

**Offer, Accept, Block, Yield:
The Poetics of Open Scene Additive Improvisation**

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This thesis was submitted in fulfilment of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
at

**The University of Sydney
2006**

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge with thanks the help and support of the following:

My supervisor Dr. John Hughes, whose continual guidance, encouragement and friendship helped me through the sometimes difficult process of this study; and my current assistant supervisor Dr. Michael Anderson, whose pragmatism has helped me focus on the study's priorities.

I would also like to thank several people for their helpful comments and feedback along the way: Dr. Roslyn Arnold; Dr. Paul Dwyer; Dr. Robyn Ewing; Dr. Rod Gardiner; Dr Len Unsworth and Dr. Richard Walker.

I also would like to acknowledge the collegiate support of PESSA in providing a forum for discussion and cross-fertilisation of ideas during post-graduate research, essential for part-time graduate students.

Most of all I would like to thank the improvisers themselves ('Xena', 'Yaron' and 'Zachary') for their wonderful efforts at providing such high quality data for the research.

Declaration

I certify that the material in this MPhil research thesis, except where otherwise acknowledged in the text, is entirely the work of the Researcher, Yanis Garrett, and has not been previously submitted towards a higher degree at any other university or institution.

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Note: All unacknowledged references beginning '1981' refer to Johnstone, Keith (1981) *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*, Methuen, London. This text is sometimes referred to by other commentators as Johnstone, 1979. This thesis makes reference to the 1981 revision of the original 1979 text.

Abstract

This single case study examines the way that Johnstone's (1981) Impro 'Poetics' are being used in the contemporary practice of Open Scene Additive Improvisation (OSAI). Johnstone's Poetics have become a ubiquitous part of contemporary drama improvisation parlance,¹ yet they have never themselves been the subject of any academic examination. This study attempts to fill that void by looking at their use in Open Scene Impro, the purest form of theatre improvisation (since OSAI relies on no structures other than the audience suggestion around which to improvise a 'Scene'.)

To do this, the research analysed seven OSAI Scenes performed by 3 undergraduate student improvisers at the University of Sydney in July 2003, and looked at the ways in which the actions that Johnstone's Poetics describe are actually being used. Looking closely at Scene segments, the study identifies a number of features: the ways that Offers are used to initiate, re-initiate, confirm or redirect meaning across five identified fields; the ways that Accepts temper these meanings; the productive use of Blocking in a Scene; and many other functions. It was also found that in-Scene negotiations about definition of situation became a subtextually enmeshed part of the Scene's meaning (often in Phases of improvisers' conflicting Endowments), while the predictive and framing control of narrative-indexing Offers ensured that character roles became defined early on in all Scenes. Overall, the study's analysis dissects each of the Poetics to show that improvisers use them for a number of major purposes crucial for the reality, forward-movement and coherence of a Scene to obtain.

The study concludes by elucidating how the nine main Poetics (Offer, Endow, Justify, Advance, Extend, Reincorporate, Accept, Block and Yield) serve these purposes. These purposes are then abstracted into the TOE Model, which in turn forms the basis of a proposed dynamic and holistic model for understanding OSAI at each moment of its (re-)creation. The ultimate aim, beyond the reach of the present study, is to be able to understand an Open Scene's every moment, and each moment's reference historically backwards, and, to some degree, predictively forwards in time. To this end, the fundamental dynamic of contextualised giving and receiving in OSAI is morphed into a Taoist energetic model, a "Tao of Impro", along with the notion, derived from Mandelbrot, of 'cybernetic semantic iteration', by which information seems to get processed in Open Scenes. The educational implications of these models are then sketched, and future directions for research in OSAI pointed to.

¹ a point made in Young, 2001

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