acquired through long experience and practice. She reinforces this cultivated spontaneity by arguing that players should separate their "selves" from their work in evaluating their abilities and progress. Of course, her heavy emphasis on "the whole self" and "instinct" as *the* resource for accessing honest response suggests an important role for untutored spontaneity—the basis for effective response in her ideal comes from expressing from a "fundamental self" (though one that grows and changes with our experiences). But this fundamental self is not seen as straining to burst forth, as in Johnstone, if only social training and education were not holding it back. While Hazenfield certainly acknowledges the power of social training in inhibiting responsiveness and expressiveness, spontaneity in her sense will not just flow automatically if these barriers are removed—performers must learn and train to be spontaneous. Her association of the "freedom" concept with spontaneity gives a nod toward

unconstrained spontaneity as well; however, this appears as more of a valued quality emergent from successful spontaneity than the focus of value for spontaneity itself. The value of spontaneity for Hazenfield is in access to one's "whole," fundamental self, and the learned ability to use this self as a source of responsiveness in improv; the experience of freedom is an effect of, rather than inherent to, this value of spontaneity.

Hazenfield does not close the door on the possibility of greater/lesser degrees of spontaneity being related to inherent subject characteristics; unlike the earlier writers above, she does not make an explicit claim to the universal ability to improvise. On the other hand, she never identifies any category of persons with greater or lesser improv capabilities, except perhaps in tendencies toward "growth-blocking" behavior like "self-criticism" or "rampaging ego." That she offers strategies for overcoming these tendencies probably indicates that she does not view them as inherent subject characteristics at all, but as learned behaviors. Learned behavior patterns are the primary basis for greater/lesser degrees of spontaneity in her account. As discussed above, greater spontaneity is achieved through exercises and practice that helps players learn to recognize and express immediate honest, emotional reaction, while lesser spontaneity results from learned behaviors of over-attentiveness to the "conscious mind" and concerns for the social reception of one's expressions.

Environmental characteristics do not appear to play a part in affecting players' capacities for spontaneity, but relational characteristics do. Players should be "polite" in the sense of treating every offer as valuable and making use of it (47). But they should also be "generous," in the sense of making strong offers and expressing well-defined characters (52), and let this concern for generosity override "the wrong kind of polite": worrying about "hogging the stage," being nice all the time, saying yes when you want to say no, or "wussing"—keeping stakes of offers

low (48-50). They should all mutually support the story they are telling together, especially with respect to her protagonist-centered model—players should identify a clear protagonist with stakes in the outcome of a question, and all work together to help, hinder, or create higher stakes for the protagonist, finally answering the key question and showing how the protagonist has changed. Shared contribution toward the performed narrative should guide performers' choices. But her system is largely based on individual practices and attitudes, and greater spontaneity of a group seems to be largely additive of the group's individuals. She encourages interrupting and acting "as soon as an impulse hits you," and encourages players to catch each other off guard— not by being "illogical," in the sense she connects negatively with spontaneity, but by making high-stakes offers that provoke a strong, unbidden response in your scene partner, which ideally will be followed and expressed. Players are together guided by commitment to a narrative, rather than a "game" as in Spolin or a "theme/pattern" as in Halpern et al. But players are enjoined to focus on individual practices of spontaneity starting from the "inside-out"—being open to one's "full self," making strong choices, and experiencing and expressing responses fully. If all can engage individually, shared spontaneity will take care of itself. Mick Napier, writing not long after Hazenfield, goes even further with this ethos of individually-produced spontaneity, but with a methodology that returns to emphasis on methods of overt behavior, and which also attempts to synthesize the wide variety of improv maxims advanced by earlier writers into a single foundational value and principle of practice.

Mick Napier

Napier's *Improvise: Scene from the Inside Out* addresses many of the same issues in earlier writings, but highly criticizes their conceptual framing of effective improv techniques. In

response to this critique, he offers a broad-based but single and fundamental practice that attempts to synthesize disparate earlier improv practices, and elaborates from that point. His title uses the same "inside-out" language of Hazenfield, but uses it for a dramatically different purpose. Whereas Hazenfield was focused on the improvier's inner life and giving it expression, Napier's "inside-out" refers to the scene itself, creating performance action from the scene's own inherent momentum, what we might call the scene's "self." This scene-selfness does not imply that there are specific directions that specific scenes should go, but rather that the most effective scenes are those that clearly follow the "dominant energy" they generate immediately as they are initiated from the bottomless array of performance behavior possibilities.

Napier is heavily focused on improvisation as a *practice*, the generation of "a performance product in and of itself," which he broadly and succinctly defines as "*getting on a stage and making stuff up as you go along*" (1). He uses the specific term "spontaneity" only once, in a purely descriptive way: In his extended analogy of improv practice with the laws of thermodynamics, he writes, "Broken glass on the floor does not spontaneously become a scotch glass, but a scotch glass is just waiting for the release of energy necessary to become broken. Everything…tends toward disorder" (107). This one mention, however, does imply an opposition of spontaneity with disorder, since that "spontaneous" reforming is what the second law of thermodynamics prevents. This is in keeping with his conclusions from the analogy, where effective improv is the result of maximizing the "energy" brought to the "closed system" of the scene and its experience by the audience. While the increase of entropy is inevitable, a temporary order can be established in the closed system of the performance, and sustained by the conversion of "potential energy" to "kinetic energy," ideally efficiently, with as little loss to entropy as possible.

As he literally uses the term "spontaneity," it refers to the creation of order out of nowhere, for no reason, with no external energy input, and is thus impossible. So he shuns "spontaneity" as such in his analysis in favor of "improvisation," a particular performance practice involving "making things up as you go along," i.e., without prior preparation of content. If we treat spontaneity as the quality that makes accomplishment of improvisational theatre possible as such, then this lack of preparation is the distinctive "spontaneity" of Napier's account. His account then turns to what makes improv performance practice successful while maintaining this distinctive quality—and indeed, the maintenance of this distinctive quality is often what *makes* improv practices successful in his account.

He heavily aligns successful improv with "play" and against "fear" and "thinking," especially in his foundational tirade against "rule" principles in improv. Here he harshly criticizes many of the tactics that are central to effective practice in earlier system, with examples like "don't deny," "don't ask questions," "don't dictate," "show don't tell," "establish who/what/where," and "say yes, then say and" (3). He argues that this approach to improv is highly problematic—following these rules does not lead to better improv, and the emphasis on the rules themselves may weaken improviers. This is because attending to improv "rules" leads to "thinking" about them as one performs, and "thinking" is precisely what Napier associates with bad improv scenes. "Good" scenes tend to be experienced by performers and audience as "magic," "trance-like," and defying analysis, especially at the time of creation—"Why bother thinking about something amazing when you just want to sit back and enjoy it?" (6). "Bad" scenes, on the other hand, are laden with "thinking"—by the performers, audience, tech crew, everyone (4-5). Thinking is diametrically opposed against "playing," which is the hallmark of effective improv. Audiences don't want "to see adult humans think and consider options around

them…They want to see people play and play hard. Throw caution (thinking) to the wind (out). Really play. If improvisers aren't truly playing then they are 'thinking about'" (11).

Thinking is associated directly with "fear," which has great value—just not in improv. It has been highly evolutionarily adaptive that "people fear things so they think of ways to prevent an unwanted outcome" (10-11). But play, not the prevention of unwanted outcomes, is what makes good improv, and focusing on prevention both stems from, and leads to more, "fear and confusion" by the performers, who respond with behavior to "defend and protect" (11). The behaviors addressed in improv "rules," Napier argues, are *effects* of this thought-laden, fearful, defensive position, rather than the *cause* of bad scenes. Defensive behavior in an improv context often takes the form of denial, questions, vague offers, dictating action, and so on. In Napier's view, these do not *cause* bad scenes but are correlated with them, and this correlation has been observed and codified precisely because these behaviors emerged in scenes where observers were "thinking-about" the scene, whereas they weren't thinking or critiquing during "good" scenes—they were swept up in the "magic" (7-8). The "Rules" are problematic because adherence to them does not "cause" a good scene, but the fact that performers are "thinking" about them may cause a bad one. In sum: "Fear begets thinking. Thinking begets protective behavior. Protective behavior is noticed as patterns in bad improvisation. Patterns of behavior become rules" (12).

Play, presumably, is not merely an injunction that players "don't think" (which would take its own place as a "Rule" of the sort Napier critiques). He goes on to elaborate a positive account of a fundamental pattern for approaching scenes that instantiates "playful" behavior. First: "Do something. Anything…*That* you do something is far more important than *what* you do" (14-15) because "it will snap you out of your head"—i.e., short-circuit "thinking" and "allow you to

make a choice out of power as opposed to fear" (16). "Doing something" allows a performer to "declare a position in the scene," what he calls the performer's "deal" and equates with concepts like "what the scene is about" or "the game of the scene" (17). While boiling improv down to "it's all still just playing," Napier says the performer's "deal" addresses the question "what are you going to play with when you play? You have to create it, but what it is doesn't matter" (17). He cautions against equating "*power* and *bold* and *immediacy*" with "*frenetic* and *loud energy*" (18); the "snap" into behavior at the initiation can be *anything*, can be highly subtle, but any strong declaration catches the audience "off guard" and tells them "there's no time to think. No time for them, and no time for you. That's exciting. That's vital. That's strong. That's playful" (18). However, though doing *anything* is better than doing nothing, he does note that many improvisers use strategies to initiate that involve thinking, which is what they should be avoiding, such a preconceiving beats, aiming for funny lines, recycling characters, or using silence as a space to think rather than as a purposeful choice (18-22).

The next step is to observe what you did—"Immediately after you do something, assess what you created" (24). He is careful to distinguish this from "thinking" about what you did: "Merely check out what you did—in a real literal way…No speculation, no self-judgment, no seeking answers to questions, no worrying about what ifs" (24)—not thinking but *observing*. This is important so the performer will "know-what-they-*are*-do-ing," which creates "your character's road map to the scene" (25). "Why" your character did what you did is irrelevant and a distraction, but *how* is essential: "Words are of little impact when not filtered through the *how*. The how comprises everything from emotion to state of being to character attribute to intonation to physical score to point of view" (25). It is not that these aspects of "how" are all instantly established by that first action, but rather that "how" is encompassing of all these aspects, and

those you observe as emphasized in your first action are "your deal in the scene, the magical road map for the character, created instantaneously, acknowledged thereafter, and played, I said played, furiously" (25-26).

Finally, once you have done something and observed what was done, "hold on to what you acknowledged yourself doing and how you did it, and do it more, in every way possible and at every opportunity. Do not let go, and passionately make more of it. Be possessed with what you created and how you are doing it" (26). Scenes suffer because players abandon their "deal," whether due to excess "niceness," fear, thinking they're run out of ideas, or thinking "that different is funny" (26-27). This commitment to whatever was initiated and observed is what constitutes Napier's positive account of play as the essence of good improv: "That is the *play* in improvisation. Creating a thing out of thin air, acknowledging what it is and *how* it does what it does, making bold choices from within that thing, and filtering everything else that comes your way through it, as well" (27).

The rest of Napier's methodology is essentially just the detailing and elaboration of this fundamental principle: good improv=play, bad improv=thinking, and "play" consists broadly of the process above. With respect to performing with a partner, most important is that both players *individually* make their strong initiation, observe it, and commit to doing more of it. Each partner, as they do this, should "listen" to the other, and not merely to know what they are saying. In Napier's account, he writes that his concept of listening became, "I listened so that I could respond to operative information my partners supplied for me and filter it through my own character in the scene…I listen to gain valuable opportunities to say or do something relevant through my character's voice, when I respond" (32). Players do not respond "to" partners, but "through" their own deals, acknowledging partners' initiations while adhering to their own

characters/points of view (33). In three-person scenes, Napier advocates all sharing a point of view, so the scene will be about the characters, not the circumstances (61); when entering a scene, the entering player should reinforce the existing points of view, or identify and reinforce one if they diverge (62). In scenes with four or more people, performers should, as always, each individually start with a strong action. They should all then identify the "dominant energy" of the scene, and each "practice responding to and acknowledging that energy while staying true to your own initiation at the beginning of the scene" (71). The key principle is strong individual initiation and commitment; as individual players respond to ongoing action *through* their "deal," the scene will emerge of its own momentum. Effective shared stage work is not "altruistic": "Like it or not, improvisation is choices made by individuals, and individuals need to know what to do" (32). Commitment to one's initiation at the moment the scene begins is how individuals know what to do.

As noted above, "spontaneity" in Napier's account is descriptive. With respect to improv, it identifies the quality—that the content of the performance is unplanned and unprepared—that is distinctive of improv, and makes it "improv" as such, but does not attach a normative implication. Normative value is instead bound up with "play," the identifying characteristic of successful improv in his view; we might view play as the accomplishment of navigating effective performance action within the required bounds of remaining "spontaneous," i.e., without planning or preparing content. In a very broad sense, he suggests that this quality is quantifiable, to the degree that we can directly equate effective improv with the minimal loss of energy from the closed system of the performance, as in his analogy. Play is not a potentiality nor an end in itself; it is a productive force, and its value has no meaning outside of the improv-generation context he circumscribes. He does not extend his consideration of the value of play to "everyday

life," except implicitly in noting the adaptive value of fear and thinking for humans, suggesting that play may often not be the best mode of behavior in many other contexts.

The value of play in improv invokes the value of Ivanhoe's cultivated spontaneity—it is a practice, a learned skill. It does not simply emerge "naturally" as a fundamental characteristic of self once social training ceases to inhibit it, nor does he connect it with freedom from constraint. His account of play is strongly behavioral—strong, observed initiation and commitment to it. Experience of improviers and audience is important in assessing the success of this behavior; experiences of "fear" or "thinking" are clear indicators that "playing" is not being accomplished. But play instantiates in what is done in the performance, not the experience of lack of fear/thinking that tends to accompany it. Play is recognized by its adherence to the practice Napier outlines, and the product of this procedure, when successful, may be experienced as having a sort of "magic" quality that defies analysis. Practice with this mode of improv production will increase prevalence of playful behavior in individuals and groups—which is valuable because it will, essentially by definition, create better improv in Napier's terms.

Play is explicitly a product of individuals in Napier's account; group play is additive of individual's play in the form of initiation, recognition, and commitment. It is identified and recognized in groups the same way it is recognized for individuals, with the added layer that *each* individual is playing, and that in groups of three or more, commitment is to a "dominant energy" of the scene as well as to individual initiations. This sense of "play" is very different from Spolin's use of the same key term. For Spolin, playing emerges through shared agreement between performers on a "game" or "problem that needs solving," to which action is oriented. In Napier, playing emerges through individual commitment to what is essentially arbitrary action established as soon as a scene begins. In Spolin, players are guided by their shared objective,

while in Napier the objective itself emerges from the playing, and need not be shared—the scene

accumulates through commitments to individual objectives, and these are commitments to a

"deal," a "how" of individual behavior, rather than "what" the players aim to accomplish.

Interestingly, unlike other writers, Napier does seem to locate the basis for capacity for play

in inherent subject characteristics. He neither argues that "everyone can improvise" nor

identifies categories of people with greater or lesser capacities for play. However, he does

identify the fundamental constraint on play with "fear," which he describes as not as an inherent

subject characteristic of particular persons, but of humans in general—fear and its resultant

thinking have had enormous adaptive survival value, and are "hard-wired" into the general

business of being human. So, people's capacity for spontaneity is limited by characteristics that

Napier associates with being human at all. Of course, learned behaviors can exacerbate this

limitation, especially adherence to the "Rules" of improv he critiques, or problematic tactics like

repeating characters that "reliably get laughs." But, as he argues, these behaviors do not *cause*

the limitation, but rather *result* from this inherent characteristic of fear. Environmental

characteristics can play a role—for example, the greater sense of stakes and thus inhibition that

comes with performing for a paying audience. But this too only gains relevance with respect to

evoking fear. Excepting his injunction to "find the dominant energy" in group scenes, relational

characteristics are not very responsible for greater and lesser degrees of play. Performers should

"take care of themselves first," and play in a scene is simply additive from each doing so—

though performers should of course listen and pay attention to each other, in order to access

material through which to respond with commitment to their own initiations. A later pair of

writers, Mary Scruggs and Michael Gellman, continue along this direction of locating

spontaneity in individuals, extending the concept to a more holistic view of individual persons

rather than particular instances of improv-creation, and applying their methodology toward a more specific performance product: a long-term, real-time, single-setting scene.

Mary Scruggs and Michael J. Gellman

The sense of improv as fundamentally individual action, though done in collaboration, is highlighted in Mary Scruggs and Michael Gellman through their choice to present their methodology in a style deliberately reminiscent of Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*. *Process: An Improviser's Journey* is presented as a fictional first-person narrative from the perspective of an actor interested in improv who takes one of Gellman's improv workshops. This device marks two interesting shifts from earlier methodologies. First, it presents the methodology not as a broad discussion of principles and tactics, but as a description of a specific course of training (though discussion of the principles and tactics implicated in the course of training are woven into the narrative). Second, the device makes for an explicitly psychological turn, as we see the narrator's imagined reactions, confusion, and discovery as the experience moves forward.

Scruggs and Gellman mark this course of training as advanced; the workshop advertisement requires audition, and restricts audition to performers with a theatre degree or equivalent experience (19). The end-product aimed for by the workshop is also distinct from previous methodologies. Unlike the thematic long-form of the Harold, the multiscenic narrative long-form of Hazenfield, or Napier's exclusive focus on the "scene," the workshop presented ends with a long-form defined by "sustaining a character for an extended period of time…where the lights were not taken down during the show—unlike the more traditional revue styles, which were comprised of short scenes and blackouts" (xviii). Specifically, the show performed at the

workshop's conclusion consists of groups of four improvisers who sustain a 20- to 30-minute scene in a single physical setting, in real time, each as the same character throughout.

The entire account is filtered through the narrator. A number of other characters, including other workshop participants and the character of Gellman himself, contribute views and reactions, but these too are filtered through the narrator's experience of them. As a result, outside of the author's introductions, it is hard to mark concepts as definitive for Scruggs and Gellman; the "journey" is one *particular* character's reaction and experience of learning improv. At times, the narrator is confused by elements of the workshop, or finds them unhelpful, and different characters offer diverging views and reactions, inviting the reader to question the program of training as dogmatic. The narrative ends immediately before the narrator is about to perform his first public show, leaving it unknown whether he "succeeds"—we do not know if the training "worked." This is in keeping with Anne Libera's framing assertion in her foreword that it "doesn't matter how, or even if, this work creates plays of literary quality. It is the process in and of itself that is worth studying and communicating to a larger audience" (ix).

The narrator's use of "spontaneity" marks it as somewhat of a magical, unanalyzed term, yet strongly associated with improv; interestingly, its use disappears as soon as the main workshop narrative starts. Describing a partner's cold reading at an audition for a scripted show, he narrates "she was good. I thought she was going off script, because her reading sounded so spontaneous" (5). Later, describing a play he watched, developed for Second City's Donny's Skybox theater, he narrates "In some ways it had the best of both worlds—a lot of the spontaneous, natural feel of improv, and a little more complexity in terms of emotion, character, and story, like you'd see in a play" (18). Finally, describing an earlier workshop in Improvisation for Actors he took, the narrator says that "the games I learned laid a foundation of

playfulness, creativity, spontaneity, and connection to others" (8). The narrator broadly associates spontaneity with these above concepts: "naturalness," "play," "creativity," and "connection," along with a sense that the impression of spontaneity is associated with good-quality scripted acting.

Explicitly discussing improvisation principles in his preface, Gellman writes, "The most important idea is simply focusing out and avoiding conscious choices…Improvisation is too often evaluated in terms of good choices or bad choices" (xviii). "Good" choices are those that are associated with a strong audience reaction. Against this view, he argues instead that "when we are working at our peak, we should not be in control or even aware of our choices" (xix). The foundational technique involved in his improv method involves "exploring and heightening" three foci. First, focus on a "point of concentration" (POC), which "gives us action instead of just activities. We learn to focus out, make discoveries, and react to those discoveries." Second, a "point of view" (POV) "gives us a method of creating dialogue, which moves the play forward, avoids dialogue traps, and heightens our knowledge of character." The third focus is "scenic," which "helps us to focus the play one action at a time and allows the actor to live in the moment." Overall, "the techniques boil down to focusing out, making discoveries, and having an emotional and physical reaction to those discoveries" (xix). Scruggs's "Note on the Text" lists the "principles of basic training" as "Follow the follower. Stay in the moment. Focus on your partner and react. Make discoveries" (xxiv).

"Reaction" is especially important. Discussing an audition scene with a partner who showed offensive and thoughtless improv behavior, a former improv teacher of the narrator chides him for arguing that the partner "wasn't playing a character," replying, "according to you…because you chose to judge his performance instead of responding to what he was creating" (17). The

teacher agrees that the partner's work was "bad" improv, but highlights the importance of responding to *what* is happening, *what* is being expressed, rather than imposing analysis on action. Later, another character in the workshop is handling a mimed object and begins to recount her history with it by way of explanation for her emotion. Gellman stops her and asks her to *just* have a reaction. She feels sad, which Gellman calls "great," until she again explains her sadness through an imagined history. Gellman emphasizes that "reaction" does not include reasons for/analysis of that reaction—*reacting* is important, not justification for that reaction. Performers are enjoined to "react to what you see, taste, hear, touch, and smell—not to the story in your head" (71-72). Reactions need not be "big," but should be "strong," i.e., "important to your character" (73). It is also important that they be "physicalized" and made apparent, for "if there is no physical manifestation of your reaction to your discovery, does it exist for your audience?" (69-70). The physicalization of reaction takes primacy over dialogue, which Gellman describes as "only the by-product of reaction—the ashes of what just took place" (57). Scruggs and Gellman offer an interesting overlay of principles from both Hazenfield and Napier. The focus on strong reactions and being affected is very much aligned with Hazenfield's emphasis on emotional response. However, where she advocates focus *inward*, toward one's "self," Scruggs and Gellman specifically advocate "focusing out" toward the scene itself in a way much more aligned with Napier's practices. Napier strongly emphasizes "holding on" to one's point of view or behavior patterns; in contrast, Scruggs and Gellman align with "change" derived from "discoveries" drawn from the environment or other characters, rather than discovery drawn from attending to internal responses.

If we take spontaneity as the defining feature of improv performance, then in addition to the broad senses expressed by the narrator, we see spontaneity in Scruggs and Gellman as associated

with "reaction," "discovery," being "in the moment," commitment to ongoing "process," and being "not in control or even aware" of choices. Spontaneity is also contrasted against "conscious choices," evaluation and/or analysis, and "being in your head."

With respect to our dimensions of analysis, spontaneity for Scruggs and Gellman appears to be a quality of both experience and behavior; performers are enjoined to have both an emotional (internal experience) and physical (observable behavior) reaction to the discoveries they make. There is no clear indication whether spontaneity is binary or divisible. The narrative presents moments of "successful" improv, as well as "unsuccessful" (which interestingly, from the narrator's perspective, includes technically effective performances where he or others nonetheless did not seem "in the moment"—i.e., the presented behavior was an engaging performance, but failed at being *improvisation*). But nothing suggests that the authors view spontaneity as clearly present in the successful work and absent elsewhere. On the other hand, nothing suggests greater or lesser degrees of spontaneity, at least not in any quantifiable (or even account-able) form. Instead, we have only the narrator's account; sometimes he interprets his own actions, or that of others, as more spontaneous or less, or as spontaneous or not. But for his own self-evaluation, we have only his fictional subjective feelings, while for others we have only his evaluation of behavior. Other characters sometimes disagree with his evaluations. It might be argued, considering Scruggs and Gellman's warnings against evaluation, that the very act of evaluating the spontaneity of self and others is indicative of lesser spontaneity. But on the whole, the choice to present a first-person narrative indicates at least a somewhat subjective character for spontaneity. The narrative perspective suggests recognition and characterization of spontaneity is itself part of the "process" of development, and indexed to at least some degree to individual experience and interpretation.

Spontaneity for Scruggs and Gellman is clearly a normatively positive quality, at least as far as improv goes—it is not addressed with respect to other contexts. They appear to view it as a valuable end in itself. While of course it is also valued as a productive force in generating effective improv, the praising of the "process" as valuable in itself, regardless of its ability to produce "literary-quality" performances, suggests an intrinsic value to engagement with spontaneous performance in their mold. They do not appear to treat spontaneity as a potentiality, except perhaps insofar as the unlimited potential for "discoveries" embedded in the scene or exercise. Instead, what is offered is "principles of basic training" (xxiv). The Gellman character emphasizes the importance of practice in getting past the "noise in our heads" that "keeps us from this work" (48-49), and later, when doing an exercise on "dialogue rules," he even encourages students to think of them as like "multiplication tables," where "you have to drill them so they become rote [i.e., automatic]" (58). Spontaneity is viewed as a learned skill, not a potentiality unleashed, and thus aligns primarily with Ivanhoe's cultivated sense of spontaneity. While the narrator's association of spontaneity with "naturalness" hints at a role for untutored spontaneity, the methodology's emphasis asks performers to focus outward and make discoveries in the scene, rather than inwards toward the responses of one's "self," as in Hazenfield. The "unconstrained" sense of spontaneity seems almost directly opposed to Scruggs and Gellman's account. Freedom to choose and act in accordance with "what one wants to do" runs counter to Gellman's assertion that in "peak" improv work "we should not be in control or even aware of our choices" (xix). Idealized spontaneity is characterized by a *loss* of control and sense of self, replaced by immersion in the learned skill of shared creation.

If "practicing" in a broad sense, simply getting more time doing exercises and performing, is the basis for greater degrees of spontaneity, lesser degrees are related to both inherent subject

characteristics and learned behaviors in the form of "personality." Decreased capacity for "being in the moment," "making discoveries," "reacting" to other characters and a shared environment, etc. is not reduced to general causes, but instead, in keeping with the narrative model, is subjective to particular characters. Of the main characters, Geoff (the narrator) is eager to impress, Marty is a consistent performer but insecure, and Kristin tends to plan and think outside the moment (Gellman's character is never presented as actually performing improv, and we do not get as well-developed insight into many minor characters). These personality characteristics are often shown as detrimental for the characters' efforts at improvisation. Geoff's anxiety about the opinions of others, Marty's fear and insecurity, and Kristen's "being in the head" all correspond to more generalized problems identified by earlier writers, but are presented as individualized issues, with different people facing different challenges.

Equally important, these same tendencies that hold back spontaneity for them are also strengths. Geoff's eagerness to impress, a liability when it takes him out of "the moment," can also translate as strong, bold choices and as concern for the interests of the audience. Marty's insecurity and tendency to hold back can also take the form of attentive, supportive behavior with scene and exercise partners. Kristen's overthinking contributes to greater narrative depth and comfort with structured exercises. By using the narrative device of dealing with improvisation as experienced by particular individuals, Scruggs and Gellman resist the reductionism risked by earlier writers in trying to generalize about what attitudes and behavioral tendencies are conducive or detrimental to effective improv. Strengths and weaknesses are presented as sides of the same coin, and cannot make sense without reference to the particular personalities that instantiate them. Environmental characteristics are not addressed as having an effect on spontaneity, and relational characteristics are not discussed beyond the general practical

concerns addressed in all texts, of listening, attentiveness, and support for partners. Instead, the individual is paramount. Whether we view "personality" as inherent subject characteristics, learned behaviors, or both, it provides the core material that both enhances and inhibits spontaneity. Increasing capacity for spontaneity in improv cannot be simply a generalized matter of shedding problematic attitudes/behavior patterns, or of practicing and developing "effective" ones. Instead, personality provides the baseline for the ongoing "process" of engagement with improvisational theatre. Performers will "succeed" and "fail;" their personalities will provide both resources and resistance, and this will happen in individual ways. But the long arc of continued practice, involvement, and challenging of self in improv presumably bends toward greater spontaneity, though what exactly this means depends on who is making the journey. Such an account offers an opening to a diversity of spontaneities as broad as the array of improv performers. While such an account may be appealing as a means for untangling the broadly divergent accounts of spontaneity given by various methodologists, it also risks diffusing the spontaneity ideograph too greatly, undermining its character as a principle of cohesion among the many practical views of improv. The final writers discussed in this section, Tom Salinsky and Deborah Frances-White, swing back in the other direction, offering a much more explicit account of spontaneity—but one which also decentralizes the term and subsumes it as one of a broad array of values and principles underlying successful improv.

Tom Salinsky and Deborah Frances-White

Tom Salinsky and Deborah Frances-White's *The Improv Handbook* is also formatted around a "workshop" model, though they write with a far more traditional description-and-discussion approach, rather than the narrative framing of Scruggs and Gellman. At 400 pages, their text is

far longer than any of the other improv texts considered in this section, and sweeping in its scope, covering not only improv theory and exercises, but also an overview of improv history, detailed insight on forming and running an improv ensemble, strategies and considerations for professional improv enterprises, and interviews with a wide assortment of figures in the improv world. The text's core is a 250 page account of exercises and discussion points derived from their fundamentals workshops. Though they identify heavily with the Johnstonian rather than "Chicago" tradition, the book is significant for its explicit efforts to identify and synthesize a variety of issues and approaches within a general account of practice. They introduce a variety of important methodological considerations and theoretical innovations, almost all of which can be seen as tying in with issues of spontaneity. However, due to the vastness of the text, I shall here focus on their more explicit use of spontaneity, but draw on their other theoretical insights where it may help illuminate this account.

Many of their explicit uses of the term "spontaneity" come with little explication. They discuss Lance Percival's improvised, topical calypso numbers, noting that he stressed being "well-prepared" for them, but also that his audience suggestions were "genuinely spontaneous and unplanned" (12). Groucho Marx is held up as having a "gift for spontaneous verbal comedy" as well as for "making dialogue sound spontaneous" (13). They note that the semi-improvised filmmaking method of Christopher Guest, while including a significant editing process, allows for a script that "makes terrific use of the spontaneous wit and insight of the actors involved" (13), and that in scripted work actors work hard to "contribute to the illusion enjoyed by the audience that they are voyeurs observing spontaneous behavior" (284).

These uses give us little insight into their meaning for "spontaneity," other than pointing to its "unplanned" character and invoking it as a quality expressed in effective acting. However, it

is worth noting that they do not disassociate being "well-prepared" with being "spontaneous," as in their Percival example. Elsewhere, they discuss "hoop games," making the point that the games' behavioral or dialogue constraints, which require thinking and choosing by the improvisers, "doesn't necessarily fly in the face of imperatives to 'be obvious' and to 'be spontaneous'." After all, there is no "best" or "most" obvious offer, "nor is it the case that their second or third choice will be less spontaneous" (219). Limitation, thinking, and choosing are not seen as necessarily opposed to spontaneity, though they elsewhere warn that one of the greatest challenges of improv as a "storytelling medium" is developing the skill of "learning to tell spontaneous stories, since many of the sub-skills go thoroughly against the grain" (270).

This last point suggests that effective improvisation in their view is not simply coextensive with spontaneity, but that spontaneity is instead one *aspect* of effective improvisation, which also involves other skills that may run counter to spontaneity. Nonetheless, spontaneity seems like a clear term of defining value for improvisation in their account. Indeed, their home-base studio is called "The Spontaneity Shop" (27). Writing of their personal histories with the studio, Salinsky states that "the challenge of artful spontaneous creation still excites and challenges me" (24), and Frances-White later laments that many improv groups function "more like a social club than a place for great creative expression or a home to develop great spontaneous comedy" (32). As a general approach to training improvisers who are reluctant to participate or make strong offers, they advocate a "safe, supportive atmosphere" where these performers are then "*pushed* to do exercises which demand that they act quickly and spontaneously" (273).

Beyond these scattered references, they also use the device, eschewed by writers since Spolin and Johnstone, of devoting a section explicitly titled "Spontaneity" as a chapter and as day one of their outline for a typical eight-class Level One improv course (403). This is the first section

of the workshop description itself, and begins with "Pointing at Things," a three-step exercise. First, students point at things in the room and say what they are; then, they point at something, then a second thing, saying the name of the *last* thing they pointed at, and so on; finally, students point at things, calling them *anything* but what they actually are (46-47). They note that the third round is almost invariably the hardest for students, with moments of silence even with a full class, generally quieter volume, and a sense in the participants that the game gets harder as it goes, as if they have "temporarily run out of words" (47). This is despite the fact that in the second round, unlike the third, it is possible to be wrong, and that the second round is really the same as the third, but more restricted (47-48). Students often attribute the problem to "too many choices," but the authors argue it is not the volume of options but rather "option paralysis"—"lots of options and *no criteria*." They attribute the problem to social education that encourages people think in terms of "Right Answers and Wrong Answers." Even though being wrong is possible in the second round, it feels more familiar, for "we take comfort…from being able to accurately judge our own performance." In the absence of criteria, students often "invent their own rules"—refusing to repeat a word is common—or try to "show off how clever and imaginative they are," or conversely, how dull, making sure "each word seems nice and safe and mundane…so as never to say anything remotely sexual, scatological or in any other way interesting" (48). They follow Johnstone in viewing these responses as running counter to spontaneity, and describe the goal as playing the third round with the same "pace and *fluency*" as the first round. "Trying" to come up with "good" words makes the game harder, but "trying harder" leads to less effective gameplay. Instead, they advocate to just name something, anything, show mild curiosity at what one says, then "*immediately* move on to the next object,"

without evaluating the choice. For some it takes time, but even a small amount of practice usually shows improvement quickly (49-50).

However, this approach usually increases fluency but decreases volume and energy. Far better is to pronounce each object "with great joy and energy and delight…loudly, brightly and boldly!" This approach is almost never taken by students without prompting, though it generally makes the game far easier, and moreover, "attempting any kind of performance with energy and focus and enthusiasm dramatically increases your chances of success" (50). They attribute the "feeble" gameplay that is most students' default mode to the fact that enthusiastic self-presentation means to "abandon control over the size of the gap between what they advertise and what they deliver." By presenting themselves as "not up to the task," they excuse their own failure, and though they are nearly guaranteeing their own failure with this attitude, they take comfort in having control over that failure. Though "advertising success" increases the chances of success greatly, students find it "horrifying" to not "be able to control the size of the advertising/delivery gap" (51).

This is related to adults' "basic feeling that talent is innate, that learning has come to an end, and that they now know what they are good at and what they are bad at" (51). The value of "Pointing at Things" is "how readily it demonstrates that your ability (talent) is related to your attitude"—playing it with "joy" actually directly improves performance. The other benefit to playing this way is that "it turns off your internal censor…the little mechanism inside your head that likes to check what you say before you say it." Though useful in everyday life, it is "a nuisance" in improv, but "if your attitude is one of cheerfulness and delight, you will fool your censor into thinking that there's nothing here that needs checking" (51). The game triggers the "learning-anxiety response" though it cannot have any bearing on our abilities in other areas of

life. A single negative remark can shut down the imagination, while a single positive one can help open up the "torrent of ideas," and the game demonstrates that we can have these same effects on ourselves (52).

The chapter drives this point home by following up with the "What Are You Doing?" exercise, wherein two performers are watched by a group. One performer announces an activity, which the second performer then acts out while naming a different activity, which the first performer does while naming a third activity, and so on; anyone who makes a mistake should be "tapped out" by a spectator, who then takes their place in the game (52-53). Typically, some groups will play enthusiastically, with lots of mistakes, and others will play very seriously, trying hard to avoid being tapped out. They describe the point of the game as to see how much "*fun*" the students will have. The procedure is difficult and "screws up your ability to plan," but is "a rather tedious spectator sport, so the game only has any interest while it's impossible to sustain. This is quite a profound demonstration of the importance of failure. Here's a game which has no function when people stop failing at it" (53).

They describe the core skills rooted in these "spontaneity" exercises as "step one" in training improvisers: "Can we, on demand, generate any number of arbitrary ideas without stress?" They contrast this skill against the structural skills of storytelling that make up so much of their methodology, writing that "the ability to control when your mind generates arbitrary ideas and when it generates connected ideas (as well as deciding which mode is appropriate) is crucial for your success" (52). The other exercises listed for the first day on "Spontaneity" in a standard workshop (401) are discussed in other sections, and are much more engaged with "connected ideas" than the two described above. Their distinction of these modes is significant for my understanding of their view of the relationship between spontaneity and improvisation in general.

Improvisation is a "storytelling" practice for them, as for Hazenfield, but they have a much

looser structure than hers, and one much more conducive to shorter scenework. First, a

"platform" is established that shows the world of the story and what is normal in that world, and

often establishes a "hero" (a central figure that is not necessarily a "protagonist" in Hazenfield's

sense). The platform becomes a "story" when "routines are broken and when A affects B," but

"surprise" is rare and powerful in effective stories, and players should learn to build from the

"obvious" of the platform (271).

The skills of storytelling are largely the generation of "connected ideas," but spontaneity, the

ability to generate "arbitrary ideas," is the essential baseline that enables the practice of improv

as such. Unlike most other writers, they do not fully dissociate "control" from spontaneity,

despite identifying the fear of loss of control over the advertising/delivery gap as a major

stymying force on spontaneity. Instead, having control over when you generate "arbitrary," (i.e.,

spontaneous) ideas is a learned skill that is a subset of general improv skills. These general skills

include many which involve "connected ideas," distinguished from the "arbitrary ideas" of

spontaneity. In practice, both modes are generally operating in greater or lesser degrees, but they

are distinct in their contributions to the ongoing production of improv. In their view,

spontaneity is not equivalent to "good" improv. "More" spontaneity does not equal better

improv, and less does not equal worse, though spontaneity is an essential baseline for improv to

exist as a practice at all.

In sum, spontaneity is more explicitly addressed in Salinsky and Frances-White than in any

other writer since Spolin and Johnstone, and is identified with the generation of "arbitrary ideas,"

as distinct from "connected ideas." Spontaneity is strongly affiliated with terms and concepts

such as being "unplanned," "lack of criteria," "joy" or "enthusiasm," "abandoning control" over

self-presentation, "fun," and embracing of failure. Spontaneity is contrasted against terms and concepts like "thinking in terms of right and wrong answers (i.e., "evaluation")," "trying," "stress," and the "internal censor."

Application of our analytical dimensions to Salinsky and Frances-White's account does not strongly align spontaneity with either behavior or experience. The generation of arbitrary "ideas" implies an internal, experiential origin for spontaneity, and the concepts aligned against spontaneity are mostly experiential factors. But the way in which ideas are expressed— ideally with a fun, joyous attitude—is held to have a direct impact on player's capacities for this generation. Spontaneity presumably exists in the feedback between the two. It does not seem binary, but is always present to some greater or lesser degree (even in the first round of Pointing at Things, players still must arbitrarily choose what they will point at next). It is not generally quantifiable, though they associate greater spontaneity with the greater "volume" and "energy" expressed when students are prompted to play with deliberate enthusiasm.

Strictly speaking, we may see spontaneity as simply descriptive, simply "generation of arbitrary ideas," but the attitudes and modes of behavior that Salinsky and Frances-White associate with effectively evoking spontaneous expression—curiousity, joy, enthusiasm, fun— are certainly normatively positive. And of course, the practice of improv as such depends on spontaneity. The value of spontaneity appears to be primarily as a productive force. It is not an end in itself, but rather a baseline for enabling improvisation. Nor do they directly implicate an unlimited potential as in Johnstone's "imagination," but simply note that "any number" of ideas can be arbitrarily generated. The focus of their "spontaneity" is on that generative process, which can be learned and developed, and is thus best seen as an expression of cultivated spontaneity. However, their emphasis on the negative impact of education and social training,

like Johnstone, also suggests aspects of a "natural self" more accessible by children, that "naturally" expresses itself when learned barriers are removed. Greater and lesser degrees of spontaneity are primarily related to these learned behavior patterns (both productive and opposing) rather than inherent subject qualities or environmental/relational characteristics. Being "free" does not appear to play an important role in their valuation of spontaneity. In fact, "being in control" of one's self-presentation is presented as a significant stymying factor on spontaneity.

However, "being in control" of the generation of both "arbitrary" and "connected" ideas is essential for effective *improvisation*. As noted above, spontaneity skills are a subset of improv skills for Salinsky and Frances-White. In this context, spontaneity appears to be a quality of individuals. In a conceptual move echoing the spontaneity debate in psychoanalysis (Chapter Two), once spontaneity is brought into the social realm, it becomes "improvisation," involving the generation of connected ideas as performers develop a scene together. The use of the "obvious" is held to generally be most useful here, but generation of arbitrary ideas remains important—ideas of some sort must be continually generated for improvisation to succeed. No idea is "more obvious" or better than another, and the judicious use of surprise is key in turning platform into story.

Synthesis: Development, Unity, and Contestation for "Spontaneity" in Improv Methodologies

Many details in our list of analytic dimensions have already been discussed above, but some broad themes are worth summarizing regarding the historical development of the spontaneity ideograph in improv methodology, points of unity cohering this ideograph across textual accounts, and points of contestation among these accounts. It should be noted that these authors

rarely explicitly cite each other and almost never directly discuss the influence of previous writers on their own work. It is also reasonable to assume that the writers are to a certain extent unaware of influences on their accounts of spontaneity, and also that these influences are diffuse, with earlier texts only one small element of a vast network of influences. I do believe that in many cases consideration of a writer's particular use of terms or expressions indicates a response to other texts, but no author ever explicitly states this. The following general claims are necessarily speculative, and in any case should not be read as necessarily implicating specific intention toward affecting the spontaneity ideograph by the writers considered.

One significant direction in the diachronic development of spontaneity in these writings is a trend toward greater backgrounding of the term. Both Spolin and Johnstone devote extensive sections to explicit analysis of "spontaneity" as such. Later writers continue to use the term, but explicit analysis largely fades away, and the term is used in a much more taken-for-granted way revealed through its association with other terms and with more specific practices of improv. The concern becomes more with the activity of "improv" in a more general sense, with the background importance of spontaneity assumed, and the question of successful improv is diffused beyond the key ideograph of spontaneity to constellations of associated ideographs connected with successful improv. Practices are generally oriented to this constellation rather than to spontaneity directly. While leaving spontaneity criterial to the identity of improv practices, writers following Spolin and Johnstone begin to focus on a wider range of practices implicated in "successful" improv, beyond the generation of spontaneity itself. This trend peaks in Napier, where "spontaneity" is used explicitly only as an impossibility, and the focus is entirely on effective improv practices. In the most recent text considered, Salinsky and Frances-White reinforce this trend by their return to an explicit address of the term "spontaneity;" their

treatment of it as "generation of arbitrary ideas" decentralizes it as only one aspect of improv practice, though a foundational one, still definitional to the practice.

Though this trend may seem to indicate a reduced significance of the spontaneity ideograph for improv methodologists over time, I believe that another reasonable interpretation of this trend is actually the progressive *reinforcement* of the spontaneity ideograph as its explicit deployment is subsumed to methods of blind obedience. Spolin and Johnstone, as the earliest methodology writers, were highly concerned with establishing the "identity of practices" to which their methods were applicable. Explicating "spontaneity," which they recognize as criterial to improv, is thus an important project for their accounts, as they are still establishing the identity of the ideographic community in which their methods and evaluations of practices are account-able and able-to-be-made-sense-of.

Methods of blind obedience with respect to an ideograph only become possible when an ideographic community has been to a certain extent established and endogenously recognized by its members as such. Only then can the conditions for both blind obedience to an ideograph and for breaches through explicit engagement with that ideograph become recognizable methods within that community. This process is ongoing; ideographic communities are not formed by reaching some critical mass of recognizable relation to an ideograph. But in the nascent stages of the formation of an ideographic community, that community's relationships with its criterial ideographs and their synchronic associations are still under negotiation (though by no means necessarily explicit or deliberate negotiation). Spolin and Johnstone's writings may be seen as an important step in this process of ideographic community formation, through their appropriation of the ideograph "spontaneity" from the broader culture and their application of it to the activities of those whose practices and values are influenced by improv methodology.

In turn, later writers tend to take spontaneity for granted. After all, improv is much more than "just" being spontaneous, though this characteristic is criterial. Though this chapter focuses on the spontaneity ideograph and its synchronic associations in improv, the methodologists above also use a number of other ideographs related not directly to improv *as* spontaneous, but instead to other aspects of successful improv performances such as narrative development, strong characters, technical skills like space-object work, etc. Again, this trend is made clearest in Salinsky and Frances-White, where the skill of "generation of arbitrary ideas" identified with spontaneity is explicitly distinguished from other relevant improv skills. Post-Spolin/Johnstone writers may be seen not as reducing the relevance of spontaneity, but instead taking its character for granted as criterial for the identity of improv practices, and focusing on practices which, though still rooted in the essentiality of spontaneity, do not necessitate explicit analysis of this foundational characteristic. In the "early days" of the establishment of improviers as an ideographic community, the character of identity of practices was still under negotiation and calling for explication. Later writers, much more secure in the criterial identity of their practices, are free to treat the character of spontaneity as "what everyone already knows" by virtue of membership in the established ideographic community to which they and their readers are presumed to belong. The improv practices they advocate can be explicated in "blind obedience" to the ideographic community's use of the spontaneity ideograph; they do not require justification of their relationship to spontaneity, as community members "always already" take the criterial significance of spontaneity for granted.

If we accept this account, it implies an emergent consensus on certain features and points of contestation associated with the spontaneity ideograph, such that improviers are progressively able to use the term more unproblematically and "automatically." Many details of these

practices as spontaneity is progressively backgrounded are already discussed in the individual analyses above, but again, some broad trends are worth noting. That spontaneity is criterial to improv is a universal theme. Methods of generating recognized spontaneity in performance are not merely additive to improv, an additional trick applied to "traditional," "non-spontaneous" theatre techniques. Nor are they merely the thing that makes improv stand out as distinctive from other performance genres. While writers often disagree about the methods, with implications for their accounting of spontaneity, all agree that appeal to such methods is what makes improv *qua* improv.

The "learnability" of spontaneity is also a universal claim, embedded in the very assumption that one can accomplish elucidating methodology at all; it makes no sense to describe methods for successfully accomplishing something if we do not assume those methods are at least earnestly believed to increase the skills underlying such projected accomplishment. Some writers make explicit claims that everyone can improvise. Others do not make this claim, or, like Scruggs and Gellman, assume a higher established baseline of related performance skills rather than "starting from scratch," but all must assume that improviers practicing (diligently and critically) the skills they describe will learn to be more spontaneous, at least insofar as spontaneity underlines successful improv. Accounts of the *particular* spontaneity-enhancing skills involved vary greatly: shared recognition of and commitment to patterns in Spolin, Halpern et al., and Napier; the shedding of enculturated inhibitions in Johnstone; access and expression of emotion and the "self" in Hazenfield; generation of arbitrary ideas in Salinsky and Frances-White. These different accounts of the concrete skills implicated in enhancing improvisational spontaneity draw writers in different directions regarding both congruence and difference in the synchronic associations they make with the spontaneity ideograph.

A number of ideographs are synchronically associated with spontaneity or in opposition to it, and some occur across most writers. With the exception of Napier, all writers explicitly oppose "control" in various forms against spontaneity, with some also aligning spontaneity explicitly with "freedom" or "loss of control." All identify some form of "thinking" in opposition to spontaneity; this term is used specifically in Hazenfield, Napier, and Salinsky and Frances-White. They and the other writers also oppose spontaneity to a cluster of terms associated with especially antithetical "types" of thinking, e.g., "evaluation/judging/choosing," "approval/disapproval," "trying," "planning," "inventing," "self-censorship," or "being in your head."

Though accounts of the "self" are divergent as discussed above, most writers (Napier, and Salinsky and Frances-White, are exceptions) connect spontaneity with access or expression to some "true" or "whole" self. This terminology is explicit in Spolin, Johnstone, and Hazenfield, while they and other writers also associate closely related expressions like "intuition," "obviousness," "exposing one's self," "instinct/impulse," and "naturalness." The idea of access to and exposure of the self would also be related to such associated ideographs as "honesty" and "truthfulness."

The idea of spontaneity as instantiated in "play" is an important theme. Napier especially makes this term central; Spolin, and Salinsky and Frances-White, also use it explicitly, while other writers deploy terms closely associated with the experience of play: "creativity," "being in the moment," "making discoveries," "joy/enthusiasm/fun." The experience of play is also contrasted against attitudinal states like "insecurity," "passivity," "fear," and "stress." A number of ideographs related to "play" are also expressed as characteristic of relationships between participants or of their group behaviors, such as "cooperation," "accepting," "trust," and

"connection." Similarly, other relational characteristics are also associated in opposition to spontaneity as being antithetical to play: "competition," "blocking" or "conflict," for example.

These categories emerge as the primary clusters of ideographs synchronically associated with spontaneity across most or all writers, and providing a certain ideological unity to spontaneity for improviers: that spontaneity is criterial to improv; that it is a developable skill; that it is associated with freedom or loss of control; that it is opposed to "thinking" in various forms; that its enactment and/or experience involves access to some fundamental and/or complete self; and that its enactment involves some form of "play," a behavior indicated through certain experiential states on the part of participants, and/or certain relational attitudes or behaviors among participants.

Within this ideological unity, certain dimensions of dissensus also emerge. Many details of dissensus are already discussed above, but it is worth noting several analytic dimensions along which our methodological writers diverge significantly. The basis for spontaneity's value divides. Spolin and Johnstone both give strong emphasis to spontaneity as "freedom," the unconstrained form of Ivanhoe's spontaneity values. Both also ascribe an important role to untutored spontaneity, as access/expression of a "natural," fundamental "self," whether in the form of "intuiton" or "imagination." Later writers deemphasize unconstrained spontaneity, viewing it more as an experiential byproduct of spontaneity. But many continue to emphasize untutored spontaneity, especially Hazenfield, and Salinsky and Frances-White. Both, however, view this access to "self" at least in part as a learned, developed skill and so ascribe value to the cultivated aspects of spontaneity as well. Halpern et al., Napier, and Scruggs and Gellman view spontaneity's value almost entirely as a cultivated, learned skill instantiating play, product, or method.

The ontological status of spontaneity's value is also at issue. Spolin, Hazenfield, and Scruggs and Gellman seem to view spontaneity as an end in itself, valuable simply for what it is. Halpern et al., Napier, and Salinsky and Frances-White all view it primarily as a productive force, valuable for its capacity to contribute to effective improv. Johnstone also shares the view of spontaneity as a productive force for performance, but gives this aspect secondary importance to his account of spontaneity as fundamentally a potentiality, a wellspring of infinite possibility.

There is also some divergence with respect to the basis for greater or lesser degrees of/capacities for spontaneity. Many writers, like Spolin, Johnstone, Halpern et al., and Hazenfield, locate this basis in learned behaviors and characteristics of the relationship among participants (which may also include teachers, audience, etc.). These learned behaviors and relational characteristics can affect prevalence/performance of spontaneity by either promoting or inhibiting spontaneity; all writers give examples of both. Salinsky and Frances-White, and Scruggs and Gellman, do not emphasize relational characteristics, instead subsuming these concerns to their account of spontaneity's basis in learned skills, with spontaneity-promoting relationships emerging from certain learned methods of behaving towards performance partners. Scruggs and Gellman also imply a role for spontaneity as enhanced or stymied by inherent subject characteristics in the form of "personality;" Napier takes this ascription to inherent subject characteristics a step further by positing the adaptive value of "fear" for humans in general as a foundational stymying force on the capacity for "play."

Finally, different writers emphasize spontaneity as emergent primarily from individuals or from social interaction. Johnstone, Hazenfield, Napier, Scruggs and Gellman, and Salinsky and Frances-White, all view spontaneity as fundamentally emergent though individuals, with group spontaneity more or less additive of individual production of spontaneity. Spolin and Halpern et

al. give the opposite emphasis, with spontaneity seen as emergent from the *interactions* of individuals together.

Conclusion

My purpose here is not to evaluate the accuracy/efficacy of consensus perspectives of spontaneity among these writers, nor to attempt to resolve areas of dissensus, but rather to make these areas clear as significant features of the use of the term "spontaneity" among the ideographic community of improv methodology writers. I have extensively analyzed the ideographic dimensions derived from Chapter Two with respect to improv methodologists' use; however, this analysis has thus far addressed only the descriptive features of these deployments of the "spontaneity" ideograph. But ideographs are by definition not merely descriptive, and have real implications for the social positioning and opportunities of concrete persons acting within the ideographic communities where an ideograph is used and of which these persons are members. In the following chapter, I address issues of the way in which the spontaneity ideograph is deployed in concrete improv practices, and the oppressive/enabling features of these deployments upon individuals—a critical assessment of methodological spontaneity.

CHAPTER 4

IMPROV'S RHETORIC OF SPONTANEITY: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

A Critical View of the Relation between Ideographic Accounts and Material Practices

An important question emergent from analysis of spontaneity in improv methodology is, what is the actual impact of ideographic accounts of spontaneity on concrete improv practices? In other words, how does the ideograph, whether employed explicitly or via methods of blind obedience, actually operate to constrain and channel commitments among members of this ideographic community? How does it affect concrete, observable behavior of community members, and what are the implications of these impacts on relations of power, privilege, and oppression within the community and with respect to the larger culture in which the community is embedded?

The particular impact of methodological writings is difficult to tease out with respect to the broad questions above. First, methodology is a production after-the-fact of concrete personal interactions, which make up the vast bulk of actual improv practice and learning; written methodology may be best viewed as artifacts of particular methodologists' concrete experiences with improv. Second, the influence of method writings is unpredictable, as actual improviers encountering these writings may interpret them and/or use them in very different ways, which may be very influential on concrete interactions but leave no readily-accessible artifacts. Still, I would argue that the effect of methodology writings, while small in the "big picture" of improv culture, is outsized in its impact, due to its wide dissemination over long periods of time, stable artifactual character, and recognized status among improviers as descriptive of paradigmatic improv practices.

Interestingly, the explication of methodology also has to some degree the inherent character of a "breach" in the improv community, even when its influence goes on to reinforce and increase unity in that community. As noted above, the practical use of "spontaneity" involves a special relationship with methods of blind obedience, as successful enactors of spontaneity are at least to some extent *unaware* of their successful enactment (at least until after the fact). This is reflected in the vague but significant language of writers invoking the "magic," "unanalyzable," "in the moment" character of spontaneity. Paradoxically, successful enactments of spontaneity require that performers be to some extent unaware of their success. Success requires that performers are not "trying" to be spontaneous, they are "just doing it," and awareness of this unawareness is how you "know" you are successful, reflected in writers' language of "intuition," "truthfulness," "impulse," or "discovery," for example. As such, "blind obedience" to principles of spontaneity is in part criterial for successful enactments of spontaneity at all.

Thus, any explication of the ideograph "spontaneity," in calling attention to it and making an effort to circumscribe or alter its applicability as an ideograph, constitutes a breach of the methods of blind obedience that make successful enactments of the values underlined by the ideograph possible. Improv methodology, in its analysis of spontaneity, is an application of *power*—social action that projects to alter the "meaning" of spontaneity as an ideograph, i.e., its "formal power" to "contain the commitments" of improv community members (c.f. Coogan 671). Again, it is not relevant that writers often do not consciously and deliberately aim to have concrete impact on the operation of the spontaneity ideograph; the *fact* that such action involves the application of power is enough to make the impact of that action on power relationships relevant. The inherent relevance of power in the activity of producing methodology thus makes such production amenable to critical analysis.

The application of critical theory is itself inherently a form of breach, an application of power against methods of blind obedience to tacit ideology. I here understand critical theory in a broad sense, inclusive of a variety of philosophical and sociological approaches that employ the "critical" label but may have significant foundational differences in worldviews, assumptions and/or goals. For example, Rune Premfors identifies significant divergences in "postmodern" and Habermasian "critical theory." In this account, the postmodern position holds that all knowledge ("science" included) is local and provisional and that "rationality…may only be achieved in specific language games" which "are always in conflict with others," while Habermasian critique rejects that "truth" is merely arguments and aims to reform communicative practice in ways that make a "rationality" possible (83). Habermas also views power as eliminable or reducible by practices of consensus-formation, while postmodernism views power/knowledge as a fundamental, unified concept that cannot be eliminated but only change forms. Habermas also embraces the possibility of genuine "democratic" social reform wherein the influence of power is reduced, while postmodernists view democracy not as a goal but as "active resistance to any form of metanarrative claiming to reduce the autonomy of local groups and individuals in the name of some 'totalizing' idea" (83-84). However, I here emphasize the unifying aspects of such divergent approaches, especially their positions that "an alternative to the philosophy of consciousness should be sought in a philosophy of language" and their critiques of "the current 'system'" as problematic and implicated in oppressive organizations of power (Premfors 83). These points of unity are especially amenable to my emphasis on the language-activity of ideographic practices and their role in reinforcement and resistance of larger social structures, i.e., the "current system."

G. D. Allen defines a society's structures as "its control holding, power wielding categories, which possess relative independence of the others" and whose "substructures exercise power through organizations." In modern societies, "there are numerous principle structures that exercise power to control the others, though often in different ways," including as examples "People, Government, Church-Religion, Industry, Economy, Education, Courts, Labor, and Police" (2). For my purposes, "critical theory" makes use of this broad view of social structures. Many of Allen's examples of structures can be viewed as analogous to less formally-institutionalized but relevant structures within the ideographic community of improviers: "People" as the influence of the "general population" of improviers and audiences; "Government" as improv organization management practices and structures; "Religion" as practices of value and ideology in improv; "Industry/Economy/Labor" as practices of maintaining viability of improv organizations; "Education" as improv training practices; "Courts/Police" as practices of enforcement for improv organizational structures and the "dominant" improv ideologies they advance. These various structures in improv have power and influence in respect to each other in different ways, with improv methodology writings most aligned with aspects of "Religion," "Education," and "Courts/Police" (this last to the extent that such texts are used to establish/justify normative orders of spontaneity for practitioners). The broader character of these structures in the larger culture within which improv communities are embedded is also relevant insofar as they impact improv-community structures and practices (and to a lesser extent, how improv practices influence such structures in this larger culture).

In keeping with my ethnomethodological perspective, I view such structures as emergent from and constituted by ongoing practices of practical accomplishment, rather than as prefiguring such interactions. Jack Katz, writing of class privilege in particular, notes that, for

example, "apartment owners" do not possess a "thing;" rather, they are "benefitting from being in a mesh of relationships that include the income earning behavior of tenants, the ongoing processes that sustain the courts…the daily dressing into uniforms of the officials who will chase out squatters, etc. What the owner has is no thing but a beneficial relationship to others' doings, doings which in their evolving, interactive interrelatings throw off material rewards to the owner" (130). A similar account is applicable for other particular instances of the many forms of privilege and oppression—that they are not rooted in structures themselves, but emergent from a mesh of relationships and interactions, with material consequences.

Ethnomethodology's focus on description and suspension of prefiguring structures of analysis may at first glance appear poorly suited for critical analysis, but Freund and Abrams have argued for ethnomethodology's critical potential. As I do, they view "critical theorizing" in its "most *general* sense: to step back and see the everyday world as strange; to understand and question the material-social-psychological-political-historical-"scientific"-etc. *status quo*; to theorize in order to *change* the world" (377). They draw connections with ethnomethodology as a corrective for "dogmatic" approaches to Marxism; by starting with core questions of *practices*, ethnomethodology asks such questions as "How is speech possible? How is science possible? How is sociology possible?," grounding analysis not in "the topics of science and sociology, but the achievement of dealing with a topic" (381). As such, ethnomethodologists "see social knowledge as inextricably linked to the contexts in which they are produced as well as their methods of production" (387). In doing so, "ethnomethodology provides a critique of ideology by showing that social perception and information produced by existing…institutions are questionable or false. This is done by treating such information and perception as subjective,

situated, and linked to the practical interests of those *producing* such perceptions and social information" (386).

The practical accomplishment of influencing ideographic practices through the production of theory as an application of power may be best viewed in terms of what David Coogan calls "materialist rhetoric," a rhetorical analysis that does not just "identify ideographs, narratives, and characterizations," but seeks to "link these and other techniques of rhetoric to techniques of power…The emphasis in our analysis, in other words, must remain on outcomes" (690). Miller argues that "social change occurs when the way people understand reality changes…when language changes, when categories change…People come to understand their world differently, [and] the sense of what is appropriate behavior (and what is not) changes; which is to say that social change occurs when the ideographs change" (477). Peter Freund and Mona Abrams write that ethnomethodology emphasizes "the materialistic in everyday settings in which 'real' people act…[and] treats the production of information as subject to such clearly materialistic contingencies as keeping one's job" (392).   A focus on the material consequences of embodied practices of rhetoric offers an amenable ethnomethodological approach to critical analysis of ideographic practices. But how do we assess outcomes of rhetorical practices regarding "spontaneity" in the ideographic community of improviers?

Critical Assessment of Spontaneity Rhetoric in Improv Praxis: Seham and Spontaneity

We may view methodological rhetoric implicating concepts of spontaneity as an application of power addressing the issue of "transposibility" for the ideograph "spontaneity" in improv, i.e., how a "form of discourse can have a meaning that is independent of any particular context in which it occurs" (Myles 880). Following Bourdieu, John Myles rejects "realist" solutions that

answer this question through accounts of linguistic "code" as determinative; this is appropriate

for "spontaneity" as considered here in keeping with my ethnomethodological approach.

Granted, "spontaneity" *is* determinative in the realm of improv practice insofar as it is a central

term marking those practices as recognizably what-they-are; however, particular accounts of

spontaneity do not overdetermine improv practices, as attested by the contestation among the

significant accounts discussed above. However, rather than reverting to a nominalist position,

Bourdieu shifts the ground of analysis from the determinative qualities of language on expressed

content as such to the view that "discourse is the product of social differences in the ability, or,

better, propensity to speak rather than any paradigmatic relations belonging or internal to the

language itself" (882). Such "habitus" in a social field orients members' use of "discursive

positions arising from differentially experienced language worlds feeding into a commonly

shared 'field' or discursive situation" (883-84).

Transposibility is accomplished through the intersection of individuals' and groups'

"expressive interest" in concrete social contexts with structural forces orienting the habitus of

"social capacity" to speak, with both "linked together by the particular nature of a field where the

expressive interest finds its opportunities or limits" (884). The "market value" of language

practices is contested and variable with time and context (885), but reinforced through practices

of social censorship and self-censorship that structure the social capacity to speak in particular

ways in particular situations (888-89). But Myles argues that such an account fails to "account

properly for the role of reflexive agency…in discursive situations" (895), to which

ethnomethodology can provide a corrective in its account of the intuitive, effective practices used

by social actors to create and recognize such discursive situations. Breaches of methods of blind

obedience, such as explicit methodology and/or critique, reveal those "reflexive moments when

the social facticity of…language arises, becomes obvious to participants and creates conditions of contestation, deference, euphemization, or self-censorship" (893).

As I argue above, methodological analysis of spontaneity in improv is such a breach, a "reflexive moment" that operates (purposefully or not) as an application of power on the structural "market value" of the criterial term "spontaneity" among the field of improv practitioners. What, then, are the materialist consequences of such operationalizations of spontaneity? How do they enable, inhibit, and/or enforce particular expressions and practices of "contestation, deference, euphemization, or self-censorship" with respect to concrete persons implicated in the improv community? What impacts do they have on access, representation, and accepted expression (which together may collectively be understood as "social capacity to speak") by participants in improv practice?

Amy Seham provides some key initial insights to these questions in her treatment of issues of gender, class and sexual orientation in improv. Seham's approach is sprawling, and addresses issues of general social discrimination practices, personal politics in improv history, and the impact of organizational and economic considerations on improviers. As much as possible, I will confine my remarks to her treatment of the rhetoric of spontaneity in improv culture, how it has been envisioned and put into practice by the organizations she studies, and the impact of these practices on women, people of color, and LGBT individuals in improv. Seham uses the term "spontaneity" commonly, broadly and often unproblematically, reflecting its use in general improv culture. Consequently, I will not analyze her use of the term as with the methodologists above, but instead seek to draw connections between the spontaneity-practices she identifies and the rhetoric of these methodologists.

She begins by noting that demographically, improv is dominated by "young, white, heterosexual men." On one level, this is unsurprising, given the power dynamics of U.S. society at large; but it is surprising given that "women and people of color have historically found a voice through improvisational modes of cultural expression—including feminist theatre and jazz—but to the notable exclusion of improv." She views this ongoing marginalization, so at odds with improv's claims to freedom, openness, playfulness and opportunity, as emergent from practices that reinforce hegemony through "the mode of play on stage, through the manipulation of rules and structures, and by the rigid control of what improvisers acknowledge as *funny*" (xviii). She shows that the rhetoric of spontaneity, and how it is put into practice by various organizations, is directly implicated in the forms of such oppressive practices.

Regarding "the mode of play on stage," she particularly raises concerns about scene-building practices of "agreement" and "groupmind," the foundational improv principles that "no offer is to be rejected—all offers must be accepted and supported," in the goal of achieving "groupmind," "the entire troupe working intuitively toward the same goals" (xxiv-xxv). Such groupmind is often associated with "collective unconsciousness" and the ability to "tap into something universal, genuine, and true" (xxv).

First, Seham notes that while some may find such a vision utopian, "for those who feel marginalized by the group, it can seem like a frightening loss of identity" wherein "groupthink forces conformity and narrows the range of options that groups are able to consider" (xxv). She argues that in actual improv practice, "any form of difference—whether it is based on gender, race, or sexuality—is subsumed into the larger groupmind. Anyone whose views diverge too far may be accused of trying to impose an inappropriate personal or political agenda…the universal groupmind for which classic improv strives is too often simply the heterosexual white male

mind" (xxvi). Even as improv grew and expanded and later organizations "found playful ways to challenge the status quo," nonetheless "traditional hierarchies of race and gender remain intact," and new organizational practices "often acted to reinforce mainstream ideology" (38). In part, this ongoing hegemonic dominance emerges as a result of factors not directly related to the rhetoric of spontaneity. Seham offers extensive analysis of how women, people of color, and LGBT persons are stymied in improv through their "social training" in the larger culture, and through organizational and economic practices such as casting, the "ghettoization" of such performers into "chick scenes" or "black scenes," the class-privileging "pay-to-play" access policies of many major organizations, and direct censorship practices for stage content (e.g., xxv-xxvi, 19, 26-27, 60, 104-05). However, she also locates the basis for such marginalization in accounts of what *counts* as spontaneous in practice, and what is *recognized* as spontaneous, especially with respect to the associated practical principles of agreement and groupmind.

Most obviously, agreement is framed in opposition to "denial," and in practice, any form of "resistance" (e.g., to a stereotyped character endowment) is often treated as "denial" and antithetical to accepted improv practice (21); the "right to say no" is contested in the context of improv's ethos of agreement (154). Far more insidious, though, is the way in which practices of groupmind can limit access to critical social reflection through its emphasis on immediacy: "Any real challenge to society's status quo requires conscious thought and the deconstruction of normative values—a task quite difficult in the context of groupmind" (68). In opposition to the utopian perspective of groupmind, Seham calls for recognition that "simple spontaneity does not access cosmic *truth*, but something else—it accesses the sediments of experience and memory that form the sense of self…nothing can emerge from improvisation that has not been learned, synthesized, and remembered by its players" (226-27).

In particular, she is concerned about how the emphasis on groupmind privileges "those fragments of the performers' personal memories, beliefs, and individual libraries of cultural reference that are most easily and immediately accessed under the pressure of the moment and simultaneously most likely to be accepted by fellow players and approved of by audiences" (xxvii). For example, she identifies the phenomenon that White performers could easily be "recognized" as playing Black characters through the establishment of readily-recognizable stereotyped behavior—something not possible in reverse. Moreover, such stereotypical deployment is almost *necessary* in the context of improv; if players need to establish themselves as another race for the purpose of a scene, about the only way to do so in a context-free improv scene is to make use of the most broadly-shared stereotypes (13); this is also true for performers playing the opposite sex (72). More subtly, an improv ethos of agreement that emphasizes "exploring and supporting relationships, giving up control of unfolding events, or subjugating self-interest for the benefit of the group" can have the effect of reinforcing "gender training" for women (14), naturalizing the playing of passive, supportive, or objectified roles in improv.

This naturalization effect is among Seham's greatest concerns with the ethos of groupmind. She especially challenges the view of groupmind as generative of "higher states of consciousness" or "universal truths" (55), asking, "when the group works as one mind, whose mind is it? How does the seeming rightness, inevitability, and spontaneity of improv mask the unmarked power of hegemony" (65)? The naturalization of hegemonic depiction in improv is reinforced through such claims as the insistence that "connections" in a Harold "are simply waiting to be found…good players never *make* connections. Rather, they 'recognize and pay attention to' patterns that already exist." Such tacit belief in an "originary, natural order" from which inspiration is drawn implies that an improvier is "not responsible for the connections he or

she makes…While this notion helps to unleash spontaneous creativity, it also serves to reinforce

and even *justify* conventional roles and relationships and absolves individuals of any obligation

to look beyond stereotypes" (54).

The belief that relevant patterns are "already there" operates to assume the

legitimacy/essentiality of convention, which is reinforced further by the emphasis on "shared

recognizability" of emergent patterns as the center of what is "funny" for the audience (43).

"Speed and spontaneity are often used as a rationale for the performance of stereotypes," and

many "players and audiences are convinced there is an implicit truth to these representations

because they seem to be intuitive references to popularly held and recognizable beliefs" (102).

Often, the audience will applaud scenes where "their suggestions produce the expected jokes and

relationships rather than original or innovative ones…these stereotypes are repeated and

revalidated by audience laughter and recognition" (102-03). Even as the steady reoccurrence of

patterns and stereotypes offers more opportunities for critique or change, "players tend not to

question the representations that emerge through spontaneous improvisation because, in that

moment, they seem like commonsense truths" (103). While "theories of spontaneity and

groupmind often protect players, giving them permission to explore and express socially

unacceptable behavior" (xxvii), such theory also "often works to absolve performers of full

responsibility for what emerges in a joke or scene" (105). Though not explicitly addressed by

Seham, another level of concern is that such theories of spontaneity not only absolve

responsibility, but can also be used as a cover for deliberately hurtful or offensive depiction and

expression. There is no rhetorical response from within the ethos of spontaneous immediacy to a

performer's claim that their expressions of stereotypes, misogyny, homophobia, etc. were

derived from sincere "in the moment" impulses.

In all these ways, "unexamined spontaneity, for all its pleasurable sensation of flow and connection, can serve to feed sexism and racism at the deepest levels of myth and archetype" (224). The general methodological injunction against self-censorship, whether framed as "intuition," "play," "freedom," etc., is a double-edged sword: It encourages self-expression, but also naturalizes and reinforces the most readily-accessible (and thus, almost by definition the most stereotypical) hegemonic expressions. The agreement principle expressed as "acceptance" or "trust" works the same, encouraging self-expression through the shared understanding that one's expressions will be accepted, but also calling for acceptance of the expressions and depictions of other players, however problematic. The methodologists discussed above never appear to acknowledge this dark side of spontaneity, usually treating it as an unqualified good in improv; even Carol Hazenfield's more critical take is directed toward inappropriate applications of the concept, not problematic consequences inherent to it.

Indeed, improv methodology as surveyed above is almost uniformly "neutral" in its treatment of the character of the actual bodies of improv performers. Improviers are treated as generic performing bodies. The existence of race, sexual orientation, and even differential physical characteristics like size, is generally never acknowledged by the above methodologists. Even the more subjective approach of Mary Scruggs and Michael Gellman falls short; while their three principle characters are gendered, none raise issues about how their gender impacts their improv experience/expression. None of the major characters is associated with a race; indeed, if any characters are, they are minor ones and any relevance is never acknowledged.

This high level of the invisibilizing of difference in improv methodology strongly supports Seham's concerns about the valorization of agreement and groupmind in improv practices of spontaneity. After all, the simple fact is that the concrete bodies on stage are not neutral. They

are particular bodies, gendered, racialized, and so on, with particular histories and with differential presentations to the gaze of the audience. The accumulated, sedimented histories of individuals that Seham locates as the basis for spontaneous expression are particular and individual, and shaped by the social positioning of the bodies involved. The treatment of agreement and groupmind as accessing shared, even "universal" truths ignores the relevance of concrete bodies and their histories and serves to reinforce hegemonic expression when the field of actual improv practitioners and audiences (with many notable exceptions, of course) is itself dominated by hegemonic bodies: i.e, white, heterosexual males.

The thin treatment of gender in particular is all the more striking in that 5 of the 11 authors of my set of methodologies are women. Only three texts in this set acknowledge gender as an improv issue at all: Mick Napier, Tom Salinsky and Deborah Frances-White, and Keith Johnstone's *Impro for Storytellers*, and all have a take that is problematic in light of Seham's critiques. Napier cavalierly naturalizes male intransigence, writing, "if women are on a campaign to change male improviser behavior, they have about as great a chance as changing the behavior of the guy they are in a relationship with," and "men joke about women not being as funny and will continue to do so. Fair or not, they do and will" (90). He also argues that beliefs about differential treatment of women in improv are merely a "power drain for women," that dwelling on such beliefs are simply indicative of insecurity and weakness, and that "no strong, funny woman improviser I've ever worked with gives any thought to any of those beliefs and hates when other women do" (90).

Johnstone explicitly recognizes the situation as problematic, arguing that women are often "driven out" of male-dominated improv, and that "male-dominated Theatresports typically has no pathos, no compassion and no tenderness. Women can provide these qualities, given the

chance," but "those who survive the put-downs and the aggression are likely to end up just as tough as the men—in which case we might as well be using men in skirts" ("Storytellers" 338-39). He vaguely recommends that teachers urge men to treat women respectfully, and to "consciously to include 'feminine' scenes, just as action movies do, and to let women control scenes and be the heroines of stories." Women, meanwhile, "should sometimes train together, away from the men, and…have a social life together, and should teach each other not to be so ingratiating" (339). While Johnstone's approach does ask men to change their behaviors, it still places responsibility on women to adapt their own behavior in response to naturalized "aggressive" male behavior. Women are lauded for a capacity to bring emotional qualities to improv, but it is not suggested that men should themselves develop capacities for "pathos, compassion, tenderness." Presumably, men's development of these qualities would not only improve their improv, but also their relationships with fellow women improviers and each other—yet an essentialized gender duality is reinforced, in which pathos, compassion and tenderness are outsourced to women and tokenized in the overall improv process ("consciously to include 'feminine' scenes, just as action movies do", 339).

Frances-White (writing without her otherwise co-author Tom Salinsky for the section "Women in Improv," Salinsky and Frances-White 337-40) takes a gentler tone and acknowledges the real impact of social training, but still places the responsibility for changing the situation on women's choices. Women should be more forceful in making and establishing high-status choices (339), and if they notice that men in a group "don't like their values or opinions, then don't work with them…leave and start your own group with people you like" (340). Her primary argument for diversity and inclusiveness in improv is not framed in the values of access to expression, broadening of recognized social depictions, or opening the field

of "propensity to speak;" rather, the argument boils down to "it will likely make the work better" (338). From this view, hegemonic depictions are problematic more because they are indicative that "a group has fallen into lazy trends" (339) than because of direct concerns about these depictions. Meanwhile, addressing the problem of comfortable access for women improvers takes an unproblematized capitalist turn: if you don't like your opportunities, make your own— as if it were as simple as that.

Where the rhetoric of spontaneity in methodological writings treats spontaneity as produced through social interaction, as for Spolin's "shared focus" or Halpern et al.'s "group mind," it runs into the critical risks associated with groupmind for Seham. However, as illustrated in the above examples, there are different critical risks implicated by the opposite direction, taken by other methodologists, of treating spontaneity as additive of the spontaneity-production of individuals. While Seham associates the groupmind problematic most strongly with practices in ImprovOlympic (now IO), she associates the problems individualist ethics of spontaneity most with the organizations ComedySportz and Annoyance Theatre.

She describes the rhetoric of the first (as expressed in official organization handbooks) as "full of ruthless positivism" insisting that success "is a simple matter of mental attitude" and "a matter of individual commitment and determination" (102-03). From this perspective, "social conditions are merely obstacles that can be overcome with hard work and fearlessness" (103). But serious critical concerns are raised by such an ethic of individual responsibility. As Andrew Ross writes: "When personal consciousness is the single determining factor in social change, then all social problems, including the specters raised by racism, imperialism, sexism, and homophobia, are seen as the result of personal failures and shortcomings. Individual

consciousness becomes the source, rather than a major site, of socially oppressive structures" (qtd. in Seham 103).

The notion of inclusiveness in this setting translates into the acceptance of anyone who can "keep up" in an aggressive, competitive format that consciously appropriates the social ethos of an "All-American" sporting event, complete with the national anthem and snack vending, where "obscenity" (including expression of homosexual desire) is censored as inappropriate, but stereotyped depictions of gender or race are not (85, 99, 105). Even as teamwork is valorized, the emphasis is on aspects of "productive conflict" resulting in improvement through competition, not on the cooperative aspects of teamwork (37). Anyone who can rise to the challenge is accepted, but challenges to the challenge itself are not. And again capitalistically, the ultimate answer to disputes over expressive practices is, if you don't like it, you can go somewhere else for your improv.

In contrast to ComedySportz, the Annoyance Theatre pointedly eschews programmatic show structures and even official titles and roles (though no formal positions are acknowledged, it is noteworthy that Mick Napier, author of *Improvise*, is generally recognized as the organization's "leader"). However, Annoyance's practices still rely on the same underlying ethic of individual responsibility, with a similar problematic. The central principles of "play" and "process over product" are framed by the belief (expressed in detail by Napier in *Improvise*) that improv "rules" and the problems individuals have in their improv experiences are rooted "not in the genre's anarchy but in the individual's own fears and 'baggage'" (Seham 126). But this principle, and the anarchic organizational policy following from it, creates an ethos of improv entirely "based on individual relationships, willfully ignoring the broader social or political context" that shapes individuals' behavior (127). Regarding women specifically, the view is that

if they feel marginalized on stage, they need to exhibit more power by committing "all the more thoroughly to the improv process, although not necessarily to such rules of improv as perpetual agreement" (154). Such commitment, though, calls for the denial of political or identity principles in improviers' practices: "Conscious resistance to society's status quo comprises a political agenda, and…any agenda (particularly a feminist one) interferes with committed improv" (157). Such a claim, of course, willfully ignores "the underlying ideology of the status quo and the so-called neutral spaces" whose very unmarkedness is political in nature, naturalizing them as "the way things are" (158).

At the same time, Annoyance also has a reputation as unusually supportive for women improviers, and taught Chicago's first class "designed expressly to help [women] overcome feelings of powerlessness on the improv-comedy stage" (127). The workshops teach that "most women's trouble centers on their belief that they must obey the rules of agreement while they watch men break those rules" (157); but this should not be an excuse for weak play. Rather, the problem is located in the very upholding of rules over relationships. "Genuine free play" is held to "always challenge oppressive limitations." While recognizing that "those personal interactions *are* political," women should pursue a "feminist agenda moment by moment, tactically and opportunistically, as a good improviser knows how" (158). The workshop's central focus for its women participants is the traditionally-masculinized virtues of "get tough and stop complaining" (155), with tactics of "assertiveness and self-permission;" when endowed with a stereotyped or low-status character, "it becomes her job to turn it into a powerful one" (156). Women in the workshop are "given permission to break the rules themselves," or better, to "maintain agreement but practice *defenses* and *escapes*:"

Instead of resenting being defined as a whore…embrace the opportunity to make that whore a unique character with a key role in the scene…If a scene partner ignores you, make the scene about a relationship in which the man ignores the woman. If he denies your reality, become a character who is confused about the facts of the situation, and make it work for you (156-57).

While such techniques are empowering, they are empowering with reference to an already skewed cultural backdrop wherein spontaneity and free play is intertwined with masculinized qualities of aggressiveness, assertiveness, control, and individualism; women's success is encouraged, but in terms that frame success as acting "like men." Meanwhile, men "naturally" have no such need for techniques of "defense and escape" (with respect to gender issues in particular; other marginalized intersectional dimensions of men's identities may of course call for such techniques). To draw a provocative analogy, such an approach is structurally similar to teaching women "not to get raped" instead of teaching men "not to rape."

The "Neutral" Body and Ableism in the Rhetoric of Spontaneity

Most of my improv methodologists take the view of spontaneity as additive of individual productions, and the character of their writings reflects this. With the notable exception of Viola Spolin, who pointedly eschews even the simplest examples, all methodology writings rely heavily on specific examples of improv. Halpern et al. tend to focus more on shared group accomplishment, but their pages are also filled with the name-dropping of celebrity comedy performers. While other writers highlight celebrity accomplishment much more sparingly, they make extensive use of examples (both from direct experience, and hypothetical though probably distilled from experience) of extraordinary improv, and to a lesser extent, "epic fail" improv.

The "quality" of the improv in these examples is assessed in terms of adherence to the practical principles the examples illustrate, never in terms of identity and power relationships—i.e., improv is never assessed as better or worse *because* of how it positions and impacts particular performers with particular bodies and histories, but rather always in relation to abstract principles. This practice of methodology writing works to reinforce a "neutral" view of a "generic" body in much the same way as writings that emphasize groupmind , though subsuming this body to principles rather than "shared experience." Moreover, the valorization or villainization of individualized examples of improv reinforces a masculinized view of spontaneity-production as "heroic" personal accomplishment without reference to the privileging or oppressive social structures that make such spontaneity-production accessible and recognizable to/for particular bodies-in-society with particular histories.

For all its impact on issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc., nowhere is the real-life impact of methodological neutralizing of bodies more glaring than in the utterly complete absence of any reference to an issue so sensitive or invisibilized in improv culture that not even Seham's extensive critical study touches it: the bias of ableism. Fiona Campbell defines ableism as "a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability, then, is cast as a diminished state of being human" (44). Laura Smith, Pamela Foley and Michael Chaney note that this diminution is "characterized by the belief that [disabled] individuals need to be fixed or cannot function as full members of society." Ableism views disabled persons as "abnormal, rather than as members of a distinct minority community" and disability is viewed "as a defect rather than a dimension of difference" (304).

Margaret McLean argues that:

Central to ableism is the concept of norm or average because it simultaneously creates the

idea of difference as abnormal deviance…Normalcy is embedded in the beliefs, actions and

discourses that make up the fabric of everyday life. For the nondisabled person imbued with

the tenets of normalcy, disability is a relative state characterized by a hierarchy of degrees of

corporeal misfortune. The effect of these notions is to privilege persons regarded as "able"

while silencing and dominating those regarded as disabled (16-18).

Jessica Cadwallader describes such tenets of normalcy as operating through the "politics of

perception" wherein perceptual practices are marked as "common-sensical" practices enacting

"sedimented knowledges" that "enable the recognition of particular kinds of difference as visible

and…meaningful." Through the invisibilization of the politics of such perceptual practices,

"dominant perceptions of disability as lack, as broken, as tragedy, as incapacity, as failure, as

pitiful, as not entirely human, as proximate to death" are enacted as "dominant, common-sensical

perceptual practices" (518).

Laura Rauscher and Mary McClintock describe these oppressive perceptual practices as

"deeply rooted beliefs about health, productivity, beauty, and the value of human life…[that]

combine to create an environment that is often hostile to those whose physical, mental, cognitive,

and sensory abilities…fall out of the scope of what is currently defined as socially acceptable"

(qtd. Hehir 3). Such hostility is emergent even through "well-meaning" social practices toward

the disabled. For example, Thomas Hehir problematizes dominant concepts of "inclusive

education" that are modeled on the assumption that "it is preferable for disabled students to do

things in the same manner as nondisabled kids" (3) as reinforcing the dominant narrative that

disability is "negative and tragic and that 'overcoming' disability [is] the only valued result" (4).

Such focus on helping the disabled to "overcome" disabilities can serve in insidious ways to

reinforce disability, by deflecting opportunities to develop other skills taken for granted by

nondisabled persons. It also reinforces problematic ableist constructions of disabled persons,

which Hehir identifies as, at one extreme, paternalistic views of disabled persons as in need of

charity, and on the other in the mythos of the inspirational "supercrip" who heroically

accomplishes challenging tasks in spite of their disability. This second extreme acknowledges

the capability of disabled persons, but frames it in terms of accomplishment *as* a nondisabled

person, implying that "a disabled person is presumed deserving of pity—instead of respect—

until the person proves capable of overcoming disability through extraordinary feats." Both

extremes "have at their core ableist perspectives, the failure to accept and value disabled people

as they are" (4).

Rooting ableism in the politics of perception reframes disability as "not an individual

limitation…but rather an oppressive relationship" (Nabbali 6) in which the marginalization of

rights and access for disabled persons is legitimized "as a necessity for public safety, rather than

for the best interests and wellbeing of those under control" (8). Like Hehir, Katherine

Runswick-Cole decries the "preoccupation with the production of ableness" in "inclusive

education" models while, simultaneously, disabled students "must fit in and not disrupt the

education of the majority" (115). She further argues that ableism operates as "a determinedly

nebulous concept…The intrinsic ambiguity of ableism means that disability becomes the focus

of attention. A fuzzy category, ableism is sustained not by declarations of what it is but by

assertions of what it is not, and thus it is necessary to hunt down and name disability in order to

maintain 'ablism'" (115).

Though Runswick-Cole views disability as needing "naming" to enforce ableism, the

maintenance of the nebulousness of the idealized "able body" is equally important to these

practices. The rhetoric of spontaneity in improv methodology that operates from the perspective of a "neutral" body vigorously enforces this nebulousness, the naturalizing of the "ordinary body." Granted, in one sense we may see the genericization of bodies in improv methodology in a positive light, as reflective of inclusiveness and the central claim that "anyone can improvise," or reflective of emphasis on shared experience, without the "singling out" of bodily difference. However, we have seen above how such treatment of bodies in spontaneity theory has problematic material impact on the access and expression of women, people of color and LGBT persons in improv practice. The problem is all the deeper with respect to ableism, for the issue is not even considered—not merely dismissed, but apparently not even identified as an issue at all.

Yet surrounding the treatment of ableism as a non-issue is a discourse of bodily spontaneity that, in its accounts and examples, is clearly *not* inclusive of disability, at least in many of its most "visible" forms. While the generic bodies of improv methodology inevitably reinforce dominant hegemonic concepts of the "neutral" (white, male, heterosexual) body, there are very few examples or accounts that cannot in principle be equally read as involving women, people of color, and LGBT persons, as characters or performers. This is not the case for disability. Instead, it is nearly impossible not to read methodological accounts of spontaneity as unproblematically valorizing the idealized "able" body.

The core of Spolin's game system focuses on movement in space, often vigorous and/or precise, as do all the methodological accounts of skills such as environment establishment and space objects. The photos of improv scattered through Halpern et al. usually show performers in complex physical positions, carrying each other, etc. Hazenfield glamorizes the character of "the spontaneous body" through images of teenage sexuality and the "thundering centaur." Salinsky and Frances-White's core "spontaneity" exercises describe ranging around a room and rapid

switches between different physicalized activities. Johnstone's censoring of hesitation, principles like Napier's "do something now," and general improv injunctions against thinking and choosing privilege the quick-acting body at the necessary expense of others for whom reaction and expression literally takes more time and effort. All writers emphasize deep listening, visual attentiveness, and the ability to react immediately, committedly, and with fully-embodied involvement.

In all these ways, methodological accounts of spontaneity unproblematically assume the "neutral" improvier body as an able body, implicitly sidelining at the least persons with sensory- or mobility-limiting disabilities. Granted that these are only the most "visible" and stereotyped forms of disability, but the assumption of their non-presence in general accounts of the spontaneously-acting body for improv methodologists is a strong indication that other less visible forms of disability may also influence access and representation in improv. Even the problematic "defenses and escapes" approaches to improv critique advocated above, are less available to such disabled persons. Women have the option to "get tough" and advance a feminist agenda "tactically" through their own "strong," "immediate" choices; it is much more difficult to tactically negotiate such work when a person's capacity to actually *express* such choices is recognized and treated as limited by other improviers.

What's more, as seen above, the deliberate deployment of a feminist (anti-racist, etc.) "agenda" is commonly seen as fundamentally antithetical to improv's ethos of spontaneity. It is difficult to believe that such backlash would not be all the more pronounced against "agendas" that called for changes in an ensemble's actual physical practices of producing spontaneity in such a way as to be inclusive of access and contribution from disabled persons. This ethos of spontaneity presents a major challenge to using institutional improv as a medium for "*disability*

artists," who use art to engage the audience "in a critical process of questioning the sociopolitical construction of disability and related ableist ideologies." Even if welcomed in an ensemble, disabled persons performing improv would almost inevitably be instead framed as "*disabled people doing art*," with the emphasis on "admiration and appreciation in which individual [disabled] artists are admired for their ability to create work similar to other able-bodied artists" (Eisenhauer 9). Disabled persons performing improv risk the cultural reinscriptions of Hehir's "persons in need of charity" (in the form of ensemble "accommodation") or "supercrips" (disabled persons labeled "heroic" for "overcoming" their disability by performing improv). Even with the most critically-minded ensemble, this ableist framing still risks being inscribed, through the experience of performances by audience that read the disabled performing body according to such hegemonic narratives. The dominance of these narratives in ableist culture places disabled improv performers "within a cultural discourse of *enfreakment*" wherein the audience's gaze is treated as "neutral and normative" while relying on "unquestioned maintenance of normal/abnormal boundaries…and the cultural construction of disability as property…something to be attended to…as both an object of curiosity and as a specimen" (Eisenhauer 11).

Spontaneity and the Comedy Bias in Improvisational Theatre

This last point connects with Seham's third mechanism of hegemony in improv practice, "the rigid control of what improvisers acknowledge as *funny* (xviii)." Johnstone explicitly invokes disability in his discussion of comedy and tragedy as they relate to status: "the man who falls on the banana skin is funny only if he loses status, and if we don't have sympathy with him. If my poor old blind grandfather falls over I'll rush and help him to his feet" ("Theatre" 40). This

example illustrates how the valuation of "funny" in improv can also serve to systematically limit access and accomplishment. Harm, humiliation, and their accompanying loss of status are hallmarks of what is culturally recognized as "funny." But due to the hegemonic framing of disabled persons as "pitiable" or "admirable for overcoming," the harm or humiliation of characters they present is likely to be experienced by the audience as "appalling" rather than funny. Of course, harm/humiliation as "funny" is a highly problematic social construct in itself; but meanwhile, in an improv milieu that so overwhelmingly values "funniness," the incapacity to be found *funny* through these means operates to limit disabled person's capacity to contribute to that so-valued "funny." The same structure operates, for example, with women; Del Close's much-discussed misogyny takes a subtler turn in an extract from his notes where he writes "*Women are not funny*. Audiences laugh when men are made out to be fools in a scene" (Libera 116)—implying both that making-foolish-of is funny, and that audiences do not laugh when women are made out to be fools.

But why the question of "funny" in the first place? Why is it relevant to the practice of improv that the humiliation of certain bodies won't be experienced as funny? One point relates to issues of the larger social positioning of persons, reflecting the observation that humor is experienced with the loss in status of a high-status, unsympathetic character. The aversion to laughter at the humiliation of women, disabled persons, etc.—*if* we take this phenomenon at face value—thus reinforces the lower-status, "sympathetic" social positioning of the bodies that portray them. The converse positioning of a "dominant" body as one that can be "safely"—i.e., humorously—humiliated in turn reinforces the social recognition of such bodies *as* higher-status.

But this point masks a deeper issue for improv: why is "what is funny" such a relevant question in the first place? Nothing in the functional dynamics of improv, or the structure of the

medium, would seem to tilt it toward producing what is experienced as "funny." But the actual

historical path of improv has so overwhelmingly emphasized such production that the terms

"improv" and "improv comedy" are often used interchangeably, including in Seham. Writers do

often ask, "what other emotional or experiential dimensions can we bring to improv?" But such

forays are always *juxtaposed* to "funny" improv, as if the categories of improv evocation are

recognized as "funny" and "everything else." While writers discuss what is funny (and not)

extensively, no such focused treatment is given to the expression of tenderness, fear, desire,

despair, awe or any of the other myriad dimensions of human experience.

The comedy bias runs deep in improv methodology, shaping the methodological discourse

even as it is challenged within it. As with the use of specific examples, Spolin is an outlier

regarding the comedy bias; she never connects improvisation with comedy, or any other

particular mode of performative evocation, embracing the whole range of physical expression

through focus on performer's "direct experience." However, she does occasionally seem to

acknowledge a bias toward comedic production as a significant risk to access of direct

experience, writing that "Improvisation in itself is not a system of training. It is one of the

results of the training…When 'improvising' becomes an end in itself, it can kill spontaneity

while fostering cleverness. Growth ceases as the performers take over. The more gifted and

clever the players, the more difficult it is to discover this" (44). It is difficult not to see

"cleverness" here as representative of "joke-making" and other techniques criticized by

methodologists. She also goes on to single out laughter as a cause of "breaks," "momentarily

pulling away from the stage environment and relationships," and suggests that teachers side-

coach "use your laughter" to reintegrate it into the performing *experience* (46).

Whether the comedy bias was in fact less of a factor in Spolin's experience, or whether she downplayed it to avoid legitimizing it through recognition, is an open question, but later writers clearly recognize and in some cases embrace it. Halpern et al. unapologetically "tip [their] hats in acknowledgement of the more serious uses of improvisation, and saunter off in the direction of chuckles, chortles, and guffaws" (15). Salinsky and Frances-White have no problem assuming that, "If you are looking to begin improvising or are already an experienced improviser, you are probably chiefly interested in improvisation as a tool for comedy" (30). The device of examples in post-Spolin writers is illustrative: though Hazenfield, and Scruggs and Gellman, draw from a somewhat wider range of experience, other writers' examples are almost exclusively recognizable as "comedic"—silly, fast-paced, often outrageous. To some extent, this may be a product of aiming for conciseness and clarity in examples rather than comedy as such. However, there is no reason to think that the improv principles illustrated could not be just as clearly shown through examples of non-comedic expression. Instead, writers illustrate key principles extensively and almost exclusively through comic examples: Johnstone's silly and rapid-fire status games (often with "psychotic" or "obscene" content), Halpern et al.'s connections and group mind, Napier's commitment and play, etc. Another point to consider is the extensive use of examples of performance by a "famous" or "accomplished" improvier, utilized by all post-Spolin writers but Hazenfield and Napier; the figures in these examples are invariably famous beyond the "improv world" for their accomplishments in *comedy*, especially film and scripted work.

Significantly, most writers *do* expressly speak against the limits and pitfalls of the comedy bias. Halpern et al. warn improviers against "trying to be funny" (23) and against making jokes, which indicate "that you are not really involved in the scene" (27). Scruggs and Gellman

identify laughter as the expression of "tension" that undermines our direct experience with anything "outside of the boundaries of what we're used to" (56). Salinsky and Frances-White write that the downside of teaching performers to be "bold and fearless" is that many improviers are trained never to play vulnerable characters (155), and become trapped in patterns of "outfunny"-ing each other (147) or joking (157) as means of "being in control" and "not being affected." Writing of approaches to using audience suggestions, Johnstone warns that "laughter misleads," and that suggestions take control from the performers and place it with "a few malcontents" in the audience "who want to be funnier than you" ("Storytellers" 26). He argues that "self-revelation should be at the heart of improvising, but suggestions offer a way to hide the performers' true identities…A suggestion may get a laugh, but don't assume that anyone wants to see a scene based on it. In general, the funnier the suggestion, the less use it's likely to be" (30). Hazenfield decries the "'real world' mentality about improv," the "conventional wisdom that improv audiences are looking for a quick comic payoff, that there isn't time to do more meaningful work" (4), and calls for a more "dramatic" approach to improv so "we can take the audience on a ride through all aspects of the human experience—not just the comic parts" (5). Napier identifies the limiting effect of "having laughs in mind when you go on stage" as producing a "product-oriented" mindset where "the product is the laugh, or the need to create that laugh." In contrast, "alleviating the burden of getting a laugh opens up a whole new universe. Suddenly, a moment that would have been joked out is played through. All moments in the scene appear more honest, and points of view and character are upheld effortlessly" (86).

Yet the very fact that methodologists so forcefully speak out against the comedy bias, even if usually only as small asides, serves to reinforce and naturalize this bias. That this bias is so widely identified as limiting is indicative that it is also being treated as the "natural state" of

improv, an assumption almost all methodologists explicitly or tacitly endorse. Even as writers

argue for more expansive approaches to improv, most simultaneously feel the need to make the

rhetorical point that this will make the work *funnier*. Halpern et al. emphasize "honest

discovery, observation, and reaction" because "*The truth is funny*" (15). The audience will

"laugh at things they can relate to" (23); this laughter is "a side-effect of attempting to achieve

something more beautiful, honest, and truthful" (24-25), and the connections achieved through

groupmind "are a more sophisticated way to get laughs" (28). Salinsky and Frances-White speak

against comedy as an overt goal, summarizing their emphasis as "positivity, risk-taking,

storytelling," but are quick to note that "out of these elements…great comedy can come" (270).

Hazenfield argues that improv emerging from "the heart" and drawing on the full richness of

performers' inner lives "can be just as surprising, delightful, and funny as game-

prov…wonderfully comic scenes can be created in this way," while the fact that this approach

supports dramatic improv is described as merely a "bonus of bonuses" (4-5). Despite all the

potential Johnstone's central principle of "status" has for critique and exploration of deeper

relationships, his examples emphasize silly, fast-paced status transactions, and he notes that

playing status transactions as "games" will release laughter ("Theatre" 35). Napier notes that

improv can "be funny on purpose or not funny on purpose" but quickly identifies that its usual

problem is that too often, "it is not funny on not purpose" (2); the approaches to scene initiation

he identifies as poor technique (19-24) are generally failed efforts to be *funny*. For all his praise

of the depth and range that working without the goal of laughter can bring to improv, Napier

immediately qualifies this point with the "punchline" that "these scenes are some of the funniest

I've ever experienced." The laughs may not come as often, "but the laughs produced are of

greater quality…not cheap laughs, but more intelligent, richer laughs: better laughs." And he

recognizes the powerful inclination toward "cheap laughs" when he accepts that such richer improvisation "can't be achieved without agreement among the players," for just one performer in "need-to-get-a-laugh mode" will "pull the rug out from under the scene every time" (87).

In all these examples, writers challenge the comedy bias with an appeal to broader-based principles of improv—honesty, groupmind, storytelling, emotional access and expression, status, commitment, etc.—but then immediately reinscribe the same bias by selling these principles in no small part *because* they are held to make the work more effective as comedy. Even Seham, for all her critique of the oppressive role that valuation of comedy has played in improv, reinscribes the comedy bias in the same way. She notes the two-sided character of comedy: that "like improvisation, comedy is often seen as an instrument of the disempowered…using tactics of irony and observations of incongruity to challenge the status quo, if only temporarily" (xxi-xxii). But comedy also often operates as:

> ...a conservative force—disparaging the lowly, ridiculing the outsider, and enforcing societal norms, hierarchies, and conventions. Women and other oppressed people are often effectively barred from wielding the weapon of humor by two obstacles: mainstream society's refusal to acknowledge their ability to create comedy, and its punishment of those who try (xxi).

Seham's book is rife with examples of such oppressive comedy practices in improv and their impacts on oppressed persons, yet she does not question comedy as a bias itself. Instead, she focuses on the incongruity that many sincere improviers claim that "improv-comedy must be based on the humor of emerging truths—incongruities, character, and situation—rather than jokes…theoretically a feminine mode of comedy," while in practice, "Chicago improv tends to privilege a heterosexual white male joking subject" (xxii). Her concerns are with the hegemony

of the "heterosexual white male" dimensions of this subject, rather than the "joking" one, for she immediately goes on to valorize improv as a "valuable means" of expressive access for women and others "underrepresented in mainstream performance," and as a vital medium for "artists seeking to express and share the unique humor of their backgrounds and experience—to show that they, too, can be funny" (xxii-xxiii).

In other words, Seham's focus is on wider representation of access to "funny" expression, and a broadening of social constructs of "funny" to be more inclusive of varying approaches to humor, while accepting the hegemony of the focus on humor itself. Yet many of her examples can be read as oppressive in the service of *comedy* rather than of sexism, etc., *per se*. Not that the two can be so readily untangled; dominant notions of what "counts" as funny are part of the web of general social structures supporting oppressive relationships. One valid approach to challenging such structures is the expansion or modification of practices for recognizing or experiencing expression as "funny," to be more inclusive of differential experiences of comedy. But such an approach cedes improv's ethos to the overwhelming comedy bias, and puts the field of contestation on these grounds: How can more people be more funny, or how can they still effectively do improv that is purposefully *not* funny? An alternative approach, though, would be to challenge the comedy bias directly, in the process pulling the rug out from under the practices by which the limiting recognition, and the enforcement, of comedy ideals supports oppressive structures and relationships in improv.

It is not only methodologists' excess attention to comedy practices that upholds this bias; the valuation of comedy is itself informed by and informs writers' accounts of spontaneity in improv. For example, the focus on "immediacy of response" as a key factor in making spontaneity recognizable stymies the expression of emotions that literally *take time* to experience

and express, like sadness, relief, or determination. Such emotions, pushed into use in the fast-paced way associated with improv spontaneity, often fall back into the comic through the incongruity that expressing them with such immediacy evokes—i.e., however sincerely expressed, the forced immediacy of response tends such emotions toward being experienced as melodrama. Viewing spontaneity as so dependent on immediacy thus reinforces a comedy bias, by forcing non-comedic expressions into a chronemic mold associated with humor.

Frances-White nods toward this consideration when she argues that improv's inclination toward comedy is "probably a product of the fact that improvisation tends to be performed as a series of scenes or sketches which stand alone, despite sometimes being connected or revisited later" (29). In longer work of "forty minutes to an hour, the audience will accept genuine emotion…because they have invested in the characters and care enough to allow themselves to feel for them" (30). She argues that audiences cannot accept a series of tragic or emotionally intense scenes that stand alone. However, this argument reinforces the rhetorical dichotomy by which improv is assessed as "comedy" and "everything else"—both by the contrast of comedy to "genuine emotion" and the assumption that the alternative to a series of comic scenes is nonstop emotional intensity. But certainly, there is some insight into how the comedy bias works through repetition once introduced—once a show marks itself as comedic, the introduction of "genuine emotion" will seem incongruous to the audience, both disrupting their ability to invest in that emotion *and* their ability to comfortably return to a comic mode of experience if the performance moves back in that direction. As a result, even longer work has still "chiefly been comedic" (30), with more "genuine emotions" pushed toward the end, where they will be least disruptive of the comedic elements of the performance.

Another example is the overwhelming rhetorical association of spontaneity with experiential states and modes of behavior that are recognized as emotionally positive, evocative of laughter, and tending toward a certain frenetic energy. Much of the language most closely tied to spontaneity in methodological accounts generally reflects these features. Spolin characterizes spontaneity by its "freedom" and "play." Johnstone extensively associates spontaneity with unfettered expression of the "psychotic" or "obscene." Halpern et al. mark spontaneity as the expression of recognized connections, which reflect "truth"—and "the truth is funny." Hazenfield also invokes "freedom" and the immediate expression of "impulse" as core components of spontaneity. Napier makes "play" his primary improvisational principle. Salinsky and Frances-White's key spontaneity exercises are specifically built around performers doing as much as possible as quickly as possible, and evaluated in terms of how much "fun" they are having. Only Scruggs and Gellman is an outlier, with central associated ideographic terms like "process" and "discovery" that do not so directly share the same joyful and frenetic character as other writers' central terms—perhaps not coincidentally in an account whose practical focus is on skills for longform, real-time, character-intensive improv.

A third example is the methodological alignment of "thinking" in opposition to spontaneity. This issue is connected with the first example, aligning spontaneity with immediacy of action and response, but goes beyond it to exclude thinking from the field of meaningful action and even experiential product of improv. Though Andrei Buckareff's response to Galen Strawson supports a model of spontaneity inclusive of cognition (Chapter Two above), improv methodologists tend to specifically exclude cognition, using the terms "thinking" and other associated terms like "evaluating," "planning," "choosing," "self-censorship," or "the mind." Such an account of spontaneity, in excluding so much cognitive action from the field of

recognized spontaneous behavior, helps contribute to the comedy bias by literally encouraging a "mindlessness"—both in the positive sense of flow experience that improv methodology emphasizes, and in the negative sense of stymying improv's potential for critique and consideration. Napier takes this position to its extreme in marking "thinking" as *the* principle symptom of bad improv, and extending this claim to the audience—if the audience is "thinking" about the improv, rather than caught up in the "magic," then something is wrong with the improv.

But the exclusion of thought from the recognized field of spontaneity limits improv's expressive potential and reinforces the comedy bias by stymying *thoughtfulness*. Exclusion of a space for analysis, reflection, etc. in improv's actual performing practices pushes performers' generation of spontaneity toward always aiming at the "next big thing." This limits improv's ability to portray realism; for people *do* think, after all, often, and often significantly, and if we accept Buckareff's response to Strawson, such thinking is as spontaneous as any other sort of action. The lack of space for thought and reflection also pushes honest emotion and serious exploration of issues toward melodrama (and thus humor) in the same way as the emphasis on immediacy of response in practices of spontaneity-recognition.

The potential of improv for social critique is also greatly limited by a lack of space for reflection and thoughtfulness. As Seham points out, "Any real challenge to society's status quo requires conscious thought and the deconstruction of normative values" (68), and the exclusion of "thought" in improv thus helps reinforce that status quo. While Seham focuses on the *production* of critique in performance, the same is true for the audience—the meaningful receiving of critique also takes conscious thought and reflection. Moreover, the meaningful expression and experiencing of critique requires space not only for thought but also for *pain*, on

the part of both performers and audience. An honest unpacking of structures of privilege and oppression is *painful* both to express and to digest, both for those victimized by such structures who must come to terms with their own experiences of oppression, and for those who, if sincerely engaging the critique, must come to terms with the destructive social forces of their own privilege and their own roles in the victimization of others. But pain—genuine, empathetic pain—is of course antithetical to humor, and thoughtfulness is marked as antithetical to spontaneity; and together these reinforce the comedy bias with respect to improv's critical potential. Comedy can of course be a powerful vehicle for critique, but the comedy bias enforced by this rhetorical framing of spontaneity limits critical approaches in improv to *satire*, which tends to be a "shallower" form of critique, drawing both its critical potential and humor from the most broadly recognizable hegemonic stereotypes in a way that mirrors Seham's concerns with groupmind. To go beyond satire to deeper, more engaged critique in improv means allowing space for *thought*—including reflection, evaluation, and for that matter, approval/disapproval—by performers and audiences. It also requires space for pain and the spectrum of other emotions related to sincere engagement with critique (regret, pride, fear, hope, etc.)—a difficult proposal under improv's comedy regime as supported by its methodological accounts of spontaneity.

Toward a Critical Improv

Granted, these same problematic features of spontaneity also have a profound liberatory potential, for all the reasons that the above methodologists justly valorize them; the problem comes with treating spontaneity, as accounted, as a neutral, unqualified good. The clear value of spontaneity in these accounts, when treated as so unqualifiedly good, masks the material

consequences of methodologists' rhetorical use of the "spontaneity" ideograph. Among these material consequences are problematic issues of access, representation, and expression for women, people of color, and LGBT persons. While the marginalization of these groups in improv mirrors society at large, the particular tensions and historical trajectory of improv have led to intracultural practices that reinforce this marginalization, as expertly analyzed in Seham's case studies.

Above, I have extended her analysis by connecting some of her critiques with particular features of the rhetoric of spontaneity in the popular improv methodology texts that help support and justify such improv organizations' practices. I have also called to extend these critical considerations to the issue of ableism, and the particular challenges it poses for improv practices and operationalizations of spontaneity. Finally, I have shown that these problematic constructs of identity, representation, and expression are also more broadly supported by improv's bias toward comedy, which is in turn supported by methodologists' ideographic rhetoric of spontaneity. All are significant concerns for a critical perspective on improv through the lens of how spontaneity is accomplished in rhetoric and practice. I believe that all are issues which improv practitioners and scholars should explore and challenge in more detail; however, I here confine myself to a few introductory thoughts on addressing these issues with regard to practices of spontaneity.

Regarding issues of demographic access, representation, and expression, my own positionality makes comments on suggested approaches difficult. As a heterosexual white male largely conforming to tacit ableist ideals, any effort on my part to speak for groups marginalized in improv practices would be suspect at best. However, as a starting place I would first broadly advocate that fellow improvisers who share my positionality (one disproportionally represented in

improv) to listen and take seriously critiques and experiences from marginalized voices in improv. Furthermore, improviers—especially those whose identities intersectionally include dominant positionalities—should reconsider unreflexive principles of spontaneity that call for refusal to analyze or question impulses and the expressions driven by them, and should assess their own expressions and impulses from a critical perspective that considers how their actions are reflective or reinforcing of hegemonic privilege. Finally, I call on improv practitioners and scholars to return to an explicit address of the key ideograph "spontaneity," and to consider critically how naturalized/neutralized operationalizations of this guiding term have real, differential material conequences for improv participants at the levels of access, representation, and accepted/accessible expression. On the theory/methodological level, one productive area to assess is the double-bind between the hegemony-reinforcing problematics that dog both groupmind (socially-generated) and individualized operationalizations of spontaneity—as discussed and critiqued above, the problematic created at either end of this spectrum is not neutralized by a simple shift toward the other end.

As discussed above, many of improv's hegemonic practices are also supported by its bias to comedic production, and addressing this issue also helps to address critical demographic issues, for the alignment of spontaneity with comedy is one general practice by which hegemony is upheld and critique is limited in improv. In keeping with my call for a direct challenge to the comedy bias (as opposed to creating space for a broader field of comedic voices), I recommend two shifts in the practice and rhetoric of spontaneity in improvisational theatre: 1) from "unmindfulness" to "thoughtfulness" and 2) from "joy" to "*jouissance*."

The first shift challenges the rhetoric of "emptying the mind," "let go of control" and "just take action, be-in-the-moment" that characterizes improv operationalizations of spontaneity.

Such accounts of spontaneity emphasize what I collectively call an "unmindfulness" that, ideally, transcends both internal and external sources of restraint and is expressed through unconsidered, unhesitating action that is considered "free" and "natural" and is opposed to "thinking," "planning" or "considered action."   While the liberatory potential of such an account is clear in a world filled with both socially-enforced and internalized censorship, such an approach also short-circuits critique, self-analysis, and consideration of the larger social implications of improv expression, for these are also sources of restraint. It also privileges persons whose positionality offers the most access to such unhesitating action.

In contrast, I would like to propose an account of "thoughtfulness" that looks to integrate action generally pejoratively marked in current improv methodology as "thinking" into improv's accounts of spontaneity. Hazenfield takes steps in this direction with her account that challenges practices focused on emptying the mind, but instead of allowing for thought and consideration, she refocuses on the impulse of emotional experience as inspiration for action, locating "mind" as a fundamental censoring force with a role analogous to "fear" for Napier. While their critiques of "mind" and "thinking" are apt and meaningful in their accounts, I would like to suggest that the diametrical opposition of thought to spontaneity goes too far, both raising the above critical concerns with access to expression, and also limiting improv more generally, by foreclosing the "thoughtful" dimensions of expression and experience.

My notion of "thoughtfulness" in spontaneity is not meant to replace action- or emotion-focused accounts with weighed and considered action, but to instead expand them to recognize equally the potential—indeed, the necessity—of spontaneity in the many "cognitive" activities shunned by improv methodologists as "thinking." Such an integrative approach would make a distinction between "thinking-about" the performance and "thinking-in" the performance.

"Thinking-about" represents the myriad of cognitive behaviors identified as problematic for generating spontaneity, including approval/disapproval, fear, calculation of self-presentation, etc. And it would *also* include the conscious "agendas" stigmatized by most improv practitioners, as discussed in Seham and above. I agree that such "agendas" are destructive of spontaneity when they take such forms as "how can I make this scene feminist?" for the same reasons they are destructive when performers are "thinking-about" how to make the scene funny, how to be in control of the scene, how to express the self-presentation they desire, etc. Such an account does not deny spontaneity to thinking, but rather identifies certain practices of cognitive action as destructive of spontaneity just as certain practices of behavior in improv are also identified as spontaneity-inhibiting. In other words, my account does not identify a mind-body division, and seek to bring "mind" into the fold of spontaneity. Rather, actions distinguished by improv methodologists into categories such as "thinking," "emotion," and "overt action" are unified within the ethnomethodological field of *social behavior*.

I argue that the "thinking" practices identified as destructive by improv methodologists stymie spontaneity not because they involve *thinking* as such, but because they involve "thinking-about" the performance and how to accomplish expressive aims beyond being-in-the-moment. But the genuine problematic with such forms of thinking-about should not radically banish all forms of "thinking" in improv. Instead, I seek to bring thinking back into the fold of spontaneity through the notion of "thinking-in" the performance. Such an account recognizes thinking as itself a form of action, as subject to spontaneity as more "overt" actions, and views thinking as integrated with, not opposed to, emotion. It allows for performers to *take time* to react, but in a way that keeps them in-the-moment with the scene. This approach to thinking in improv creates space for performers to think, not *as* performers but within the context of the

spontaneously-created scene. As stated above, people *do* think—evaluate, plan, approve/disapprove, etc.—all the time, and much thinking is spontaneous reaction. In "real life," we do stop to think when confronted with choices and with forms of expression we find problematic. We do consider our actions and responses. And emotions, though valorized for their immediacy in much methodology, are often not so immediate in "real life"—they are often arrived at and discovered through thought and reflection.

Instead of opposing thought to spontaneity, I advocate for allowing thoughtfulness into the range of recognized "spontaneous" responses in improv, in the form of "thinking-in" rather than "thinking-about"—that is, thinking as a form of deep involvement with the moment, "in-character" as it were, as opposed to the "thinking-about" cognitive behaviors that alienate performers from the moment. Such thinking does not involve "choosing" a response in the way methodologists critique, but instead involves allowing oneself to *be affected* by thought, in the same way that Hazenfield advocates for emotion, but without the breakneck pace of response her account of impulsiveness calls for. Thus "thought*ful*ness," which allows for deep involvement with ongoing action through thought as shaped by and shaping emotion, as opposed to "mindlessness" that banishes thought as antithetical to immediate experience.

Such an approach to spontaneity in improvisational theatre would call for a de-emphasis on "unhesitancy" of action, and an embrace of the power of silence, to which many methodologists nod positively but give short shrift. It also creates space in improv for reflection and critique, neither as deployment of "agenda" nor as a matter of resistant "tactics," but as its own rich dimension of experience through which reactions can be discovered and expressed. Such "thoughtfulness" does not *force* critique and reflection, but *allows* for them as forms of genuine spontaneous action and response, from which performers can express their discoveries and

impulses. In doing so, it moves away from the problematics associated with the "immediacy" and "unhesitancy" of accounts of spontaneity that constrict it to "mindlessness," and opens paths for a richer, deeper improv that embraces those dimensions of experience that take time to discover and express. And like many of the challenges to the comedy bias discussed above, the argument can be made that in addition to helping address issues of access, representation, and expression in improv, such expansion of what is accepted and recognized as spontaneous in improv has the potential to generally make the work *better*—and hell, perhaps even funnier.

The second shift I advocate, from "joy" to "*jouissance*," challenges the comedy bias more directly by expanding the scope of improv's rhetoric in associating spontaneity with terms like "play," "fun" and "pleasure." While much improv rhetoric of play leaves room for serious engagement with issues or emotion as a form of "play," the strong tendency is toward a gleefulness, a "randomness" of behavior, quick action, bizarreness, and exaggeration. As shown above, this bias badly limits both improv practice in general and the voice of individual improvisers, especially those with nondominant positionalities. In place of this rhetoric of "joy," I would propose a rhetoric of "*jouissance*," in the broad sense employed by Elizabeth Bell that goes beyond its associations with sexual pleasure to "encompass potentiality as well as immediacy, excess as well as completion, desire as well as satisfaction in sexual, literary, political and economic realms…a powerful and empowering trope: at once physical and discursive, biological and political, material and social" (108).

While Bell's use of the term focuses on feminist ethics and aesthetics of performance, and the connections of performance with sexual pleasure, I believe the broad sense of the term has valuable applications for improv. In Bell's "pleasure-centered" economy/aesthetics of performance, *jouissance* plays the role of transcending the sexual pleasure she places at the

center of this dynamic, moving toward a pleasure of complication, reflection, and deep experience. We may see improv's rhetoric of "joy" as analogous to the simplified and visceral center of sexual pleasure in Bell's account: something to be cherished and sustained, but, as the *center*, also operating as a homogenizing and controlling force—and so also something to question and go beyond, to create a richer and more vital pleasure economy, if you will, by creating space for a multitude of "pleasures."

In improv, a shift to *jouissance* helps to decentralize "joy" and invites a more diverse "economy of experience/expression." This expansive economy recognizes deep, rich experience—including of sadness, fear, anger, injustice, oppression, and so on—as nonetheless in the realm of joy, as pleasurable by virtue of *having* meaningful experiences, *having* meaningful opportunities to express onself. In short, to approach improv as a true "flow" activity in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's sense, an effort to go beyond mere "pleasure" to the rich, meaningful—and not at all necessarily pleasurable—experience of *enjoyment*. Such an aesthetic shift in the rhetoric of spontaneity would call for a methodological approach that asks improviers and audiences to go beyond the easy pleasures that uphold the comedy bias, and to actively engage with their hurt, their tenderness, their desire, their cultural positionality, etc—as well as their joy—as groundings for pleasure in performance. Not merely as add-ons, experiments to showcase range beyond comedy, but as the essence of improv: A space for the unlimited wellspring of the imagination, for shared experience, for the range of human emotions, for commitment to engaging honestly and powerfully with whatever happens.

The purpose of this critique is not to silence by layering in new rules, new "don't's." Instead of seeing improv made safer, I want it to be scarier. The purpose of encouraging "thinking" in improv is not to give performers a chance to "think twice" about the implications of their choices

or the course of action they are spontaneously playing out. It is because thinking is powerful and dangerous. In "everyday life," we make purposeful, tactical choices to be silent all the time, for good reasons as we navigate power structures emerging as forms of control that create consequences for expressing "what one thinks"—depending on what that is. For all its risks, improv is about as safe a public social space as we can make for expressing all those thoughts we silence in the everyday. Dangerous thoughts. Frightening thoughts. Irrational thoughts. Approval and Disapproval. Acceptance and Rejection. They are all so powerful to express, both from the perspectives of resistance to and reinforcement of hegemony. Why should improv sever such a source of rich and powerful expression by shunning it as outside the realm of spontaneity, when there is no good reason to frame it this way?

Awful things will get expressed and done sometimes. Good. Instead of silencing them, let us take them seriously. Again, improv is about as safe a public social space as we can make for experiences and enactments of both hurting and being hurt. So let us take risks with our feelings and our choices, and not be afraid to hurt each other, or to suffer ourselves. For that matter, let us not be afraid to be *truly* happy—not just gleeful—to love things, to find things beautiful and valuable and worthwhile. And then let us be affected by all this, and learn from it, and not only to be better at improv. In Spolin's terms, let us not leave improv on the stage, but "carry the learning process into daily life" as we take to the everyday world the discoveries that things we've never even thought about can come out of our bodies and mouths, and that things we've thought about an awful lot can too.

Conclusion

An understanding of the spontaneity ideograph in improv is essential not only to making sense of its criterial accounts for accomplishment of the activities implicated in communities of improviers, but also of the power relationships and aesthetic character implicated in particular productions of those (ideally) spontaneity-generative activities. As discussed above, the ideographic rhetoric of spontaneity, while valorizing the concept as enabling, facilitative and/or liberatory, also has oppressive qualities through its marginalization of non-hegemonic identities and issues, through its naturalization of the neutrality of bodies, and through its reinforcement of a comedy bias. I have offered several points of entrance toward a more critical practice of improv, and a rethinking of its rhetoric of spontaneity, that would begin to address these concerns, at least at the level of marking them as relevant to improv's relationship with the larger culture wherein its practices are embedded. This critical analysis, however, is still grounded in the artifacts of formalized written methodology, itself analytical of improv attitudes and practices. In the following chapter, I shift to a different set of artifacts—narratives prompted about improviers' experiences of spontaneity in improv practice, offering a set of individualized, concrete examples of spontaneous experience not subsumed to a broader analytic schema. This approach provides an opportunity to apply questions of ideographic structure and critical implications to personal, rather than synthesizing, accounts of spontaneity.

CHAPTER 5

CULT OF THE STAGE MONKEY'S'S NARRATIVES OF SPONTANEITY

The relevance of concrete examples as a form of account to illustrate and clarify

operationalizations of spontaneity was addressed in the previous chapter as an important tactic

for negotiating the meaning of such accounts. Indeed, although analysis of more broadly-based

conceptual accounts of "generic" models of spontaneity has thus far been the focus of my

attention, in keeping with my emphasis on the ideographic character of the "spontaneity" term, a

strong argument can be made that example-based accounts are far more foundational to an

assessment of the practical use of concepts of spontaneity in improvisational theatre from an

ethnomethodological perspective. After all, as discussed above, methodological accounts of

spontaneity are derived from, not prior to, actual experiences of spontaneity by methodology

writers. Methodology accounts (again, excepting Spolin) are riddled with examples of

spontaneity (or its breach/failure) experienced or observed by methodologists; even with writers

like Napier, who rely heavily on hypothetical examples, it is strongly implied that these

hypotheticals are distilled from and analogous to actual experiences. Given that methodology

writers are engaged in the activity of establishing accounts of the meaning of spontaneity for

improvisers, it seems reasonable to presume that their accounts are attempts to "make sense of"

these experiences of spontaneity and non-spontaneity, rather than an elucidation and application

of prior accounts of spontaneity to the particular activity of improv.

Given this consideration, the present chapter will offer a final perspective on the rhetoric of

spontaneity, this one "from the ground up." Rather than examining the assumptions and

implications of derived accounts of spontaneity, as in the previous chapters, this section will

consider spontaneity as expressed in the direct narrative accounts of improviers prompted to give examples of their experiences of spontaneity and non-spontaneity in the process of engaging in improvisational theatre. These narratives provide concrete examples of how improviers generate their own accounts of "spontaneity" when asked to provide illustration of the term's meaning for themselves. Although the improviers providing these narratives have undoubtedly been influenced in their interpretations of spontaneity by existing methodological operationalizations, either directly by reading such literature or indirectly through the literature's influence on the overall social milieu of improv, such narratives still provide examples of more "self-constructed" concepts of spontaneity, of the type from which more formal operationalizations are derived.

Ethnomethodology and Narrative

Regarding any concerns over the use of reported narratives rather than direct observation as an object of ethnomethodological investigation, many of the same comments apply that were discussed at the beginning of Chapter Two regarding conceptual analyses. As with that set of artifacts, narratives cannot offer "direct" access to practices of spontaneity. However, as "interpretive behaviors"—behaviors requiring a certain form of self-understanding on the part of actors about "what-they-are-do-ing"—phenomena of spontaneity are fundamentally resistant to literal descriptions anyway. Instead, as with conceptual analyses, the following should be viewed as descriptive of overt behavior that involves interpretation on the part of social actors. The behavior described via analysis of the narratives does not imply that these accounts are "accurate" or "definitive" of practices of spontaneity. Rather, the behavior assessed is that of "practices of reporting one's experience of spontaneity in the absence of a prior imposed account intended to influence responses." As the reports are drawn specifically from the participants'

experience in a social activity, improvisational theatre, which marks spontaneity as criterial and with which all narrators strongly identify with their own social identities, the narrations in question can be reasonably considered as offering insight into the interpretive behaviors of participants regarding their practices for recognizing, assessing, and making-visible that which they treat as "spontaneous," at least within the social realm of improv.

A number of scholars offer insights that support these above perspectives. John Shotter distinguishes "theories" and "accounts" in a manner parallel to the way I treat improv "methodology" and "narratives." He argues that theory/methodology is grounded on accounts/narratives; that theories are explicit, abstract, discrete, systematic, complete, and predictive, while accounts "have no such pretensions." Regarding accounts, "what sense there is to be found is *not decided* beforehand, but is discovered or disclosed in the course of the exchange in which the account is offered" (114). A narrative is like theory "only in the requirement that it be coherent and be understood as a whole…it cannot itself be grounded in evidence, for it works to shape what we will interpret as evidence" in formulating theory (113).

From an ethnomethodological perspective, narratives cannot be seen as definitive beyond the situatedness of their practical use, but can still serve as examples of "knowledge" within that situated perspective. Ethnomethodological assessment of narrative related to membership in an ideographic community "prioritizes members' experience" through primary focus on what members relating narratives "are *doing*, what knowledge they are demonstrating" through language and paralanguage "to organize, define and make sense of their social experiences" (Manzo 142). Barbara Smith argues that all value claims are based on local and contingent conditions, and that aesthetic/value judgments "are not essentially different from 'descriptive' or 'factual' statements" in that they are neither more nor less compromised by social positioning

and idiosyncrasy; the difference is the relative uniformity across a larger culture of those

judgments treated as descriptive/factual, "although the value of *all* objects is to some extent

subject-variable" (29). Linda Alcoff argues that the experiences reported in narratives are

necessarily situated in individual identity and social positioning, but it is exactly these features

that make local, contingent practices of knowledge possible: "Cognition is incapable of total

closure or complete comprehensiveness precisely because of our concrete, situated, and dynamic

embodiment. It is only because being is always being in the world, and not apart or over the

world, that we can know the world" (70). Though "identity" (as a woman, African-American,

improvier, etc.) is often treated as directly associable with certain histories of experience,

"identity" as a concept of practical use is better treated as a sort of shorthand for "the cognitive

significance of experience" (73), i.e., not "shared experience" but a shared *orientation* toward

experience as one would find among an ideographic community.

The knowledge expressed in narratives is necessarily local and contingent, but

ethnomethodologically, this is the only form of knowledge possible, for what is treated as

"knowledge" is itself dependent on contextual social practices for evaluating the knowledge-

status of claims. With respect to particular situated contexts, these practices tend to be mostly

successful. Thus, certain biases and limits in perspective allow knowledge as a practice to

operate; as Susan Babbitt notes, "When we try to be objective, we try not to be *un*biased, but

rather to be biased in an appropriate way (298)." David Carr describes this facilitating role of

bias and limited perspective in narrative practice: "All the extraneous noise or static is cut

out…A selection is made of all the events and actions the characters may engage in, and only a

small minority finds its way in the story. In life, by contrast, everything is left in; all the static is

there" (13). The function of narrative as authoritative often takes a form where the "big-picture"

truth is irrelevant; "knowledge" consists of recognition that *something* matters to *someone*.

In the case of our improv narrations, in a sense even the *honesty* of storytellers is an

irrelevant consideration, if we consider the activity under observation to be not "narrating

examples of spontanteity," but instead what the activity "really" is, i.e., "narrating examples of

what storytellers present to be interpreted as experiences of spontaneity." Dennis Day and

Susanne Kjaerbeck describe this practice as "positioning," where, in interaction, "one inevitably

positions oneself through the actions one performs (verbally and non-verbally) and, at the same

time, is positioned by other participants" (17). Positioning is especially useful as an analytic

concept in contrast to the more static "role," allowing for analytic inclusion of a greater

"diversity of selves" and an increased sense of relationality in shaping the "self" of the

positioning/being-positioned subject (18). They describe storytelling as object of

ethnomethodolgical analysis as "characterized by a focus on the interactive accomplishment of a

story's telling…the teller of the story demonstrates a stance with regard to what is being reported

which, in turn, makes relevant the taking of a stance by the story's recipients (30)." We may

view the narratives considered below as artifacts of interview respondents' practices of

positioning themselves in concrete ways to the criterial ideograph "spontaneity" with respect to

their shared participation in improv. Any "regularity" of phenomena identified in these

narratives is not an explanation of participants' experience of spontaneity, but rather itself a topic

of investigation (34). Conversely, "anomalies" in patterns of reporting on spontaneity are not

puzzles to be solved, but opportunities to examine one's own positional/positioned limits as a

story's recipient, and invitations to consider the relevant perspectives of others as they present

their contextualized contributions to a milieu of endogenous knowledge (Hoagland 137).

Participants and Method

As described in detail in Chapter One, participants volunteered their responses to seven guiding questions presented without additional prompting, either in writing or verbally in an audiorecorded interview. All respondents are affiliated with the improv organization Cult of the Stage Monkey (COSM), originally organized at University of Louisiana—Lafayette in 1998, where many generations of performers later it still performs throughout the Fall and Spring semesters, now organized as a registered student organization. An early member of this ensemble later established Stage Monkeys, affiliated with the University of Southern Mississippi (Hattiesburg) and is still performing throughout the year. Members of these two ensembles later founded other non-university organized ensembles across the United States: COSM Chicago (2007-2011); MicroCOSM of Washington D.C. (2008-2010); COSM of Carbondale, IL (2008-2011); and Stage Monkeys of San Diego (2009-present). A professional group, Silverbacks, initially consisting entirely of earlier members of various branches, has performed bimonthly in Lafayette, LA since 2012.

While these various groups use variations of the original name, all recognize themselves as sharing membership in the larger organization confederated of these ensembles and their former members; "Cult of the Stage Monkey" is also generally recognized as the name of the organization at large. The organization at large has no formal influence over the affairs of individual branches beyond permission for use of the name, and the various branches developed largely with little direct influence from the others. However, shared affiliation with the organization at large is an important part of each ensemble's "identity." A number of personal relationships are maintained across ensemble lines, and present or former membership in any

branch confers a sort of standing credibility and connection with other members of the various branches, in a somewhat fraternity/sorority-like manner. Connections across ensembles are formally maintained through national events that bring together members and alumni of all branches for workshops, performances, and socializing. These have included seven semiannual conference-like "Barrels" held at locations of the various branches, and more socially-oriented "Bananaversaries" held in Lafayette, LA to celebrate the 10th and 15th anniversaries of COSM's founding.

Twelve respondents participated in the interview, most answering all or a majority of the seven questions, with two respondents answering only one question each. Most respondents have been primarily affiliated with COSM-Lafayette and/or Silverbacks, two worked with COSM-Chicago, one with Stage Monkeys-Hattiesburg, and one with COSM-Carbondale, with some overlap among these groups. All have been primarily onstage performers, with one exception of a lighting operator; six have also worked extensively in a director role, usually while also performing.

I will assess these narratives by addressing responses to the guiding questions in the order they were presented to respondents, identifying emergent themes and points of contestation or divergence. While the questions only ask for specific examples, most responses also include additional "explanation" or "justification" by respondents wherein they elaborate on their reason for choosing the example they give, or offer a more broad-based account of their examples' connections to the broad concept of spontaneity. I draw extensively from these explanatory comments in identifying themes across the narratives. Though not prompted, they are an important part of the narrative process in this context, as the positioning of the narrator with

respect to spontaneity is not usually clear from the example alone; instead, narrators feel the need to establish the "moral" of the story.

Indeed, these "morals," the "point-of-the-story," often takes center stage in the narratives, most of which are glossed, thin description of complex events where the "point" is the respondents' reaction to the experience. I was personally present for some events described in narratives; others I was definitely not present for; and a few I am literally not sure about. Throughout the following, I will deliberately elide any personal impressions I have of events described. Though in some cases additional description on my part may be enlightening, my choice of "relevant" detail and interpretation would superimpose a prior account of spontaneity upon the narratives in the same way I have tried to avoid by refusing to give respondents information on what I "mean" when asking about spontaneity. Consequently, I will limit description of narrated events to features included in the collected narratives themselves, using the narratives' exact language as much as possible. The unprompted inclusion of explanatory comments by respondents serves as a valuable resource for overcoming this limit of description.

I will also set aside considerations regarding my own "positioning" with respect to respondents. All respondents are known to me personally, and I have performed improv with all of them to some extent, in some cases for many years in an ensemble. It is difficult to believe that our personal and professional relationships did not influence respondents at least at the level of choice of examples put on the record; however, specific accounts of influence would be, at best, highly challenging to identify. Again, here I focus on the specific language and features of the narratives.

Finally, it should be noted that some narratives specifically identified other performers, including others in the respondent sample, either by name or with distinctive identifying details.

As a matter of privacy, excepts from the narratives below will be edited in such a way as to remove names and identifying details of individuals mentioned other than the narrator.

#1) The Experience of Spontaneity in Improv Performance

Eleven of twelve respondents answered the question, "Can you share a story or example of a time when you felt especially spontaneous when performing improv with Cult of the Stage Monkey?" Two responses were actually that the narrator could not provide an example, with David Sarton elaborating:

> I will forget most of the scenes that I do. The rush of being on stage, combined with the fact that the improviser's job is to come up with something on the spot, adds up to the point where I can never remember exactly what happens on stage. So, I can't think of any particularly spontaneous on-stage moment for myself.

Others provide examples of particular shows, scenes, moments, or their own sustained accomplishment across a show. This account of inability to remember are associated with one significant narrative theme, variations of the experience of "being caught up in the moment." Henri Dugas describes a scene playing one of two assistants at a Banana Republic retailer, both assisting the same customer, as "I was just caught in the flow of the scene because it was moving so fast that going with it was the only way to keep the flow." Similarly, Tim Massoth describes a highly physical scene of fleeing from pursuers after robbing a soda machine, stating:

> I like this scene because we all worked together in a physical sense without the need for explicitly stating what we were going to do…I was able to silence my mind and bounce ideas with the other members. Instead of worrying about how this scene made sense in a practical sense, we all just had fun and enjoyed the insanity of the moment.

Lauren Auverset also narrates losing herself to "the moment" during her audition:

> I had never really done improv before, and I was told that I was on Mars, and also a giant space penguin. The combination was so surreal and unlike anything I had anticipated, and I think my brain didn't have the time or space to process it cognitively. I remember

specifically NOT thinking, just reacting…I stood up really tall, held my arms very stiffly at my sides, and waddled while exclaiming, "WHAHH!"…At that point in my life I never would have imagined that I would willingly do something like that in front of an audience.

Jason Petitjean describes a sudden tone shift triggering a "caught in the moment" experience. In a duo performance, he and his partner immediately followed a "sad…humbling, depressing scene with a touch of anger" with a scene of "two buddies discussing how funny it was when people beg for their life but are murdered anyway." The sudden shift was so "jarring" that:

> …there was almost no option but to just let the scene be as over the top and robust as it could be. I felt lost in my character, narrating the deaths of these innocent people at my hands but in a way that suggested my character thought the whole thing was funny...Having to disregard the nature of the scene and simply embracing what it was (especially in comparison to the previous scene) allowed me to feel a freedom in spontaneity rarely matched my other experiences on stage.

Respondents Sarah Brown and Elaine Kibodeaux both associate an experience of spontaneity with playing a sustained character outside of their "normal" range. Brown states:

> I love when a character emerges from me that is outside of my comfort zone, and that I wasn't expecting. It's additionally pleasing when I am able to maintain that character's motives and inner life…[In one memorable longform] I think I started with a posture, or perhaps an emotion. What emerged was a moody teenage boy who had a difficult relationship with his father. I was able to maintain his postures and manners throughout the show. I certainly had no plans or scripting when deciding to play that character. It was spontaneous, and especially memorable for it.

Elaine Kibodeaux, having earlier discussed a strong aversion to "anything sexy on stage" during her first years with improv, describes a longform during her third year where she was partnered on stage as the wife of a powerful Roman politician. Drawing from historical practices:

> He was a powerful leader in society, and you know, no one brings their *wife* out, that's not respectable…So he was going to dress me up as a concubine, so he could take me out because he didn't want a concubine. And I embraced it fully that…I was the sexiest thing on stage, and I had one boob out…It was completely out of my box, I don't know where it came from, but that was a big turning point for me when it comes to spontaneity on stage, because I was finally a character that wasn't Elaine.

Another theme is that of "aptness" or "appropriateness," action that "works" in making a performance successful. Rick Manual describes a small-cast longform where two scenes started in an office setting and a fantasy world:

> …and [another player], who we later found out had no knowledge of World of Warcraft, managed to tie in very organically that the fantasy world was an online game we were playing in the office world, and our manager kind of picked it up and it became this team-building exercise where the fantasy world were avatars of ourselves in the office…It fit, and it clicked along, and we just had some great energy through the whole show…[We were able] to feel out each other's energy and each other's motivation.

Laura Kibodeaux, writing from the perspective of an improv lighting operator, sees one role for her spontaneity as "an audience member with the power to end a scene whenever I feel it needs to be cut;" usually, "when a nice, memorable line of dialogue or action comes out of one of the performers, then I will end the scene by turning all the stage lights off at once." Moments she associates with spontaneity also include using color and brightness to create emotional or weather effects, and at the end of a competitive show where she flashed the red and blue lights to support the celebration of a tie between the Red and Blue teams.

Matthew Titsworth gives three examples with different perspectives on spontaneity. He also evokes the theme of aptness, describing entering a rhythmic mining activity "doing this sort of scat cat break up the monotony thing where I suddenly went "Bang! Bang miners! Bang!" Suddenly this became the band "Bang Miners!" and off it went." Later in that same show, Titsworth and another character have fallen down and mine shaft and are injured, express their feelings for each other, and kiss. However, he elaborates:

> On both of those occasions though I would not call it just pure spontaneity. [In the mineshaft scene] things became inevitable, but the kiss was absolutely in the moment. In the bang miners I had an agenda going in, but the line popped out and that was that - sort of more a surprise that is apparently spontaneous after the fact. As far as just feeling spontaneous and not knowing where antyhing was going to go from moment to moment, I've probably never felt that more, though, than in the 2006 DC Barrel Schizologue performance. I had absolutely

no idea what was going to happen with that or where it was going to happen. I don't even really remember most of it. But it certainly came out of nowhere.

Titsworth was the only repondant to this question to distinguish between levels of spontaneity, contrasting a "pure spontaneity" with the spontaneity of aptness. His language for the Schizologue he references (where he played seven characters solo for 15 minutes) is more suggestive of "caught-in-the-moment" spontaneity as the "pure" type.

In addition to these themes, most respondents seem to associate some level of surprise with their examples of spontaneity, with language like "I don't know where it came from," "it came out of nowhere," or "I never would have imagined that I would willingly do something like that." Respondents also often associate spontaneity with the "suppressed areas" of the imagination, like Johnstone, as in E. Kibodeaux's example of sexuality, or references to "enjoying the insanity" (Massoth) or Auverset's "space penguin." The theme of "aptness," in turn, aligns with Johnstone's concept of "ordinariness." These narratives emphasize different associations with spontaneity, some locating it in concrete moments and others in sustained action, some with individual choices and some with collective accomplishment. The primary themes throughout reflect a nebulous "being in the moment," sustained accomplishment of behaving out of one's "comfort zone," an "aptness" reflecting the appropriateness of choices and their effective integration into ongoing action, and a level of surprise at one's own choices or their outcomes.

#2) The Observation of Spontaneity in Improv Performance

Eight of the twelve respondents answered the question "Can you share a story or example of a time when you observed performance by other members of COSM that seemed especially spontaneous to you?" These narratives include the only instance of two respondents both referencing the same incident, when another performer became the autistic adult brother at the

center of a longform about a troubled family, which Auverset calls "beautiful" and Titsworth

describes as "a holy-shit moment." Titsworth also identifies a moment where a "scene about a

documentary interviewing trans people having difficulty coming out became an entire long

form" when the documenter placed his hand on the repressed trans-woman's shoulder and said "I

had trouble too": "It was very much a moment when things changed all of a sudden because of a

single instantaneous remark."

This theme of instantaneousness was common in these narratives. Brown notes being

impressed with the "elaborate and unusual" use of language by other players under "duress."

Massoth gives an example of news anchors discussing an animal breakout at the zoo:

> What I remember most about that scene was how they connected different people
> involved…and how others in our group quickly jumped to the stage and adopted these
> characters on the spot. I believe one of them was an animal-rights activist, another was a
> crazy person who enjoyed the chaos this scene causes, and so on. And everyone was just so
> quick in jumping on the stage and turning into these characters, while still anchoring the
> scene around the general plot… part of the scene was led from the anchors, but it was the
> group members who embodied these people spur of the moment and made the scene count.

The theme of "cohesion" as indicative of spontaneity was mentioned explicitly. Sarton

describes:

> We would have theme shows, loosely connected by a narrative strand but ultimately a set of
> short-form games. It was our first real experiment with long form in performance. The other
> members of the group quickly adapted to the format, maintaining a cohesive narrative in
> spite of the quirk-centric games. This combination of old information (the knowledge of the
> games' rules) and new information (the addition of a story that connected all those games)
> helped the group to provide a cohesive story.

Dugas qualifies his amazement at fellow cast members' ability to create a deep backstory out of

nothing by noting that he does "build in story" for himself while watching improvisation.

However, "if it's truly spontaneous in a cohesive pattern, I feel that it allows the audience to

build story for themselves instead of trying to backtrack and put the pieces of the scene together

to 'make it make sense'." Benelli finds spontaneity in the cohesion of a scene with broader

events in the community. In the last scene of a show on the theme of "dreams" performed a few

days after a local mass shooting, "the deceased husband is communicating to the wife through

her dreams through an intermediary angel, spirit, whatever you want to call it…It seemed to fall

into place…in that particular week, with the things that had been going on…around that time, to

kind of hit everybody…"

As with the above scene, and the earlier scenes about the autistic brother and the trans

coming-out documentary, a disproportionate number of these narratives cite examples of non-

comedic improv. Manual makes this theme explicit in his example:

> Early on…I had only thought of improv as something that was comedic…[Two performers]
> did a game…where they were moving back and forth in time along the relationship of these
> two people…and just fell into place as this psychic and her client, and it was just this
> beautiful relationship…it was just like a normal relationship between two people, and it was
> gut wrenching, and heartbreaking at the end when we went to the day when one of them
> passed away and I remember the audience…you could feel people on the edge of crying, and
> I didn't know that improv could do that.

These themes on observing spontaneity somewhat parallel those about experiencing

spontaneity from the first question, with "instantaneity" related to themes of "being caught in the

moment" and "surprise," and "cohesion" associable with "aptness" and "sustained

accomplishment." In addition, the set of examples derived from non-comedic improv is almost

certainly disproportionately high compared to the prevalence of such improv in respondents'

overall performance experience.

#3) The Experience or Observation of Non-Spontaneity in Improv Performance

Ten respondents answered the question "Can you share a story or example of a time you felt

especially non-spontaneous when performing improv with COSM, or observed a performance by

other members that seemed especially non-spontaneous to you?" The narratives generally connect with four distinct themes: Trying to "force" something, "overplanning" for improv, doing something that they'd "done before," and personal discomfort.

Benelli identifies a moment like this for himself, where in a longform "things were stagnating a bit, and I was trying to push the storyline ahead and force things along…trying too hard to make something happen that would be entertaining in that moment, rather than just letting it happen naturally." Petitjean similarly finds himself "forcing" connections between storylines in a longform:

> There were instances when I would walk into a scene to simply establish how some other scene tied into it, never for that particular scenes sake but for the sake of [making the longform work and]…me worrying how the scenes would be arbitrarily tied…Scenes would die for the sake of an arbitrary rule, and I would no longer focus on allowing scenes to develop unhinged. I was almost scripting.

Dugas eschews examples, simply saying "numerous times," and launches into an explanation that also draws a line between appearance and reality of spontaneity:

> I'm not engaged (internally), I'm awaiting the right time to land a joke or inject a plot point or plot twist. Sure, from the outside this may look spontaneous, but if I've had time to formulate the thought AND wait for a perfect time to deliver it, then it is not spontaneous in the purest sense.

> Manual describes problems with trying to force a format:

> We had a tradition at the point of doing a particular style of Halloween show, and…even though there were only three of us, we tried to do this really large format that worked better with a big cast…It got really far away from our original style, where we would just come in random Halloween costumes and we got characters assigned to us…by other performers based on their impressions of our costume, and this was "I'm developing my own character"…and it just didn't work.

Brown also describes a "murder-mystery" structured show as impeded by overpreparation: "We had pre-established some basic elements of our characters…I don't think that pre-devised

characters are necessarily something that would kill spontaneity, but in this case, the overly

complicated structure…caused most of us to fall back onto our bag of 'tricks'."

Among this "bag of tricks" she identifies "falling onto one of my crutches as being a 'femme

fatale' type of character, which bored me even as I made the audience laugh," an example which

also highlights a distinction between a successful improv performance (for the audience) and the

successful generation of spontaneity, and implicates laughter with reinforcement of non-

spontaneity. Auverset similarly accounts how, when faced with an unfamiliar suggestion, her

"go-to in those situations was always to 'try to take over the world' *insert mad-scientist forearm

gesture here*…I have no idea why that was my default panic choice, but it was. Maybe it got big

laughs the first time and I remembered that?" While Massoth does not implicate laughter, he

shares a similar explanation in a story about not knowing what to do after starting a solo scene in

which he was painting in silence and "couldn't think of anything to say":

> I made my decision to use a planned character trait that had worked for me in earlier shows: act completely crazy. So out of nowhere, I started smearing the paint all over my face and body…As you can imagine, it didn't turn out very well…Even if something worked before, whether it's a joke, a character trait, etc., it doesn't mean it will work all the time. The craziness worked beforehand because it fit with the prior scene and corresponded with the character at the time, not just because someone was acting crazy.

Massoth's repetitive choice was pushed by a sense of discomfort with the scene. E.

Kibodeaux also identifies personal discomfort, at the level of scene content. Expanding on her

early aversion to sexual portrayal on stage, she says it is something she has worked on, and

claims greater comfort now, but "it's gotten to the point where nobody tries anymore; so I don't

know how I'd react to that now." Titsworth identifies discomfort working with a performer

whose choices to him "felt like damage control" and would "push [their] agenda regardless of

whatever happened," also tying into the theme of "forcing" scenes. Finally, Sarton identifies

"alcohol" with physical discomfort as stymying for himself and fellow cast when, the morning

after drinking at an improv festival, "during the workshops and shows, we were very hung over, to the point where we completely forgot suggestions that had just been given by the audience and froze on the spot, leaving the stage quiet for several very awkward seconds."

#4) Spontaneity-Encouraging Practices of Improv

Nine respondents answered the question "Can you share a story or examples of COSM ensemble practices that you believe especially encouraged spontaneity in yourself or other members?" The reported narratives partake of a diversity of themes. Petitjean and Massoth both identify practices that create "permission" to not worry about aspects of performance. Petitjean cites a rehearsal where the cast did

> scenes on the worst/most offensive/vulgar suggestions we could conjure. After the shock of some of the suggestions disappeared, the play felt liberating…[Normally,] Grasping porn star penises and inseminating cows is repulsive as far as scene work goes and thus discourages exploration in the scene, but overcoming our notion of vulgarity led to some amazing work.

Massoth singles out a game where players clap a beat, and describe doing actions in turns, stating that "I was encouraged to say things that wouldn't always work in a scene. You didn't have to worry about continuity or spacial relations: you just said a line and you were done."

Auverset and Dugas both identify practices involving a theme of "rapid changes." Auverset identifies the game Minor Characters, where the scene "follows" any character that exits, writing "You could never get too attached to any one character, and sometimes you would be so caught up in the scene and leave the stage…only to get offstage and remember, 'Shit! It's minor characters!' and head right back onstage with no forethought as to what you were about to do or say." Dugas describes the exercise "Four Corners" wherein one person in the middle answers four different types of questions (Basic math, colors, basic history, personal history) all being asked at once from four questioners, with questions repeated until they are answered. He states

that "This exercise prevents me personally from planning, and there is so much information to keep track of that my planning mind goes away, and I go into strict active listening and rapid response without thinking."

Benelli and Manual give examples of "emotion work," especially with focus on "building relationship between characters" as Benelli puts it, stating, "that heightening of the emotional stakes gives more room for the natural spontaneity to happen between the characters." Manual gives an account of a "no-laugh rehearsal" he led:

> We were getting into a block with some members where the assumption was that improv had to be comedic, and to me that's not real spontaneity because…you're just forcing the joke. So we did a rehearsal where the goal was genuine human interaction and not any kind of comedy…that was a really trying rehearsal on a lot of us, really pushing us outside our comfort zone…we started to get comedic toward the end of the rehearsal, but it was very natural…not all "I'm gonna tell you this joke now!"

Brown expands her criticism of overstructuring from Question #3, expressing preference for "loose structures without many preconceived notions" that "leave us enough flexibility for spontaneous events to occur." Sarton, in addition to citing simply adding more rehearsal time as encouraging spontaneity, offers a counterpoint to Brown, writing:

> I found that my most spontaneous moments came from when I was required to follow some sort of restriction. Being told…that I have some rule that must be followed helped me to be spontaneous by giving me something that I can bend and, at times when the scene required, break. Granted, these restrictions can inhibit the growth of a scene and overall spontaneity, but that's if the scene hangs on the quirk, rather than having a scene with an incidental quirk.

In Brown and Sarton's explanations, we see examples of both less and more structure claimed as encouraging spontaneity.

#5) Spontaneity-Inhibiting Practices of Improv

Nine respondents answered the question "Can you share a story or examples of COSM ensemble practices that you believe especially inhibited spontaneity in yourself or other

members?" The theme of "overstructuring" shows was repeated by both Brown and Manual,

referencing shows with plot-heavy structures where they felt the complex format pushed

performers "into their heads" and to "fall back onto bad habits." Both Auverset and Sarton

single out the structure of "guessing" games (where one performer who is missing information

about the scene must figure out the missing information, led by hints from other characters) as

inhibitive of spontaneity, Auverset noting that though they are "audience favorite game[s]," she

"always felt as if I was trying too hard to follow the clues and that didn't leave too much room

for character work." Sarton argues that "When the game took focus over the actual improv, our

group became less about creating spontaneous art, and more about inspiring cheap laughs." A

guessing game in particular:

> does not promote any sort of scene building, as the scene itself almost always comes pre-built. The improviser has no need to come up with a motivation, as the prime directive is already in place. Even the characters are essentially pre-determined by their quirk…and most of the time, when we play a guessing game, the interpretation of the character is the broadest, most absurd one the improviser can manage.

Dugas offers a variation of this theme with his critique of an exercise where two performers each

present the other with an object and a problem, then each must immediately use their object to

solve the other's problem.

> It seems like spontaneity, and in the moment it is, but if you build that muscle and use it in a scene where you have time to plan something out and wait, then that actually works against the spontaneity of the scene and becomes scripting…Not everything needs to be solved, and thus, I feel like this game which is supposed to promote "spontaneity" really builds poor muscles of "solve everything". And indeed, when I see scenes after this game, more often than not people are solving problems that are really the legs of the scene.

Three other respondents offered stories on the theme of "practices which undermined group

trust and cohesion." While it is not clear they are referencing the same occasion, both Titsworth

and Benelli identify exercises where tennis balls were thrown at performers for "failing" to

accomplish the exercise's objective. Benelli elaborates:

There was an exercise brought in that I believe was originally geared to foster spontaneity…someone would take the stage solo and they were instructed to be entertaining; that was the scope of the instruction, was "be entertaining."…The rest of the troupe was…armed with tennis balls and instructed to throw balls at the person if they were not entertaining enough…It had the opposite effect of what was intended, and people became scared to not be entertaining.

E. Kibodeaux relates two instances of undermined cohesion/trust related to sexualization:

I don't know what brought it on, but we all decided we needed to be more comfortable together, and so somebody took their shirt off, and they decided this was a thing…everyone is ripping clothes off, and I'm fidgeting at the edge of my shirt, and [the one other performer who was not undressing] grabbed my hand…It made us look bad, like we didn't trust them, because we were outnumbered…For the rest of that rehearsal, I felt very picked on, because I kept getting suggestions I was uncomfortable with that maybe I would have been more comfortable with if we hadn't just stripped down.

She narrates another event where her co-director, looking to push the comfort limits of several new members (less than a month with COSM), gives the emotion "orgasm" for one exercise; everyone was uncomfortable and "it just broke the spirit of the rest of the rehearsal."

I couldn't "no" him at that point because we were co-directing, if I "no"d him in front of everybody it would have started a schism…It's good to push your comfort levels, but you really have to know which comfort levels you can push before you push them…It's really gonna put them in their heads and go "are these the people I want to be with?"

The examples given on this theme identify practices that are spontaneity-inhibitive in part because of their relation to interpersonal relationships and organizational structures, leading into themes identified from the last two guiding questions.

#6) Spontaneity-Encouraging Organizational/Relationship Features of Improv

Eleven respondents answered the question "Can you share a story or examples of relationship dynamics and interpersonal behaviors among members of the ensemble that you believe especially encouraged spontaneity in yourself or other members?" A few responses gave examples that reference practices rather than relationships as such, e.g., Auverset's positive

response to a policy that no one ever sit down during rehearsal (unless in a scene), or Massoth's

praise for "someone who doesn't lead or control the direction of the scene; instead, they focus on

the finer details of making the setting or characters come alive." Petitjean emphasizes

"professional trust," elaborating, "many of us are well grounded in improv theory and have the

troupe (not simply themselves) in mind. There is something we all admire about each other and

we seem to be mindful of the troupe's performance as a whole as well as our individual

performances."

However, the overwhelming preponderance of responses were variations on the theme of

"developing friend relationships outside of improv time," though a variety of reasons were given.

Brown emphasizes the "longevity" of both improv and personal relationships among

Silverbacks, which "in itself creates trust." E. Kibodeaux develops this "trust" reason with her

praise of

> getting to know one another as a major part of the group dynamic, it's just as important as
> rehearsal…it helps me trust my own decisions on stage more, because I know that even if I
> make a crappy decision, [someone] will be all like, okay, we're working with that!...There's
> something to be said for improvising with strangers, but it's comforting to know that I can be
> completely random with these people, and have that trust in them…It's not that I know what
> to expect, it's that I know we will find a way through it together.

E. Kibodeaux also associates "comfort" with trust, and this associated theme of "comfort" is

mentioned by several others. Sarton notes that "As a result of our time simply relaxing

together…we feel comfortable enough around each other to trust each other and follow whatever

impulse strikes us." Benelli, though noting that it is not "necessary…to have a good

performance ensemble…it helps, just from a comfort level standpoint" to have close personal

relationships with fellow improviers: "To have that dynamic to where you can open up on stage

really makes it easier to have those deep, relationship based scenes." Ben Zaunbrecher waxes

poetic on the "family"-like character of his ensemble, writing:

Once you are a Stage Monkey, it is a given that you will remain one for the rest of your life. This acceptance, this complete lack of judgment one feels is instantaneous…It's really an astounding sense of comfort—just being who we are and knowing we are family allows you to be free to be your own crazy, silly, serious self without restrictions.

Despite E. Kibodeaux's assertion that "it's not that I know what to expect," both Dugas and Manual associate the value of close personal relationships with insight into each other's practices on stage. Dugas suggests "Get to know the media they watch, the news they consume, the books they've read, their interests…you'll just discover little things that creep in that they can pick up…and become this major plot point or story arc that, without this intimate knowledge of one another, those connections would not have been made." Manual has lived with three fellow COSM performers over the years, and describes how, through that closeness, "We learned each other's tells, and body language, and thinking patterns…it really made us able to divest ourselves of having to concentrate on that, and it was really automatic, and it made our relationships stronger on stage."

Manual connects this theme of personal closeness with another theme addressed by a few respondents to this question, regarding style of and relationship with directors in ensembles:

We've had varying types of directorship styles…more authoritative…more familial, or sometimes just more on the ground level, like, hey, I'm one of you guys…I think that the most effective stuff we've had is when we had very strict, structured rehearsals where we're really there in a business mindset to get something accomplished. But then that's probably facilitated by the fact that later on, we're spending time together…if we weren't getting that recreation time in, that authoritative directorship might not be as effective.

Titsworth offers a narrative of helping another cast member whom he was directing in a jam session attended by the cast:

[He] was having difficulty getting out and onto stage. As the last scene of a set, I grabbed him and brought him out with me leading off with something like "BASE jumping isn't as scary as it seems." The rest of that scene was us discussing the finer points of performing improv in front of an audience including statements to the effect that I, as his director, was there with him and that it was part of my job to be his safety net at this juncture. As things crept along we got closer to the edge of the stage and he became more comfortable - not just

in character but also as a performer in that situation. By the end we jumped off and it was all well and good, but that did a lot to teach him about being fearless on stage and taking risks, and his ability to be spontaneous and take risks significantly improved afterwards.

In contrast, Sarton gives an example of how even a problematic director can have positive influence on an ensemble, citing a director with an "aggressive leadership style" including:

anger whenever anybody questioned one of his ideas, relentless stage hogging whenever he felt the need to say something, and a passive-aggressive attitude towards improvisers he did not like. Perhaps in an attempt to spite him, several of us bonded closely and became better improvisers. While I would never recommend an improv director to be so aggressive and megalomaniacal, having a common enemy did inspire us to work harder in regards to improv.

#7) Spontaneity-Inhibiting Organizational/Relationship Features of Improv

Ten respondents answered the question "Can you share a story or examples of relationship dynamics and interpersonal behaviors among members of the ensemble that you believe especially inhibited spontaneity in yourself or other members?," though two respondents' answers were to disavow any such experience with the COSM organization. Auverset simply writes "Honestly…not really…COSM was overall an amazingly free and spontaneous encouraging experience," while Brown provides contrast with another setting: "I would say the closest I ever was to that was taking improv classes in Chicago, where everyone is trying to impress the teacher. Everyone is basically freaking out, all the time." Massoth and Petitjean give examples that more reference onstage practices than group relationships as such. Massoth is concerned with performers starting or developing a scene with "a set idea" ("forcing" scenes), while Petitjean sees both a performer trying to be the "star" of a scene, and one "scared to embarrass himself/herself," as symptoms of "someone who is not mindful of the scene before they are mindful of themselves."

Other responses give variations on the theme of interpersonal conflict negatively affecting ability to work with others onstage. Not identifying any particular event, Dugas enjoins improviers to "Leave your baggage at the door…If you come to rehearsal mad or bitchy or with an attitude, you are going to kill the atmosphere. When threatened, no one wants to be original and no one trusts anyone to be there for them, they want the stress to be removed…Know your limits and if you can't let your baggage go before rehearsal, just don't show up." Benelli identifies times where "people did not see eye to eye, whether on a personal level or a professional performance level," and

> External drama was introduced into the shows and rehearsals in a way that caused arguments and infighting and bickering…if you find yourself on stage with somebody that personally you just do not like for whatever reason…it can be kind of a natural response, no matter how professional a performer you may try to be, to on some level kind of shut down, and not give everything to that person in the scene.

E. Kibodeaux shares a similar story, in which conflict over finances with her roommate/co-performer:

> Would've been fine if it had just been between me and him… he and I could act brilliantly on stage but as soon as we were off we wouldn't speak to each other. It's that other people in the group kept bringing it up, and bringing it up, and I stopped trusting them on stage, and wouldn't even jump on stage to save them if they needed it, because I knew the gesture would not be appreciated…If I got on stage with them, I was thinking about "what can I do to not offend this person?"…I didn't trust them to not take everything I said personally, and so I would go onstage and be in my head the entire time.

Sarton particularly locates within-group romantic relationships as a catalyst for group conflict:

> Such relationships, in my experience, cause the two members to instinctively pair off in scenes, preventing the two from developing any chemistry with the other group members and making their interactions with the others stilted and awkward. Even worse, when those relationships end…the group would either side strongly with one person, thus alienating the other person, or the group would split down the middle and bad feelings would come between the members for a while.

On the other hand, Manual cites "dynamite scenes" between romantically-involved couples in an ensemble, "even during a bad breakup," and argues that "all relationships are good for improv, because you have something to build off of:"

> Even when I've had difficulty with castmates on a personal level, that tension actually leads to good dynamics on stage. Maybe we're overcompensating. But the only relationship I've had where I feel it harmed our spontaneity was where we were distant, and that I didn't work or spend any time with that cast member…that I didn't *know* them, and I think that affected us poorly.

Overview and Analysis of Emergent Themes

Responses to the first three questions, regarding the experience and observation of spontaneity/nonspontaneity, clustered around two types of theme. Positively associated with spontaneity are themes of "instantaneousness," "being in the moment," and "surprise." A second type of theme positively associated with spontaneity expresses it in terms of "cohesion," "aptness/appropriateness," and "sustained accomplishment." To some extent, these two directions of theme are in tension with each other. Though some narratives show overlap between, for example, "surprise" and "appropriateness" (e.g., Manual's example of the office team and their fantasy online world), others seem to emphasize one direction or another. At least part of this difference appears to relate to the *scope* of the account: Examples emphasizing "being in the moment" type themes tend toward accounts of particular, vividly memorable moments in scenes, while examples emphasizing "appropriateness," "sustained accomplishment," etc., tend toward longer-scale accounts across a show.

Accounts of nonspontaneity typically express themes opposite of these positive associations: "Overplanning" and "repeating what was previously successful" both go against the grain of themes such as "being in the moment" and "surprise," while "forcing scenes" aligns against

"appropriateness" and "sustained accomplishment" (by others). Nonspontaneity is also associated with "personal discomfort," whether discomfort physically, discomfort with scene content, or discomfort with the behavior of fellow performers. However, the positioning of performers toward "comfort's" relationship with spontaneity is ambivalent; note that the examples of "sustained accomplishment" offered by Brown and E. Kibodeaux also include the element of sustaining a character outside of the performers' comfortable range. This ambivalence toward comfort is developed further in later questions about improv practices and ensemble relationships; while many examples are given of situations where discomfort negatively impacted spontaneity, we also have Sarton's and Manual's counterexamples, giving accounts where even sour relationships had a positive impact on improv.

Some themes from questions four and five, about spontaneity encouraging/inhibiting practices, also connect with these clusters. Spontaneity encouraged by "rapid changes" supports "being in the moment" and "surprise," while "emotional and character relationships" encourage the spontaneity of "appropriateness" and "sustained accomplishment." Flexible show/game structures are held to encourage spontaneity, and even more commonly, "overstructuring" of games and shows is commonly held to inhibit spontaneity. This theme against overstructuring also connects to themes of "instantaneousness" and "surprise"—though Sarton again offers a counterperspective with his account of rules and restrictions as spontaneity-encouraging. The theme of "comfort" returns, especially regarding practices which negatively impacted "trust" as being spontaneity-inhibitive. Finally, a theme of "permission" is mentioned, in which practices help a performer experience the "freedom" to try new and different things, related to "unconstrained" valuations of spontaneity.

This theme of "permission" to explore is repeated in questions six and seven, about interpersonal relationships and organizational features, in Titsworth's example of a directorial moment of "creating permission" to take chances. The theme of "trust/comfort" dominated responses to these questions. Close, long-term relationships between performers are viewed as encouraging spontaneity due to their promotion of interpersonal trust and comfort, while inversely, distant relationships or interpersonal conflict are associated with loss of trust and comfort, and so also spontaneity. There is also the somewhat different relationship of "professional trust" identified by Petitjean, to be mindful of the ensemble's show as a whole, which he juxtaposes against both "trying to impress" and "trying not to be embarrassed." Another reason given for the value of close relationships was "learning others' behaviors," which on stage helps support "aptness" and "cohesion."

I identify three clusters of themes emergent from this overview, each strongly associated with or indicative of spontaneity across the sample of narratives and examples. The first marks spontaneity as "being in the moment" and "instantaneous," indicated by "surprise," and supported with "rapid changes" and flexible structure. This cluster also negatively associates spontaneity against "repeating" and "overplanning/overstructuring."

The second cluster relates spontaneity to "sustained accomplishment," "aptness/appropriateness," and "cohesion," all longer-term formulations that view spontaneity less as momentary, and evaluate it more regarding its role in a larger performance. In this cluster, spontaneity is negatively associated against "forcing" scenes, and viewed as supported by emotional- and relationship-centered scenework practices, and by increased personal knowledge of fellow performers.

The third theme-type clusters around language of "trust," "comfort," and "permission." Unlike the other two themes, it is not directly indicative of spontaneity, but features prominently in supporting both other aspects of spontaneity identified above; inversely, the lack of these qualities is held to inhibit spontaneity. Such trust and comfort is promoted primarily through quality of personal relationships, especially *outside* of "improv time" where the group acts primarily in their roles as ensemble performers. Petitjean's identification of the "professional trust" relationship is the only specific given for ways that trust and comfort are actively supported within improv time, but a number of examples are given of "breaches" that violated trust and comfort in this context (the tennis ball exercise, sexualization, interpersonal conflict affecting onstage work, etc.). The theme of "permission" also associates with practices within improv time. These practices support spontaneity through the sense of freedom they convey, and so are somewhat different from formulations of "trust/comfort" as spontaneity-promoting. However, I categorize "permission" themes with this cluster through their similarity in upshot to themes of trust/comfort in narratives of interpersonal relationships, which often couch the value of such relationships for spontaneity in the "freedom" that personal closeness provides to take risks and have deeper emotional connections between characters. Unlike other major themes, no obverse is presented for the theme of "permission" as spontaneity-encouraging; i.e., no examples were given that appear to narrate an occasion where a sense of "lack of permission" is identified with the inhibition of spontaneity.

Considering these themes through the lens of the analytic dimensions for spontaneity identified in Chapter Two and applied to textual improv methodology in Chapter Three, many of the same areas of consensus and divergence emerge. Respondents tend to treat spontaneity as a matter of both behavior and experience, but rarely at the same time, emphasizing either overt

action or their experiential interpretations. Positing of a relationship between the two is not

made explicit, though it is implied in some examples, such as one performer's "surprise" at their

reaction to another performer. To some extent this tendency may be an artifact of the way the

questions are presented, especially with Questions One, Two, and Three worded in ways that

suggest an observed-behavior/individual-experience distinction. Respondents appear to treat

spontaneity as gradable, though only in a very vague way not quantifiable by any particular

measure; certainly, no account above appears to treat spontaneity as an absolute, present-or-

absent quality. This also may be an artifact of the questions' wording, particularly with use of

the phrases "especially spontaneous," "especially non-spontaneous," "especially encouraging

spontaneity" and "especially inhibiting spontaneity" connoting distinctions of degree. Whether

or not resulting from the questions' wording, spontaneity and non-spontaneity are treated as

single-continuum opposites by respondents, with the themes associated with non-spontaneity

generally giving examples reflecting the opposite of spontaneity, rather than a separate

continuum as in the work of David Kipper and his various collaborators (Chapter Two). Themes

regarding the behaviors/experiences indicative of greater or lesser spontaneity are synthesized in

detail through the first part of this section.

Certainly, spontaneity is treated as a normatively positive quality, and not merely descriptive.

Again, this may be an artifact of my own assumptions as reflected in the presentation of

questions. While I made every effort not to steer respondents toward a particular interpretation

of spontaneity, the very status of the questions as intelligible to their respondents implicates the

treatment of spontaneity as foundationally criterial to improv, and thus normatively valuable for

anyone who values improv. As a normatively positive quality, respondents treat spontaneity

primarily as a productive force for effective improv, which in turn may have a productive

influence on the personal relationships among performers—improv is commonly cited as a *reason* for deepening interpersonal relationships—or on their behavior in everyday life. Respondents generally do not address spontaneity outside of the context of improv performance, but certainly nobody indicates a context where spontaneity is less desirable or detrimental, and at least one narrative draws explicit parallels between the value of spontaneity in improv and that in other contexts. Rick Manual, in an aside not attached to any guiding question, states:

> I originally was going to be a tech, and run lights, and I was terrified of being on stage, couldn't maintain eye contact with people, couldn't hold a conversation, I was very shy and reserved, which I think most people who know me now would never guess that…Improv has been great for me to come out of my shell, express myself, deal with people…career skills, just being able to get through a job interview…being able to handle the craziness that comes through the door with aplomb…Improv has been a very strong force for me.

Respondents do not generally appear to treat spontaneity as a potentiality or an end in itself. This may also be a result of question wording, as questions are directed toward specific observed or experienced accomplishments of spontaneity in improv, and the practical/relational means of producing such accomplishments.

Certainly, all respondents who answered Question Four, at the least, view spontaneity as something that can be increased in frequency/intensity for individuals and groups, and give examples of means to do so. No respondent describes inherent subject characteristics as a basis for greater/lesser degrees of spontaneity, except perhaps regarding level of experience with improv, or literal physical discomfort. Nor are environmental features indicated as affecting spontaneity. However, a significant role is ascribed to learned behaviors, especially practical improv skills, and to relational characteristics, especially depth of relationships outside of formal improv time. Though various examples ascribe both spontaneity and nonspontaneity to both individuals and groups, no explication of a relationship between individual and social spontaneity is given. Spontaneity is identified and recognized in both individuals and groups

through the presence of various features interpreted as clustering about the themes of "instantaneousness" and "aptness/appropriateness" discussed above.

Compared to the set of improv methodologists, a relatively unified sense of spontaneity emerges from the above narratives. However, this may be, as I show above, a result of the "positioning" of respondents to cues in the wording of the questions. Future research in this direction may yield a different array of spontaneity-accounts among a similar pool of respondents with reworded questions; however, rewording may in turn implicate different positioning toward spontaneity in provided narratives. For example, removing the continuum-implying "especially" from questions may position respondents in orientation to a more binary interpretation of spontaneity. Crafting several versions of the questions, addressing the areas identified above as potentially influenced by wording, and distributing the versions at random among a similar and larger pool of respondents may offer insight into the degree to which question wording shapes respondents' interpretations of spontaneity and/or choice of narratives. Questions might also be added that specifically prompted an orientation to elements such as the encouraging/inhibiting impact of environmental/situational features or personality characteristics on spontaneity. While these areas are seemingly less significant than the behavior and relationship characteristics, their elision from responses prompted through a deliberately vague sense of "spontaneity" may not indicate that such features are not relevant to practical applications of spontaneity in this community, and prompting them may reveal additional features of spontaneity as a working concept. While my prompting in the questions called for descriptive narratives, certain critical features also emerge from these narratives, implicating many of the concerns raised in Chapter Four. In the final section of this chapter, I consider these narratives through the lens of Critical Narrative Theory, with respect to those concerns and to

ways in which narratives of spontaneity can themselves exhibit features which enable, inhibit, and/or enforce those practices of "contestation, deference, euphemization, or self-censorship" (Myles 893) impacting concrete persons in improv practice.

Critical Narrative Theory and Narratives Judgments of Spontaneity

Narrative as a practice is wrought with opportunities and pitfalls for a critical viewpoint that considers narrative from the perspective of how it enforces, challenges, or reveals relationships and orientation to structures/practices of privilege and oppression. On one hand, the practice of narration has significant liberatory potential. Jennifer Lapum et al. identify storytelling as at the center of practices for a Critical Social Theory class for Nursing students to "conceptualize and interrogate our own positionality within a social justice agenda in nursing" (28). Such storytelling, joined with their poetic practices of presentation, offers "the possibility to cultivate cognitive capacities beyond the rational, but also include emotive ways of understanding human experiences" (29). Reflecting the importance of personal relationships for improv among my respondents, they write that "Social justice in nursing requires an understanding of both self and other and the social structures that shape who we are…embedded in a social justice agenda is developing the capacity *to know* someone…By peeling back the layers of oppression, we begin to see self and other" (40-41).

However, they also recognize the limits and recursive complexity of this approach, going on immediately to note "But these layers and the social world that shaped these layers is also part of us" (41). Gene Combs and Jill Freedman locate their practice of narrative therapy in having clients re-view and reinterpret their own narratives: "rather than viewing people themselves as problematic or pathological, narrative therapists look at the relationship that people have with

problems" (1039). Oppressive narratives are both an individual byproduct and a central tool of hegemony, for

> Modern power, instead of coming from a central authority, is carried in discourses…We don't usually notice the powerful influence of these discourses—certainly not in the way we would notice a public flogging. Modern power recruits us into policing ourselves…We tend to try to live up to dominant discourses, to compare ourselves to what they deem good, or normal, or successful, and to judge ourselves through these comparisons (1038).

Though Combs and Freedman associate oppressive narrative practices more with a macrostructure of dominant discourse, Anne Rawls and Gary David offer an ethnomethodological account of "narrative" that illustrates its problematic role in specific, concrete interactions. In a broad pluralistic society featuring everyday interaction between groups of differing beliefs, shared trust in the mutuality of everyday practices of interaction is essential to shared intelligibility of everyday functional interactions (470). Successful interactions involve

> an other who reciprocates with a self in the doing of a shared practice in such a way that the two share significant symbols requir[ing] that both self and Other be – in just and only the ways that commitment to a particular interaction requires – the "same."…The process of situated interactional "Othering," by contrast, reveals – or constructs – ways in which persons are not "the same" (that is, not committed to the same practices, not committed to one another's performances within a practice, not giving one anOther the benefit of the doubt, not sufficiently competent to perform). This process in turn threatens self and practice and prevents actors from engaging in mutually oriented and intelligible interaction (473).

They understand the breakdown of interactions brought about by failures of trust in shared practices to instantiate not as exclusion from groups, but from those "*situated interactions*" wherein "the essential economic, political and social transactions take place" (474). Such "boundaries of Otherness *within* differentiated societies prevent the very forms of social engagement that the society at large has come to depend on" (475). They summarize the process of Othering as "the speaker now and henceforward rejects any interpretations the hearer may make of them in subsequent turns, while at the same time claiming the right to make interpretations of the Other that the Other is not allowed to assess" (480). The employment of narrative in interaction is a significant practice contributing to this process, for

> narratives represent the beliefs of the individual who is speaking, and may or may not be shared by the Other. Narratives, unlike practices, are shared by members of demographic groups, specific worksites, or institutional memberships, not members of situations…Choosing a narrative account that is unknown or offensive to the Other, and treating the Other's recipiency of the interpretation as irrelevant, treats the Other as the Object of interpretation rather than as a recipient. Far from providing a basis for meaning in situated interaction, the use of narrative – when it is not shared and not open to reflexive assessment–threatens…mutual orientation and trust (480).

Such Othering practices are self-reinforcing, tending toward a "vicious circle" wherein "the stronger the narrative becomes, ironically, the more often interactions will fail because the narratives are invoked. The more often interactions fail, the stronger the narrative accounts will become" (490). Both in specific and repeated interactions, this Othering takes the form of "a process of driving someone outside of practice, either because of problems that emerge over the course of interaction or by invoking excluding categories even before problems arise" (490).

This process is reinforced and enforced through shared narratives which are invoked to exclude the Othered party from taken-for-granted inclusion in the order of shared practices.

Narratives as a practice can thus be seen as both liberatory and problematic, as a means both of enabling and stifling expression, and as a means of both deepening connections and deepening alienation from oneself and from others. Narrative is thus infused with an almost inevitable ethical character that forms one dimension against which recipients of narratives form "narrative judgments." Biwu Shang identifies "narrative" broadly as the telling that something happened, in a particular situation and for a purpose, and "narrativity" as involving the dynamics of both telling and audience response (198). Narrativity calls the audience to both "observer" and "judgment" roles, with the first usually necessary to facilitate the second, but not necessarily leading to it. Judgments can be broadly typologized as relating to interpretive, ethical, or aesthetic judgments (198).

While these categories are intertwined and inseparable in actual practices of narrativity, they reflect real distinctions of emphasis and entrance to narrative judgments, with questions of critical analysis falling toward the "ethical" category. In an ethnomethodological turn, Shang argues that "the rhetorical theorist does not do ethical criticism by applying a pre-existing ethical system to the narrative", but rather "tries to reconstruct the ethical principles upon which the narrative is built" (200). Various "ethical positions" can be posited as the subject of analysis for such reconstructing, identified as "(1) that of the characters within the storyworld; (2) that of the narrator in relation to the telling, to the told, and to the audience; (3) that of the implied author to the telling, the told, and the authorial audience; and (4) that of the flesh-and-blood reader in relation to the set of values, beliefs, and locations operating in positions", as well as "the ethics of the rhetorical purpose", i.e., the ethical character of the specific narrative act itself (201). All

such dimensions may be relevant when making narrative judgments, a process bound up with any critical analysis, of the narratives collected for this chapter. Despite warning against imposition of prior ethical systems, Shang also acknowledges that "the rhetorical theorist does bring values to the narrative"—though these must be subject to questioning and revision in the process of engagement with the narrative itself (200)—and that "*individual readers need to evaluate the ethical standards of individual narratives, and they are likely to do so in different ways*" (202).

In other words, though prior ethical frameworks need yield in rhetorical theorists' judgments to elucidation of the ethical dimensions of the narrative itself, the practical act of individual engagement with a narrative inevitably calls for a "starting point" of ethical consideration on the part of any critical analyst, for the audience's own positioning with respect to values remains an important dimension of any narrative judgment. Indeed, "both narrative progression and narrative judgements constitute the key elements of narrative experience" (208), and narrators must count on audience's practices of narrative of judgment for the intelligibility of narratives. For example, in my set of narratives from Cult of the Stage Monkey, narrators depend on my own practices of narrative judgment to imply the "point" of stories, i.e., what does the story express about their own value-positioning with respect to spontaneity. Accordingly, I will critically assess these collected narratives from a starting point of value-positioning that extends the topics of critical concern raised in Chapter Four: the positioning of concrete bodies to the hegemonic problematics of both groupmind and individual production of spontaneity; the neutralization of bodies and tacit enforcement of ableism; and the critical problematics of the comedy bias in improv.

COSM's Narratives of Spontaneity: A Critical View

Within the set of narratives and themes derived from them can be seen several examples reflecting critical concerns detailed in Chapter Four. One obvious example is the prevalence of "instantaneousness," "in the moment" themes in connection with quick action, frenetic energy, and immediate response, in opposition to "in your head" experience. This aspect of spontaneity runs into the concerns addressed above regarding ableism and capacity for such "instant" response, as well as those regarding the comedy bias to which I address my critiques of "unmindfulness" versus "thoughtfulness" and "joy" versus "*jouissance.*" A second such reflection of established critical concerns can be seen in Elaine Kibodeaux's narratives of sexualization. In her story of group undressing, we have an example of "groupmind"-like practices serving to marginalize some persons while establishing inclusivity among others. Similarly, her experience of feeling unable to "call out" her co-director when the orgasm exercise was introduced, because "no-ing" him would "started a schism," illustrates a problematic case of "the right to say no" being contested in improv practice.

With respect to issues of ableism in particular, the issue is silent from the narratives; none of the respondents addresses ability-based features of themselves or others at all in their accounts of spontaneity (it should be noted that equally absent was respondents' explicit address of their improv experience in relation to gender, race, or other social identity characteristics; even E. Kibodeaux's sexualization narratives are focused on her individual discomfort with sexualization, not with her role as a woman as such in those situations.) However, an interesting trope emerges in connection to ableism through some respondents' use of the language of mental illness in association with spontaneity. Massoth, for example, praises the experience of "the insanity of the moment" in an effective scene, and later gives an example of a non-spontaneous

scene in which he uses "a planned character trait that had worked for me in earlier shows: act completely crazy." Titsworth relates a narrative from improv rehearsal in which he was arrested while "wandering the halls and getting lost in playing a psychotic episode," which while "not for the good," he associates strongly with encouraging spontaneity in his response to Question Four; elsewhere, he titles his seven-character/solo-performer longform the "Schizologue." In these cases, language that is commonly used perjoratively with reference to mental illness (crazy, insanity, psychotic, schizo) is linked in positive association with spontaneity for improv.

However, this positive association is problematic in its appropriation of such terminology. While Essya Nabbali offers many examples of the reappropriation of terms like "mad" among self-identified psychiatric survivors, no such process is at work in improviers' appropriation of such language to describe successful improv. Instead, I would argue that the opposite is at work: such use of language reinscribes the marginalization of mental disability, whether we treat such disability as physiological or socially-constructed or anything in between. Accounts associating effective spontaneity in improv with "craziness," etc., appropriate the exoticized, "taboo," aspects of mental disability, placing them on display in a "safe space" for the gaze of largely hegemonic audiences to be entertained by such simulated performance of "craziness"—a sort of behavioral blackface of broad cultural stereotypes of what "crazy" people are like.

Granted, only a tiny portion of improv portrayals are directly implicated in this process through their presentation of characters marked as "crazy" or mentally ill, and at least some of these portrayals are probably more "honest" in presenting their subjects as *characters* rather than stereotypes whose amusement value is derived from their "craziness"—for example, the performance of an autistic adult character cited by both Auverset and Titsworth. However, a general conceptual association of spontaneity with "madness" in some form does not operate in

improv by serving as an example of, say, the arbitrariness of social constructs of mental disability. Rather, by locating "crazy" behavior in "safe," "obviously sane" performing bodies, such a conceptual association allows for commodification of the display of "insanity"—while "actual" "insane" persons, those socially marked as mentally disabled, are subject to control, ostracization, and medicalization, and their so-called "crazy" behavior constrained and hidden from public view through both self-censorship and formal enforcement.

This same problematic is found in at least one methodologist, Keith Johnstone, who associates loss of spontaneity with fear of being thought "psychotic." This approach, encouraging students to express thoughts they might censor as "psychotic," has great expressive liberatory potential, but does not undercut the basis for students' fears in the first place. It gives students a frame to express "psychotic" thoughts and to learn that this does not mean that they are psychotic themselves. Of course, the same "mad" behavior from a socially-marked "actual" psychotic person—perhaps even on an improv stage—would invite restraint and sanction. Improv performers are invited to appropriate behaviors they deem "psychotic" for entertainment without questioning the basis for their deeming of such behavior as "psychotic." Also left unexamined is the connection of improviers' notions of "psychotic" expression with the concrete experience of actual persons marked as mentally disabled, from whom such interpretations about what is "psychotic" are ostensibly derived. In this linguistic framing, the spectacle aspects of socially-marked mental disability are marked as "spontaneous" and presented to the audience in such a way that their expression is associated with freedom and skill. While other authors did not tie "craziness" in its various forms as clearly to spontaneity, a valuable direction of future rhetorical research on this subject might examine *examples* of effective improv in other methodologists to determine to what extent such language is associated with these examples.

This problematic dynamic with "craziness" is of course also reinforced by improv audiences, who tend to accept "insane" expression within the same "discourse of *enfreakment*" critiqued by Jennifer Eisenhauer for its role in reinforcing normative barriers in ableism generally. Several respondents also implicate the audience more explicitly as a stymying force on spontaneity. In particular, critiques of the comedy bias are implicated in examples where audience laughter is said to reinforce non-spontaneous improv. Massoth's "crazy painter" narrative is one such example, where Massoth acts in a nonspontaneus way that had "worked in earlier shows," i.e., had previously elicited positive audience response (presumably laughs, though he does not mention "laughter" explicitly), *in response to* "dead silence" from the audience. Auverset describes "guessing" games, which she associates with inhibiting spontaneity, as nevertheless "always a good audience favorite." She also associates laughter more directly with reinforcing her "mad-scientist forearm…default panic choice…Maybe it got big laughs the first time and I remembered that?" Sarah Brown also implicates audience reinforcement of a performance she experienced as nonspontaneous: "I found myself falling onto one of my crutches as being a "femme fatale" type of character, which bored me even as I made the audience laugh."

In these examples, audience behavior, as well as performers' own responses to audiences, serve to stymie spontaneity among performers. Through the role of audience laughter, we can see another mechanism of enforcement of improv's comedy bias. Interestingly, the set of narrative examples given by respondents implies a certain level of backlash to the comedy bias in their working concepts of spontaneity, just as with many methodologists. Auverset, Benelli, Brown, Dugas, Manual and Titsworth all cite examples of non-comedic improv in association with experience, observation, or encouragement of spontaneity. In addition, Sarton opposes "making spontaneous art" against "inspiring cheap laughs," and Benelli identifies more serious

work and focus on in-scene relationships as encouraging of spontaneity, while Manual explicitly

narrates a "no-laugh" rehearsal as a spontaneity-encouraging practice. Given the high

preponderance of examples of more "serious" improv, it seems there is a genuine strong

association among these subjects between spontaneity and non-comedic improv. However, as I

addressed in concerns about methodologists' treatment of this subject in Chapter Four, this

preponderance may also mask a reinforcement of the comedy bias as the "normal" of improv, by

marking these examples of non-comedic improv as "exceptional" and "extraordinary," or by

tokenizing non-comedic improv by such practices as a special "no-laugh" rehearsal.

Finally, the single most consistent theme among respondents, that of personal closeness

encouraging spontaneity, can be seen as problematic in light of Rawls and David's critique of

practices and narratives. Despite its value in encouraging spontaneity, such practices do

inevitably lead to exclusionary "Othering" practice with respect to those not "in the ensemble" or

with an unclear relationship to it, as the in-group ensemble develops the sort of shared

"narratives" that operate in one function to establish and enforce membership boundaries—and

thus access to what in-group members view as positive, effective practices of encouraging

spontaneity. This practice of intertwining social and performance relationships, in other words,

can reinforce such "narrative" practices as Rawls and David critique as "Othering", in this case,

shutting down access to transactions of spontaneity through membership boundaries enforced in

part by shared narratives.

Rawls and David would of course advocate an orientation toward *shared practices* rather

than narratives. An interesting case may be seen in one of Jason Petitjean's narratives, where he

cites spontaneity as inhibited when

> working with those new to the improv scene…when my stage partner is only looking out for
> himself/herself…whether the stage partner wants to be the star of the scene at everyone's

expense or perhaps the stage partner is too scared to embarrass himself/herself and thus will not make bold choices, having to work with someone who is not mindful of the scene before they are mindful of themselves makes spontaneity difficult.

Here we see an example of this sort of narrative Othering; Petitjean narrates his stage partners' behaviors as violating the order of shared practices (through "incompetence" with those practices in this case) and, rather than turning to the reinscription of such shared practices to reinstate the shared social transaction, instead narrates the "Other" out of the transaction, as a party who cannot participate in the shared practices—who "makes spontaneity difficult." A similar dynamic can be seen in other respondents' examples of inhibition on stage with partners with whom they have interpersonal conflict or clashing styles of performance. In these examples we see reflections of the conversation in Mary Scruggs and Michael Gellman where Geoffrey describes the offensive and thoughtless behavior of a partner in an improv audition scene, and is rebuked by his former teacher for claiming the partner wasn't "playing a character." The teacher replies "according to you…because you chose to judge his performance instead of responding to what he was creating" (17). Though the teacher agrees that the partner's work was "bad" improv, she reminds Geoffrey that the path to success with spontaneity lies in the return to accepted shared practices—in this case *response* to what is being created—rather than turning to "Othering" practices involving the narrative positioning of an Other as incompetent at improv practices, in the process alienating *both* self and other from the shared transaction of spontaneity-generation through improv.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the rhetoric of spontaneity as expressed in specific narrative examples by a set of individual improviers. The accounts of spontaneity offered in these

narratives, often supported by unprompted explanations from respondents, tended to cluster

accounts of spontaneity around the two themes, in tension to some extent, of

"instantaneousness," "being in the moment," and "surprise," on the one hand, and

"aptness/appropriateness" and "cohesion" on the other. In addition, central spontaneity-

supporting tenets of "trust," "comfort," and "freedom" were couched mostly in accounts relating

to personal relationships among performers, and the ways in which relationships were affected

by improv practices and vice versa. I have provided a broad synthesis of these narratives as if

they were collectively a textual account of improv along the lines of my ideographic-analytic

dimensions of "spontanteity" from Chapters Two and Three. I have also considered how these

accounts include features relevant to critical analysis, and how examples from these accounts

illustrate concerns over power, access to expression, and the rhetoric of spontaneity as discussed

in Chapter Four. Such a grounded account of spontaneity offers insight into the practical self-

analytical process by which improviers "make sense" of "spontaneity" when prompted to give

account of this vague but clearly important and value-laden term for their improv practice. Such

narratives can never offer direct access to "what spontaneity is" for respondents. But they do

help us understand how improviers construct their own working operationalizations of this

important principle that criterially grounds their practice of recognizably doing improv as such.

The very act of prompting these narratives, of course, also constitutes a breach of those

accepted methods of spontaneity, by calling to account in concrete terms something that

functionally operates through methods of blind obedience. Some effects of the "bewilderment"

induced by this breach may have affected the final respondent pool, with at least four potential

respondents who signed consent forms and received the questions never offering narratives, but

all taking the time to reply with variations on the theme of "whenever I try to think of examples,

I just can't do it," sometimes months later. Other respondents whose narratives were included also expressed difficulty in identifying examples.

The breach of prompting examples is itself a component of these narrative acts, itself subject to ethical narrative judgments, as it calls to respondents to account for aspects of their practice that work by being taken-for-granted. Explicit methodologies like those examined in Chapter Three are synthesized from exactly such moments by improviers in concrete practice, who at moments explicitly recognize the organizing practices underlying what they do, and turn to other methods of analysis and account to answer the question "So how are we doing what we are doing?" That it can induce bewilderment is a testimony to the efficacy of such taken-for-granted methods of spontaneity in everyday improv practice. A similar dynamic, presumably, is at work among the other areas discussed in Chapter Two where explicit invocation of a principle of spontaneity is operationalized. Where functional, taken-for-granted methods of blind obedience leave off, methods of analysis, account, and narrative take over. From this leap of breach and recognition, methodology has its origin, as illustrated in these improv narratives from one small corner of one ideographic community in a vast sea of culture that uses principles of spontaneity for different purposes all the time, but rarely notices. Which means they must be working.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Soooo…how is spontaneity done? And what difference does it make?

Well, it still kinda depends on what you mean. But in making the conceptual shift from a realist account of spontaneity to an account that treats it as a social practice, that "what you mean" changes. Realist accounts of spontaneity are brought into the fold of an ethnomethodological perspective, as cases of practices where treating spontaneity as a "real" thing is part of the way that spontaneity functions in concrete social interactions. An ethnomethodological account of spontaneity instead asks how spontaneity is recognized and utilized by social actors in such concrete interactions. As the "what you mean" by "spontaneity" shifts to consider these features of ethnomethodological interaction, so what it "kinda depends on" is actors' orientations toward their shared activity—the "what they are do-ing together." Spontaneity, like other tacit social practices, operates through orientations ranging from blind obedience to purposeful breach. Blind obedience to shared practices might be called the "normal state" of orientation to them, when they are operating effectively and all parties to an interaction share an orientation to what-they-are-doing. But it is in breaches, interactive moments where the effective practices break down and participants experience bewilderment, that such tacit social practices become amenable to be made-account-of.

One method of breaching social methods involving language is through the explicit rhetorical deployment of ideographs. These vaguely-defined but highly normative terms operate by channeling and constraining commitments to action, rather than by having clear shared denotative meaning. Indeed, their contestability is one of their key features, though they are still

associated with methods of blind obedience to hegemonic social structures underlying the practical use of an ideograph in a culture. Shared practical mastery of the methods of acting in blind obedience with reference to an ideographic term is what constitutes an ideographic community within a broader culture. Within an ideographic community, any explicit deployment of the relevant ideograph, even to uphold hegemonic uses, is a form of breach in its disruption of the methods of blind obedience that are criterial for the identity of the ideographic community.

Explicit analysis of the term "spontaneity" is one such breach. In Chapter Two, I identify a number of areas of scholarship where spontaneity is explicitly analyzed, and in some cases, contested. These cases yielded a set of "guiding questions" regarding the various ways that principles of "spontaneity" can be put to use, and the sorts of questions that analyses of spontaneity explicitly or tacitly seek to answer, i.e. (one more time!): Is spontaneity a quality of behavior, or of experience, or of some relationship between the two? Is it binary—either present or absent—or can it be divided into degrees of greater/lesser? If divisible, can it be quantified? What is the relationship between spontaneity and non-spontaneity? What behaviors and/or experiences are indicative of greater or lesser spontaneity? Is spontaneity treated as simply descriptive, or is it a normatively positive quality? If positive, is it a potentiality, a productive force, or a valued end in itself? Can it be increased in frequency and/or intensity in an individual or group? Why would it be valuable to increase it? If it can be increased, how? Is it always desirable, or only valuable in certain contexts? What makes a context more or less appropriate? Are greater and lesser degrees of spontaneity due to inherent subject characteristics, learned behavior patterns, or environmental/relationship characteristics? Is there a distinction between

individual and social spontaneity, and if so, what is the relationship between them? How is it identified and recognized in individuals and groups?

The accounts in Chapter Two provide an array of examples of how such questions are addressed. However, with the exception of psychodrama, in none of these areas is orientation toward the ideograph "spontaneity" necessary for the identity of practices. The practice of improvisational theatre, however, offers a site of investigation where spontaneity is not merely a valued or interesting feature of orientation to practices, but is recognized as criterial by those engaging in improv—i.e., improv performers cannot understand themselves as "doing improv" at all unless they are "being spontaneous," or at least trying to be. The deployment of the term and/or concept of spontaneity in improv methodology texts, and its synchronic association with other terms and with practices, is the sort of breach enacted by explicit analysis. The same is true of narratives offered by improviers when prompted to make explicit examples of their experience and observation of spontaneity and influences on its effective enactment.

In the rhetoric of improv methodologists, the particular role and use of the term "spontaneity" varies widely. For some it is explicitly criterial and analyzed as such. Others background the explicit use of the term, and it emerges as criterial through its synchronic associations with related ideographs of improv. Napier all but absences the term completely, refocusing on improv as the practice of "play." Salinsky and Frances-White treat spontaneity as the foundational skill of improv, but not necessarily something that improv as a broader practice aims for at every moment—a move echoed rhetorically in the structure of Scruggs and Gellman, where the term disappears once Geoff begins the workshop. On the whole, the term "spontaneity" is subject to less conscious explication over time. However, the synchronic associations connected to the term, and the practices of enacting it, continue to change,

indicating that the gradual reduction of explicit attention to spontaneity in improv is not the result of the practical use of the term becoming "fixed" in the analytic days of Spolin and Johnstone. The trend may imply a decentralization of the term as improv methodology becomes more focused on practices that build from spontaneity, but do not necessarily implicate spontaneity themselves. It may also reflect a sedimentation of the criteriality of "spontaneity" to improv's identities of practice, as such criteriality comes to be more and more "taken for granted."

All methodologists agree on the learnability of spontaneity as applied to improv, and share other common themes. Almost all writers oppose spontaneity to "control" in some form, and sometime associate it with "freedom" or "loss of control." Spontaneity is also positioned in opposition to various forms of "thinking." Most writers connect spontaneity with expression of some sense of a "self." All writers directly associate spontaneity either with "play" or with ideographs strongly associated with normative-positive senses of "play."

Some divergence occurs with respect to spontaneity's value—whether it is derived from "freedom," expression of some fundamental "self," or the expression of cultivated skill. Similarly, improv's status as an end in itself, a productive force, or a potentiality is also disputed. While significant overlap exists, different writers give greater primacy to relationship characteristics, learned skills, or inherent subject characteristics as the basis for greater and lesser degrees of capacity for enacting spontaneity. Most writers seem to treat spontaneity as additive from individuals, but Spolin and Halpern et al. treat it as emerging from interaction.

Similarly, when specific examples and narratives of spontaneity and factors that influence it were elicited from my interview respondents, a collective text emerged that indicated features of the "spontaneity heuristic" among this group. These features can by summarized as a tension

between instantaneous, in-the-moment, surprising action/experience on one hand, and apt, appropriate action that coheres through a performance on the other hand. Effective spontaneity is supported by performance practices that are held to encourage these features, and through personal relationships among performers that promote trust, comfort, freedom and permission to take risks.

With respect to both broad principles of spontaneity and specific examples of rhetorical practices among the sets of both methodology texts and narratives, these practical accounts of spontaneity also have critical implications. The way in which "spontaneity" is used rhetorically and recognized/understood in improv practice contributes to structures of privilege and oppression, both within improv and reflecting the larger culture in which improv communities operate. Practical concepts of spontaneity in improv have material impact at the levels of access, representation, and accepted expression for participants in improv.

Among the issues emerging from this perspective are practices of spontaneity that serve to reinforce white-heterosexual-male hegemonic representation and expression in improv, particularly the double-bind in the problematics of treating spontaneity as produced-in-interaction versus treating it as individually additive. The first connects with Amy Seham's critique of practices such as groupmind that reinforce the most easily accessible archetypes, stereotypes, and forms of expression, and naturalize them as "truth" emergent from shared consciousness, ignoring their socially constructed and often hegemonic character. The second naturalizes the standing order of access and expression in improv, and demands that others conform to this order of accepted improv expression. Responsibility for failure is placed on the individuals who fail, but the normative order that sets the terms for failure is left unquestioned, and the ultimate answer to disputes over approaches to improv is the glib capitalistic response

that improviers should make their own opportunities if the established communities aren't working out for them. While, following Seham, I mostly consider this double-bind with respect to women and gender issues in improv, Seham indicates that the same structural problematic is relevant with issues of race, sexual orientation, etc.

Though Seham indicates the power of these homogenizing practices of spontaneity to marginalize other perspectives and experiences, she does not explicitly state that the hegemonic white-heterosexual-male body is treated as the "neutral" body in improv practice. However, I believe this is a reasonable conclusion to draw from her research, and supported by the practice of "neutralizing" bodies in improv methodology. The bodies presented in examples are almost universally neutralized, and thus inevitably hegemonic, but this practice of neutralizing masks a pervasive ableism. Exemplar bodies are treated as neutral, but the examples and accounts of spontaneity presented by methodologists strongly reinforce tacit ableist ideals at least regarding mobility- and sensory-disabilities. Accounts strongly emphasize visual, auditory, and tactile engagement and almost always quick, immediate bodily action, inherently limiting the capacity for spontaneity as recognized in these accounts for bodies that take greater time and effort to communicatively act and react.

Unlike issues of gender, race, etc., which are at least recognized as issues among improviers, even if often addressed thinly and problematically, ableism in improv does not even seem to be considered among the research, methodology texts, and personal narratives that make up my sample of accounts and examples of spontaneity for improv. In the absence of a more critical practice, improviers with disabilities are subject to larger cultural forces of ableism as they are positioned within social discourses of "enfreakment," between perspectives that view them as either pitiable and in need of accommodation or as "heroic" for performing improv. Also of

concern are methodologies and narratives that appropriate the language of mental illness in positive association with effective improv, and in doing so exoticize, idealize and commodify "madness" in improv practice without reference or concern for the experience of persons actually socially marked as mentally disabled.

Such commodification of "madness" is often done in the service of upholding improv's comedy bias, a practice that contributes to the various factors that stymy access, representation, and expression for marginalized groups as discussed above, and which further limits improv's capacity for accepted expression more generally. This bias is recognized and criticized in improv methodology, but is never questioned as the "natural state" of improv. Method-text critiques of this bias tend to reinforce it, by juxtaposing improv categories as "comedy" versus "everything else" and by undermining their own critiques of comedy's limits and pitfalls by consistently asserting that non-comedic approaches are valuable in large degree *because* they ultimately make improv "funnier." Even critiques like Seham's focus on broadening access opportunity to and accepted expression of comedy, without questioning the comedy bias's own contribution to the very social problematics in improv she criticizes. After all, many of the examples and organizational dynamics she criticizes can be read as implicating sexism, racism, homophobia, etc., as a result of their unquestioning orientation toward *comedy*; i.e., the valuation of comedy in improv production can be understood as the ideographic justification for improv practices that Seham identifies as oppressive.

Methodological accounts of spontaneity reinforce the comedy bias in several ways. First, by emphasizing immediacy of action and response, these accounts of spontaneity push improv expression away from emotions and modes of experience that literally *take time* to experience and express, for such forms of expression, when forced into the mold of immediate response,

tend to fold back into comedy through the incongruity of their forced chronemic expression. Similarly, the alignment of "thinking" against "spontaneity" in these accounts forecloses the more "thoughtful" emotions and modes of improv expression. The opposition of "thinking" to "spontaneity" also largely limits improv's potential as a critical medium to satire, employing and critiquing only the most broadly-recognized and -shared hegemonic expressions. More nuanced critical expression is truncated where thought is rejected and comedy valorized, for such deeper critical engagement calls for both thoughtfulness and pain on the part of performers and audiences. Finally, almost all methodological accounts of spontaneity associate it strongly with behavior and experiential states that are emotionally positive, evocative of laughter, and tending toward frenetic energy, in the process dissociating spontaneity from the vast array of human experiences and ways of acting that do not readily fit this mold. This tendency is also reinforced through the use of examples in methodology texts, which are almost uniformly comedic in tone. Interestingly, the set of narratives collected from respondents showed unusually heavy emphasis on examples of non-comedic improv in association with spontaneity, compared to method texts. While this may mark a backlash to the comedy bias, it may also be read as reinforcing the comedy bias as "normal," by marking such non-comedic improv as "extraordinary" or "heroic" for overcoming improv's "natural" comedic orientation.

In challenge to the comedy bias, I offer two conceptual shifts in improv's orientation toward spontaneity. The first, from "unmindfulness" to "thoughtfulness," seeks to understand "thinking" not as pejoratively opposed to spontaneity, but as itself within the field of shared social behavior that also includes emotion and overt action. Certain cognitive behaviors can indeed be reasonably viewed as destructive of spontaneity in improv, just as certain overt behaviors can; but thinking is not in itself any less spontaneous than the behaviors that method

writers oppose it to, and bringing it within the fold of recognized "spontaneity" opens up vast potential for expression and critique stymied under an improv perspective that treats thought as inherently antithetical to spontaneity. The second shift, from "joy" to "*jouissance*," challenges the centralization of modes of behavior associated primarily with "play," "fun," and "pleasure" in operationalizations of spontaneity for improv. The centrality of this association tends action recognized as spontaneous in improv toward gleefulness, "randomness" of behavior, quick action, bizarreness, and exaggeration. In contrast, orientation toward "*jouissance*" in association with spontaneity invites a richer and more diverse "economy of pleasure" in improv expression, recognizing deep, rich experience—including of sadness, fear, anger, injustice, oppression, and so on—as equally spontaneous. Such a sense decentralizes the playful freneticism of "joy" in recognizing spontaneity, but also folds such challenging emotions and expressive modes into the realm of joy. Such experiences are *meaningful* experiences, *meaningful* opportunities for expression, spaces of opportunity for improv to go beyond mere "pleasure" to the deeper—and not at all necessarily pleasurable—experience of en-joy-ment representative of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's flow.

Upshots

From this analysis of spontaneity as a social rhetorical practice, I hope to offer several key takeaways for academic scholars and for improv practitioners. For academics, I first call attention to the theoretical connections I draw between ethnomethodology, ideographic rhetorical theory, and critical theory. As discussed above, the centrality of concrete description of situated practices in ethnomethodology seems at first glance to be at odds with the analytic focus of rhetorical theory. However, I strongly advance that concrete rhetorical practices are very much

within the realm of ethnomethodology. Indeed, rhetorical analysis is itself a situated concrete social practice, no less subject to being viewed ethnomethodologically for being carried out most visibly through the production of artefactual texts distant from the original situated observations and experiences that occasioned them.

Similarly, ethnomethodology's injunction toward a strict descriptive approach seems a poor match for critical approaches that start from or turn toward analyses of power as a structural social phenomenon. But again, such critical approaches are well within ethnomethodology's purview, though it would begin with concrete description rather than recognized social structures of privilege and oppression. Power, after all, is a *practice*, engaged in through rhetorical behavior and everyday social interactions. Critical approaches can be themselves treated ethnomethodologically, as social practices of analysis and power in much the same way as rhetorical analysis. But ethnomethodology also has much to offer to critical theory in the form of an approach that begins with concrete description of rhetoric and social interaction, and describes power as *practical accomplishment* of privilege and oppression. While a few writers have developed connections between these theoretical approaches, I would call on others following my work to continue this development, and to more consciously use these differing approaches to complement each other.

I also call for increased awareness and communication among the divergent areas of scholarship that use spontaneity as a heuristic or operationalized principle. As noted in Chapter Two, a wide number of fields use spontaneity in this way, but with few exceptions, none of these sources ever cite or seem aware of the others. Analysis of spontaneity is provincialized into various scholarly ideographic communities, each operationalizing the term more or less independently and for their own purposes. As far as I know, this dissertation is the first work to

recognize spontaneity as a shared but divergent ideograph, and to identify practical and conceptual connections among disciplines that use it this way. Surely, dialogue between these disciplines would help all inform each other by offering new perspectives on their shared ideographic term "spontaneity."

Extending this point, I would also call for consideration of the practical use of "spontaneity" in areas beyond those I have collected. My sample included only explicit analyses of the term, i.e., breaches. Far more results of the initial search were not included because their use of "spontaneity" was done unproblematically, i.e., with a stance of blind obedience to the practical shared methods of using and recognizing the term in the context it is deployed. To ask "what do you mean by spontaneity?" of such uses would be to breach the methods allowing the term to be deployed as something of which competent members of the ideographic community can say "you know what I mean." Nonetheless, accounts of the practical use of the term "spontaneity" can be derived from such unproblematic examples through descriptive analysis of their concrete uses and synchronic associations, as an emergent order that makes such unproblematic use of "spontaneity" possible in the relevant ideographic communities. The list of questions I synthesize from examples of explicit analysis in Chapter Two provides a helpful starting point to guide other researchers in describing such emergent orders of spontaneity as an everyday rhetorical practice.

More broadly, my general approach in this dissertation of shifting the ground of analytic discussion of spontaneity from a realist to a practice-based view may offer a helpful theoretical direction for making sense of other vague but value-laden terms. By treating use of the term "spontaneity" as an ideographic rather than descriptive practice, we can sort out the wide range of uses it applies to by refocusing on how the term works as a practical method and/or

recognized accomplishment. While all ideographs of course have a "descriptive" component in their diachronic histories that establish the ideograph's range of recognizable uses, this description is subject to challenge and change through social practice. Unlike descriptive terms, such challenges do not so much alter the meaning of the ideograph as instead expand it among more and wider fields of contestation over its power to shape and constrain commitment.

Argumentation or analysis of the "correct" or "appropriate" meaning of an ideograph (a realist perspective, however tacitly) is part of the social contestation process by which ideographs thrive; when social contestation over the "meaning" of an ideograph ceases, the term effectively becomes fully descriptive in practice, and ceases to be an ideograph. This social contestation need not take the form of direct conflict between parties or ideographic communities over differential ideographic practices. While such overt conflicts provide the most visible examples for researchers, I would argue that social "contestation" over the meaning of an ideograph is overwhelmingly grounded in the simple fact of difference between ideographic communities. Different communities share the same resource of an ideographic term, but have different purposes and practices for their use of the term in concrete interactions among members of an ideographic community. This creates inherent "conflict," but typically in the form of everyday breaches that generate "confusion," "bewilderment," and the "need-to-make-account-of" a shared situation when ideographic practices are not shared, or when they break down. But within ideographic communities, ideographs are used effectively and unreflexively, except in the rare occasions of breaches of explicit deployment or analysis.

The question for ethnomethodology is how both unreflexive use and breaching are accomplished through social practices within and between members of ideographic communities in concrete interaction. Artifacts of rhetorical practices are one such concrete interaction. The

practice-based approach I here apply to the term "spontaneity" has much potential for researchers seeking a deeper understanding of the "meaning" of ideographic terms, for such meaning emerges not through "accurate" descriptive analysis, but rather precisely in the dynamics of differential concrete practices for "making use" of the shared term by varying ideographic communities. The use of "spontaneity" may also be subjected to deeper critical analysis beyond the field of improvisational theatre where I have considered it here, by the same approach. For example, what practices of power, privilege, and oppression are emergent from the rhetorical use of "spontaneity," and the social practices for recognizing it, in the fields of politics or cultural theory?

Finally, I would like to call critical researchers' attention to the challenging dynamics posed by what ethnomethodology understands as practices of blind obedience. The term is unfortunate in many ways: with its ableist language, and its implications of ignorance and lack of agency. However, the term is not pejorative in its ethnomethodological function. Indeed, it is viewed as a practice, fully agential, and indeed foundational in accomplishing interaction. Shared practices *allow* for blind obedience, rather than blind obedience compelling shared practices. Critiques of hegemonic social structures tend to treat hegemony from the latter perspective, whereby the "automatic response" to ideographs and other practices upholding hegemony is viewed as involving ignorance and loss of agency. Ethnomethodology, on the other hand, views practices of blind obedience to shared structures as an *accomplishment* by social actors who are highly competent in such practices—if they were not, such interactions would swiftly break down under breaches.

Viewed from a perspective of power, privilege and oppression, such accomplishments are often highly problematic, needless to say. But these exact same methods of blind obedience also

allow for the accomplishment of all manner of everyday social orders by which people's needs are met—for food, shelter, affection, respect, integrity, and on and on. Spontaneity is a special case of a practice for which blind obedience is criterial for the identity of practices. However, in a very real sense *all* practices are like this; while blind obedience may not be criterial as such in most other areas, it is foundational to the ongoing shared functioning of every social order. After all, from an ethnomethodological perspective, *awareness* of practices by participants practicing them is the most fundamental form of breach, the most basic indication that shared practices are breaking down. And as Anne Rawls and Gary David explain (Chapter Five), it is in the breakdown of shared practices that participants are mutually "evicted" from concrete social orders of interaction, creating the ground for segregation and oppression. It is in the breach that practices change—good thing we also have practices for negotiating changes of practice—but not always for the better, from a critical perspective.

Moreover, such methods of blind obedience are themselves integral to all sorts of social practice a critical perspective would likely view as positive. Spontaneity in improvisational theatre, for all the problematics I identify above, is nonetheless something I would argue to the grave is extremely positive, and rife with critical and liberatory potential and accomplishment. And for all the problematics of blind obedience to hegemonic practices, it is also true that there are vast ideographic communities whose members have an equally automatic response of negative reaction to practices they recognize as "sexism," "racism," etc. Not that this doesn't have its own problems; there are obvious reasons for encouraging greater reflexivity by all about ideographic practices that challenge hegemony, as well as those that support it. But it would be hard to argue against the value of blind obedience in such cases from the perspective of David Coonan's "materialist rhetoric." I encourage critical researchers to take these offerings from

ethnomethodology into consideration, and to see what insights can be gained from examining how methods of blind obedience operate toward critical and liberatory ends, as well as oppressive ones.

This dissertation also offers several key takeaways for improv practitioners and teachers. First, I would like to call attention to the *variety* of spontaneities alluded to through their differential treatment in various texts and narratives. Despite its shared criteriality for improv practices, spontaneity is associated with many different values, roles, practices, and operationalizations amongst concrete improviers, as evidenced by the variety only among method texts, where a great deal of practical synthesis and selection of uses of "spontaneity" has already occurred. Due to both its central criteriality and its special relationship with blind obedience, spontaneity has been largely "taken for granted" in improv even as it looms large over the concrete ways that improviers and audiences engage with improv. However, as I have shown in both rhetorical and critical analysis, operationalizations and practices of spontaneity have consequences and possibilities, and these emerge as differences in improviers' practical relationships with spontaneity. I would encourage improviers to give more awareness to their own practices of how they recognize and do spontaneity, and the consequences of their own tacit operationalizations: how does your own relationship with spontaneity enable and limit you as an improvier, and how does it affect others with whom you perform? I would also encourage improviers who have taken this first step to go further, and consider experimenting with "spontaneities" in their practices—to treat spontaneity not as a given, but as a differential, indeed manipulable dimension of improv practice, where experimentation and exposure to varying approaches to spontaneity can expand and enhance improv skills and reveal new possibilities for practices. These same comments apply, of course, to improv ensembles and organizations.

In the process, improviers should also recognize that spontaneity as concrete improv practices involves power relationships. Our practical methods of recognizing and enacting spontaneity in improv have consequences, in the ways I have described above and no doubt in others, and our spontaneity practices both challenge hegemony, and also uphold and reflect it, in complex ways. Spontaneity is rightly championed and celebrated by improviers, but let us not forget it has a dark side, and can be used as a practice to exclude and silence as well as to express and connect. In my call for greater reflexivity about spontaneity by improviers, I also advocate that this reflexivity include honesty and dialogue about our spontaneity practices with respect to this dark side. In particular, we should address spontaneity's implications for the issues discussed above: Its role in differential demographic access, representation, and expression in improv; its problematic relationship with ableism; and its deep association with improv's comedy bias. The strong association of spontaneity with personal relationships that emerged in Chapter Five's narratives is also a double-edged sword, operating through practices of exclusion as well as connection.

The short of it is, if we take these contrasting analyses and critiques seriously, we are caught in a quandary as improviers. We need to be able to take spontaneity "for granted" to accomplish improv. Yet only by not taking-it-for-granted can we address the problematics emergent from our spontaneity practices, and create new possibilities for ourselves as improviers by exploring the *range* of spontaneities—to really make spontaneity something we *do*, not just something that happens to us when the moment is right. I offer no solution. But I also argue it would be a great step forward for improv, recognizing that we're playing this game anyway, to go ahead and really play it.

Directions for Future Research

Like all research, this dissertation is but a start. Future research would start by expanding the scope of the studies above, including more improv method texts and study of similar texts such as the many applying improv principles to business practices. Study on narratives of spontaneity can also be greatly expanded through a larger interview subject pool, or one drawing from a greater diversity of individuals and improv organizations. Manipulation of question wording to assess its positioning effects would also be informative; I identify a few specific examples in Chapter Five. In addition, this same template of questions can be easily edited to apply to other groups or social practices, creating a standard interview tool for assessing senses of spontaneity in settings beyond improv.

At the risk of reifying the comedy/everything-else binary in improv, I also call for further research into explicitly non-comedic improv, i.e., improv that explicitly takes something other than comedy as its expressive aim. This has long existed in such forms as Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (which also more fully integrates cognitive action and critical thought), but in practice these forms are exploratory and pedagogical; the performance is a means, not the end. Attention to such forms in the improv tradition this dissertation focuses on has been scant, and my impression is that such practices are rare in improv, even as scripted forms readily balance comedy productions with drama, romance, mystery, fantasy and myriad other modes and genres. I would first call simply for the gathering of examples of improv that explicitly ignores or challenges the comedy bias, whether long-term ensemble practices or "experiments" by ensembles working primarily in a comedy mode. Drawing further from these examples, we may offer practical insight for improviers seeking to challenge the comedy bias, asking such questions as: How do ensembles working in non-comedic modes identify and recognize their expressive

aims, and why? How are these aims enacted and enhanced through improv methods? How is successful accomplishment operationalized and recognized? How do the expressive methods of such ensembles interface with and react against "traditional" improv practices oriented toward comedic production?

Given its thorough elision in the literature I have considered, I also call for explicit research into improv, disability, and ableism. The obvious place to start here would be to ask improvers who identify as disabled about their experiences with improv, fellow performers, and audiences through this lens. Also valuable would be to research the experiences of improvers who do not identify as disabled regarding working with those who do. It is likely that many improvers have never performed with a self-identified disabled person, and of course, a wide spectrum of disability exists, so the experience of those who have is likely to be highly limited in scope. Interviewing improvers who do not identify as disabled about their reactions to the prospect of performing with persons identifying with various forms of disability would doubtless be revealing for this issue. Given improv's problematic commodification of "madness," I would also encourage such research to attend to forms of disability identified with mental illness.

Given the narratives' strong emphasis on personal relationships among improvers affecting spontaneity, I would encourage more attention to this aspect of improv by researchers, improv method writers, and practitioners alike. The interpersonal aspects of improv are little discussed in improv methodology; these texts focus on "onstage" behavior and address improv problems through improv practices. Little consideration is given to the practical interpersonal workings of an ensemble: the taking on of roles and organization of influence, managing personal conflict between members, negotiating divergent visions or approaches, or simply how to be friends as well as improvers. Not all of the shared practices that hold the improv together are *improv*

practices per se; an ensemble's improv practice is founded on interpersonal and organizational practices that both influence and emerge from onstage improv behavior. I advocate that improv methodology writing, in particular, undertake a deeper look at the interpersonal dynamics of improv and how these are related to onstage practices and outcomes.

Finally, I would like to call for more research and methodology that considers improv from the perspective of the audience. My analysis of spontaneity above has been highly performer-centric, but many, probably most, improviers would argue that improv also doesn't really become improv without an audience, even if that audience is only fellow ensemble members in rehearsal. Treatments of the audience in improv literature are thin, from Spolin's inviting but ethereal audience as "co-experiencers" to the nebulous concepts of audiences as an abstract consuming body that "wants something," to which improv practices are shaped as a practical response to the problem of drawing an audience, a requisite for the performance as end-in-itself. Many improviers and improv directors and teachers speak throughout the literature, but nowhere have I found a contributory voice that speaks primarily from the perspective of an audience.

Improv audiences are variously treated as entitites to be tolerated, appreciated, or educated, but an ethnomethodological view treats audience members as fully involved, independent actors in the social transaction of an improv show, highly competent in their own methods of involvement. These methods go beyond generic cultural "good audience behavior" and overt participation like giving suggestions, and involve all the methods involved in *experiencing-a-performance-as-an-improv-show*, interpreting behaviors by performers and other audience members through this lens and responding accordingly. Among other aspects of performance, this lens involves reading the performance as criterially spontaneous, with methods for recognizing spontaneity and its breach in this context. Improv method writers, and myself in this

dissertation, have largely ignored the audience in assessing spontaneity, viewing spontaneity through the lens of improv practitioners. However, audience members, including those with little or no experience in improv, of necessity still have methods for recognizing and interpreting spontaneity in improv, almost certainly with methods emergent from their methods of treating "spontaneity" in other social settings. Future research on spontaneity in improv should include this perspective, and ask audience members about their own practices for recognizing spontaneity. Improv methodologists may also take advantage of this perspective, going directly to audience members to ask how they recognize and identify other valued qualities of improv.

Curtain

So that's a few ways spontaneity gets done, a few ways it gets used, a few connections it has with other things. It's still extraordinary; a certain antiscientific "magic" that resists description seems to be part and parcel of doing spontaneity, however much we operationalize it. It's still pervasive and ignorable, precisely because we are so good at doing it. It's still slippery, even when you look for it where everybody knows it has to be. It is still valuable and enticing; it also still poses real problems and concerns. But we now have a conceptual framework for spontaneity that allows us to watch the slipperiness slip, a lens that allows us to view spontaneity not as frozen identifiable moments but as a process and practice that changes through concrete social interaction, whose slipperiness is no small part of what makes it usable in the methods of the social actors who do it. The taking-for-granted of that slipperiness is what allows us to do spontaneity in the first place; in the breach of that taking-for-granted, by asking "so *how* do we do spontaneity?" we find the methods by which we may begin to accomplish knowing-what-we-were-doing-in-the-first-place.

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