Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter, the research area (1.1), aim (1.2) questions (1.3) and limits (1.4) are defined, within the broader philosophical research framework (1.5).

1.1 Subject of the Research

This study looks at theatre improvisation. It uses a single case study of an Open Scene Additive Improvisation (OSAI) performance in order to examine the way nine of the Impro ‘Poetics’ derived by Keith Johnstone (1981) are currently being used in OSAI’s contemporary practice. These Poetics (Offer, Endow, Justify, Advance, Extend, Reincorporate, Accept, Block and Yield) have become a ubiquitous part of contemporary drama improvisation parlance, yet they remain unstudied from an academic perspective.

1.1.1 Additive improvisation

Additive improvisation relies on the principle of give and take that lives at the centre of all communication, transposed to a fictive reality cast on stage. Johnstone calls his method ‘additive’\(^1\) because it allows each improviser to ‘add’ to the contributions (or ‘Offers’) of previous improvisers without contradicting those earlier Offers. In this way improvisers balance the group-individual problem: they build the Scene through collaboration on stage\(^2\), and yet assert their characters’ realities freely and independently.

Additive improvisation is thus accretive in nature, building up realities, situations, locations and characters over time through individual contribution, and weaving those elements through the vectors provided by the narrative and character objectives. However the ‘play’ that is created is multi-authored: the narrative has no single

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\(^1\) Johnstone, 1981, p.27. Johnstone’s term for this form has also been referred to as ‘pure’ improvisation (by himself, 1981, p.27; O’Neill, 1995), ‘spontaneous’ improvisation (Foreman, 1998), Improv (the American favoured term, eg see www.improv.com), or its later incarnation as ‘Theatresports’ (Pierce, 1991; Johnstone, 1999; Young, 2001).

\(^2\) a kind of ongoing fictively-negotiated dramatic consensus, a negotiation that becomes in some measure a part of what every Scene is ‘about’
authorial voice, since no improviser has overall steering of the scene. In response to previous Offers, different improvisers will tend to steer the scene at different times.\(^3\)

OSAI’s accretive quality follows from the fact that what has happened previously becomes established as part of the scene’s reality and history, and thus the Scene thereon must proceed from those initial Offers\(^4\). An improvised theatre piece is limited by the system requirements of everyday human interaction: open conversations have a history within themselves and have their own internal organisation and structure, and as a corollary, exist in the participant’s memories as they progress\(^5\). Thus memory plays an equally if not more crucial part in the creative construction of a Scene.\(^6\) Additive improvisation is Johnstone’s way of reflecting these accretive, self-regulating features of normal conversation, to recreate and replicate its naturalism\(^7\) within the Scene\(^8\).

The ‘improvisation’ part of Johnstone’s additive improvisation calls for personal creativity and spontaneity from the actor. The longest chapter in Johnstone’s seminal work (1981) is dedicated to examining the well-springs of the creative unconscious\(^9\), and many of his exercises are aimed at exploring this level of the mind and facilitating its creative expression on stage\(^10\). Johnstone asserts that successful improvisation should not aim for a neat final product, but be used as a method for actors to get past socially imposed psychological blocks, which negate or shut down what is deemed challenging or unsafe to one’s normal sense of reality\(^11\), namely, the active imagination. Within the safe confines of an Impro theatre stage, actors are free to

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\(^3\) It would be an interesting and highly rewarding study to examine exactly when and how this is done, that is, who takes over the steering at what points and to what extent, and then how that is relinquished and the ‘baton handed on’. However space and the parameters of this study do not allow that investigation to be made here.

\(^4\) 1981, p.97

\(^5\) Tannen, 1990

\(^6\) The balance between memory and creative spontaneity is urged as a topic for further study in the field of OSAI, but is not examined here.

\(^7\) Johnstone eschews strict naturalism and realism (1981, p.26-7), and reinterprets Stanislavski’s meaning of these terms, in order to privilege the free play of the child-like imagination (1981, p. 46-7). This seems a logical position, since the imagination is also part of human ‘reality’.

\(^8\) 1981, p.33

\(^9\) 1981, pp.143-205

\(^10\) 1981, pp.75-108

\(^11\) 1981, pp.33, 55
accept from their unconscious mind content which is usually banned as absurd or psychotic (1981, p.83).\textsuperscript{12} Mask work can assist this.\textsuperscript{13}

Additive improvisation, in its various forms, is practiced globally, and, it has been argued, is the most globally predominant form of improvisation since the Commedia dell’Arte (Schwarz, 2001).\textsuperscript{14}

1.1.2 Games and Exercises

Since Johnstone (1981), there has flourished a vast array of Impro game books that focus on an equally burgeoning array of games and exercises.\textsuperscript{15} They are generally aimed at facilitating various elements and skills in the additive improvisation process, and while some of these exercises originate from Johnstone, others have been developed by other practitioners elaborating on Johnstone’s work.\textsuperscript{16} Some of these exercises include games for getting people

- to make and accept Offers\textsuperscript{17} (name game, misname game, present game, it’s Tuesday),
- to tell stories (present game, it’s Tuesday, word at a time story, spoon river, sentence at a time story),
- to explore emotion (emotional roller-coaster, emotion transfer, emotional replay),
- to create effective, longer narratives that reincorporate Offer (typewriter, space jump, film guide),
- to establish scene basics quickly (death in a minute),
- to physicalise (expert double figures, slo-mo commentary, 3 levels)

\textsuperscript{12} In classes, he frequently lowers his own status as the teacher (and physical level, by sitting on the floor), to allow students to believe that there is no judge or monitoring figure, and thus trust their own inner well of creative impulses.

\textsuperscript{13} This is the reason Johnstone conflicted with George Devine at the Royal Court theatre in his free use of the Commedia masks for this purpose, rather than remain within Commedia’s traditional role boundaries and functions.

\textsuperscript{14} Comments duplicated in www.improland.com, and www.theatresports.com

\textsuperscript{15} as Young (2001) has noted

\textsuperscript{16} many of these are in Pierce (1991), or listed on the Impro web ring.

\textsuperscript{17} 1981, pp.100-5, and see 1.1.6 below

\textsuperscript{18} 1981, pp.130-3
• to Justify\textsuperscript{20} (Space jump, sculptures),
• to establish and develop character (spoon river, typewriter, subtitles),
• to improve spontaneity (spit-fire, playbook, Verbal chase\textsuperscript{21}),
• to explore status (master-servant\textsuperscript{22}, status charades\textsuperscript{23}, status switch, status endowment),
• to improve memory (scene in reverse)

and so on. All of these games and exercises focus on particular skills needed in the additive improvisatory process.

1.1.3 Open Scene Impro

Open Scene Impro, although sometimes categorised as a game\textsuperscript{24}, has none of the narrower boundaries of the games and exercises, instead requiring students to freely develop a well-made Scene\textsuperscript{25} around a single audience suggestion. That is, improvisers collaboratively ‘write a play’ on stage as they perform it, bringing together creation and performance in the moment.\textsuperscript{26}

Pierce (1991) defines Open Scenes as

\textsuperscript{19} called ‘Expert’ in 1981, pp.126-8
\textsuperscript{20} See 1.1.6 below
\textsuperscript{21} 1981, pp.128-30
\textsuperscript{22} 1981, pp.62-3
\textsuperscript{23} A popular game among high school students, involving a person who leaves the room and returns to figure out the pecking order of a group of characters in a scene.
\textsuperscript{24} See eg. Pierce (1991, p.31)
\textsuperscript{25} The reference to the work of Augustin Eugène Scribe and his notion of the \textit{pièce bien faite} or “well-made play” is here apposite, itself derived from the Aristotelian paradigm and its three unities (see section 2.4.2 below)
\textsuperscript{26} Picking up on a sentence in Johnstone (1981, p.27) Foreman calls Johnstone’s method ‘pure’, and perhaps it could be argued that Open Scene Impro is the purest version of pure improvisation, since there are no externally guiding effects. See also Meyer (2005) and Gell (2004).
...scenes which allow free improvisation. They are not played within
game structures. Players begin scenes without specific requirements.
Sometimes we call these scenes, ‘scenes from nothing’. 27

The reference to ‘nothing’ is pertinent to the discussion of Johnstone that follows.

Whilst an Open Scene indeed has no ‘specific requirements’ and is outside ‘game
structures’, it can make use of a range of acting styles (melodrama, naturalism, satire)
and genres (drama, mystery, horror, western, action) 28, borrowing freely from the
pantheon of theatre styles and routines. At a deeper level, many of the stories told
through the Scenes conform to traditional narrative structures, involving objectives,
obstacles, and heroes and helpers. 29 In this sense, OSAI comes across as both a
profoundly post-modern form of theatre improvisation, and a profoundly conservative
one. Nevertheless, the main focus must remain squarely within the traditional, almost
dramatic principles of the ‘well-made play’ 30, for this is part and parcel of the OSAI
improvisers’ art: Open Scenes are required to tell a story dramatically that “makes
sense.”

An Open Scene lasts longer than most games and exercises, and may range from
between 5 and 15 minutes. 31 By contrast, the games and exercises generally last
between 1 and 4 minutes. 32 Open Scenes are thus often themselves composed of a
number of ‘scenes’, i.e. changes of time and place, where actors exit or enter the stage
to signify a new time and/or place.

The only external constraint of an Open Scene is the audience suggestion itself,
around which the Scene must in some way be oriented. The ways in which it is

27 Pierce, 1991, p31. This type of game is also described in Meyer (2005) under a different name (‘The
Harold’)
28 depending on the nature of the audience suggestion
29 Cf. Vladimir Propp’s analysis of Russian folk tales (1928), used to structure understanding of mythic
forms of storytelling.
30 See N. 26 above
31 Some Scenes by accomplished troupes may go much longer, becoming entire one-act plays. See for
eexample Coleman, 1990
32 This has led Young to critique the “games-as-theatre” movement of Theatresports as being in danger
of becoming ‘slight’ or at worst, no more than a collection of parlour games played before an audience
(Young, 2001).
oriented is a matter for the improvisers and their ‘additive’ process, revealed and unfolded collaboratively on stage, moment by moment, Move by Move. These ways – essentially, the building blocks of OSAI - and the use improvisers make of them, comprise the Poetics which form the subject of this research.

1.1.4 The Improvisers

A contemporary example of OSAI is here analysed through a case study of a performance in July 2003 by three undergraduate Impro practitioners at the University of Sydney, Australia. These practitioners were typical undergraduate improvisers, having had at least one year of training with the Theatresports group at the University of Sydney, and performance time on-stage at the Sydney University Union’s Manning Bar - a large, open multi-purpose performance space located near the centre of campus – and thus had a practical grounding in and facility with Impro through this training and performance experience.

1.1.5 Rationale

Why study OSAI? This question has been partly answered above, but, more formally, the research is offered for the following reasons:

1. To date, OSAI has never been studied academically.

2. To date, little or no academic analysis of the underlying general principles of Additive Improvisation per se has been undertaken. By focusing on the particular use of the Poetics in Additive Improvisation, the study aims to bring to light the underlying principles they serve in Open Scenes. Many commentators have highlighted the lack of such a study. Young for instance has drawn attention to the uncritical application of additive improvisation exercises in drama education, where Impro games are presented 'in a pabulum-like manner' without reference to theoretical underpinnings. In his criticism, Young suggests that the lack of an

33 Yin, 1991
34 Young, 2001 in his review of Johnstone, 1999
35 (ibid 2001, p.122)
36 (ibid)
academic enquiry into its theoretical basis could well be part of the reason for this uncritical approach, and cites Johnstone himself\textsuperscript{37}, acknowledging a criticism of Theatresports as being in danger of becoming 'gutless light entertainment'. \textsuperscript{38}

3. Poor Definition of Johnstone’s Terms. Many of Johnstone's (1981) terms (Offer, Accept, Block etc) have become part of the lexicon of improvisation practiced today, but have never been scrutinised. For example, the terms ‘Offer’ and ‘Block’ have been incorporated into the most recent revision of the NSW Junior High School Drama Syllabus (BOS, 2003), without further explanation or definition. Yet the term ‘Blocking’ itself is ambiguous in the field of drama. This would assume that (1) teachers are already using these terms in their practice, and (2) it is additive improvisation that is being referred to, and not, say, Commedia, for which these terms do not apply. This research thus aims to give these terms further definition.

4. Improvisation’s Central Relevance to NSW Drama Education. Improvisation is a core component in itself of both the Junior and Senior Drama Syllabi in NSW schools (BOS, 1999, 2003). It is offered as a first Unit of work for a model Stage 5 Drama program, underpinning subsequent Units. It is acknowledged a key method in the NSW Syllabus for play-building the Group Performance, which comprises 30% of the external NSW Stage 6 Drama Assessment marks.

5. Improvisation’s Central Relevance to Professional Actor Training. Improvisation has been placed squarely at the centre of educational Drama programs in Western schools since Stanislavski's MAT First Studio of 1911 was taken on tour to New York. \textsuperscript{39} Improvisation largely underpins the Stanislavskian System of Actor Training from which the Hollywood system (via Lee Strasberg’s New York Actors' Studio) derives, and whilst this area of application lies beyond the scope of this research, the effects of the practice of improvisation are felt well beyond its own boundaries of specific practice. \textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{ibid}, p123
\textsuperscript{38} Johnstone, 1999, p.73
\textsuperscript{39} Stanislavski, 1937
\textsuperscript{40} See also Hodgson and Richards, 1966
6. Improvisation’s Central Relevance to Education in General. The importance of Improvisation as an educational tool needs no defence here. Indeed the very words 'Improvisation' and 'Improve' both stem from the same Latin root (the former via Italian, the latter via Old French), indicating a semantic connection between openness to change and educational growth. Meanwhile, within the Heathcotean school, the development of ideas around a theme through improvisation is at the centre of not only drama practice, but assists in all Arts and Humanities learning experiences. Furthermore, additive improvisation (qua improvisation) has also been shown to assist in a broad variety of educational outcomes.

7. Additive improvisation’s Global Popularity. Additive improvisation is currently being played globally in a huge variety of forms and guises, from the sub cultural level of unsubsidised pub theatres (“Late at the Gate”, “Brickbat’s Volunteers”, “Scared Scriptless”, etc.) to established Comedy Venues, mainstream theatres, and television game shows ("Whose Line Is It Anyway...", "LifeGame", and the successful Australian concept “Thank God You’re Here”). It is a globally popular theatre practice at the amateur level. A glance on Google gives an insight into how broad this cultural phenomenon is at the amateur level, with groups in most American, Canadian, European, and increasingly, Russian, Central Asian and Asia-Pacific cities. It would seem that such a broad based, global cultural phenomenon invites some kind of academic analysis.

8. Personal social benefits for students. Many students, particularly Senior High School and tertiary students, report that they participate in Impro to help them with communication and interaction development. The give and take of Impro seems to appeal to students wanting to develop this skill in social interactions. Johnstone

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42 Taylor, 1996
43 These include increased spontaneity, thoughtfulness, mindfulness, concentration, sensory awareness and flexibility of response (Pierce, 1991; Stewig, 1973; Moore, 1968), as well as truth to self (Stanislavski, 1937; Moore, 1968, p.39). As a by-product of this research, it is hoped that some insights into the fundamental processes that are at work in all skilled practices of additive improvisation are made apparent.
44 Working Dog Productions
45 Frost & Yarrow, 1990, p.187; Young, 2001
46 Johnstone, 1981, 1999
elaborates on this point\(^{47}\), and it is one frequently cited on Impro web sites. It is also attractive to students because its content-free form allows students to create scenes that more closely reflect their own lives.\(^{48}\)

### 1.1.6 Johnstone’s Poetics

Johnstone’s Poetics deal with the mechanisms, processes and skills that students need to master in order to perform additive improvisation fluently.

The nine Poetics under study are the following\(^{49}\):

- **Offering:**\(^{50}\) Initiating Moves; any physical or vocal action
- **Endowing:** Naming or giving a quality to something not yet predicated in the scene
- **Justifying:** Naming or giving a quality to something already in the scene, that requires naming or qualification
- **Extending:** Stopping the narrative to focus, explore and extend upon one aspect of the scene, or to add detail to it
- **Advancing:** The opposite of Extending: moving the narrative on to the next step
- **Shelving/Reincorporating:** Memorising narrative elements and Offers and bringing them back into the scene later
- **Accepting:** Responding Moves that acknowledge, validate or extend upon other’s Offers
- **Blocking:** Negating or refusing an Offer, or undermining the basis of an Offer without accepting any of its assumptions
- **Yielding:**\(^{51}\) A stage-‘uncluttering’ device. Dropping one’s own Offer in order to maintain a single stage focus for the Scene.

\(^{47}\) Johnstone, 1999, p.24

\(^{48}\) Johnstone (1981, pp.111, 142.) See also fn 12

\(^{49}\) The nine Poetics are throughout this text used with capitalisations to show their technical as opposed to lay use. The capitalisation of the word ‘poetics’ refers to the nine Poetics of additive improvisation under discussion in this study.

\(^{50}\) The present participle is preferred to emphasise the process-based, ongoing nature of the actions.
Whilst these Poetics do not comprise an exhaustive descriptive system, they are strongly indicative of the processes underlying the making of Scenes in OSAI.

1.2 Research Aims

The purpose of this research is to conduct a case study analysis of an OSAI performance, and look at the ways in which the Poetics of additive improvisation are being used. If the Poetics form a kind of language of Impro, then what is this language that OSAI improvisers are speaking? What is its nature? Mastery of the Impro language allows for the seemingly effortless step-by-step unfoldment of a coherent, well-formed, convincing piece of narrative theatre that is the product of all of the improvisers. To borrow a common creative writing edict, if the Scene seems to ‘write itself’ - or rather ‘play itself’ – then how does the underlying language of Impro – the Poetics - catalyse and set in motion this process?

The research aim might thus be best stated as follows:

**Research Aim One:**
To discover the ways in which student improvisers make use of Johnstone’s Poetics in OSAI in order to arrive at coherent, engaging and dramatically well-made Scenes.

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51 Most of these terms are used throughout Johnstone (1981), particularly Offers, Accepts, Blocks, Endow, Reincorporate, as well as free-Associate, and these terms are now part of the discourse of improvisation more generally. Other terms (Justify, Yield, Extend and Advance) have been developed later either by Johnstone himself (1999), within Theatresports (Pierce, 1991) or other improvisation practitioners and thinkers globally, to extend the thinking and understanding surrounding the additive improvisation process.

52 Seidel, 1999

53 The statement of the research aim significantly uses the phrase ‘makes use of’ to imply that student improvisers are not fulfilling a formula, but making use of techniques (the nine Poetics) that are, in a utilitarian and phenomenological sense, literally tools ‘to-hand’ (Heidegger, 1926, p.104-5), to help fulfil the purpose of constructing an Impro scene.

54 As in Scribe’s notion of the pièce bien faite. See N. 26 above.
Approaching the raw data inductively and qualitatively, the research looks at Moves relating to the way Improvisers perform four basic actions in a Scene:

1. Making Offers: Initiating the basic ground and definition of the Scene
2. Defining Character
3. Controlling, Directing and Shaping Narrative
4. Responding to Offers, Accepting

Move types (the nine Poetics) are thus categorised into these four broad functions, and the ways in which they fulfilled them (and others) is examined.

A further, more tentative, aim developed out of the first:

**Research Aim Two:**
To suggest an overall ‘working model’ that could inter-relate the nine Poetics organically, and be applicable for any OSAI Scene.

The first aim was met by the qualitative observations discussed in the Results section. The second aim, derived partly from the Grounded Theory approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967), and evolving some time after the results had been analysed, is explored in the Conclusion section.

### 1.3 Research Questions

The central research question follows logically from the two research aims:

**Research Question**
How are Johnstone’s Poetics being made use of by improvisers in OSAI, such that dramatically interesting, coherent and well-formed Scenes\(^{55}\) are being collaboratively created?

This central question spear-heads the research. Further, minor research questions that spring more directly from close observation of the qualitative data include the following:

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\(^{55}\) See N. 26 above
What are some of the ways improvisers are indexing, creating and negotiating meaning on stage at any given moment? How is fictive reality created by the actors? What are their Offers, in Johnstone’s (1981) terms, and how are they being made?

How do improvisers share, communicate and negotiate situational and narrative understanding on stage? What are their Accepts and Yields like?

What other choices do improvisers make, in terms of the narrative flow and their character’s contribution to a Scene? Where are improvisers Advancing and where are they Extending?

Where do Scenes really ‘fire’? Where is evidence of synergy and collaborative creativity amongst improvisers happening, and how can we understand this through Johnstone’s (1981) terms? Where do Offers get instantly Accepted by improvisers? Where do positive cycles of Offer-Accepts between improvisers occur?

What is failure and what is success – for instance, why are some response choices better than others? Why do some Accepts spur and some flatten a Scene? When does a Scene die and when does it spark? What role do Blocks play in determining success or failure?

How do improvisers negotiate conflicts and Blocks without distorting the fictive fabric of the Scene? At what point do they adjust to each other? When can Blocks be creatively used?

How does the improvisers’ overall approach qualify, refine or specify our understanding of each of the terms of the Poetics?

These subsidiary questions serve to both focus interpretation of the data through the nine Poetics, and head off the tendency to apply the Poetics in a positivist fashion.

1.4 Limits

The study was limited by the focus of the research aim, namely, the study of the Poetics of OSAI. The most important limit thereafter was to do with the mode of interpretation of the data.

Data can be interpreted in a diverse (theoretically, infinite) number of ways, as there are a correspondingly infinite number of perspectives from which to view it. Indeed,
data and perspective are intricately (and, according to quantum physics, ultimately\textsuperscript{56}) linked. So far as this research is concerned, the guiding aim of understanding the Poetics of OSAI is a pragmatic one: to study the doing of OSAI as an additive process and not a reaching after particular content\textsuperscript{57}; that is, Impro as praxis, not product. The very process of Impro is that of a doing, something that improvisers “get up to” on stage. To coin and reframe this famous question of the American psychologist and father of non-directive therapy Carl Rogers: what are improvisers “getting up to” in an OSAI Scene?

Anything outside the bounds of this action, as interpreted by improvisers within the ongoing, \textit{in situ} understanding of their own practice, evolving within this globally understood, representative theatre form, is seen as not relevant. That is (and this is in line with Copeau’s concept of professional Improvisation as ‘bare boards’ theatre\textsuperscript{58}, and his privileging of it as an independent theatre form in its own right), the research is not concerned with the impact of any contextual feature on the performance situation - except where improvisers directly make use of such features within the Scenes - but rather with the internal self-configuration, self-organisation and fictive reality\textsuperscript{59} of the Scenes themselves, as defined by the improvisers, \textit{in situ}.

Specifically, the study circumscribed as irrelevant:

- any technological manipulation of the recorded data, or the impact on the meaning of the performance by any of the technological recording devices.
- the effect of the setting, except where improvisers made use of it to serve their purposes (e.g. the use of a chair as a multiple prop in Scene 7.) For instance, the blue colour of the carpet and the grey of the curtains were not deemed to have any subconscious effects on the progress of the performance, or if so, the research was not concerned with finding or analysing these effects.
- the interpretational implications of the cultural, social, racial or gender background of any of the improvisers. Following Johnstone\textsuperscript{60}, the study subordinated questions of content to those of process and function, and restricted context to the denoted \textit{fictive} context within the Scene, proceeding

\textsuperscript{56} Vide Penrose, Roger (1989, 1994, 2005)
\textsuperscript{57} 1981, p.111
\textsuperscript{58} Copeau, 1913, p.72. See section 2.3.6 below.
\textsuperscript{59} Elam (1980)
\textsuperscript{60} 1981, pp. 111, 142
from the audience suggestion, **as defined and continually revised by the improvisers themselves within the Scene.**

- the analysis of the Poetics in a context outside of their use in additive improvisation\(^{61}\), that is, the study was only concerned with their use by Improvisers *in media res*.

In short, any background information that did not have a direct, or at least observable impact on the focus of the study was ignored. It is admitted that while these contextual items may well have had some effect on the progress of the Scenes, they were not germane to the focus of this study.

These were the limits of the research.

### 1.5 Theoretical/Philosophical framework

Any study must first establish an appropriate method of approaching its subject. The research subject of OSAI entails a dual deductive and an inductive viewpoint towards the data it generates. This is for two main reasons:

(1) Impro has an objective element to its practice: Impro has an established tradition of practice in a global cultural context stemming back to Johnstone’s 1960s performances, and has evolved a common language for its practice (stemming originally from Johnstone’s Poetics)

(2) Impro has a subjective element to its practice: it is produced and practiced at the local level.

Impro is a practice that is at once globally understood, and *ipso facto*, locally negotiated, or improvised. Given the dual, Janus-like nature of Impro, the research methodology takes on a correspondingly dual, deductive/inductive basis for its schema of interpretation by employing a Critical Theory approach to the data\(^ {62}\).

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\(^{61}\) For instance, the post-structuralist analysis of a ‘Block’

Rejecting both Positivism and Subjectivism, Critical Theory acknowledges empirical sense data as being formed within the objective framework of a particular social practice that can be validated by common, social and ‘scientific’ understandings of that practice, and yet must be interpreted from an ineluctably subjective standpoint. Impro Scenes are partially self-interpreting; the other part is made up of the receiving audience and the improvisers’ global understanding of Impro’s practice. These common understandings are objectively verifiable and globally understood, even as they are experienced, viewed, reproduced and used subjectively.

In sum, Critical Theory acknowledges both the objective and subjective validity of data, and provides an inductive/deductive analytical framework for interpretation that is in line with the dual local/global nature of the research data itself. Impro is practised locally, but within a global understanding of its functioning. Critical theory allows the researcher to approach the data on that same basis.\footnote{See also 3.4.1 below}

This chapter has defined the field and aim of the study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review sets the contextual backdrop for the research. In (2.1), the study examines Johnstone’s seminal work\textsuperscript{64} and then looks at the terminology (the Poetics) that he developed (2.2). It then surveys historical improvisation styles that have points of contact with Johnstone’s method (2.3), examines the notion of a poetics itself (2.4), and ends by surveying recent academic literature on the subject of improvisation (2.5).

2.1 Additive Improvisation in Johnstone

Additive improvisation is that method of improvisation which works by “combining the imagination of two people”\textsuperscript{65}, and provides a method for working as a coherent ensemble, by allowing participants to accept and remember each others’ characters’ contributions (‘Offers’) rather than block them (‘Blocks’), and using, developing and reincorporating them back into the scene as its \textit{donnees}. To this end Johnstone teaches students to ‘offer’, i.e. inject into the scene dramatic ideas of location, identity and action, created spontaneously on stage, and ‘accept’, i.e. work with, accept and build on the dramatic ideas of others (1981, p.100ff.). Through alternately offering and accepting,\textsuperscript{66} a scene’s narrative can be ‘woven’ collaboratively and seamlessly by a group of skilled and team-oriented improvisers, such that the resulting play can seem to have been previously scripted.

This form of improvisation began life, by Johnstone’s own avowal, as a solution to a problem\textsuperscript{67}, the problem of how to get two or more actors on stage in an improvised scene to work coherently with one another without blocking each other’s ideas.\textsuperscript{68} How did Johnstone arrive at this solution? The answer to this can be found in Johnstone’s own teaching experience.

2.1.1 The context and background of Johnstone’s additive Impro

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\textsuperscript{64} 1981
\textsuperscript{65} 1981, p.27
\textsuperscript{66} 1981, p.99
\textsuperscript{67} 1981, p.26
\textsuperscript{68} 1981, p.27
Having been a primary school teacher during the 1950s in the (then) poor inner London suburb of Battersea, Keith Johnstone became very interested in the way great teachers are able to stimulate their students’ minds, and on the other side of the classroom, the ways in which primary students’ (and students of any age) could learn to have faith in the power of their own imaginations rather than a concern with matching up to external standards of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. Deeply impressed by an experience with an art teacher at teaching college named Anthony Stirling, Johnstone had a flash of insight into the notion that creativity was inside a student already, and that the function of a great teacher was simply to help bring it out, and not to impose external values of ‘good’ or ‘bad’, or notions of ‘the right way to go about doing something’ on the student. From Stirling’s ideas, Johnstone realised how the teacher as facilitator could engage and allow space for the creative element inside all students, and by extrapolation, all people, in all areas of education.

This became apparent in his first teaching position in Battersea, where he managed to teach a class of students who were hitherto unable to write their own names, and were deemed ‘ineducable’ by the school. Engaging students in literacy by typing out their written dreams on a typewriter in class, including spelling mistakes, the students soon realised how writing could be fun and relevant, becoming so engaged with creative writing that they refused to stop for recess. This idea, and the enthusiasm it tapped, stemmed largely from the principle (after Stirling) that the person’s world is unique and ‘right’ for them, and cannot be imposed from without. The creative imagination of a person only needs to be esteemed for it to blossom of its own accord.

When Johnstone later joined the Royal Court Theatre, he automatically applied these same principles to first the Royal Court Theatre Writer’s Group, and then to the actors in the Royal Court Theatre Studio. The ideas he had learnt from Stirling translated easily across to this new environment. He insisted in the writing group that developing writers (among them Edward Bond) avoid discussion and rather try things out through imaginative acting exercises. Then in the Royal Court Actor’s Studio he stressed that the director should not enforce specific directions onto actors, and that actors should find for themselves the right way to play a role, to move on stage, and

69 whose teaching methodology seemed to come out of the Tao te Ching – see 1981, pp.19-20
70 1981, p.20
71 1981, p.21
72 1981, p.22
73 just over the other side of the Thames from Battersea
where to stand. Scrapping playscripts and relying solely on improvisation exercises in the Actor’s Studio, and (perhaps following Brecht) banning discussion during the classes in order to make them entirely practical\textsuperscript{74}, he devised and taught methods of firstly unblocking the individual’s inherent creativity and imagination, and secondly of combining the imaginations of the actors. Johnstone had not read Spolin’s work on improvisation\textsuperscript{75}, and so had to rely on his own ideas to solve the problem of how to combine imaginations. His solution led to the discovery of what he termed ‘additive improvisation’.

2.1.2 The difference between Johnstone’s and Spolin’s approach to improvisation

The ground of Viola Spolin’s work, adduced from her seminal text\textsuperscript{76} relies on establishing character, situation and context (as well as other ideas such as mood and what she terms ‘focus’) before an improvised scene commences. In Spolin there is almost no issue of actors blocking each other or contradicting each other’s ideas during the scene, because the scene parameters are established beforehand.

In Johnstone’s method however, nothing is established beforehand but the Scene title. In OSAI, Scenes accrete and form the parameters that Spolin’s method pre-establishes prior to the start. In Johnstone, these parameters are subtextually negotiated by and between the improvisers while the scene is in progress. The effect of this seems telepathic\textsuperscript{77}, but during performance, this negotiation of the Scene’s reality itself becomes part of the Scene, as the audience is witness to its negotiated creation at every moment.\textsuperscript{78} This can be both highly exciting and highly dangerous for a performer. Johnstone commented about his time during the ‘Theatre Machine’ tour of Europe that “it [was] weird to wake up knowing you’ll be onstage in twelve hours, and that there’s absolutely nothing you can do to ensure success.”\textsuperscript{79} Such ‘pure’ improvisation means that improvisers indeed start from ‘absolutely nothing’\textsuperscript{80} but the

\textsuperscript{74} 1981, p.26
\textsuperscript{75} Spolin, 1963
\textsuperscript{76} Spolin, 1963
\textsuperscript{77} 1981, p.102
\textsuperscript{78} cf. Stanislavski, 1937, p.78
\textsuperscript{79} 1981, pp.27-8
\textsuperscript{80} See Pierce’s definition of Open Scenes given above, as starting from nothing
audience suggestion, and this requires great trust in the process, as ‘nothing’ can be a challenging place to start before a paying audience.

2.1.3 Johnstone’s Theatre Machine Tour and after

Johnstone records that as he developed his method, the classes at Johnstone’s Royal Court Theatre Studio soon became ‘hysterically funny’.\(^1\) This made him worried that, while the actors in the group were of themselves clearly talented, the insularity of the group might have made actors unduly confident about the worth of the material that they were producing, since it didn’t seem ‘right that every class should be like a party’.\(^2\) To put the group to the test then, he took hand-picked actors from the Royal Court Actors’ Studio, formed a honed-down group which he called ‘The Theatre Machine’, and sent them out to six local London schools and colleges. He comments that ‘when the work was good, the audience laughed far more than we would have done’.\(^3\) The group was in fact so successful that the LEA\(^4\) sent a further honed-down group on a tour of many more schools and colleges. Then the British Council ‘sent [them] around Europe’ (\textit{ibid}) on a European tour. Johnstone took the Theatre Machine to various global theatre expos, then left the group in 1971\(^5\) to found ‘The Loose Moose’ in Canada, where he still teaches and works at the University of Calgary.\(^6\)

2.1.4 Time and the additive method: a paradox

Time, and timing, is a crucial element in all performing arts. \textit{Tempus fugit} - ‘time flies’ and ‘waits for no man’. In OSAI, these warnings are used to advantage, by trusting and accepting the flow of associations as and when they occur across the group and across the Scene. This means that actors have to work inter-subjectively to both maintain narrative presuppositions (prior Offers) that ground the Scene, and pursue objectives that propel it forward. Temporally, past is closely related to future in an OSAI Scene, as back-story is often used as a springboard to determine a Scene’s

\(^{1}\) 1981, p.27
\(^{2}\) 1981, p.27
\(^{3}\) 1981, p.27
\(^{4}\) The London Education Authority, later to become ILEA, the Inner London Education Authority
\(^{5}\) Frost & Yarrow, 1990, p.55
\(^{6}\) 1981, p.140; 1999
future course. Yet back-story develops cumulatively in the present moment\(^\text{87}\) by the establishment of presuppositions (through the various ‘Offers’ made\(^\text{88}\), and by the re-incorporation of previous Offers back into the narrative\(^\text{89}\)) which create future Objectives which are then thrown forward in time from this past, established ground of the story.\(^\text{90}\) How in practice might the Poetics facilitate this temporal process?

### 2.2: Johnstone’s definition and terminology (the ‘Poetics’)

Improvisers’ ability to seamlessly create a narrative on stage from ‘nothing’ but the audience suggestion can be looked at through the ways they make use of Johnstone’s Poetics across the Scene.

These Poetics are described in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offer</td>
<td>Anything that an actor <em>does or says</em> on stage is an Offer.(^\text{91}) An Offer is any verbal or non-verbal piece of communication that can be interpreted as such. Standing still (i.e. just existing) on stage can be endowed or justified as an Offer (see Endowing and Justifying below). To make an Offer is to “give a gift”(^\text{92}) to another player.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>To say ‘yes’ to an Offer. To support or develop an Offer made by another actor’s previous move, by your own additive building upon their Offer and its presuppositions. Sometimes this might even be as simple as copying your partner’s action yourself, e.g. yawning if they do.(^\text{93}) Ultimately Accepting an Offer takes on a larger significance as the psychological process of accepting oneself as well as others in the moment, and thus accepting Offers from both without and within, i.e.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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\(^\text{87}\) *vide* Johnstone’s metaphor of walking backwards - 1981, p.116

\(^\text{88}\) 1981, p.97


\(^\text{90}\) Past and future are thus intimately related in OSAI. Cf. Heidegger’s notion of ‘thrownness’ (*Geworfenheit* - Heidegger, 1926, p.160) seems apt here, as a posited existential quality.

\(^\text{91}\) 1981, p.97

\(^\text{92}\) Meyer, 2005, p10

\(^\text{93}\) The example Johnstone gives (of yawning). See 1981, p.97
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block</td>
<td>A Block is saying “no” to an Offer. “A block is anything that prevents the action from developing, or that wipes out your partner’s premise”.&lt;sup&gt;94&lt;/sup&gt; However, Blocking does not necessarily mean using the literal word ‘no’. The word ‘no’ can be an Accept, and the word ‘yes’ can be a Block in certain circumstances.&lt;sup&gt;95&lt;/sup&gt; It is the premises and presuppositions of an Offer being accepted or not that constitutes the definition of a Block or an Accept.&lt;sup&gt;96&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield</td>
<td>To drop one’s own Offer or idea for another actor’s offer or idea, in order to maintain a single stage focus. Yielding is accepting the Focus of the Scene, so that only one is foregrounded on the stage at any one time. Yielding is thus concerned with questions of Scene Focus and avoiding (or rapidly ‘healing’) Split Focus. Johnstone does not deal specifically with Yielding&lt;sup&gt;97&lt;/sup&gt;, however, the concept is always allied to that of Accepting, which he discusses throughout (1981). Yielding is especially important in large group Scenes, which might otherwise become chaotic and unfocused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend</td>
<td>To explore and develop an idea, object, situation, character feature or relationship further. To momentarily halt the forward narrative flow in order to do this (roughly comparable to a <em>lazzi</em> in Commedia). Johnstone looks at Extending through his quizzing exercises in teasing out stories from performers.&lt;sup&gt;98&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance</td>
<td>The opposite of Extending. To move the narrative forward onto the next logical step in the story. Note that Extends can create new avenues for Advancing that were not there before, and help avoid the Scene falling into a stereotypical story form. Johnstone looks at this idea both through the concepts of Free-Associate and Re-Incorporate&lt;sup&gt;99&lt;/sup&gt; when he discusses narrative.&lt;sup&gt;100&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<sup>94</sup> 1981, p.97
<sup>95</sup> 1981, pp.97-8
<sup>96</sup> However beginning improvisers are frequently instructed not to use the word ‘no’ for the first weeks or months of training in additive improvisation, in order to get them used to accepting Offers.
<sup>97</sup> See instead Pierce (1991)
<sup>98</sup> 1981, pp.109-142
<sup>99</sup> 1981, pp.117-8
<sup>100</sup> 1981, pp.109-142
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reincorporate</th>
<th>Re-incorporation mostly occurs in the second half of a Scene, after several central Offers in the narrative have been established. These Offers become elements in the story to reincorporate at a later stage, to weave the story together and give it a sense of cohesion\textsuperscript{101}, integrity and completeness. As Johnstone puts it: “What matters to me is the ease with which I free-associate and the skill with which I re-incorporate”. \textsuperscript{102}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Endow</td>
<td>When an improviser Endows they can be simply be naming something, or they can assert a quality, attribute or characteristic to another actor, object, stage area or weather condition (indeed any aspect of the Endower’s environment), by their action or speech. Johnstone alludes to Endowment in terms of Status,\textsuperscript{103} as well as the idea of creating Offers.\textsuperscript{104} It is also useful to think of Endowing as ‘framing’\textsuperscript{105} something, to endow or imbue it with a meaning that it did not have before. (The advertising industry is wholly based on the creation of skilful Endowments.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justify</td>
<td>Justify is to Endow a physical or paralinguistic Offer that requires Endowment. An Offer left unjustified threatens to disrupt the stage reality, or at best, weaken the sense of belief. Justifying on a stage often involves accounting for some physical aspect of another improviser’s pose, stance or gesture. Justifying can also be used to account for off-stage Offers. An audience member’s fit of coughing that threatens to disrupt the fictive stage reality may be Justified on-stage as the Offer of a character within the Scene: E.g. Improviser A: “There goes Grandma’s emphysema again – Bill go and see to her will you?” Improviser B: \textit{walking to the edge of the stage, calling off towards the coughing audience member} “Are you OK grandma? Have you taken your pills?” Thus the disruption is integrated (by the Justifying Endowment of the coughing audience member as</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{101} See Halliday & Hasan’s notion of linguistic cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1976)
\textsuperscript{102} 1981, p.113
\textsuperscript{103} 1981, pp.33-74
\textsuperscript{104} 1981, p.97 ff.
\textsuperscript{105} cf. Goffman, 1974
Johnstone calls these terms simply ‘categories’\textsuperscript{107} for establishing and building an additively improvised Scene, and also plays around with the terms to make various points (eg. he coins the term \textit{overaccept} (ibid) to stress the idea of the second improviser strenuously accepting an Offer). Some of the terms (such as Yield) have been developed after Johnstone, as an aid to developing and fostering greater understanding of the processes that make OSAI work. Thus the Poetics themselves have been arrived at ‘additively’, by various Impro schools.

In this research Johnstone’s ‘categories’ are referred to collectively as ‘Poetics’ and their individual examples in a Scene as ‘Moves’.\textsuperscript{108}

\section{2.3 Additive Impro within the Stylistic History of Improvised Theatre}

Where does Johnstone’s \textit{oeuvre} stand in relation to other forms of theatre improvisation? What points of contact and areas of intersection are there between his method of additive improvisation and those of other practitioners of non-scripted drama?

The scope of functions of improvised drama is wide, and these functions often contradict one another. They range from the artistic approach to the scientific, from soul-searching and psychological healing through to the agendas of political agitation and wry social commentary and analysis. Indeed historical styles of improvised theatre have, like the plastic arts, often reflected the prevailing philosophy, ethos, ideology and world view of the historical period in which they developed\textsuperscript{109}. How additive improvisation now links to contemporary post-modern and globalised culture

\footnotesize
\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[106] Johnstone (1981) uses the word ‘justify’, and alludes to the concept, but he does not develop the term into a discrete concept or term. The concept of Justify in Johnstone (1981) remains for the most part intuitive and implied by Endowment, and was developed later by Theatresports practitioners.
\item[107] 1981, p.100
\item[108] A term borrowed from discourse analysis, which itself borrows the notion from Game Theory.
\item[109] E.H. Gombrich makes this point (Gombrich, 1950)
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
in its content-free approach\textsuperscript{110} seems similarly suggestive. The research here seeks to briefly pinpoint some connections with prior forms of improvised theatre, in order to gain a broader contextual understanding of the historical and cultural basis upon which Johnstone’s work rests.

2.3.1: Naturalism

Johnstone pays direct homage to Stanislavski and his system at several points in his seminal text (1981). He notes that he at first rejected Stanislavski’s methods, on the grounds that they restricted the actor within the edicts of realism, and disallowed the exploration of the imagination.\textsuperscript{111} He later eschewed this interpretation, realising that Stanislavski’s system did not necessarily imply this restriction, and that techniques of naturalism in acting could result in theatre that was non-naturalistic\textsuperscript{112}.

Whilst treasuring the unfettered imagination from his primary school teaching days, Johnstone shows a clear concern for actors to be grounded in naturalism. He recalls that on his appointment in 1963 to teach at the Royal Court Theatre Studio, he found to his frustration that actors were unable to reproduce normal conversation on stage:

\begin{quote}
If casual conversations really were motiveless, and operated by chance, why was it impossible to reproduce them at the studio?\textsuperscript{113}
\end{quote}

By shifting Stanislavski’s concept of the character’s Objective and Inner Motivation, to focus instead on their “weakest possible motives” (\textit{ibid}), Johnstone chanced upon a style of improvised acting that was at once strongly realistic, and yet free from the tenets of strict realism (\textit{ibid}).

Stanislavski’s thinking was focused on removing artifice from performance and getting actors to return to the natural and spontaneous source of behaviour and action for a character. Much of an actor’s work then became research on the character’s “given circumstances” or outer life situation, and “inner motivation”, or well-springs of action, from which completely natural acting would flow.

\textsuperscript{110} cf. its use by global corporations for staff development and team-building
\textsuperscript{111} 1981, p.33
\textsuperscript{112} 1981, p.26
\textsuperscript{113} 1981, p.33
Stanislavski’s radical insistence on removing the artificial array of gestures that the nineteenth century actor inherited for representational mimetic acting – a removal that was often hard-won, through arduous concentration exercises and the deep elimination of fixed, embodied muscle tensions - was aimed squarely at privileging the truth of the actor’s role and his/her real impulses above mechanical, pre-determined and “staged” behaviour (Chekhov, M, 1953). Moreover, Stanislavski realised that the audience followed the actor’s attention as it moved towards perception and its scene objective, and thus in order to establish the reality of the play the actor should first create that reality in himself. All else outside this scope became irrelevant (Stanislavski, 1937, p.78).

2.3.2: Ramifications of Stanislavski: The Actor’s Studio, Method Acting & ‘Docudramas’

The evolution of Stanislavskian ideas into the model for acting developed by Lee Strasberg (thereafter termed ‘The Method’ or ‘Method Acting’) laid the basis for the main thrust of future mainstream filmic acting. With few exceptions, Hollywood acting focuses almost exclusively on the revelation of the private inner character onto the lens of the public movie camera, and this is due to Strasberg’s use (and modification) of Stanislavskian techniques, which aimed at producing naked, raw and powerfully authentic performances.

114 referenced in Johnstone, 1981, p.179
115 This approach to actor training renders the idea of a total poetics of theatre absurd (see Frost and Yarrow, 1990; Esslin, 1987; Elam, 1980; Pavis, 1976). The attainment of this 'holy grail' (MacCauley, 1999) is not only logically impossible, since meaning can never be permanently indexed (Wittgenstein, 1958), it is largely irrelevant to the project of Impro (as it is indeed of all theatre), whose meaning as a representational signalling system is continually negotiated by the improvisers and the audience. Even such empirical theatre forms as Beck's Living Theatre (Biner, 1972), or Absurd Drama, seek to transcend literalist reductionism in order to successfully convey some point of fictive meaning.
116 The exercise known as the private moment exercise (Strasberg, 1987, p.144ff.), was an exercise where private behaviour was re-enacted on stage as if there were no audience. His techniques stem largely from Ouspenskaya’s lessons, a key member of MAT, who had decided to remain in New York after the MAT’s return to Russia.
At the heart of the Stanislavski/Strasberg teaching of Improvisation\textsuperscript{117} is the idea that the truth and reality of the encounter in the present moment is more powerful than the larger, more gestured performance tricks of melodramatic acting styles. When private acts are made public by their re-enactment on stage as the character, less strenuous acting paradoxically creates a more powerful effect, with the force of performances deriving from their raw truth, especially when combined with increased sensitivity to the presence of other actors\textsuperscript{118}. This finer approach ties closely into Johnstone’s focus on the “weakest possible motives” of a character\textsuperscript{119}. 

Improvisation was one of Lee Strasberg’s core techniques to enable actors to get inside the character, and embody them to the degree where it was impossible to tell where the actor finished and the character started. Strasberg’s writing, too, indicates the centrality of Improvisation to this aim:

> Improvisation is essential if the actor is to develop the spontaneity necessary to create in each performance “the illusion of the first time”\textsuperscript{120}

The stress upon the inner logic that is given to a performance by the grounding of that performance in the actor’s own reality\textsuperscript{121} inevitably leads to powerful, compelling drama, since what is being seen on stage/film is indeed “real”.\textsuperscript{122}

The British film-maker Mike Leigh uses a similar method\textsuperscript{123} whereby reality is incorporated directly into the filming process, resulting in an almost documentary-like effect.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{117} this point that is continually made throughout Johnstone, 1981  
\textsuperscript{118} Willis, 1964, p.114  
\textsuperscript{119} 1981, p.33  
\textsuperscript{120} Strasberg (1987, p.107)  
\textsuperscript{121} Notwithstanding some tendencies towards self-indulgence in some exercises, or of students using the training as a personal growth tool to free inner “blockages” (Strasberg 1987, p.144ff.)  
\textsuperscript{122} Strasberg, 1987, p.110  
\textsuperscript{123} In Leigh’s work, no script is given to actors prior to filming. In a nod to Commedia’s canovacci, only a scenario and the circumstances of the character are known by the actors, and the meeting of actors takes place for the first time on film, so the reactions that their encounters engender are real ones.
All forms of improvisation privilege the reality of the actor’s creative processes on stage, such that what the audience sees is real, and is not ‘acted’, in the sense of ‘put on’. Stanislavski’s legacy to OSAI derives from this truth to reality, since the improvisers too are engaging in a thought process that is ‘worked out’ on stage, in front of the audience, for “the first time”, expressed with genuinely felt emotion. For actors to remain in such an apparently unprepared state calls on the same skills Johnstone’s method focuses on, namely that of going inside self and freeing up the actor’s creative mind.

2.3.3: Grotowski: Encounters with Self and Others

Grotowski takes this idea of self-revelation to its logical extreme. Taking his point of departure from Artaud, Grotowski developed a systematic method of removing all obstacles between the actor and the audience, by the actor’s work on themselves. This was a ‘via negativa’, a path of elimination, whereby the gradual process of purgation allowed the actor-audience communicative link to arise of itself. There is much in common with both Eastern mystical traditions in Grotowski’s work, but most pertinently to the central core of an actor’s truth on stage was the concept of avoiding ‘publicotropism’, which Grotowski described as ‘the actor’s worst enemy’. For Grotowski this meant the ways in which actors reach out in an automatic way for approval and praise from the audience like plants reach for the sun, and their behaviour and performance on stage is dictated by the attention they receive. Grotowski argues that the actors’ reaction to any such rewarding stimuli from without can only lead to heightened, exaggerated and ultimately artificial acting (ibid).

Although the final form of improvisation (and theatre) style that Johnstone created is very different from Grotowski’s, the principle of reduction that Grotowski engendered

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124 More recently, this modus operandi has been taken up by producers of Larry David’s scriptless comedy ‘Curb Your Enthusiasm’.
125 Grotowski, 1968, p.87
126 Grotowski, 1968, p.101
127 Grotowski, 1968, p.198
128 The French existentialist writer Natalie Sarrault’s novel ‘Tropisms’ is interesting in this regard.
- the ‘via negativa’ - has points of contact with Johnstone’s techniques\textsuperscript{129} in that they enable the creative performer to bypass the delimiting forces of the social personality, and reach the origin of creative force within the actor\textsuperscript{130}. Johnstone’s notion of overcoming one’s own inner Blocks and Accepting one’s own inner Offers arising from the subconscious mind also has a similar aim to Grotowski’s project.

2.3.4: Commedia dell’Arte & Mask

The Commedia dell’Arte at first glance would seem to be strongly opposed to additive improvisation, given its reliance upon set scenarios and lazzis, elements that stand directly against the notion of a ‘pure’ improvisation defined above. Yet as an established system of improvised performance, the kinds of improvisatory techniques used in Commedia inevitably trickle into other improvisatory practices, and the acceptance of elements of Commedia is inevitable given the many common performative roots it shares with additive improvisation\textsuperscript{131}. Some of these elements include:

- Many additive improvisers have their own kind of lazzis, as roles, behaviours or approaches to Scenes they feel comfortable with.
- Actors often use battute (sequences of fast back-and-forth one liners between characters.) These ‘dance’ forms can help render a scene effectively where a pedestrian thinking out of each next line would hamper the pace of a scene. Whilst a single mood may obtain in the ongoing progression of a scene, sequences of battute do, in some form or another, occur.
- In Open Scenes audience suggestions are used, and this process derives from the use of a soggetto, since this provides the guiding theme of an improvised piece, and may structure the piece accordingly, or hint at certain narrative structures, or ‘fabula’\textsuperscript{132}.

\textsuperscript{129} Particularly with Johnstone’s interest in the trance state, and the latering of the public persona of the actor through mask work

\textsuperscript{130} Johnstone, 1981, p.143 ff.

\textsuperscript{131} see fn 50

\textsuperscript{132} See Elam, 1980. Examples of these ‘fabula’ could include any number of fairy tales, myths, legends, anecdotes, skits, news items or any narrative that might structure a scene.
Linked to the idea of the *soggetto* is the concept of the *canovacci*, the scenario, which according to Foreman\(^{133}\) sets Johnstone in opposition to Spolin in the structuring of improvised material. Yet whether the scenario is imposed from without, or is inductively arrived at through the developing givens of a scene (i.e. the improvisers finding and ‘locking into’ a *canovacci*), the point provides no fundamental qualitative distinction. When in the Scene the scenario form gets implied makes little difference to the end result, if the *canovacci* can be seen as ultimately determining the meaning and structure of the Scene. Naturally, in accordance with Johnstone’s notion of interruption\(^{134}\), such *canovaccio* can be broken, or two or more *canovacci* can be joined together, and so on. Nevertheless some form of overarching story that controls and guides the plot\(^{135}\) is essential in creating a frame\(^{136}\) for the story’s understanding. While frames can be broken, or ‘interrupted’, they can never be escaped (*ibid.*)

* Actors, in addition to their stock of *lazzi*, might also take soliloquies in the manner of a Shakespearian (or Jacobean and Elizabethan) play form, linking in with the Commedia tradition of using *concetti*, moments where actors use premeditated rhetorical passages, or asides to the audience, commentary to the audience on the other actors in the piece, self-talk\(^{137}\) or some other type of meta-language speech act (Burton, 1981), though it may be used ironically or self-consciously.

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Johnstone’s use of masks provides another clear connection between his work and Commedia. Commedia mask work was a core workshopping practice at the Royal Court (under George Devine) before Johnstone arrived. Johnstone’s disagreement with Devine over the function of mask work (which lasted right until Devine’s death\(^{139}\)) illustrate Johnstone’s concern with using the mask as a means of exploring and releasing forbidden, inner creative forces,\(^{140}\) rather than as an adjunct to script preparation and character work, or within prior traditions of masked theatre such as Commedia. Johnstone saw mask rather as a window into the creative unconscious of

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\(^{133}\) Foreman, 1998

\(^{134}\) 1981, p138

\(^{135}\) Elam, 1980

\(^{136}\) Goffman, 1974

\(^{137}\) Goffman, 1959

\(^{138}\) Rudlin, 1994, pp.48-63

\(^{139}\) 1981, p.145

\(^{140}\) 1981, pp.164-76
an actor, and a channel that could realise these energies on stage. Masks create a set character through which inner sub-personalities can be accessed and brought to light within the safe confines of the stage space\textsuperscript{141}. This enactment of inner forces within a person goes to the heart of the Stanislavskian project of the use of affect memory, but here it is not confined to a particular emotion surrounding a particular event, but becomes the process by which the entire personality of the actor becomes momentarily suspended and transformed. (On this, Vervain\textsuperscript{142} looks at the connection between masks and possession, that is, at what point do we control the mask and at what point does it control us?)\textsuperscript{143} The person of the actor becomes the site within which various forces competing for dominance become subordinate to the creative unconscious.\textsuperscript{144} This ‘letting go’ requires an enormous amount of trust on behalf of the actor, for it is a letting go of the self in a very real sense.\textsuperscript{145} It is a paradox indeed, that by donning a mask, the actor sheds the social face that veils their true expression in the public arena.

Johnstone’s project therefore takes on board the tool of the mask (to which he devotes the longest chapter\textsuperscript{146}) as a means of penetrating the surface layers of the mind and socialised personality of the actor, to allow forth otherwise dormant creative, ‘ego-reshaping’\textsuperscript{147} forces within\textsuperscript{148}. By this Johnstone is extending the concept of

\textsuperscript{141} 1981, pp.83-7, 195-9
\textsuperscript{142} Vervain (2004)
\textsuperscript{143} Chris Vervain (2004), Performing Ancient Drama in Mask: the Case of Greek New Comedy, New Theatre Quarterly 20:3 (august 2004) © cambridge university press
\textsuperscript{144} Post-structuralist thinkers (eg Derrida) and language philosophers (Wittgenstein, 1953) see these competitions as essentially language based (ibid; Howarth, in Scarbrough and Tanenbaum, 1998, p.268-93)
\textsuperscript{145} Soules, 2004
\textsuperscript{146} 1981, pp.143-205
\textsuperscript{147} Cf. Brandi’s (2003) essay on masks and entering new identities. Quoting William S. Burroughs from ‘Naked Lunch’ “I am a ghost; wanting what every ghost wants – a body” she links that idea of (dis)possession to Johnstone’s concept of the shaman, mask and trance: “In unserer Kultur wissen wir nicht viel über Masken. Jedenfalls nicht viel über das wahre Wesen der Maske, die im Rituellen verwurzelt ist und deren Gebrauch eng mit Trancetänzen u. ä. verbunden ist. Die Maske kann nur verstanden werden, wenn man Kenntnis von der Trance hat, sagt Keith Johnstone.” She goes on to note that the shaman becomes a connection point between the inner and outer worlds, and links this to the state of childhood: “Die Schamanen sind als ‘Techniker des Heiligen und der Ekstase’ im Umgang mit Geistern bewandert und verwenden zur Kontaktaufnahme mit der anderen Welt verschiedene Methoden der Trance und des rituellen Maskentanzes. „Wir alle kennen doch diese stillschweigende Übereinkunft. Sie ist ein elementarer, spontaner Kindertrick, ein Zauberkunststück, mit dem die Welt im Handumdrehen von banal in magisch verwandelt werden kann. Ist doch ihre Unvermeidlichkeit in der Kindheit eine jener universalen Eigenschaften des Menschen, die uns zu einer Familie vereinen. Sie ist folglich eine elementare Voraussetzung der Wissenschaft vom Mythos, die sich ja genau mit dem Phänomen selbst verursachten Glaubens befasst.” This self-caused belief, a self-
Stanislavskian inner truth towards a more Grotowskian extreme, via mask work. Soules\(^{149}\) makes this same point about this use of mask (similar to Johnstone’s appropriation of mask work for his ego-bypassing ‘trance’ project), and points out the link between vulnerability and power in this state.\(^{150}\)

2.3.5: Political Implications

Improvisation has political implications, and although these have remained outer-lying concerns within the practice of additive improvisation, it is not possible to eliminate the socio-political context from the practice of improvisation altogether. The ‘Living newspaper’ scenarios of Chicago’s Second City and Compass Theatres\(^{151}\) and Fo and Rame’s calls for a ‘throw-away’ theatre, something like a newspaper\(^{152}\), are phenomena which key into the function of improvisation as a critical and socially aware form of artistic practice, as well as pointing to the disposability and temporal nature of additively improvised scenes.

Boalian improvisation seeks to liberate the individual from state-controlled or other externally-imposed modes of behaviour, through the exploration of certain physical and mental exercises. Boal’s notion that all theatre is inherently political (1979: Foreword), keys the theatre practitioner into the direct struggle for personal freedom through practice of these forms of theatre improvisation. Koudela (1992) uses

\(^{148}\) Note Johnstone’s extensive reference to Michael Chekhov’s notion of ‘possession' in actor training (1981, p.179)

\(^{149}\) Soules (2004)

\(^{150}\) Soules, Marshall, 2004, ‘Improvising Character: Jazz, the Actor and Protocols of Improvisation’

\(^{151}\) Coleman, 1990

\(^{152}\) Italian Playboy interview, translated in Mitchell 1984, p.58
Brechtian Lehrstuecke\textsuperscript{153} as a model for increasing awareness of participants in educational drama with the aim of ‘helping players overcome egocentric orientation’\textsuperscript{154}. Brecht’s exercises for actors promoting the development of the Verfremdungseffekt or estrangement effect\textsuperscript{155} keys in with Johnstone’s notion of actors using mask work to encourage a child-like wonder towards familiar situations and objects as if encountered for the very first time\textsuperscript{156}, to make them ‘strange’ and new.

Improvisation has long had a secular and non-aligned political\textsuperscript{157} approach to socio-historical events, even before Commedia. This has sometimes allied it in its more extreme forms with the political doctrines of anarchism\textsuperscript{158}, but in general has been used to raise individual political and critical awareness of contemporary events, in much the same way political-orientated stand-up comedy does. After all, an actor standing on stage and physically asserting ideas is in itself a political act.\textsuperscript{159}

2.3.7: Bare Boards Impro: \textit{Un Treteau Nu}

Copeau’s insistence at the end of his essay on the modern theatre

\textit{Pour l’oeuvre nouvelle qu’on nous laisse un treteau nu!}\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{153} translated as “learning plays”, but literally, from the playwright’s perspective, “teaching plays”
\textsuperscript{154} Koudela, (1992), NADIE Journal, Winter, 1992
\textsuperscript{155} The ‘estrangement effect’ or ‘effect of making strange’ is preferred over ‘alienation effect’, which is an entrenched mistranslation that leads to a misconception of Brecht’s purpose.
\textsuperscript{156} 1981, p.168ff.
\textsuperscript{157} For instance, Meyerhold’s Marxist-materialist biomechanical approach seeks to bypass bourgeois ideology and free up creativity. This goal is is in essence not dissimilar to Johnstone’s throwing off of habitual approaches and restrictions to creativity; however Meyerhold’s empirical, objective and positivist approach to acting choreography creates a very different focus and ethos to Johnstone’s. (Braun, 1979). See also Gelb's discussion of physicalisation as a way of looking at the performing, acting body as an instrument, or expressive tool (Gelb 1981, p.103ff.)
\textsuperscript{158} Grotowski, 1968; Binet, 1972
\textsuperscript{159} Cf. Boal, 1979
\textsuperscript{160} “For the new work, just leave us a bare stage!” (Copeau, \textit{Essai de renovation dramatique}, 1913, p.72)
has the reductive ethos of Grotowski, but applied to a more community-focused end. Current additive improvisation also only needs ‘the bare boards’, as many Impro groups use theatre spaces that are at best, minimal,\(^{161}\) and use little or no props or lighting effects.\(^{162}\)

Copeau’s rationale was that he wanted to return the focus of theatre squarely back to the actor. “He believed deeply in truth on the stage. But he also believed in liberating the physical and vocal creativity of the actor”\(^{163}\). The improvisation approach of Copeau privileges the creative process over the end result in much the same way as Johnstone’s additive improvisation does, but Johnstone goes further, offsetting Stanislavskian naturalism with the freedom of expression of the unbounded imagination. Johnstone applies Stanislavskian techniques to divine a character’s ‘weakest possible motives’\(^{164}\) and create truth on stage, but rejects those same techniques of naturalism as a hindrance to the actor’s unbounded creative imagination, which transcends naturalism. So far as Copeau is concerned, however, Johnstone’s minimalist, actor-centred focus shows that his Impro ideas have been, consciously or unconsciously, adduced from Copeau’s practice.

2.3.8: God, Catharsis & Psychotherapy

The notion of the shaman as a channel of other-worldly realities onto a magical stage space\(^{165}\) links in with Johnstone’s concern with the mask as a passage to bypass the conscious mind and access the creative subconscious\(^{166}\). Where Boal and Brecht were against the representation of catharsis on stage, since that process encouraged empathy and made spectators forget themselves by becoming over-involved with the

\(^{161}\) Tom Tollenaere of the Belgian troupe The Lunatics recounts a story of having to play on a plywood stage resting on empty beer kegs behind the bar of a Flanders pub (improvland.com, 2001)

\(^{162}\) West London’s Gate Theatre (just off Notting Hill Gate) which ran Impro nights called “Late at the Gate”, and then "Brickbat's Volunteers" during the 1990s, is set in a small room above a pub.

\(^{163}\) Frost & Yarrow, 1990, pp.21-22

\(^{164}\) 1981, p.22

\(^{165}\) See Frost & Yarrow’s discussion of this (Frost & Yarrow, 1990, p.4ff.)

\(^{166}\) 1981, p.143ff. This idea is not new, however. The Oracle at Delphi made himself available two and a half thousand years ago to the divine realm in order to channel revelations about the future into the present moment (Kirkpatrick, 1992, p.743). See also N 148 above.
protagonist’s own process\textsuperscript{167}, other performers speak of ‘finding the space’ or being ‘in the zone’\textsuperscript{168} in Impro scenes in fundamentally empathic terms.\textsuperscript{169}

The process of catharsis, the entering of trance-like states, and the ability to see things from an extra-personal perspective led the Viennese psychotherapist J.L. Moreno to develop his psychodramatic method, whereby inner role states are systematically acted out and actualised publicly, for the patient to come to terms with them in a group situation. Moreno was reacting against what he saw as the overly passive, solipsistic and couch-bound approach of Sigmund Freud’s\textsuperscript{170} psychoanalytic method, where crucial physical information was being neglected from the revelatory process. Moreno’s quasi-Husserlian critique of reality\textsuperscript{171} and its division into the three realms\textsuperscript{172}, first described in Marx’s Das Capital\textsuperscript{173}, led to the technique of role-reversal, where patients were encouraged to bring out inner psychological material into the dramatic situation, and to explore these inner psychological dynamics through an external, interpersonal dramatic performance of their inner conflicts. The role reversal stage of these enactments enabled patients to gain access to opposite and dual ways (\textit{Ein Gang zu Zwei}\textsuperscript{174}) of seeing their psychological illness\textsuperscript{175}. Johnstone’s additive process encourages a form of ‘\textit{Gang zu Zwei}’, since it offers a way to the duality of balancing one’s own Offers with accepting others’ Offers within the shared Scene.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{167} O’Neill, 1991a, p.202
\item \textsuperscript{168} www.improland.com
\item \textsuperscript{169} O’Neill (1991a) quotes Joan Rivers’ momentary experience of such a state in ethnomethodological terms, where she describes her mind going ‘click-click-click’ (O’Neill, 1991a, p.74) of its own accord, in concert with her opposite improviser (Rivers, 1987, p. 269-270, quoted in O’Neill (1991a, p.73-5)).
\item \textsuperscript{170} Freud was working in Vienna at the same time as Moreno, before the rise of Nazism. Moreno’s criticisms of Freud’s ‘couch-bound’ methods were therefore highly contemporaneous.
\item \textsuperscript{171} Williams and May, 1996, p.65
\item \textsuperscript{172} Infra-reality, Life-reality and Surplus Reality, coined from Marx’s concept of surplus wealth.
\item \textsuperscript{173} 1867, (ed Engels) 1885-94
\item \textsuperscript{174} “A meeting of two: eye to eye, face to face. And when you are near I will tear your eyes out and place them instead of mine, and you will tear my eyes out and place them instead of yours, then I will look at you with your eyes, and you will look at me with mine.” (Moreno, J.L., \textit{Einladung zu einer Begegnung} (1914)). The violence of the image Moreno uses of tearing out and swapping eyeballs with someone else points figuratively to how entrenched a person’s own habitual perspective tends to be.
\item \textsuperscript{175} Moreno, 1914, trans. in Moreno & Moreno, 1975, p.12
\end{itemize}
2.3.9: The culture of contemporary Impro: Improv, Theatresports, Seinfeld & ‘Curb’

Currently, additive improvisation is practiced both within and without the affiliation of global Theatresports clubs and networks in the Americas, Canada, UK, Australia, South Africa, Europe and Asia. There are many varieties of these, and they each tend to focus on particular styles and games. Many of these have performance evenings, and some established venues continue to have Impro shows every night. A glance on the web indicates that Impro is a global phenomenon, flourishing at a grass roots level in virtually every OECD country. Many hundreds of variations on the standard game repertoire have been developed, and continue to be so. Clubs that specialise in OSAI are usually not affiliated, and advertised ‘Impro’ can mean either games or Open Scene Impro.

One of the most successful TV Sit-Coms, Seinfeld has probably done most to popularise Impro. The process through which the scripts for Seinfeld were arrived at (from rambling conversations had between the writer Larry David and stand-up Jerry Seinfeld in a New York coffee shop), and the idea of exploring the characters’ ‘weakest possible motives’ (for example, characters anguishing over what shirt to wear) indicate the ‘weak motive’ link with Johnstone’s OSAI.

Whilst Seinfeld was ultimately scripted, Larry David’s later show Curb Your Enthusiasm was not. Scripts for the show ‘Curb’ were dispensed with in favour of a five page outline given to actors on the day of shooting (Poniewozik, 2002), somewhat like a Commedia scenario. Interestingly, one of the directors of the shows, Robert Weise, stresses

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176 See the plethora of web sites giving course and performance dates for ‘Impro’ or ‘Improv’.
177 As a general rule, more professional actors seem to play longer Open Scenes from audience suggestions, where amateur clubs, University groups and Theatresports groups (including Johnstone’s current theatre in Calgary) will play the shorter games. See also Johnstone, 1999
178 The ‘show about nothing’ has resonances with an Impro form whose Scenes also stem from nothing.
179 Both had been relatively unsuccessful until their meeting.
180 Or the mundane ‘The Chinese Restaurant’ (episode 5 from the first series), whose plot line is essentially: ‘four characters go to a restaurant and don’t get a table’.
181 This approach has clear points of contact with Mike Leigh’s method.
One of our rules for actors is ‘Don’t try to be funny or go for the joke… It will only end up on the cutting room floor.’

This advice reflects almost word-for-word Johnstone’s disavowal of gagging at the expense of the scene. Whilst the structural basis of the show’s narratives is a mixture of Second City storyboarding/Commedia canovacci, additive improvisation is the central dynamic at work within the actual dialogue and interactions of the scenes themselves, and this use of additive principles at the micro-level links ‘Curb’ strongly to Impro, within the Second City tradition.

It is Impro games, and not OSAI, which very much suit the game show format, however. Fox cable has had a long-running slot for ‘Whose Line Is it Anyway?’, which continues to be popular, and the ease with which the games can be tried by anyone without thinking of them as high art or performance theatre seems to make them globally accessible to all.

At the time of writing, a cursory glance on the web reveals that Second City, Chicago has a year-long course in Impro; Staircase Theatre run a series of Improv workshops and an Improv clinic; Unexpected Productions in Seattle runs regular Improv courses; La Mama theatre Melbourne, Australia has ‘Impro Sundae’ nights (Sunday night open Impro), while in Sydney Channel Ten television are running a mid-week early evening show from Working Dog (producers of ‘Frontline’) called ‘Thank God You’re Here’, whose premise is “four actors, one location, no script”.

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183 Quoted in Poniewozik, ibid

184 1981, pp.33, 108, and a point that seems to need to be made over and over again. Second City, Chicago emphasise it in advertising their Impro courses – “it doesn’t have to be funny”, they stress (www.SecondCity.com), as does Pierce (1991) – “Don’t gag”, and Theatresports have enshrined it as one of their ten Impro Commandments: ‘Thou shalt not gag’

185 in its use of scenarios and set characters

186 Coleman, 1990

187 The flip side of this availability is that it can reduce the level of improvised theatre to that of the parlour game, a tendency about which Young (2001) raises concerns.

188 See fn48

189 www.staircaseimprov.com

190 UnexpectedProductions.org (out of Seattle, Washington State)

If we also include reality TV as a form of ‘edited additive improvisation’, this theatre form is prevalent on all non-scripted shows.

2.4 The idea of a Poetics

The idea of a poetics draws a comparison with Aristotle. The concept of a poetics has to embrace the fact that individual terms operate within larger scale structure both of narrative progression and overall performance principles (such as keeping relaxed, breathing, using the space, focusing on character, etc.) Nevertheless the progression of narrative is a logical one, and Offers building on previous Offers largely follow the dramatic logic of Aristotle’s poetics. In some measure, Plato’s and Aristotle’s ideas again mirror the dual approach of deductive-inductive reasoning this research takes.192

2.4.1 Plato’s theory of Forms

Plato’s discussion of the theory of Forms in ‘The Republic’ provides an interesting perspective on Johnstone’s Poetics. In Book Six, Socrates explains to Glaucon that it is the duty of every philosopher to train the mind to apperceive the universal form of the Good that lies behind every act that is known as good. This argument builds on the idea in Plato’s philosophy of the universal theory of Forms (The Meno, The Phaedo), the idea that behind the myriad manifestations of a thing (its ‘particulars’) lies its perfect Ideal form, which in some way acts as the ‘master copy’ from which all the actual, physical manifestations are somehow generated. In The Timaeus, Plato argues that this world of perfect forms is entirely separate from the manifest world, an idea that is never proved, and strongly argued against by Plato’s pupil and junior colleague in his academy, Aristotle. Later in the argument, Socrates likens the relationship between the world of Forms and the manifest world as similar to the relationship between mathematics and the manifest world. But for Plato the Forms are not an abstraction from the world, but a generative model that creates the world which we perceive. The world of forms is apprehended by pure human thought (‘pure attention’) and not through sense experience, and Plato deemed an individual’s degree of perception of the forms as a key indicator of intelligence.193

192 See sections 1.5 above and 3.5.4 below

193 The explication of this difficult idea at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_forms is a useful, if incomplete, analysis
Plato’s line of argument might help explain why each of Johnstone’s Poetics can be grasped as a single idea, yet every individual instance of them in practice will be different and unique from any other. It is important to understand that Plato was reasoning deductively, and that forms are not categories of real things (the ‘particulars’), but the generative principle lying behind them. Thus no two Offers, Blocks, or Accepts will be alike; and yet all will have an identical function in the context of the Scene. From the innate idea of an Offer stems every Offer that can be made, which is infinite.194

For the purposes of interpretation, Johnstone’s Poetics can be likened to these Forms. They are solely ideas (or ‘Offering’ is an idea that an improviser holds in their head as they enter a stage), yet they give rise to a multitude of creative possibilities within the Open Scene, as they form the constituent moves or mental building blocks ready-to-hand195 for improvisers to construct any dramatic event within it. Whether or not Forms or Blocks and Offers really exist is not a valid question – we can only infer that they exist, never prove them, just as Plato was unable to prove his Forms, since they are only accessible through pure thought. However, the idea of Forms that (may) lie behind Johnstone’s Poetics gives us further reason to balance out local empirical observations with the presuppositions of global improvisation training already established and deductively played out into the Scenes by the improvisers. This pragmatic196 approach to meaning bypasses questions of ultimate veracity in favour of the external validity of function in context.197

2.4.2 Aristotle’s Poetics

194 This also implies that Johnstone discovered rather than created these terms, which, given the educational background within which he developed these ideas and the influence of Stirling, is a tenable argument.

195 Heidegger’s Zuhandenheit, a Heideggerian notion of things in the world as existing for us, as extensions of thought and being (Heidegger, 1926, 1962, p.106). See also his treatment of Descartes’ notion of the world as res extensa, in Part One, Division One, Section 3 (Heidegger, 1926, 1962, p.91-148).

196 James, 1907

197 an approach which sits well with Heidegger’s ontological coining of craftsman’s metaphors
Aristotle was a junior colleague in Plato’s academy and although he disagreed with Plato over the theory of Universal Forms, Aristotle’s Poetics shows a clear continuation of this line of thought. The central aim of Aristotle’s Poetics in drama (which he formulated by watching Athenian plays performed at the Great Dionysia) was to provide a unifying set of principles that can create coherence and singularity of action, place, time and character. Aristotle\textsuperscript{198} saw these as essential for the stage action of a play or drama to be intelligible to the audience, and not simply a collection of random events presented in dramatic form.\textsuperscript{199} These can be glossed as the six poetics concerning the Character, Plot, Thought, Diction, Music, and Spectacle\textsuperscript{200} of a drama. Close analysis of any dramatic sequence of events\textsuperscript{201} will show the operation of these functions over the course of any play, scripted or not, and focusing on these six poetics can allow writers of drama to fine-tune their scripts.\textsuperscript{202}

OSAI improvisers also have an active awareness of the various features of a dramatic performance, and seem to carry with them a notion of the well-made play, or rather, the ‘well-made Scene’\textsuperscript{203} onto the stage. This is evident in the way they approach their Scenes’ construction collaboratively, and build it logically, from each others’ Offers.

2.5 Prior Academic Research Studies into Open Scene Impro

At the time of completion of this research, no analytic academic studies appear to have been undertaken of OSAI.

Many writers have made studies in related fields to Johnstone’s form of improvisation however, and found applications for his principles and Poetics in the fields of education, cognitive therapy and behavioural therapy, computer science and organisational management (to name a few), which often draw heavily on his ideas. Some of the more relevant applications are surveyed below.

\footnotesize
199 MacGowan, 1962, p.87
200 Schellhardt, 2003, p.69
201 Field, 1979
202 Schellhardt, 2003, pp.232-8
203 See N 26 above
Meyer (2005), acknowledging Drew Carey’s show ‘Whose Line Is It Anyway?’, cites Thomson’s (2003) work on capacities developed by collaborating undergraduate improvisers, and finds the development of ‘idea flow, freedom from judgment, “true listening and authentic response, surrendering to the unexpected, and the equal authority and creativity of questions and answers”’ is fostered by its practice. In her paper Meyer goes on to talk about many related areas of Impro. She discusses the long-form of Impro known as “the Harold” in the US (which bears some resemblance to Open Scene Impro), speaking of the way Offers “become “givens” (non-negotiable boundaries) within which the players continue to make discoveries, expand upon and explore.”

She also discusses the importance of form and memory as key controlling factors to the accretive build up of scenarios, noted above in this paper, and warns players against ‘asking questions’, instead encouraging them to “give gifts”, i.e. make Offers. She later discusses Accepting and Yielding to group focus. However, her primary focus is for Impro to be used as facilitating tool for organisations, in the ways that new systems and structures and interactions can occur through improvisational principles. Her discussion of Johnstone is thus geared to this purpose. Corsun, Young, McManus and Erdem (2005) explore a similar use of Impro to leverage organisational conundrums.

Many writers are interested in the possibilities of audience involvement and participation, and follow on from the democratic ideals held by Johnstone. Lehmann and Szatkowski’s (2003) work on constructing a virtual puppet theatre with which children could improvise along storylines draws significantly on Johnstone’s (1981) ideas about the relationship between narrative, status and spontaneity, as well as his further development of storytelling forms. In their project, conflict and improvisation are explored through a range of possible storylines set on a virtual farm, and involving particular characters for the storylines (eg a

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205 Thomson, 2003, p123-4

206 Johnstone makes this exact point in his later book (1999, p24)

207 Meyer, 2005, p8

208 ibid, p10

209 See also Gell (2004) below

210 Lehmann and Szatkowski’s (2003), Theatrical Virtuality - Virtual Theatricality: Virtual Narrative, Autonomous Agents, and Interactivity in a Dramaturgical Perspective

211 in Johnstone (1999)
farmer, a “naughty cow” that wants to escape her pen and go dancing, read books or engage in other “anthropomorphic activities”, and others.) This Danish Government-funded early childhood education research project emphasises the importance of play and improvisation to childhood development. Nora Roozemond and Karola Wenzel (2002) take the developmental idea further in that the child participants are wholly constructors of their world. In this fascinating paper, the notions of free play and improvisation and their link to the process of creating a public sphere of knowledge and understanding between children is examined. Po Chi (2006) examines the general relevance of Impro in teaching, while the UNESCO conference on “artistic practices and techniques from Europe and North America favouring social cohesion and peace” in Helsinki, 2003 looked at the ways Johnstone’s improvisational techniques could be brought to bear the achievement of this end (as for example in the Dialogue School in Kazakhstan). From Vienna, Gell (2004), in seeking to examine the parallels between sport and the (performing) arts, examines the connection between Theatresports and Sport, and while examining the democratic, spectator-oriented basis of Impro and the greater power that it confers the audience, he makes a strong argument for the similarity of physical processes involved, as well as the notion of a shared team ethic. Gell’s thesis is perhaps particularly vital for cultures

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212 English translation 2004

213 We Like Good Disco! "The Public Sphere of Children" and Its Implications for Practice by Nora Roozemond (Netherlands) and Karola Wenzel (Germany), delivered at the Seventh IATA (International Amateur Theatre Association) World Festival of Children’s Theatre, organised in Lingen (Germany) in June 2002

214 “Kinderöffentlichkeit”, translated by the phrase, ‘the public sphere of children’, is “the term used for those moments in which children represent their own spaces, times, forms of exchange and activities publicly” (Roozemond and Wenzel, 2002, p1)

215 Gell quips: “Das Spiel bleibt Schauspiel, der Theatersport ist nur eine Variante davon.” He continues, pointing out the close similarities between Theatresports and other Sports: “Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede zum Sport werden hier allerdings besonders gut sichtbar. Die Darsteller improvisieren innerhalb eines gegebenen Rahmens, um ein Ziel, das vom Publikum geforderte Thema, zu erreichen. Sie müssen dabei ähnlich schnell und flexibel reagieren wie Sportler. Der genaue Inhalt entsteht dabei erst im Zuge der Aufführung, ein Charakteristikum des Sports.” Both improvise within a given framework (literal, and rule-based), both require fast and flexible reactions, and the exact content of both is a function of the actual moves in performance, an insight that implies a connection between ball-control and Scene focus control, an elegant analogy. The difference lies in the power of the audience, which is greater than in both normal play-going and in sports spectatorship: “Die Zuschauer haben damit mehr Macht als beim normalen Theaterstück und beim Sport.” (Gell, 2004, p74)
such as Australia, which have an entrenched view of sport and culture as being diametrically opposed.

Continuing the AI theme, many workers are looking at how the parameters of real world improvising actors can be encoded into software programs. Rank’s (2004) work looks at emotion, while Wong’s (2005) paper outlines the paradoxical notion of rules for spontaneous living, i.e. the parameters within which spontaneity can and cannot occur, which leads to some fruitful distinctions between creative, destructive, imitative, pseudo and superficial spontaneity (2005, p2-6)\(^{216}\). Faas (2002)\(^{217}\) uses Johnstone to develop improvisational elements in storytelling, in designing virtual narrative tools. Juha Huuhtanen (2005) is also noteworthy in his use of improvisational principles within the design field.

Meanwhile writers such as Guli (2004) and O’Conner (2003) centre on the therapeutic benefits of Impro processes.

There is no shortage of Impro game books, and, following Young’s (2001) charge, handbooks such as Libera’s (2004) appear to be looking at Impro processes in greater depth and along more thematic lines than their ‘parlour-game book’ predecessors.

As Young\(^{218}\) himself points out, the use of Impro to cover a far broader span of experiences than the theatre game is well overdue, and since he made that claim in 2001,\(^{219}\) there has been a steady growth of analysis in this field, branching into many seemingly non-related disciplines. His own paper (2005) extends the Impro metaphor to cover all aspects of life, education and creativity generally, and indeed, posits these processes as fundamental to our ability to creatively shape our lives.

Soules’ article (Soules, 2004) is one of many papers that connect musical (particularly jazz) improvisation and theatre improvisation together. His focus on the congruence of processes in jazz and theatre improvisation and its implications for the notion of self as essentially dialogic, culturally framed and fluid, enables him to lay bare some

\(^{216}\) Paul T. P. Wong (2005), Rules for Positive Spontaneous Living, Coquitlam, B.C., Ph.D. paper, Canada

\(^{217}\) S. Faas, (2002) Virtual Storyteller, An approach to computational story telling, Universiteit Twente, Netherlands

\(^{218}\) Young, 2005

\(^{219}\) Young, 2001, p.122
of the underlying dynamics at work in all framed improvisation events, and clarifies processes that can certainly be seen at work in OSAI practice. Paradoxically, he locates the notion of self-abandonment within the improvisation process and context of improvisation (which he calls the ‘protocols’, after the Greek) as providing the key to the actor’s creative process and finding of themselves. Citing Chernoff’s study of native African drummers, he points out the paradox that the most influential drummer in the group is the one whose rhythm is most open to the influence of others.  

Waterhouse (2004) also makes the point that that the tradition of classical improvisation – eg. Bach’s impromptu 6-obligato part improvisations on a theme given to him at court and improvised by Bach on the spot – died out in 1895, when Maria Wurm gave her last improvisation performances, consisting of accepting musical suggestions from the audience and improvising around them, a performance process which illustrates a startling similarity to OSAI performance protocols.

No study has as yet specifically dealt with OSAI or with Johnstone’s Poetics per se, and so it is hoped that the present study augments the current understanding of this field.

This chapter has established the context and background for the study, showing the links OSAI has with past traditions, present cultural practices and future-looking research projects.

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220 Meyer (2005) notes that improvisers also mirror each other’s status levels, and this has led McGinn, Thompson, and Brazerman (2002), to discover “that negotiators respond "in kind" to both competitive and cooperative tactics, resulting in negotiations in which the actions of the players appear to match one another (Cited in McGinn & Keros, (2002), p. 460). These findings have implications for the impact of even one participant using an improvisational mindset within an interaction. A participant using an acceptance/agreement-based framework is likely to positively influence the "logic of exchange."” (Meyer, 2005, p6).

221 Waterhouse, 2004, p15-6

222 Sawyer (2005) has to some degree inchoately begun this process, though framed within a critically different, social science perspective, which differs from the approach taken by the present study.
Chapter 3  Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used to conduct the research. In (3.1) the participants are described, then the instruments for recording the data are outlined (3.2), and the procedure by which the data was produced is described (3.3). This is followed by an explanation of the philosophical (3.4) and methodological (3.5) frameworks for interpretation.

3.1  Participants

The three participants were drawn from a pool of undergraduate improvisers at the University who practice Theatresports/Impro games and perform at the University Union’s Manning Bar.

3.1.1  Sample

The improvisers were first canvassed by word of mouth, through the networks of the Sydney University Theatresports group, and drama education lecturers. After an initial sample proved logistically problematic in 2002 further enquiries were made and two new groups were found. Of the two groups, the group that had greater experience and a stronger command of Open Scene playing was chosen for data analysis. Sampling occurred through existing networks between the Faculty of Education (Drama), Sydney University Dramatic Society (SUDS) and the University Theatresports group. It was made known in advance that Open Scenes were to be called for, using suggestions for topics drawn at random, and this was re-emphasised at the commencement of the performance.

The group of three was co-ordinated and organised by ‘Yaron’\(^{223}\), who arranged for two other improvisers with whom he often worked, ‘Xena’ and ‘Zachary’, to also participate. During the video and audio taping performance session it was immediately apparent that the three improvisers worked very fluidly and easily with one another, and were each skilled at balancing the strengths of the other two members.

\(^{223}\) Names are coded to preserve anonymity. See section 3.1.2 below.
The Case study was sampled by network or snowball selection\(^{224}\), using a common form of criterion-based selection.\(^{225}\) The troupe selected was a typical\(^{226}\) case for practitioners of additive improvisation.\(^{227}\)

3.1.2 Code-Names

The three improvisers are given the code names Xena, Yaron and Zachary in this research\(^{228}\). As performers they might be characterised as follows:

**Xena** (female) An intelligent and harmonious player with an excellent memory for shelved Offers, thus a very important member in cohering the narrative of the Scenes. Xena played both low and high status characters, and both major and supporting roles in the Scenes, playing a wide range of character types, from a 6 year old girl to a sleeping grandmother.

**Yaron** (male) The coordinator of the group, who generally, though not always, played the high status roles. Yaron was a verbally articulate player skilled in naming things in the Scene, but also capable of generating a strong dramatic presence through silence. Yaron possessed a fairly deep, and by turns slow, authoritative or ‘laid-back’ vocal expression, depending on his adopted characters.

**Zachary** (male) A highly-charged, committed and dynamic player with a high degree of nervous energy, often adding action and forward momentum to the scene, and making full use of the stage space and physical levels. Zachary often came on to help a Scene that needed action, by adding a new level to the plot-line. However he was also able to switch mood and pace and play very quiet, withdrawn low-key characters. Zachary had the greatest range and variety of characterisation of the three, and an original, off-beat approach to Scenes, using action-oriented low-status support characters who served the storyline well.\(^{229}\)

\(^{224}\) Le Compte and Preissle, 1993, pp.73-4

\(^{225}\) ibid, p 69

\(^{226}\) Yin, 1991

\(^{227}\) ibid, p 75

\(^{228}\) As per University protocols, to preserve anonymity

\(^{229}\) Zachary also caused some transcription problems owing to the occasionally incomprehensible high-speed volubility of some of his characters.
Xena, Yaron and Zachary were full-time undergraduate students at the University of Sydney who gave their free time willingly to participate in a performance activity that they enjoyed doing. They all had training in the various Theatresports games and exercises, had had performance time on stage at Manning Bar Impro and were familiar with the OSAI process.

3.1.3 Authenticity of the data.

Aside from their own assurances, the possibility of the three improvisers preparing all the material for the seven Scenes beforehand would not only have been extraordinarily time-consuming for them, it would have also been against the grain of their entire Impro practice to date. Additionally, it would have been very difficult for them to prepare the correct Scenes prior to the performance, since the audience suggestions were not known by them beforehand; yet their Scenes were often nicely tailored to the given suggestion. Furthermore the data exhibits features that clearly show them negotiating and improvising ideas in the moment, and focusing the narrative of the Scene towards the suggestion given by the audience. Certainly, commonly recurring themes and identifiable routines and exchanges did emerge from the data, and clearly improvisers were more comfortable with certain characters and status levels than others\textsuperscript{230}, but the possibility of the data being prepared beforehand is remote in the extreme.

3.2 Instruments

The physical instruments for recording the primary data were three audio-visual recorders, two recording directly onto standard VHS tape (placed right and left), and one digital camera recording onto digital tape (placed centre). Questionnaire sheets and the round-table audio interview were used as secondary, reflective evidence, following the performance.

3.2.1 Triangulation

\textsuperscript{230} This issue is addressed above in the section dealing with the links between OSAI and Commedia (sect. 2.3.4).
Triangulation was achieved by the use of multiple channels of recording and reflecting on the data\(^{231}\). These channels were: Audio-Visual recording, Participant Questionnaires, Audio Recording of Interview post-Performance, memos and Field Notes recorded by the researcher after the performance, and the researcher’s own non-performance participant observation.

These five channels enabled a diversity of inputs to provide a firm context for interpretation\(^{232}\), and helped to support analysis of the main two channels: the researcher’s direct observations and Audio-Visual recordings of the performance event.

3.3 Procedure

The procedure by which the data was collected was as follows.

3.3.1 Overview of the Process

Improvisers had approximately two months’ prior knowledge of the performance, while a mutually suitable time was arranged for all of us to meet. The performance took place on Monday 7\(^{th}\) of July 2003, at 2pm on Level 5 in Room 513 of the Faculty of Education Building A35, The University of Sydney.

All three improvisers first warmed up with a shared story (story-in-the-round) exercise. After about five minutes of this, the first suggestion was given and the performance proper and data recording began. The improvisers then performed seven Scenes over a period of one hour and 13 minutes, derived from title suggestions given by the researcher. Some of these titles were prepared, and some were improvised by the researcher in response to a previous scene. This roughly paralleled what would occur in a live audience situation at an Impro performance. The Scenes differed greatly in ethos, mood and pace, and gave the three improvisers a broad scope for the

\(^{231}\) Dooley, 1995, p.260

\(^{232}\) Ragin, 1994, p.109
creation of a variety of characters and the telling of a range of different narratives. The scene titles and times were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene Number &amp; Title</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene 1: The Ice Cream Cone</td>
<td>5’45”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 2: Samuel’s Big Night Out</td>
<td>6’01”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages</td>
<td>14’50”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 4: Bubble Gum and Nature</td>
<td>6’40”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)</td>
<td>13’03”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 6: Holiday in Eastern Europe</td>
<td>12’30”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 7: The Camel Test</td>
<td>10’04”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the performance of the seven Scenes, a table was set up and performers were asked to complete questionnaires. They did this in silence for about ten minutes. Immediately following this, an audio-taped discussion took place on aspects of the improvisation that had just been performed. The questions that the researcher asked were oriented towards the pedagogic purpose of clarification and explanation of the improvisers’ creative processes and working practices. The idea of the Poetics was enquired into but not foregrounded, so as to not create a forced ‘expectancy set’ within the interview.

At the end of this, performers were asked to sign consent forms, permitting use of the material in this research. They were also given a copy of the ethics forms. This was done at the end of the session so that the formal paperwork stage did not interrupt the creative ethos they had developed as they warmed up. Consent forms were returned signed to the researcher three weeks later.

### 3.3.2 Researcher Role, Situational Set and Pedagogic Purpose

Researcher Role. The researcher did not participate in the Scenes, and defined his participatory role as befitted the pedagogic aim of the research. There was a general expectation that the improvisers perform to the best of their ability, so that the best possible material could be derived for other students of OSAI. However, the researcher as an audience member found himself reacting and responding spontaneously and naturally to the events being depicted. It was felt that this ‘participatory non-participant observer’ role help the naturalness of the event, reflecting what a true audience would have been like, where a clinical ‘white coat and
clipboard’ approach would have disturbed the veracity of the data. Each of the researcher’s audience suggestions was partly given with the sense of challenging the improvisers to make something of it, which they responded to.

The situational set\textsuperscript{233} projected by the researcher was of its pedagogical purpose in helping other less experienced improvisers to reach the skill level that Xena, Yaron and Zachary had achieved. They also realised that the recordings made by the three cameras that were taping them would be viewed by other students of OSAI. Despite this (or perhaps because of this), they remained quite relaxed and seemed to have fun with the session.

\subsection*{3.3.3 Description of the Research Site}

Room 513 on Level 5 of the education building A35, Faculty of Education at the University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia is a rectangular seminar/class room with windows to one side, a green board and moveable white board, measuring approximately 8 metres by 6 metres. Chairs and desks were stacked in one corner of the room. Three cameras were used: one digital camera placed front-on, and two old-style VHS recorders on either side of the room, angled at about 30 degrees, capturing left and right sides of the ‘stage’. The stage was in front of the whiteboard, where a tutor would normally be teaching. This location presented no problem, as Impro is often performed in makeshift spaces or in the open.\textsuperscript{234} The researcher showed the demarcation area that was off-camera and thus off-stage to the improvisers, and they used the whole space fully and skilfully, as well as all three levels.

This description is sketched in the following figure:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{233} Goffman, 1974
\item \textsuperscript{234} vide the numerous global web articles (www.improland.com \textit{et al}) on troupes having to perform in cellars, school halls (where Johnstone’s group first performed), in curtained off areas competing with noisy drinking areas, and in school and university classrooms.
\end{itemize}
3.3.4 Audio-Visual Recording of the Performance

Audio-visual taping occurred to ensure that an accurate and objective record of the performance event was made. Video tape allowed the researcher an intricate and accurate recall of external behaviours in a single co-linear stream-of-behaviour chronicle. While LeCompte and Preissle's account of video-recording now seems somewhat dated, they state\textsuperscript{235} that the essential aim of mechanical recording is "to preserve to the greatest extent the raw data"\textsuperscript{236}. Whilst (inter-)subjective impressions would be lost on other researchers not present at the time of the performance, they allowed the researcher who was present the possibility of examining and reviewing the data from a number of different perspectives repeatedly, thus revising their first impressions.

3.3.5 Participant Questionnaires

\textsuperscript{235} citing Mehan (1979)
\textsuperscript{236} LeCompte and Preissle, 1993, pp.230-1
Once the performance was completed, improvisers were invited to fill out a brief questionnaire. The questions were designed to reflect the research aim, couched in terms that could be related directly to the Impro Scenes they had just performed. They also gave an indication of the questions to be asked in the interview stage. The questionnaire took about 10 minutes for participants to complete.

Questionnaires are seen as private moments for reflection. The form of the questionnaire "is the same as it would be in a face-to-face interview, but in order to remove the interviewer the subject is presented with what, essentially, is a structured transcript with the responses missing." By providing participants with a running order of the questions to be asked in the less formal (but not informal) group interview stage, this allows participants time to reflect and ponder more deeply on the answers to these questions, and on the Scenes they had just performed. The paucity of questions prevents item order effects being a problem.

3.3.6 Group Audio Interview Recordings

Once the questionnaires had been responded to, the researcher then began an open ended interview which lasted about 25-30 minutes. This was audio-taped. Questions were asked on the areas responded to on the questionnaire, and improvisers were asked to elaborate on points made. Participants were invited to contribute to the discussion at any point that they felt relevant. Questions were directed individually to participants, but digressions and interruptions by other members were invited.

The researcher’s manner during the interview phase was throughout relaxed and friendly, but not informal. As Cicourel points out, the researcher’s role is to frame questions, but do little talking, so as to allow participants the maximum breadth for unpacking thoughts, feelings and reflections about the recently completed performance.

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237 See addenda on CD-ROM
238 Walker, 1985, p.91
239 Dooley, 1995, pp.142-5
241 Nevertheless, interviews are not chats, since interviews "have a script, and an agenda, and a purpose set by the researcher" (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993, p.179). Listening to the audio recording proved very useful during data analysis, but did not substitute for it (ibid, 1993, p.230).
3.3.7 Memos and Field Notes

Memos and field notes were used in an ongoing-way after the performance phase and throughout the duration of the analytical phase to record insights, make initial organisational memos, categorise of ideas, and define data categories that emerged through reflection on the data in respect of Johnstone’s Poetics\(^\text{242}\).

3.4 Framework for Interpretation: Philosophical Framework

Upon what basis should the data be analysed? Clearly, the nexus between ontology and epistemology, raw data and theory, is informed by the research aim, and this prevented the research from becoming distracted by abstract or phenomenological questions.

3.4.1 The four paradigms

Pure phenomenology is not strongly merited in social analysis, let alone in Additive Improvisation. Additive Improvisation already has its own terms, namely, Johnstone’s Poetics, but even ‘bare’ social interaction itself has mechanisms built into it for self-definition, since it is framed by situation and role expectancy, and co-constructed through agreement in the moment, with consequent speakers defining prior turns of talk reflexively\(^\text{243}\). This process can cause agreement or disagreement between participants, as a function of time, memory and history. What paradigm should we use then for a research subject that is already part-constituted in its own interpretation? How do we understand the paradigm that is the most appropriate for the features of this research subject?

Guba and Lincoln\(^\text{244}\) identify three ways of arriving at an understanding of paradigms. These three ways are provided by ontological, epistemological and methodological questions. The ontological question is the question of reality, of determining the

\(^{242}\) Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Miles and Huberman, 1994

\(^{243}\) Ten Have, 1999, p.169

\(^{244}\) 1994, p.108 ff
actuality of events described; the epistemological is the question of the relation between the knower and the known, between the researcher who is making sense of the data, and the data that is being made sense of; and the methodological question is concerned with the ways in which a type of method or selection of methods can be employed that fit both the data and the framework of understanding that the researcher brings to the research (his/her purposes, intentions.)

They then look at how four paradigms of research interpretation approach these questions in the form of a table, which is given in full below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Postpositivism</th>
<th>Critical Theory et al.</th>
<th>Constructivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>Naïve realism- “real” reality but apprehendable</td>
<td>Critical realism- “real” reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendable</td>
<td>Historical realism- virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallised over time</td>
<td>Relativism-local and specific constructed realities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Dualist/objectivist: Findings true</td>
<td>Modified dualist/objectivist; critical tradition/ community; findings probably true</td>
<td>Transactional / subjectivist; value-mediated findings</td>
<td>Transactional / subjectivist; created findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Experimental/ manipulative: Verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods</td>
<td>Modified experimental/ manipulative; critical multiplisms; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods</td>
<td>Dialogic / dialectical</td>
<td>Hermeneutical/ dialectical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.110)

Which paradigm best fits the purpose and nature of this research?

3.4.2 Critical Theory paradigm

The paradigm this research takes is the one that best fits its subject. Since the nature of the subject has both subjective and objective elements, the methodological framework for interpretation must necessarily reflect this two-sided nature.

Critical Theory, which stemmed from the social thinkers that made up the Frankfurter School (The Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt) of the 1930s and 40s such as
Herbert Marcuse, Jurgen Habermas and Walter Benjamin\textsuperscript{245}, asserts that reality is both subjectively constructed and objectively constituted. Critical Theory perfectly fits Case Study (Multiple and Single) Methodology, Action Research (particularly in its transformative aims\textsuperscript{246}) and Qualitative Social research, because Critical Theory allows for inductive inferences to be drawn at the same time as acknowledging the real effects of social paradigms within any social field\textsuperscript{247}. This enables the field of interpretation to be narrowed down significantly, which has a distinct advantage for research into OSAI, whose nature is immanently temporal.

The rapidity and facility of OSAI furthermore circumscribes as non-pragmatic the notion of profoundly evolved subjective meanings. On the other hand, since meanings are processed, experienced and relayed from subjective states, the philosophical model of interpretation also has to take into account the ontological end of the research spectrum. Furthermore, Critical theory recognises that facts \textit{(qua} mental objects\textit{)} are already defined by critical perspective\textsuperscript{248}. In privileging process over facts\textsuperscript{249} whilst still honouring the objective reality and socio-political knowledge effects of those facts\textsuperscript{250} (cf. Foucault’s “\textit{savoir}” and “\textit{pouvoir}”\textsuperscript{251}) within the realities established within OSAI, Critical Theory is able to bridge both the objective and subjective features of the data\textsuperscript{252}.

### 3.5 Framework for Interpretation: Methodological Framework

Given the philosophical approach provided by Critical Theory, what methodologies are appropriate to understand and analyse the data?

\textsuperscript{245} Honneth, 1993

\textsuperscript{246} see Horkheimer, quoted in Outhwaite, 1987, p.77, and Carroll (in Taylor ed. 1996)

\textsuperscript{247} Horkheimer, quoted in Outhwaite, 1987

\textsuperscript{248} Guba and Lincoln’s essay ‘Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research’ (1994) terms this idea ‘the theory-ladenness of facts’ (1994, p.107), and Kincheloe (1991) also points out the way interpretations of data always occur within a theoretical frame.

\textsuperscript{249} “\textit{Tatsächlichkeiten}” – Horkheimer 1993, p.7

\textsuperscript{250} see also Cavallari, Hector Mario, "Savoir and Pouvoir: Michel Foucault's Theory of Discursive Practice." Humanities in Society 3 (Winter 1980), 55-72.


\textsuperscript{252} See also Section 1.5 above
3.5.1 Approaching the Single-Case Study

The use of the case study in drama research is well documented. As Carroll notes, the case study of an improvised drama group within Critical Theory research paradigm "fits because drama, by its very nature as a negotiated group art form, is a non-reproducible experience." Given the flux-like state of the material, triangulation (or, in the case study, "multiple sources of evidence"), and convergence is important in order to dialogically determine interpretation of data. This is able to accurately reflect the inter-subjective reality of the research situation.

3.5.2 Single over Multiple Case Study

The advantage of a single exemplary case study for this research is that it allows the Poetics under study to be scrutinised more closely and accurately. A multi-case, quantitative study would not be appropriate for this end, since assumptions about the nature of the Poetics would have to be made across cases that may distort or obscure the real nature of the data. A longitudinal study is also inappropriate, since the development of skills over time is not being measured. It is therefore important with a single case study that the case under analysis is a typical one. This requires correct sampling procedures.

Overall, the use of Critical Theory on a single case study of an Impro group performing OSAI is highly appropriate, where the single case can be viewed within the context of, and as being typical of, the global context of Impro practice.

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254 Carroll, in Taylor, 1996, p.77
255 Yin, 1991, p.23
256 Le Compte and Preissle, 1993, pp.48-9
257 Ragin, 1994, p.49
258 Le Compte and Preissle, 1993, pp.81-2
259 Also the factors that the research is focused on - the Poetics of additive improvisation - involve skills that may improve and develop, but are unlikely to develop into qualitatively different skills.
260 Yin, 1991; 1993
261 see 3.1.1 above
3.5.3 Action Research & Open Scenes

There is no such thing as pure, empirical social research. Ragin (1994) argues that the social nature of social research, that is, its embeddedness within the social context, means that all social research has bias automatically built into it: "Social research is inescapably social in its implications. For this reason, social researchers cannot escape bias, regardless of which goals motivate research".

Action research embraces this fact and follows what Edmiston and Wilhelm term a four-step process or cycle of action, where researchers plan, act, observe effects, and reflect on those effects in order to plan for future actions. Given that "there is no research without a researcher", the researcher, framed the research situation from the start as being about the ways that improvisers were using the Poetics of OSAI skilfully, and did not look for e.g. psychological interpretations of Scenes.

3.5.4 Qualitative and Quantitative Research Procedures

Qualitative data analysis allows for subjective and ethnomethodological readings to find expression in the interpretation of the data, as well as allowing the inductive process of Grounded Theory to progress from the open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) of empirical data to higher order categories. This leads to the inductive building of theory from the recognition of real patterns within the data. Where in quantitative research categories precede research, in qualitative research "participant observers have only generalised questions as their guides and cannot translate them into standardised measures". Qualitative research investigates a priori assumptions about the nature and definition of the data under study.

Whilst the Poetics of additive improvisation exist beforehand through the global practice of Impro, the quantitative counting of coded occurrences of the various terms of Johnstone’s Poetics would not be able to tell us much about how Improvisers were using them. Moreover, such a quantitative process would presume a Positivist

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262 Ragin, 1994, p.53
263 in Taylor, 1996, p.94
264 Le Compte and Preissle, 1993, p.328
265 Dooley, 1995, p.269
research philosophy, and assume that (1) there was only one Poetic in operation at any one time, which the multi-valency of skilled improvisers' Moves discounts\textsuperscript{266}, and (2) that they were fixed in definition, which the notion of an Offer only being validated by the Accept that follows it discounts.

Under Critical Theory, the research rather aims to look both at the qualitative, intersubjective nature of the process whereby improvisers additively co-create improvised Open Scenes, and the ways in which they ‘deductively’ make use of the Poetics to do so.

3.5.5 Participant Observation in Qualitative Research

Whilst the researcher did not participate directly in the Scenes, he became an audience participant, to allow for minimal interference on the data\textsuperscript{267}. By becoming part of the social action, the researcher is able to - paradoxically - minimise disruption to the data being researched; by contrast, taking a positivistic approach and being a cold and clinical distant observer within the research situation would distort the quality of the data gathered. Taking a participant observational role (without actually taking part in the Scenes) also served to lower the researcher's own status down to the level of the group, an approach also taken by Johnstone in his practice with his improvisation groups\textsuperscript{268}. The paradox is that by becoming part of the action the researcher ensures least disruption to the material\textsuperscript{269}, as well as greatest access to its inner, ethnomethodological meaning.

This chapter has defined the methodology by which the study was conducted.

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\textsuperscript{266} We might compare this to the multi-valency of a skilled chess player’s move, which fulfils a number of functions at once (eg. attacking, blocking, protecting, pinning all at once)

\textsuperscript{267} Gubrium and Holstein, 1997, p.25

\textsuperscript{268} 1981, pp.29, 33ff.

\textsuperscript{269} Gubrium and Holstein, 1997, pp.25-8
Chapter 4. Results and Data Analysis

This chapter looks in detail at how the nine Poetics were being used in OSAI by the improvisers, code-named Xena, Yaron and Zachary.

After making some preliminary remarks regarding data transcription conventions (4.1), an overview with a ‘thumbnail’ outline of the seven Scenes is given (4.2), followed by a full and detailed narrative description of each Scene (4.3). The chapter then proceeds to examine the nine Poetics individually, through instances of their use across the seven Scenes. The Poetics are divided for purposes of analysis into four groups: Offering Moves (4.4), Character-focused Moves (4.5), Narrative-oriented Moves (4.6), and Responding Moves (4.7).

4.1 Preliminary remarks on the data

We here make two preliminary remarks clarifying terminology and categorisation of the data.

4.1.1 Terminology

A Scene, in OSAI, may contain within it a number of what are commonly regarded by playwrights as ‘scenes’. To avoid confusion we use a capital S to denote the overall Scene, and borrow the term ‘Phase’ (in preference to ‘Transaction’) from Discourse Analysis\(^\text{270}\) to denote the component ‘scenes’ within that Open Scene. A Phase is the next step in the Scene’s narrative, and mostly involves actors leaving the stage and coming on again to signify a change in time or place. So the phrase, ‘during this Phase in the Scene’ is used in preference to ‘during this scene in the Scene’.

Also, the Discourse Analysis term ‘Move’\(^\text{271}\) (or just ‘line’, abbreviated as ‘L’) is often used in preference to the singular ‘Poetic’, when talking about individual

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\(^{270}\) Coulthard and Montgomery (eds), 1981

\(^{271}\) A term borrowed originally from Game Theory.
instances of the Poetics from the data. ‘GAT’ stands for ‘Given Audience Title’ – the audience suggestion.

4.1.2 Transcription Conventions

Transcribed numbered examples in playscript form are used to illustrate or highlight important points from the data. Italics are used for bracketed stage directions and vocal emphases in the dialogue. Longer examples are used wherever possible, so that the discussion of segments is seen in context. Three fully transcribed Scenes (3, 5 and 6) are placed in Appendices 4-6 (on CD-ROM), referred to in the text by Example, Scene and Line number (thus E13_7:129-148 means Example 13, Scene 7 (The Camel Test), Lines 129-148), as well as the Appendix number. Where long sections from Scenes 3, 5 and 6 are referred to, the first and last words of the two lines are quoted, and the Appendix should be referred to. Capital L is used to refer to line numbers in the text body of a current example under discussion.

4.1.3 Categorisation of Data

How has the data been categorised? It is important to note at the outset that Moves, as specific incidents of the Poetics, have a favoured focus for definition. A Move may function in two, three or more different ways at once, and so may fulfil two, three or more of the Poetics’ functions at once. Where data examples are dealt with under a particular section, it is that particular feature of the data that is being highlighted, and not others (though others may be touched upon.) In assigning a single code, it was therefore necessary to find the most important definition as the Move stood in its context. This may not have been how next speaker defined the Move (though it often was)\(^{272}\). Thus, a Move’s key function in context here determines its coded definition.

That a Move is multi-functional and has more than one definition is a good thing – it signals that the improviser has a holistic understanding of how to develop a Scene and is able to reference multiple Scene parameters simultaneously. The categories that the data is assigned to, then, are not absolute, only preferred, for the purposes of the particular function under study at that point.

\(^{272}\) Sometimes, the real intent of the Move was not picked up until three or four Moves later; at other times the content of an ignored Move was shelved and reintroduced several Phases later.
4.2 Overview of the Seven Scenes

The seven Scenes are given an overview and a thumbnail outline as follows:

4.2.1 Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene Number &amp; Title</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene 1: The Ice Cream Cone</td>
<td>5’45”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 2: Samuel’s Big Night Out</td>
<td>6’01”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages</td>
<td>14’50”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 4: Bubble Gum and Nature</td>
<td>6’40”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)</td>
<td>13’03”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 6: Holiday in Eastern Europe</td>
<td>12’30”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 7: The Camel Test</td>
<td>10’04”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 ‘Thumbnail’ Outlines

Scene 1: The Ice Cream Cone
Dean (Zachary) has got his tongue stuck in an ice-cream cone. Sally (Xena) tries to help him by buying an unsticking device from Yaron but his tongue gets disconnected from his mouth instead. Complications ensue.

Scene 2: Samuel’s Big Night Out
Xena’s vicious (mimed) dog Samuel attacks passer-by Yaron. Bonzo (Zachary) tries to sign Samuel up to his Dog club. Zachary and Samuel go out to a night-club, and meet another member (Xena), but the dog-catcher (Yaron) abducts Samuel and then Bonzo, and then Xena as well and “loves all the viciousness out of them.”

Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages
Deirdre (Yaron) has a virtual office package and Frank (Zachary) wants one too. This involves a call to Mrs. Smith (Xena), a trip, a reunion of a grandson (Zachary) and his grandmother (also played by Xena), and the grandmother and her long-lost sister (also played by Yaron).
Scene 4: Bubble Gum and Nature
A bubblegum-blowing girl (Xena) meets a bird called ‘Bird’ (Yaron) with a physical problem. The girl is then revealed by company rep Peter (Zachary) to be John, a competitor from a rival bubble gum company. Peter (Zachary) loses a bubble-gum blowing competition with Xena, thanks to Yaron.

Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)
Xena and her husband Troy (Yaron) are doing some home renovation and trying to get rid of some unwanted parquet flooring. Through some coercion, Noah (Zachary) is persuaded to take the wood in his spa, but in the process, it becomes apparent that Zachary’s dead wife is lying in it, half-dissolved in acid. After consulting his dead wife he dissolves the wood as well, but his crime is caught.

Scene 6: Holiday in Eastern Europe
Greg (Zachary) and Bill (Yaron) are two eastern European car hire-salesmen, who attempt to rent a clapped-out car to a dumb American tourist (Xena). After many modifications to the car and much persuasion, she finally rents the car.

Scene 7: The Camel Test
A burger maker (Yaron) is giving a new recruit (Xena) ‘the camel test’ using a live camel (Zachary). Zachary then secretly reveals to Xena he is in disguise and seeking to recruit Xena into his company. Xena bargains with Zachary while playing along with Yaron. A specimen of Zachary’s hump for eating turns out to be poisoned, then Zachary turns up at Yaron’s lab out of disguise as Yaron slowly poisons himself. Zachary leaves, Xena follows, and Yaron dies.

4.3 Full Description of the Seven Scenes

Each of the seven Scenes is now fully described and where necessary commented on. The character roles that the three improvisers Xena, Yaron and Zachary take on are given prior to each description.

4.3.1 Scene 1: The Ice Cream Cone

Characters:
Xena = Sally – helpful person
Yaron = Unsticking-Sticking Device Salesman –formal, businesslike role
Zachary = Dean – low status person with tongue stuck; Shakespearian thespian at end

Close Description & Commentary:
Dean (Zachary) is eating an ice cream when Sally (Xena) enters, but Dean (Z) soon gets his tongue stuck in it. Zachary asks Xena to try and find some sort of unsticking device. At this point Yaron conveniently enters as an ‘unsticking device’ salesman. Xena tries to buy an unsticking device for one dollar, but she has no money and Zachary only has fifty cents, so she offers Yaron the ice cream as well. Yaron agrees and Xena buys the unsticking device and tries it out on Zachary after a count of three. Unfortunately, Zachary’s tongue becomes unstuck from his mouth, and is left attached to the ice-cream. Xena tries to justify this by telling Zachary he can now taste ice-cream for the rest of his life, but Zachary is not impressed and Xena realises a ‘re-sticking device’ is called for. Xena asks Yaron and he conveniently also sells these. Xena sells the unsticking device back to Yaron for $1.50, and buys the re-sticking device for a dollar. (Zachary whispers to Xena that she’s making a 50 cent profit.) After a count of three the problem is solved and Zachary gets his tongue back, testing his tongue out with the tongue-twisting line “I am the very model of a modern major general.” It works perfectly. However Xena now decides to try the ice cream and now gets her tongue stuck. Fed up, Zachary grabs the ice-cream and delivers a thespian diatribe to it, before throwing it out of a forty storey window.

The Scene moved through a logical structure of establishing a situation or problem to solve, then exploring various variations, alternatives and reversals of the problem, until it was resolved by Zachary’s ending. The narrative structure is of interest in this Scene as it was simple but elegant, proceeding in a cycle and to a degree mirroring the musical sonata form of statement of theme, development and restatement of theme. The Phases of the Scene mirrored one another as alternate versions of the same idea. For instance, there were two ‘application of the devices on Dean by Sally’ Phases, three modified Phases dealing directly with the ice-cream, and three modified Phases all dealing directly with the salesman Yaron. The first and penultimate Phases functioned as a return of the cycle, with the new person Sally getting her tongue stuck. Phase 9 was initiated by Zachary as a means of concluding the Scene. Overall, the Scene seemed to function as a further warm-up exercise for the players, who were not yet ready to get into deeper character explorations or more complex plot lines.
4.3.2 Scene 2: Samuel’s Big Night Out

Characters:
Xena = dog-owner / vicious dog society member
Yaron = passer-by / dog catcher
Zachary = Bonzo the vicious dog society president

Close Description & Commentary:
Xena enters walking her dog Samuel, whom she Endows through mime. Yaron enters, and Xena and Yaron chat for a while. Suddenly Samuel attacks Yaron’s leg, and rips off his trousers. Xena agrees to help Yaron get “a new pair of pants”, and Xena and Yaron go off, Xena helping Yaron walk with his bleeding leg. Zachary then enters on all fours as Bonzo and tries to induct (the Endowed) Samuel into a ‘vicious leg-eating dog society’, of which Bonzo is president. Bonzo and ‘Samuel’ then ‘roll on it’ (a kind of canine equivalent of ‘shaking on it’), and Zachary exits and re-enters standing wearing a tuxedo in front of a club on a ‘big night out’. Xena arrives, calling Zachary ‘boss’, and Zachary introduces Xena to Samuel. They are now in the club and Xena comments on the strange and quiet behaviour of Samuel. Zachary explains that the dog is nervous and suggests they buy him a drink. Suddenly Yaron calls from off-stage that “the dog-catchers are coming”, runs on and grabs ‘Samuel’, absconding with him off-stage. In shock Xena and Zachary exit to go and look for Samuel. Yaron enters the stage with ‘Samuel’ and rolls on the floor with him to ‘love all the viciousness out’. Xena and Zachary then re-enter and try to get Samuel back into their fold, but Yaron then grabs Zachary and pulls him to the floor and hugs and loves his viciousness out as well. Transformed, and with Xena now on her own, Zachary and Yaron then set upon Xena, pull her to the floor and love the viciousness out of her. All then exit. Zachary re-enters to give a ‘moral of the story’ ending, concluding that “all the dogs in all the Land were loveable and loving for ever”.

4.3.3 Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages

Characters:
Xena = Mrs Smith / Frank’s Gran
Yaron = Deirdre / Mrs (Pauline) Smith
Zachary = Frank

Close Description & Commentary:
Deirdre (Yaron) is sitting on stage typing. Frank (Zachary) enters and says hello and asks her what she’s doing. Deirdre explains ‘she’ has bought a new home office package that is completely virtual (it even has a “chairless chair”!). Frank (Zachary) is very interested, and Yaron tells him the story of where she got the equipment, telling Frank that he got it from a Mrs Smith from the Yellow Pages. Frank says he wants one too, and Deirdre tells him to “grab the shoehorn” in the vortex, for that will give him a direct link to any landline number. Frank gets a connection to Mrs Smith, who is a voice off-stage (Xena). Mrs Smith (Xena) however is quite difficult, and tells Frank that if he wants a virtual home office, he has to do a good deed, by paying his grandmother a visit, and bringing her some blue flowers. Deirdre agrees to drive Frank to his grandma’s in the hovercar (also bought from Mrs Smith.) They exit.

Frank’s grandma (now played by Xena) is asleep on-stage in her chair. Frank and Deirdre enter and Frank wakes his gran. They begin talking. It seems that Frank’s gran has been asleep for 23 years, and it turns out that Mrs Smith is Frank’s gran’s sister, Pauline Smith. Frank’s gran (Xena) is very concerned for her sister’s welfare and wants to talk to her Pauline. Zachary carries his gran off-stage and all three re-enter the scene back at Deirdre’s virtual home office space. Deirdre says she has to go to the toilet, and exits off. Frank’s Gran makes contact through the shoehorn with Pauline (now played by Yaron, as a voice off-stage). They catch up on lost times, since they haven’t spoken “since the War”. Frank and his gran (Xena) decide to visit Pauline Smith via the vortex. They go off. Deirdre (Yaron again) comes on, wondering where the others have got to but returns to happily typing her email in her office to end the Scene.

Phase 1 is almost two minutes long. This was appropriate, as three of the four characters were old folks, who were quite ‘dodderly’ and slow of speech. From the set-up, Frank’s character is the main impetus to the plot, for it is his desire to have a home office that guides the general action. However, Mrs Smith (Xena), using Blocking creatively, sets up the obstacle which forces Frank to go and visit his gran. The middle Phases involve visiting gran, but then a complication and connecting device is introduced by Xena at the end of this section, who says that Mrs Smith is her sister. Subsequent Phases explore this line, and Frank’s original line or objective is reintroduced afterwards (evident within the fictive Scene, as Frank reminds them of this original objective.) The next Phase resolves both lines or objectives: that of Frank wanting an office, and the later objective of Frank’s gran wanting to see her sister Mrs Pauline Smith. Deirdre is then left to return the Scene to its opening scenario. The completion of all four character’s objectives at the end is very satisfying.
4.3.4 Scene 4: Bubble Gum and Nature

Characters:

Xena = Bubble gum girl Sally, aged 6 / “John”, President of Hickory Dickory Bubble-Gum Corporation
Yaron = ‘Bird’, a big bird trapped inside a little bird
Zachary= Peter, employee with Hopsy Topsy Bubble Gum

Close Description & Commentary:

Xena enters as a bubblegum-chewing six-year old girl Sally, singing ‘Lollipop’ and dancing round the stage. Sally’s singing is interrupted by squawking off-stage (Yaron). She attempts to continue her singing but is interrupted by further loud squawking. She calls out, striking up a conversation with a bird called ‘Bird’. It transpires that Bird has an involuntary squawking reflex, which is the result of being a big bird trapped inside a very little bird. When Bird asks Sally (Xena) about herself she becomes shy, but admits she is 6 years old. Sally asks Bird if there is a solution to his squawking problem, but suddenly Zachary rushes on, lost, calling out to his (mimed) boss behind, as they are both looking for Bird. Peter (Zachary) sees Sally and explains to her that he is working for the Hopsy Topsy Bubblegum Company and is in direct competition with the Hickory Dickory Bubblegum Company (which brand Xena is chewing), and that he has to find the giant bird trapped inside a little bird to pound it up and make an amazing new recipe of bubblegum that will send their competitors broke. Sally reacts with revulsion at this idea. Peter then begins to question Xena about her identity, and suddenly ‘unzips’ her to reveal that she is really ‘John’ the president of the Hickory Dickory bubblegum company, the rival company to Hopsy Topsy. Peter and John/Sally face off against each other, boasting about who is the best, then Peter suggests they have a competition to see who can blow the biggest bubble. John agrees to the challenge. Then, during the competition, Bird (Yaron) enters and bursts Peter’s bubble. Peter falls to the floor saying the bubble-gum is like acid burning his eyes out. Bird calls to John/Sally to let him climb inside her bubble to escape, and they leave Peter rolling on the floor.

This Scene explores the theme of layered identity. Players were asked to do something to do with bubble gum and nature, and this is established in the opening lines. Phase 2 develops the characters and establishes the situation and relationship between bubble gum girl Sally and Bird. The following Phases explore a tender
connection between Bird and Sally, until Zachary enters and changes the pace and mood. The theme of exploitation of nature by global companies is then introduced by Zachary, as well as the further development of the layered identity idea, as Zachary ‘unzips’ Xena’s identity to reveal a new one. The competitive theme is given stage action by the bubble gum competition with the inevitable turn-around in fortune and hubris for Zachary, and re-establishment of Bird and Sally’s tender relationship as they escape.

4.3.5 Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take two)

Characters:
Xena = wife
Yaron = Troy, Xena’s husband
Zachary = Noah, a friend of Xena and Troy.

Close Description & Commentary:
Typical drawling-accented Aussies Troy (Yaron) the husband and his wife (Xena) are doing some home renovation. Troy is apologising for laying a thick oak timber floor while Xena was away instead of the blue carpet she wanted. Xena forgives him, and they figure out how they might get rid of the timber. Xena suggests that they ring up Noah, as he is building a big boat. Troy says he’ll call him up and see if he wants the wood. Troy calls up Noah (Zachary) and asks him round for a cup of tea. Noah sounds rather nervous on the phone and comes round soon after, and when Troy gives him a cup, Troy points out that Noah has dropped and smashed the saucer on the floor. To make up for it, Troy suggests to Noah that he takes the timber that they don’t want, and Xena reminds Noah that he is building a boat and could use the wood. During the conversation Noah insists he lives alone, but Xena and Troy remind Noah that he has a wife. They have a problem about transporting all the wood, as Noah only has a small rucksack, so Troy comes up with the idea of removing Noah’s spa and putting it on wheels to transport the wood in.

They go to Noah’s house. They go into the bathroom, and Xena and Troy comment on the funny smell, but Noah denies this. Noah leaves them, saying he is going to get the wheels for the spa, and telling them not to take the cover off the spa. While Xena and Troy are alone they notice a woman’s shoe sticking out of the spa from underneath the cover. After a while, Troy dares his wife to take a look under the...
cover, where they discover Noah’s wife’s half-dissolved headless corpse. They decide not to force the issue with Noah, as they still want him to take the wood, and when Noah returns, despite his extremely suspicious behaviour, they assure him they aren’t interested in anything except him taking the wood away. During this Phase of the Scene the cover-up is played on and extended (the shoe of the dead wife poking out visibly, the smell, the burning acid). Noah puts the wheels on the spa, and they pick up the spa and all exit to carry it back to Troy and Xena’s place. As they re-enter the house with “the wrong floor”, acid drips on the wooden tiles and burns holes in it. Xena says ‘that ain’t right’, but then Troy reminds Noah it’s now his wood, and he and Xena make some pretext to go upstairs and “leave [Noah] to it”. Noah, now alone, talks to his half-dissolved wife, and says that she’s going to have to share the acid with the wood. He dissolves all the wood in the bath. Xena and Troy return onstage, and remark how well he’s managed to get rid of the wood. He lies, saying he took it home. They then tell Noah that while they’ve been out they’ve made a phone call and “there are some people” they’d like him to meet (i.e. they’ve called the police.) They exit, taking Noah out with them.

This Scene was probably the most exciting and interesting one to watch, as it created rich three-dimensional characters, a dramatic situation, a multi-layered subtext and conflict between the differing agendas and crossing objectives of all three characters. The Scene latched onto the GAT immediately, developing the situation of “the wrong floor”, and that of the two characters Troy and his wife. The Scene then introduced the new character Noah as a solution to the problem. While Xena had in mind the biblical Noah for Zachary, Zachary’s development of his own character developed a further layer, and the ‘wrongness’ became Noah having killed his wife. This fact was then extended upon through the narrative, followed by the bringing together of the two main narrative lines (the ‘wrong’ done, and the wooden ‘floor’ to get rid of) in the final Phases. The ending of the Scene provides a satisfactory ‘moral’ conclusion to the story, with justice prevailing.

4.3.6 Scene 6: Holiday in Eastern Europe

Characters:

Xena = Sarah, dumb American tourist
Yaron = Bill, higher status Eastern European car hire salesman
Zachary= Greg, Bill’s sidekick business partner
**Close Description & Commentary:**

Bill (Yaron) and Greg (Zachary) are two eastern European hire car salesmen. Bill is berating Greg for denting his car, and Greg explains he dented it when he ran over a small child “with the soft head” in a road accident. Sarah (Xena), an American tourist, then enters to rent a car, and explains she wants a convertible because she is travelling ‘down the coast’\(^{273}\). Bill and Greg introduce themselves, and Bill pulls Greg aside and tells him to steal a military sword, cut the roof off and attach a tarpaulin to turn the car into a convertible. He gives him five minutes. Bill then turns to Sarah and gives her a guided tour and history of the Eastern European town to keep her occupied, while Greg is rushing about madly refashioning the car in the background. Bill turns aside from his tourism spiel to berate Greg for taking so long and to fix the dent. Bill returns to distract Sarah’s attention from the refitting of the car, and offers to tell her a further story, this time for “ten U.S dollars”, which she agrees to. However this is interrupted by Greg, who announces that the car is ready, but then Sarah says that the $200 per week asking price for a convertible is too expensive, and that the $100 price for a non-convertible is more suitable. Bill and Greg exchange glances, then Bill goes back to telling Sarah the story, while Greg urgently refashions the car back into a non-convertible with an oxyacetylene torch. Now the car is rewelded, the two partners then persuade Sarah that the various aspects of the car which she notices (the car is “smoking”, has no steering wheel, no door, a broken window, and no reverse gear) are all quite normal for this model. Finally, convinced, Sarah drives off.

The situation and characters are clearly established early on, as is the relationship and status of the two Eastern European characters. Xena picks up on the Offer in Yaron’s speech to Zachary about how he is going to rent the car ‘to stupid American tourist’ and Xena thus ‘Accepts’ this narrative Offer and enters as this character. In this first Phase, almost all elements of the Scene are established, and the following Phases simply play them out in various permutations. As Xena comes on, it becomes apparent that she is both dumb and demanding, and this leads to the comic interchanges throughout the Scene, of the two schemers trying to swindle the

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\(^{273}\) The researcher had images of the Dalmatian coastline along the Adriatic sea at this point, while X and Y could have been thinking of the Black Sea, or even the East or West coast of America, since X’s character Sarah was a culturally nieve American who could only think in terms of her own country. This perhaps indicates the ways in which the objective framework of an OSAI Scene is filled in by subjective audience interpretation, again emphasising Johnstone’s point about privileging process over content.
American tourist out of her money, so they can make a good deal ($100 a week for a $4 car, plus $10 for the ‘story’).

Much of the comedy occurred from the way the Scene ran two actions in parallel. On one level was Bill (Yaron), sales-talking Sarah (Xena) into renting the car and distracting her attention by pointing out features of the ‘quaint’ Eastern European town with its Soviet era crumbling concrete blocks of flats and civil architecture, telling unbelievable stories of fictitious historical events such as a local hero called ‘Tom Hanks’ attempting to assassinate a US President. On another level was low status Greg (Zachary), madly rushing around the stage at high tempo, making the necessary modifications to the car, sword, oxyacetylene torch and tarpaulin in hand. There was no split focus as both actions ran in parallel. The characters Bill and Greg formed a typical straight man and his sidekick routine, the two shonky car dealers attempting to dupe the gullible but resolutely high status Sarah into handing over her money.

4.3.7 Scene 7: The Camel Test

Characters:
Xena = Burger Boy applicant Frank
Yaron = Owner of burger company ‘Burger Burger’ “Darryl”
Zachary = Camel; Competitor burger company member trying to hire Xena, and planning to cross-breed cows and camels; “Barney”

Close Description & Commentary:
Straight off the GAT, Zachary enters the Scene as the ‘camel’, putting a chair on his back as a hump. Yaron and Xena enter talking, and Yaron the burger company owner is giving the new ‘burger boy’ recruit Xena ‘the camel test’, by which Xena must identify camel meat. Yaron leaves Xena alone with the camel (Zachary), in order for Xena to familiarise herself with him, to prepare herself for the test later. Xena and the camel spend a while on stage eyeing each other up, and then Xena speaks to the camel, saying that she doesn’t like him but is just going through with the test to get the job. Zachary then takes off the camel hump (puts down the chair), and reveals that he’s not a camel but a spy working for a rival burger company who are trying to

274 Mirroring the ways two Zanni characters might approach a high status Pantalone, Dottore or Capitano in order to swindle them
cross-breed cows and camels in the desert to make ‘cowmels’. Zachary the competitor
tells Frank the burger boy (Xena) that if she agrees to come and work for his
company, they will pay her well. Frank the burger boy is not yet sure, and Zachary is
also non-committal. Yaron re-enters and Zachary quickly reassumes his hump
disguise. Yaron tells Frank that in order to identify the camel, she needs to cut a small
slice of meat off the camel, and cook it to see if she can identify the taste. Yaron says
he has a rotisserie out back, which cooks camel kebabs called ‘kemabs’ and he hands
Frank a big butcher’s knife and exits to go and heat up the pans. As soon as Yaron
leaves, Frank asks Zachary again to clarify the exact payment. Zachary then tells
Frank urgently that he’ll guarantee payment of seven million dollars if she agrees to
switch sides. Frank agrees, but asks what to do about the meat Yaron wants cut off
him. Zachary says take the chair, and pretend it’s the cut off meat, but not to eat it
herself as it is poisonous. Yaron enters and takes the chair as the meat specimen, but
is slightly suspicious of it. Frank explains it’s like a four pronged shish kebab (the
four thin metal legs of the chair). Yaron seems persuaded and cooks the chair in
boiling oil. Zachary now turns up out of disguise as the burger competitor. Yaron
starts to eat the poisoned chair. Yaron is not happy about having his competitor
Zachary in his laboratory, and goes to call Security, telling Frank to try the meat while
he’s gone. When Yaron returns Frank pretends to be chewing. Zachary exits before
‘security’ come and Frank finally agrees to follow him. Yaron, alone, is philosophical.
He continues to eat the chair, then freezes still, and drops dead.

This Scene again worked with the idea of layers and duplicity, and the development
of characters with clear motives and objectives. Xena was the character in the middle,
through which the competing aims of Zachary and Yaron were fought. The threatened
cutting of a slice of Zachary to fry up and taste raises the stakes\(^\text{275}\), as does the
subsequent slow poisoning of Yaron, which produced an extended dramatic irony,
and heightened the sense of urgency between the characters Xena and Zachary, in
particular for Xena to commit her hand. The Scene overall showed the ways in which
improvisers think beyond their own roles in OSAI, and in terms of the narrative of the
whole Scene, to determine what it needs to continue and develop. Despite the
weakness of Zachary and Xena’s exits at the end, Yaron’s death created a satisfactory
tying up of the narrative threads to close off the story.

The study now proceeds to its core business: the analysis of the individual use of the
nine Poetics in the Scenes.

\(^{275}\) no pun intended
4.4 Initiating Moves: Offering

Offers are ‘anything an actor does’ on stage. This extremely broad definition allows for the acceptance of any creative action, ranging from extreme physical and vocal exertion to the improvisers’ bare existence on stage, as an “offer”. Improvisers are encouraged to “give gifts” of Offers, which help to define and support the situation on stage. Offers and accepting the process of Offering encourages improvisers to ‘accept their own Offers’, ones that emerge from their own creative subconscious, by viewing them as ‘offerings’, and also enables them to see Offers as significant only within the frame of the fictive reality of the Scene.

Johnstone makes a further point about Offers, taken up by his followers: an Offer is only as good as its Accept. That is, an Offer does not become valid within the Scene until it gets accepted as real by a second improviser. An Offer remains only a possibility until it is accepted by another, at which point the Offerer can make good on his/her Offer. That is, final definition can only be arrived at dialogically, which can lead to the conundrum that a Block can be accepted as an Offer, and thus cease to be a Block. Nevertheless, the dyadic process of Offering and Accepting makes up the core fabric of the Scene’s weave. Johnstone remarks: “Scenes spontaneously generate themselves if both actors offer and accept alternately” (1981, p.100), and the Scenes in the data clearly appeared to be being ‘knitted’ together by this self-replicating binary process of Offering and Accepting. This section examines the ‘Offering’ side of the Offer-Accept equation.

4.4.1 Targets and Functions of Offers

Offers are closely bound up with the parameters of fictive stage reality. These parameters refer to the creation of character, definition of the surrounding space as a location, definition of the ongoing action, and the socio-psychological and

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276 1981, p.97


278 1981, pp.75-88

279 Schwartz et al., 2001

280 cf. Bakhtin’s notion of the way that truth is constructed dialogically (Bakhtin, 1981)

281 Elam 1980; Esslin, 1987
interpersonal relationship dynamics through which that action takes place. Johnstone is more concerned with the process of offering, as stemming from the actor’s instrument (their body, voice and imagination), rather than the fictive locale and content of the Offers themselves. Yet these Offers exist in a social space and define it, and when prior premises are additively Accepted, this social space becomes thereby defined. Accepted Offers thus form the fabric of the fictive social space.

The OSAI data therefore draws attention to the targets of Offers, the definition of this fictive reality, and the functions that Offers can fulfil. From the data, it emerged that Offers appear to fulfil the following functions. They may:

1) open the Scenes from the GAT
2) have a spatio-temporal deictic function,
3) have a phatic, relational or emotive self-expressive motive not necessarily arising from the given circumstances (Stanislavski, 1937) of the character
4) be derived as a product of the linguistic world\textsuperscript{282}: the combining of lexical elements, the deriving of neologisms and synonyms, or associative lateral thinking or imagination, via semantic and/or phonological cues
5) close the Scene

While some of these functions are more properly dealt with in the sections on Endowment, character and narrative-based Moves, they are here broadly touched on as arising crucially from the actor’s Offering process, even as they serve those other particular Scene parameters. For instance, while an improviser who comes on and says “Nyeh!” might be interpreted as being angry, a petulant child, an inmate of a lunatic asylum in his cell etc., this is all post-facto, and doesn’t get confirmed until an Accept is made (by another improviser, or indeed, himself.) The guttural “Nyeh!” is thus primarily performative and physically self-expressive, before its Endowment by the subsequent Accept, and thus is a type 3) Offer.

The five functions of Offers are now examined.

4.4.2 Opening Offers

\textsuperscript{282} Wittgenstein’s famous edict is appropriate for this type of Offer
Opening Offers are the first Offers of the Scene, and serve to establish character, situation and action, deriving from the presuppositions (taken to be) contained within the GAT.

In the data, the opening Offers of the Scene proceeded directly from the GAT. There was no time-out taken for planning or discussion - the improvisers began the Scene immediately. It was clear that the improvisers were skilled and confident in doing this. The Researcher’s (R) GAT is included in the transcription prior to the Scene’s opening:

[Example 1] [E1_1:1-10]

*Scene 1: The Ice Cream Cone*

(Off) R: The Ice-cream cone… A scene with an ice-cream cone in it.
1 X: (enters) Hi Dean.
2 Z: (enters with head tilted to side and tongue sticking out, apparently licking an ice cream, which slurs his speech) Hi- Hi Sally, how ya doin.
3 X: Pretty good
4 Z: Good.
5 X: What’s that?
6 Z: Ice cream
7 X: Yeah? Is it good?
8 Z: No.
9 X: Oh, why not?
10 Z: Cos my tongue’s stuck in it.

Here, the characters’ names are established, and the main action is named as well as their attitudes and emotional states conveyed paralinguistically. L5-6 name the physical Offer from L2 to confirm the link to the GAT, and by L10 the problem to solve is established as the characters’ mutual objective.

In Scene 2 only the dog Samuel is named, but since this name is the focus of the GAT, and since the Scene opening reflects the type of conversation dog owners have, the omission of other identities seems natural:

[Example 2] [E2_2:1-23]

*Scene 2: Samuel’s Big Night Out*

(Off) R: Ermmm… Samuel’s big night out.
1. X: * (Enter. To ‘Samuel’ at feet) Come on Samuel, Come on. Sit here. Sit! Sit.

2. Y: * (enters and stands by X, rubs hands and blows into them)

3. X: Gettin chilly.

4. Y: * (continues to rub hands)

5. X: * (to Samuel at feet) N- No!

6. Y: Awful lot of weather we’ve been having.

7. X: It’s certainly- there’s an unusual amount of weather in the weather.

8. Y: Mmm.


10. Y: That’s a nice dog.

11. X: Thank you. * (to Samuel at feet) Samuel!

12. Y: What’s the dog’s name? * (lifting leg in protection) Oh!

13. X: It’s * (scolding) Samuel!

14. Y: * (mimes being attacked by dog on leg)

15. X: Yeh- Samuel! Samuel! Stop it. No, come just- No, Samuel! Samuel! Samuel! Come! Stop!

16. Y: * (defending himself from mimed dog) Ah …

17. X: Oo! I’m very sorry. Oh… Yes

18. Y: * (clutching leg, then crotch)


20. Y: Mm.

21. X: Right! You seem to be-

22. Y: Had its whole mouth round my trouser leg, and the rest of the trouser as well

23. X: Yes. You seem to be bleeding

[Example 3] [E3_3:1-25]
Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages

(Off) R: Erm, I found it in the yellow pages. I found it in the yellow pages.
1 Y: (enters and sits down...)
25 Y: … Wooo! (mimes floating orb screen with hands)

The link to the GAT is handled more obliquely, and it is not until L50 that the ‘yellow pages’ idea is worked into the Scene. This ‘delayed gratification’ of the GAT’s acceptance signals greater long-term control by the improvisers over the development of the whole Scene. The opening Phase establishes the two somewhat odd characters Frank and Deirdre, the location of Deirdre’s home office, and Frank’s objective of wanting a similar office. These plot and character tendrils grow quite naturally in the first few minutes, and nothing is forced or hurried, but allowed to develop at its own pace, in a kind of surreal quasi-naturalism. The situation and given circumstances are futuristic and fanciful, but the acting of the characters and their relationship is grounded in naturalism. Notice how L4 is sensitive to the physical Offer in L1, naming it as Y mimed it in L1. L6 is an attempt to respond to the motive of L1, and Justifies why Deirdre has called off-stage for Frank.

Scene 4 establishes the relationship dynamics of the Scene as much as naming the characters and justifying the GAT link:

[Example 4] [E4_4:1-28]

Scene 4: Bubble Gum and Nature

1 X: (enters dancing and skipping as she sings) Lolly pop, lolly pop, mm-yeah a lolly pop, Lolly pop, lolly pop, mm-yeah a lolly pop-
2 Y: (off-stage, interrupting with squawking bird noise, galah-like) Aa!! Aa!! Aa!!
3 X: (attempts to start dancing and singing again)
4 Y: (Squawking bird noise, Galah-like, again) Aa!!
5 X: (attempts to start dancing and singing again)
6 Y: (Squawking bird noise, Galah-like, again) Aa!!
7 X: What is that? (looking about) Hello?
8 Y: (off-stage) Yes?

As discussed above, Johnstone makes this point when he admires Stanislavski’s naturalism but wants to combine it with the free play of the (non-naturalistic) imagination.
9 X: Hello?
10 Y: Hello.
11 X: Who are you?
12 Y: I am… Bird
13 X: I can’t see you
14 Y: I’m standing… equidistant between your ankles.
15 X: (looking down) Hello!
16 Y: Hi.
17 X: How’re you going?
18 Y: I’m not bad, how are you.
19 X: Good. (moving back)
20 Y: Thank you.
21 X: That’s- Sorry I didn’t mean to skip over the top of your head.
22 Y: Well I’m very small.
23 X: Y-
24 Y: It happens quite often
26 Y: Thank you. Do you like my wondrous plumage?
27 X: It’s wondrous.
28 Y: Oh. Thank you.

The link to the GAT is immediately established in L1-2. L9-28ff. establish and build a relationship between the two characters (who correspond to the two GAT elements), the little girl blowing bubble-gum and Bird. Physical and locational properties are endowed between X on-stage and Y off-stage, which begins the thematic idea of levels and layers.

Scene 5 exploits the phatic communion of the married Aussie couple, situated in a typical home-renovation scenario:

[Example 5] [E5_5:1-28]

Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)
(Off) R: Erm, The Wrong Floor… (after first take) Another Wrong Floor.
1. X: (enters, kneeling…
28 Y …mimes phoning Noah)

The GAT is taken up non-verbally by X in L1, who then names the floor in L5. Y’s L12 & 14 lay the ground for the ‘wrongness’ that he admits in L16, using the
synonym ‘mistake’ for ‘wrong’ in L18. (The notion of ‘wrong’ is developed as a theme later on by Z’s character Noah.) The establishment of the typical ‘Aussie’ characters with their droll humour and pragmatism also heightens naturalism.

Scene 6 uses an oblique beginning to offset and delay the holiday Offer being accepted until L15-16. From L1 on, Y indexes the Eastern European location through accent and prosody, and establishes back-story and (sub-)culture through his and Z’s materialist outlook, as the two partners argue over the dented car. The tourist part of the GAT is not invoked until after this conversation, at which point X’s entrance as the dumb American Sarah is called for:

[Example 6] [E6_6:1-16]

**Scene 6: Holiday in Eastern Europe**

(Off) R:  *(referring to their previous scene)* That was great… That could probably have gone on for another half an hour. Erm… Holiday in Eastern Europe.

1    Y: (to Z) So you are telling me, you have… you have dented car.

16  X: *(entering. Strong American accent)* Hello!!

As in Scene 3, this delay in the opening is a measure of improvisers’ collaborative control over the narrative shape.

Scene 7 accepts the GAT immediately through a physical camel Offer in L1. L2 gives the verbal Offer of both the camel and the test. L10-33 further establish the physical reality of Z as a camel, while L34ff. begins the central plot line based around the ‘test’. The Scene develops these two lines of ‘camel’ and ‘test’ through to L46 and beyond:

[Example 7] [E7_7:1-48]

**Scene 7: The Camel Test**

(Off) R:  *(referring to their previous scene)* That was great. We’ll just do one more quick one, then I’ll get you to fill out these forms. The… The… erm… The Camel Test.

1    Z: *(comes on as the camel, using a chair on his back as a hump)*

2    Y: *(to X, American accent)* Well young Frank, you’ve passed the litmus test, you have one more hurdle to being a fully fledged… burger boy. You have to pass the camel test.

3    X: *(also American accent)* The camel test?
Y: I’m going to prep you for that now.
X: OK.
Y: OK?
X: OK.
Y: You ready?
X: Yeah.
Y: OK. (to Z the camel) Come here boy (whistling to him)
X: My!
Z: (Z the camel comes over)
X: That’s a camel.
Z: (Z behaves as a very odd camel, smiling, bucking and shifting and spinning abruptly – a temperamental camel)
Y: All right. All right. That’s good.
Z: (Z continues to behave as a very odd camel– he turns and gazes directly at X and flashes a huge toothy smile, then spins away.)
Y: Here’s the camel, OK?
X: Yeah.
Y: You can see that can’t you?
X: (Less than convinced) Yeah.
Y: All right. I want you, I want you to look at him very carefully
X: He’s looking-
Y: just for a moment.
X: He’s looking at me funny
Y: Oh camels are funny funny things. They sometimes… smile like that.
Z: (Z behaves more oddly, smiles again manically, then turns away)
X: No, he wasn’t, he-
Y: (interrupting) Sometimes they just smile, you know they’re really happy-
X: No he-
Z: (Z calms down suddenly)
X: OK.
Y: See the way he’s just-
Z: (Z stands at ease)
Y: Well I want you to take a good look at him, and then I’m going to take you back to the lab, and then we’re going to show you a series of images, with our scientist, Barney? (rising intonation)
X: Yeah.
Y: And from those, you have to pick the camel. Because as a burger boy…
X: Mm.
Y: …It’s important that we do not serve camel meat in any of our restaurants
X: True
Y: Yet there are a lot of dangerous people in the burger industry, and these people will try to sell you… camel meat.
X: OK
Y: So I want you to – I’ll leave you alone for a moment, I want you to get to know the camel, so that you can choo- you know
X: Yeah, no OK.
Y: OK?
X: Fair enough
Y: Good
X: OK
Y: All right. (exits)

Note how Y again creates back-story in L2, which he then uses as his character’s objective through to L48.

4.4.3 The GAT Offer

E1-7 above show how the GAT Offer is taken up by the opening Offers of the Scene. Opening Offers collapse the infinite possibilities of the GAT into a real time and place, realising it as a fictive reality on stage. Opening Offers link backwards to the GAT Offer (acting as Accepts or Extends to that Offer), and forwards towards situational objectives (via the situated characters’ motives.) Thus the Scene proceeds directly from the GAT, fusing harmoniously and integrally with it, and creating a forward-moving trajectory from its presuppositions.

Improvisers served the GAT by installing it as the central axis point round which the rest of the Scene’s narrative and thematic development revolved, returning at points throughout the Scene to re-emphasise it. For instance, E4 establishes a relationship between the bubble-gum blowing little girl and Bird (‘Bubble gum and Nature’) that will provide the major alliance against the capitalistic Z, that makes up the central conflict of the whole of the Scene (global corporatism vs. nature.) Scene 3 (I Found
It...) is about finding not only virtual computer technology but also long lost souls. Scene 5 (The Wrong Floor) explores the notion of wrongness and doing wrong, and the motif of breaking both physical laws as well as moral ones got worked crucially into the subplot of the Scene, and then became an equal part of the main plot: the solving/dissolving of both the wood and Z’s crime, itself one of dissolution. Scenes 1, 6 and 7 all link directly and clearly to the GAT. (Johnstone’s linking of creativity with the unconscious mind runs throughout his first book (1981), and the notion of puns or jokes on the titles of the Scenes that then become its themes are suggestive of Freud’s observations on the connection between puns and the unconscious.\(^\text{284}\))

The multi-level interpretation of the GAT indicates how improvisers can integrate the GAT Offer into the realised Scene at both a conscious and subconscious level, developing motifs and central plot-lines that reflect back on, and more deeply interpret, the GAT’s surface content.

4.4.4 Deictic Offers

Deictic Offers are crucial for establishing the reality of the fictive world on stage. Deictic Offers ground the Scene spatiotemporally, and create references to features of the surroundings or objects. They also provide an avenue for action. For example Y’s directive Offer “…grab the shoehorn” [E8_3:73] both furthers the story and supports the Offer developed and extended in [3:48-55]. L73 opens up a window into other worlds and locations that will be developed in the next Phase.

Deictic Offers often develop the plot at the same time:

[Example 9] [E9_5:60-2]

*Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)*

60. Y: Yeah, I made …
62 Y: …look you just broke the saucer.

This very literal Offer of a cup of tea proffered to Z was established earlier as a suggestion by X to get Z to come round. Here it is actually a set-up by Y to make Z’s character obliged to take the wood from X and Y, however, the dropping of the saucer

\(^{284}\) Freud was fascinated by humour and its physiological effects. Vide Sigmund Freud, “Jokes and Puns and their Relation to the Unconscious” (1917)
is Y’s development of the Offer, and creates a deictic effect of furthering the reality of the floor onto which it drops, the floor which forms the central theme and title of the Scene.

When we examine a well-made Open Scene we soon get an appreciation for how much is going on in every line. The polyfunctionality of these lines appears to stem from an unconscious process, and uses a process of weaving social reality that is taken for granted in normal conversation. The paranoia with which Z is covering up his tracks when he says “Just don’t take the cover off…” [E10_5:135] is key to his character’s predicament, and the subplot (which becomes the main plot towards the Scene’s second half) of the murder of his wife and her dissolution in a bath of acid is here furthered. However, while it plants the suggestion for Y and X to do exactly that - take the cover off - and discover the dead body of Z’s wife in Z’s absence, its mere physicalising of the presence of the spa and its motivic importance fulfils a vital deictic function on an objective as well as psychological level.

Another example of multiple functions embedded in deictic Offers occurs in [6:85]:

[Example 11] [E11_6:79-85]

Scene 6: Holiday in Eastern Europe
79. X: Erm. That that part …
85. X: …We have one of them in America.

The dramatic effect of pointing out to the horizon in the opposite direction to the mad Z in the background, is essential to the establishing of location and space as well as the tableau effect and double-paced contrapuntal rhythm of the Scene. (It also phonologically furthers the East European location through the loss of the definite and indefinite articles in Y’s speech – L84 “…that is bridge. Of town’.) Moreover, both parties are trying to ‘keep face’ (Goffman, 1959). Through L85, X establishes both a connection between herself (Sarah) and Y (Bill) by pointing out that they both come from countries with bridges in them. L85 also makes the cultural assertion that anything in Eastern Europe is always going to be matched or bettered by the same version in America, indexing a stereotypical New World response. Y’s intonation in

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285 Slade and Eggins, 1997, p178
286 T.S.Eliot called this the ‘objective correlative’ (‘Notes Towards a Definition of Culture’, 1925)
L84 meanwhile maintains his patriotic pride for his country. The deictic meaning of L79-84 becomes thus recontextualised in this broader cross-cultural dialogue.

More blatant deictic Offers occur at Phase changeover points, where the new step in the story needs to be located. In Scene 2 Z moved close up to the front of the stage, and looked upwards, as if to signal large doors and an impressive building:

[Example 12] [E12_2:47]

Scene 2: Samuel’s Big Night Out

47. Z (Z comes back on stage, standing this time) Mighty fine tuxedos we’ve got, Samuel. Ho-hoo. Oh yeah! (looking upwards – presumably at the door to the club) Gee this is an exclusive club. Do you think we can get in? (different voice) Of course we can!

Here it was necessary for Z to depart from character somewhat to establish the locale at the Phase opening. Along with this deixis this new Phase also brought the Scene into line with the GAT Offer, and the relish and tone of Z’s expression furthered the enthusiasm of his character for the alliance with Samuel.

Generally, Deictic Offers have secondary functions: when a character points out some element of the environment it is for a reason, or if not, is soon Justified as having a reason by the second player. In this way Deictic Offers flesh out the Scene and the setting in which action is taking place, but also define character, relationship, motive and theme.

4.4.5 Expressive Offers

Offers inevitably express some kind of emotional or subjective state of the Offerer as their by-product; further, some Offers are solely focused on the revelation of the Offerer’s inner world. The Scenes that favoured the development of character over plot, and thus gave the most scope for Expressive Offers, were the three middle Scenes (I Found it in the Yellow Pages, Bubble Gum and Nature & The Wrong Floor (take 2)). Two of these Scenes (3 and 5) were also the longest at 13 minutes and nearly 15 minutes respectively. This would indicate that ‘feeling’-based Scenes take longer to develop and explore, and lead to greater narrative complexity and sophistication.
Out of self-expression comes character, and character in situation is fundamental to establishing the reality of a Scene. In [E1_1:8\&10] we empathise with Z in his predicament even as we find it comic. In [E3_3:1-25], characters are not only establishing the givens of the Scene but also their own character’s inner worlds. Scene 4 [E4_4:1-28] is particularly oriented towards the communication of inner worlds between X and Y’s two characters Sally and Bird. Scene 5, meanwhile, becomes increasingly concerned with the revelation of the private side of Z’s character.

The roles and relationships of a Scene were often also controlled by status relationships (1981, pp.33-71), such as the relationship between Y and his side-kick Z in *Holiday in Eastern Europe*. Here feeling and expression were largely controlled by the situation and narrative, and the Commedia style *battute* double-act.

However, narrative functionality and pre-determined plot roles were not always prohibitive of self-expression and often allowed inventive characterisations to flourish. In Scene 7, Z enters out of camel-disguise as a creepy and rather bizarre character:

[Example 13] [E13_7:129-148]

*Scene 7: The Camel Test*

129. Y: Right. So we’ll just let that sizzle away. How do you think you’re going to go on the test?
130. X: Oh…. Yeah, I think I’ll be OK.
131. Y: Really?
132. X: Yeah.
133. Y: I hope so, you look like a good burger boy.
134. X: Oh well you know I- I- I-, you know- there could be another job if I don't make it
135. Y: *(instantly suspicious)* What do you mean?
136. X: Well, you know
137. Y: *(sinister)* What do you mean?
139. Y: *(angry)* What do you mean?
140. Z: *(entering, to Y, soft, strange, melodious voice)* Hell-o, Darryl. How are youuuuu?
141. Y: *(seeing Z)* Oh, Barney…
142. Z: At your little… burger boy’s shop?
143. Y: What are you doing here?
144. **Z:** Oh nothing. Just erm, dropped around for the new recruits, you know? Thought I might want to come by here because I understand your workers aren’t very satisfied…

145. **Y:** Just what are you implying?

146. **Z:** Oh, nothing. Nothing, nothing.

147. **Y:** All right then if you’re implying nothing why don’t you im- (self-corrects) sit down and have a meal with me?

148. **Z:** No!…. No… problem. I can do that… for you.

The transcription cannot adequately do justice to Zachary’s performance: his great strength as an improviser (and actor) was in playing complex, multi-levelled characters. Here his entrance in L140 was to save X, but in doing so, he creates a ghostly other-worldly personality for his character, who seems to probe and test out Y’s character even as he asserts his own. Moreover, in Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2), after the spa has been brought back to X and Y’s house, X and Y find an excuse to go upstairs and ‘leave Z to it’ [5:263-280]. This then allows Z time alone with his semi-dissolved wife in the spa. Z’s mad monologue to her half dissolved corpse was masterful in its use of irony – ‘(shouts) DON’T TALK!!’ (long pause)’ [5:280] - as it gave the audience a partial insight into his mad motivation and psychology, and tantalisingly, only half explained the situation. Overall, it functioned as an Expressive Offer to further the Endowment of Zachary’s character as being seriously unhinged.

Expressive Offers show character and narrative to exist in a loop. Narrative controls character and role, but is itself generated by character (whose emotional footing is created through Expressive Offers) and would not exist without it. Here it provides a vehicle for interesting types of characters to be explored and expressed.

### 4.4.6 Pure Imaginative Offers

Johnstone gets student actors to depart from realism, and conjure up any reality that their imaginations comes up with, without prohibition. As he states: ‘imagining should be as effortless as perceiving’(1981, p.79). Here, students brought their imaginations into play, not only in establishing the reality of the Scene, but in the concoctions of back-story, Endowments, suggestions for action, and pure flights of fancy. Ideas such as the Vicious Leg Eating Dog Association, the technical gadgetry in *I Found it in the Yellow Pages*, the convoluted corporate motivations of *Bubble*
Gum and Nature, and neologisms like ‘cowmells’ and ‘kemabs’ in The Camel Test, all showed improvisers favouring pure imagination over strict naturalism.

However, as mentioned above, those Scenes that used imagination pragmatically and structurally over the longer term of the whole Scene and in relation to naturalistic and grounded character footings were more successful in conveying a convincing sense of reality. As a result, the more imaginative and tenuous Offers that otherwise would have been dismissed as fanciful, springing from a firm foundation in naturalism, became completely convincing (and delightfully absurd.) Z’s character in Bubble Gum and Nature (called ‘Peter’ by X) was strongly plot-driven and unnaturalistic, but because the Scene’s first four minutes had established the firm ground of a naturalistic relationship between Y and X, the sudden entrance and plot convolutions of ‘Peter’ (see E21, [3:74-6] below) did not jar.

Generally, Johnstone’s free-associative and imaginative method was made good use of by improvisers, and since these more far-fetched Offers proceeded from the naturalistic ground of the established Scene’s reality and were in line with that reality (often, but not exclusively, through the use of Justifys), they spring-boarded the Scenes into interesting imaginative realms.

4.4.7 Closing Offers

Closing Offers serve as a clear framing marker to signal the end of the Scene. They are not really Offers in the sense of offering anything new, but serve to mark a clear boundary that satisfies the closing of the narrative structure and tying together of the plot-threads that have been woven through it. This strongly narrative-oriented function means that while Closing Offers result in not terribly realistic or naturalistic last lines, they are inherently necessary as clear markers to signal narrative closure. From the audience’s point of view they complete the telling of a recognisably well-formed story.

Here are the seven endings:

[Example 14] [E14_1:113]

Scene 1: The Ice Cream Cone

113. Z: I blame the ice cream. (steps forward and addresses ice cream in his hand) Ever since I met you ice cream it’s been downhill. What was I
thinking? Was I thinking you were going to be my friend? My lover? No you weren’t. Ever. Begone. Begone ice cream I’m opening the window (mimes opening window and rushing wind) Yes, it’s the 40th storey and you’re going. (throws it violently out) Bye ice cream! (slams window shut)

[Example 15] [E15_2:112-4]
Scene 2: Samuel’s Big Night Out
112. Y: Love… love… love… love… (they grab X and pull her also to the ground)
113. X: (pleasant squeal while being hugged on the floor by Y) Oo!
114. Z: (exits, then re-enters stage standing downstage to audience) And so all the dogs in all the land were loving and loveable for ever.

[Example 16] [E16_3:293-4]
Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages

[Example 17] [E17_4:127-30]
Scene 4: Bubble Gum and Nature
127. Z: This Hopsy-Topsy bubble gum is burning my eyes out!
128. Y: (to X) Quickly! Gather up your bubble and save me.
129. X: Oh, right! Erm, jump in the bubble! There we go! Bye-bye Peter! Sorry about the eyes!
130. Z: Come back! I can’t see! Wahhh!

[Example 18] [E18_5:312-6]
Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)

[Example 19] [E19_6:314-23]
Scene 6: Holiday in Eastern Europe

[Example 20] [E20_7:201-17]
Scene 7: The Camel Test
201. X: Say that you were to say… you know, cross-breed… a cow… and a camel. Would you get a kind of a blobby stringiness which would probably be-
202. Z: *(suddenly interrupting, quickly)* That’s crazy! That’s crazy. No-one would do that, no-one would do that! No-one would go to cross-breed, no-one, no-one’s going to cross-breed, no-one’s-

203. X: *(cottoning on and agreeing)* No… no-one’s

204. Z: Why would they want to do that? Why would they want to do that?

205. X: No.

206. Z: They’re not going to do that.

207. X: No.

208. Z: *(to X and Y more directly)* I don’t know what you’re talking about

209. Y: *(Pause. Deliberately to Z)* I’m not talking. It’s you that’s talking.

210. Z: I’m not-

211. Y: What’s going on here?

212. X: Nothing!

213. Z: I’m just, I’m just-

214. Y: This is really a strange kind of vibe for me, to have the competitor show up in my laboratory, and…

215. Z: I’m just going to leave… *(stands and moves slowly in an off-stage direction)* and anyone who wants to… *(quieter)* work for me, is free to… they can just follow me out this door now… *(looks at X, but she is not following)* Fine! *(exits quickly)*

216. X: *(stands up)* I forgot to get something, that I meant to get from the… you know with the… I’m just going to- *(exits)*

217. Y: All right then. At least they won’t find out how much I like camel meat. *(Eats chair and dies)*

The seven Scenes all made definite, clear closing Offers that created a sense of plot closure. This sometimes involved characters actually coming back on-stage to give the sense of a completed circle of action (E15), or else to announce the ending or ‘moral of the story’ (E14 and 15). Elsewhere they enacted the character’s hubris (E16 and 17), or stereotypically ended the action of the story (E18, a parody of the Hollywood-style ending as X drives off into the sunset), or satisfied the logical, inevitable conclusion (Y’s death in E20).

A strong closing Offer is necessary to be found by improvisers from out of the Scene’s givens, and in the data all improvisers appeared aware of how to use this function. Improvisers seemed innately aware of the ways in which a Scene should have a satisfactory ending, by tying the main threads of the story-line together, resolving an incident or issue *(Scene 2)*, calling up important shelved Offers and
dealing with them (Scene 7), or solving a problem or completing the cycle or next step of a mythopoeic story structure (Scenes 1 and 6). Sometimes the endings resolved a number of characters’ objectives simultaneously (Scenes 3 and 5).

Offers, as the broadest category of Johnstone’s Poetics, are an innate part of the creative, imaginative and expressive components of a Scene’s fictive reality. Offers can address all of the parameters that constitute the Scene’s parameters by Opening, Defining, Self-Expressing, Imagining/Hypothesising and Closing its fictive reality. Moreover, the process of Offering forms the human substance of the Scene, since all life is engaged in a process of improvisational offering. In other words Offering is both content and process, target and arrow.

4.5 Character-Focused Moves: Endowing and Justifying

The distinction between Endowing and Justifying is a narrow one, as both involve essentially the same process of naming, either applied prospectively (Endowing) or retrospectively (Justifying). Generally, Endowing creates an Offer for time, location, character, and/or object, or else imbues qualities to an already-present Offer. Justifying, by contrast, arises out of a necessity to have a partially existing Offer fully defined in the Scene, where some confusion might otherwise result. Justifying seems required by the Scene, where Endowing is voluntary. While Endowing can serve the Scene’s plot, Endowing and Justifying are focused primarily on establishing character and motive, and exploring the ground of the objectives that then become realised as the Scene’s narrative. They are dealt with separately, but very often both functions occur together.

4.5.1 Endowing

Endowing frequently occurs early on in a Scene, to establish the reality of time, place and character.

The most obvious Endowments occur when a new character is named, brought into play or identified within the Scene (Dean, Sally, Deirdre, Frank, Grandma, Noah, etc.). In Scene 4: Bubble Gum and Nature, Z (Peter) drove a plot change that altered the identity of X from a six year old little girl (Sally) who had been established with Y’s Bird, to ‘John’, the CEO of the rival bubble gum company. This was a quantum
leap in the plot whose non-naturalistic absurdity Z was perhaps using to counterpoint the more character-centred work by Y and X prior to Z’s entrance:

[Example 21] [E21 _4:29-81] [continues on from E4 (above)]

Scene 4: Bubble Gum and Nature

29. Y: What’s your name?
30. X: Sally.
31. Y: That’s a nice name.
32. X: Thanks.
33. Y: How old are you?
34. X: (Quickly) Six.
35. Y: How old is your older brother?
36. X: (after a period of thought) Old.
37. Y: I thought so.
38. X: (Quickly) Twelve. Twelve. (Pause) Twelve.
39. Y: (Confirming) Twelve
40. X: Twelve.
41. Y: What were you singing just now?
42. X: (Quickly) Lolly-pop. (starts singing and skipping around the stage)
Lolly pop, lolly pop, mm-yeah a-
43. Y: (interrupting with very loud squawking bird noise, Galah-like) AA!!
44. X: (visibly shocked)
45. Y: Sorry.
46. X: (nervously) That’s OK
47. Y: That sometimes happens.
48. X: ‘s OK. Wh- Why do you do that?
49. Y: Well you see I actually have a large bird trapped inside me.
...
59. Y: Urm… Does that help?
60. X: If you had something big and then you made it small? Like urm… play-
dough?
61. Z: (Rushing onto the stage) Hey boss! I think it went this way! Yes, through here, boss! That giant bird and the little bird went right through here! Quick, let’s get it!
...
77. Z: (slight pause) You’re not really a little girl are you?
78. X: (little girlish) What do you mean?
79. Z: I mean this! *(Makes ripping sound and motion as if to rip off mask and unzip suit)* It’s you, John, the President of Hickory-Dickory Bubble Gum!

80. X: *(deeper voice)* Yeah?

81. Z: You were trying to get here first and steal this Big Bird Trapped In A Little Bird!

Note how the chain of Endowments of X as a 6 year old girl in L29-41 is contradicted by the absurd re-Endowment of X by Z at L79 as a CEO. Yet this re-Endowment, though dramatically problematic (and problematic for X, to convincingly change characters at the drop of a hat from 6 year old girl to a CEO) is nevertheless coherent with the plot, and so justifiable on narrative terms, even as it Blocked the previous Sally Offer. L60 – ‘like play-dough?’ (Sally’s attempt to understand Y’s explanation for his squawking) – is very much in keeping with X’s 6-year old Sally perspective, while Z’s L61 cuts across the established characters and ethos and radically accelerates the plot. Improvisers’ creative freedom to re-Endow at will, freely used by Z throughout the seven Scenes, here befits (or is made to fit) the forward movement of (Z’s re-interpretation of) the plot.

The relationships of the characters are also a key feature of the Endowments. Relationships are automatically endowed by players as soon as they address one another, in connection with shared role tasks, attitudes and varying statuses, as well as the external attributes such as gender, age, occupation and their motivation within those roles. In *Scene 6: Holiday in Eastern Europe*, the two friends Greg and Bill use a status (1981, pp.33-74) relationship and stereotypes to establish and Endow one another in a way that is instantly recognisable.

Endowment also Endows the Endower. When one player Endows another with status, they inadvertently Endow themselves, and it is a function of dramatic irony that the audience can see both sides of the relationship at once. This is why improvisers seem

287 Note that too much re-Endowment would start to have a serious Blocking effect on the whole Scene and destroy its fictive reality.

288 See for example their exchanges in 6:192; 215-8. The notion of signing in this way is a necessary first step in creating recognisable characters, even if that stereotype is modified or radically changed later on in the scene. Stereotypes in Impro only become a problem when their adoption hinders the creative interpretation of character. Interestingly, both Y and Z voiced dissatisfaction with these characters in the post-performance interview.
conscious of the ways Endowments create/affect relationships, understanding that every Endowment has an Endower, who by that Endowment is themselves Endowed. In Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2), X and Y’s Endowment of themselves establishes the normalcy of the stereotypical Aussie battler renovating couple, through the use of accents, drawling, the hedging interrogative ‘ay?’ at the end of the lines, the cups of tea and home renovation (E5_5:1-15). These lines Endow the situation, location, action and relationship of the characters with a particular stereotype, and this creates the ground for subsequent actions and objectives to arise.

It was clear that X and Y did not yet know where the Scene would lead, only that they would continue to lay down the Offers and Endowments that established the reality at the beginning of a Scene, and let the Scene ‘look after itself’.

In L2ff., X accepts Y’s ockerness and presentation of himself as the considerate ocker Aussie handyman, and returns the Endowment by consolidating their roles as husband and wife. Status issues (Y conceding he has made a mistake, X accepting this) and the concept of the Pollyanna principle (that the next speaker interpret the previous speaker’s utterance in the best possible light) are here in evidence. While X is physically down at floor level, Y is busy lowering his status, and coming down to X’s status level by his apology. It is clear again in this example that an Endowment is never just an Endowment – it is connected to the elements of status, relationship and attitude by a web of associations. These are built into the subtext and the audience does not have to think long and hard about them, for they become immediately apparent and real to us as soon as X and Y open their mouths.

The Endowment of the central characters continues with the entrance of Z:

[Example 22] [E22 _5:27-118]

Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)

27. X:  Yeah, just call Noah and see what he wants.

118. XYZ  (they all re-enter)

X and Y’s Endowment of Noah creates the goal and tension in the Scene. L32-44 (the phone conversation) confirms the unease X and Y feel about Noah, as Noah is

289 Cf. Tannen, 1989, p.97

290 As Johnstone says of these early stages of another Scene: “The actors have automatically become involved in some sort of gangster scene, but all they actually worry about is the category the offers fit into. The scene ‘looks after itself’.” (1981, p.99)
nervous and highly strung. L48-54 Endow Noah with further background detail, and furthers the sense of unease about him. L59 is a moment of Impro ‘meta-theatre’ as X sorts out what names they have. In L60 Y tactfully ignores this and sets about drawing Z into a relationship of obligation to X and Y through the broken saucer in L61-67. Troy and his wife’s objective is to get rid of the wood (comically stated in plain terms by Y in L66), and they Endow Noah with needing the wood because of the boat he’s building (L67-81). This is initiated by X, an Offer comically undercut by Y in L74 and L76, but then renegotiated and justified through the idea of a ‘curving’ (L77) or a ‘mosaic kind of look’ (L78) boat. In L86, X’s development of the ‘Old Testament Noah’ Endowment is contradicted (but not Blocked, since the presuppositions are accepted) by Z in L92, and L94-102 follow this idea through, and arouse suspicion about Noah by his equivocations. Y’s spontaneous and imaginative ‘spa’ Offer in L89 (X’s comment in L90 can be taken literally (the Y’s Offer really was a left-field stroke of ‘genius’ (L90)) which is another example of the incorporation of the meta level into the fictive reality of a Scene) becomes a central motif linking to Z’s suspicious character.

There are some Impro games that deal with emotional Endowments, and transferring emotions, and these switches occur at the opening of Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages when Frank’s mood turns from dour to excited. In Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2) a similar process occurs in L103-7. X’s excitement (the rather sweet “Well we could help you!”) gets supported by Y in L104 and L107, and this transmits to Z by L108, where he bursts into spontaneous volubility. However, the seeds of Z’s Endowments have been planted, and grow into ‘the flowers of evil’ by the next Phase:

[Example 23] [E23 _5:118-213] [continues on from E22 above]

Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)
118. XYZ (they all re-enter)
213. Y: Good.

With L131-2, X and Y find the key to the Endowment for Z that the Scene has been looking for. As the Endowments of the bathroom inevitably build, Noah’s suspicious behaviours come into focus with his L133 and L135, and L136, where the Endowment is sealed by Y. Z’s response ‘No’ (L137 & 139) clearly means ‘Yes’. From L140, the confirmation of the shoe, to Noah’s exit at L173, the development of the Endowment of Noah as a murderer emerges almost as a shared thought between the three improvisers.
Handling subtext (an idea mentioned in the questionnaires) is crucial to the process, and requires all improvisers to be on the same wavelength, even as they produce layered or misleading surface text. The subtext of Endowments builds up through connecting chains, and the improvisers seem to arrive at the shared subtextural idea inductively, as it emerges. Once the subtext is established, though, it becomes deductively generative to the rest of the Scene, until the subtext changes, or is contradicted or modified by later Offers.

When these ‘chains of Endowments’ are analysed across the whole Scene, it becomes apparent that improvisers act somewhat like a relay team with the baton as the Offer. Each member takes the Offer further, develops or extends or advances it, and the other team-members follow on. When everyone is paying careful attention to everyone else’s development of and response to an Offer, character objectives are telegraphed very quickly between players, and the story can be developed seamlessly, so that the result seems like a pre-scripted play.

Animals (the mimed dog in Scene 2 and enacted camels in Scene 7), and objects (the car in Scene 6) are also created through Endowment. Because they form the ‘third party’ in the Scene, much negotiating can go on between the players in defining their Endowment. From the introduction of Samuel the dog into the conversation at 2:L51 to L67 Samuel’s Endowment is constantly re-Endowed, negotiated and Justified between X and Z:

[Example 24] [E24 _2:48-67]

Scene 2: Samuel’s Big Night Out
48. X: (entering) G’day boss!
49. Z: Hey man. What’s happenin?
50. X: Ah, not much, took- took- took both of the legs off the postman this morning, (high fives) hello! (laughing)
51. Z: (joining in) Heeeey!! (to Samuel) You like that one Samuel? (to X)
   Samuel. (indicates mimed space) Meet Samuel.
52. X: G’day.
53. Z: Samuel’s er, a bit of a young pup, but I see a big future in you Samuel.
54. X: He seems to be bleeding from the mouth.
55. Z: Ah… I wouldn’t- I wouldn’t worry about that. That’s erm…
56. X: yeah?

291 Johnstone alludes to this point when he says ‘[g]ood improvisers seem telepathic’ (1981, p.99).
57. Z: He’s a bit, he’s a bit green
58. X: No but er he seems to be frothing a little, is that healthy or…?
59. Z: That’s excitement
61. Z: he’s just really excited, cos erm-
62. X: Me too. Big night out.
63. Z: I understand. Samuel’s never been involved in an organisation like us, you know?
64. X: Right.
65. Z: and er-
66. X: He’s a quiet one.

By this stage, X and Y have developed their own vested interests in and Endowments of Samuel. X challenges Z’s Endowment (L54); Z defends (Justifies) it (L55). L58 continues the rabies theme that X had begun earlier (at the beginning of the Scene) and shelved, and Z has to parry this off without blocking it (L59). Samuel is ‘green’ (L57), which links to being a ‘new recruit’, innocent and inexperienced, yet X links this nicely to her Endowment, ‘ill’, i.e. suffering from rabies. Z Justifies this Endowment of Samuel in terms of the broader situation: Samuel is just ‘excited’. X supports this in L62, then metatextually Justifys the fact that Samuel is ‘a quiet one’, since in reality he’s a circumscribed (mimed) volume of thin air on stage (L66). References to the meta-situation (see Z’s Endowment of a chair as a camel hump in Scene 7, and then as ‘a chair’ (see [E26] below)) are always delightful for the audience to watch, as they tie the actual reality of the object or performance location into the fictive reality of the conjured Scene on stage, and demonstrates the magic of an improviser’s skill at fictively reframing material reality (cf. Elam, 1980).

The line between physical and verbal Endowments is always a fruitful one to explore. At the start of the Scene (see E7) the tension between the non-verbal strange behaviour of Z the camel and the verbal Endowment ‘camel’, leads to Z’s Justify:

[Example 25] [E25 _7:47-59]
Scene 7: The Camel Test
47. (Y exits)
48. X: (standing with Z the camel) All right camel. I don’t like you, you don’t like me, so let me just say, I’m a burger boy, or at least I will be, in about twelve hours. So you know, let’s just hang out, be cool, (camel Z
is moving rather alarmingly) be cool, be cool!... and I’ll pass the test. Mmm...(doubtfully) (Looking dubiously at Z the camel)

49. Z: (After a while Z suddenly takes off chair-hump, and leans forward to whisper to X) OK listen up. I’m from… OK I can’t tell what company I’m from but I’m from another burger company. We’re working undercover with the camels. We’re trying to figure out a way, that we can actually… cross-breed cows and camels, so we can save a lot of money, and have our farms of cows out living in the desert.

50. X: (interested) Mmmm! (loudly) That makes sense!

51. Z: (hushing her with urgent gesture to be quiet) Ssh!

52. X: (whispering, but almost as loudly) That makes sense!

53. Z: Don’t blow this for me, don’t blow this for me, and I can get you a job, a well-paid job with our company, serving cowmells.

54. X: How well paid?

55. Z: Well let’s just say there’s going to be a whole load of zeroes.

56. X: Yeah?

57. Z: Yeah.

58. X: Will there be like, non-zero zeroes as well?

59. Z: Well, you know, we can talk about that more at the contract signing stage.

The re-Endowment in L49 serves to switch the roles of the players, and send the Scene in a new direction, by establishing motives (keying into X’s initial objective set up before (see E7) of becoming a burger boy), creating the ground for conflict (between Z and Y), and Justifying Z’s odd behaviour as the camel previously. This is comically extended on later in the Scene, when Y has demanded that X cut some meat off Z, and Z buys X out with a big money offer. At this point he admits:

[Example 26] [E26 _7:98-102]

Scene 7: The Camel Test

98. Z: (quietly and confidingly) I tell you what. The thing on my back is actually a chair.

99. X: (amazed) Oh, right!

100. Z: Take the thing off my back

101. X: Yes.

102. Z: Tell him it’s meat. And make him eat it. Don’t you eat it, because it’s poison.
With the chair now being endowed as ‘a chair’, Endowment comes full circle, back to material reality.

4.5.2 Justifying

Justifying is simply retrospective Endowing or ‘being required to Endow’, a requirement made either by the Scene itself, or another character.

Where a character is forced into a period of silence (as in Z as a camel), breaking out of that role clearly requires justification. Z sets up an entire back-story to Justify his disguise (he explains to X he’s “working undercover with the camels”), and establishes a pattern that will determine future objectives for all of the three major roles in the Scene [7:53]. Z’s ‘de-humping’ from his camel disguise (L47) and his spiel are both required by the Scene, and because the latter is strongly motivated and justified, the effect is equally comic.

Almost the entire Scene of *Holiday in Eastern Europe* functions as an exercise in Endowing and Justifying, since most of the conversations centre around Endowing the faults of the car and the two salesmen Justifying them:

[Example 27] [E27 _6:63-317]

*Scene 6: Holiday in Eastern Europe*

63. Z: Oh, OK (running off then rushing back on a few seconds later, then around on the side of the stage like a lunatic, modifying the car).


This long excerpt is a good example of extended negotiated Endowing and Justifying. The Endowment/Justify borderline becomes blurred, because each one of the various clapped out features that X is drawing attention to (Endowing), Z and Y are continually re-predicating in the best possible light (Justifying). This occurs almost iteratively throughout the Scene.

X’s question “Are they… good cars?” (L174) is an opportunity for Endowment. Z’s Endowment and comic Justify that ‘weight means reliability’ indexes a stereotypical image of Eastern European physicality (weight, stockiness) (L176-8). Improvisers are using the process of Endowment and Justification as an integral part of the Scene’s
fabric itself, and X’s role in it follows Johnstone’s exercise of getting the other improviser ‘into trouble’ in a Scene, and seeing if they can justify their way out of it (1981:94). Z’s line (L278) borrows from advertising (an industry whose entire business is Endowment – Endowment of products with desirable qualities): “(advertising spiel) You’ll find it a lovely driving experience, with pleasure.” [E28_6:278]. Z’s comic appropriation of this line, as if from a television car commercial292, is all the more funny for its broken Slavic-English syntax.

X’s Offer in Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (5:140-1), which furthers the implied subtext that Noah has murdered his wife and put her in the spa, requires justification. Z’s meek tone of voice as he tries to justify the shoe, ties in beautifully with the interrogative-like conversation that becomes the script of this Phase. Since the situation is clear to the audience, narrative effects of dramatic irony can be explored. His nervous repetition “to to to to… adorn it” (L141) to explain the presence of the woman’s shoe sticking out of the spa, also emphasises the notion of the cover-up, and the search for an excuse293. The improviser Z was himself searching for a Justify, and the interesting effect that is created here demonstrates the coming together of the improvisation process with the fictive reality depicted of a character having to make something up. There is an audience connection also, as we want to see how the improviser will get their character out of trouble.294 The audience senses that something needs to be Justified, and follows as the improviser accomplishes this.

A character’s Justifications also provide a direct window into their emotional worlds. In Scene 7: The Camel Test, Y came across as quite manipulative, yet it is Y who becomes ‘the fall guy’ at the end. As the tables begin to turn, and the allegiance of X begins to move to Z, we feel more sympathy for Y (his disappointment at not having the Barney Offer taken up may have had some bearing on his response here, particularly as directly afterwards he goes to ‘call Security’.) Y’s Justify in L214295 is very much required by the Scene, as Z has been sitting in Y’s laboratory for quite some time without Justification. Y seems also impelled to speak this, since the Scene

292 An ubiquitous feature on free-to-air commercial television in Australia, arguing further that Impro is, albeit unself-consciously, never divorced from its cultural context, and is inherently political.
293 here literally ‘adorning’ the truth with a lie.
294 See Stanislavski’s insightful point on this, (1937, p.78), also quoted in Frost and Yarrow, 1990, p.102). Also Johnstone’s point on an exercise involving an improviser getting the other person into trouble (1981, p94), to challenge their ability to Justify (though Johnstone does not call it this in 1981.
295 see E20_7:214 above
is clearly heading in an unintended direction from his initial opening. His uneasiness and feelings of discomfort about having the competitor in his research laboratory is thus voiced and his footing and emotional attitude become apparent.

Another function of a Justify is to give an account of the past, a recent action or provide a potted autobiography of the character. In Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages, X’s Offer of a grandmother who has been sleeping since the war (an Offer that was partly missed by Y in focusing on his own character - a demand of human memory constraint that is frequently experienced by improvisers, hence the idea of the Yield), presents a stereotypical picture of the sleeping old person, taken to an absurd extreme:

[Example 30] [E30 _3:152-179]
Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages
152. (Z and Y re-enter…
179. Z: Yes. Do you know her?

X’s potted autobiography functions as a self-Justify, and the tagged question that is part of this Justify (“what’s happened?”), brings that account into relevance with the on-going Scene, as she is asking to be brought into the picture of recent events. How she is then seen to fit in is a function of her responses in the Phases that follow. Frank explains to her about a Mrs Smith who is going to sell him ‘an integrated home office solution’. A mirror-image meta-irony is noteworthy here, since Z is explaining to X (as Frank’s grandma) what X (as Mrs Smith) had been offering to sell to Z. X responds energetically and with sudden emotion to this name:

[Example 31] [E31 _3:178-204]
Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages
178. X: Mrs Smith?
204. (They all exit stage)

Whilst this is partially an Endowment, Mrs Smith is being Justified within the frame of the story, and integrated within the character’s life story as X’s sister. Whist this is a spurious plot device, it is nevertheless necessary to unify characters and narrative threads within the Scene, and also to lend the following Phase an air of familiarity by which the characters can explore their emotional relationship. Such a ‘clunky’ Justify might seem hammy in the text, but plot devices such as these are necessary to the narrative workings of the Scene.
The conversation between Frank’s grandma and her long-lost sister Pauline Smith in the next Phase becomes at points an exercise in Justifying:

[Example 32] [E32 _3:205-276] [continues from E31 above]

**Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages**

205.  (Z and Y re-entering, X still sitting off-stage)
276.  Y:  … an integrated home office solution

The conversation here is largely phatic, however it features a sequence of 4 Justifys: (1) what Pauline has been doing, which repeats and expands on some of the information we knew already, from the Offers in the opening section of the Scene, when it was X who was playing Pauline, and Y Deirdre; (2) how Frank’s grandma has been (she is never named); (3) the story about Bill (which is a sub-routine, but one that ties back into grandma’s character as having been asleep since the War); and (4) the ‘integrated solution for the legless’. During this last section, X puts Y on the spot several times, by getting him to Justify the Offer about her being unable to walk, getting him to expand on what this ‘integrated solution’ involves, and asking him if it involves pipe-cleaners (an inspired left-field Offer: X was perhaps thinking of primary school models or ‘stick figures’). X continually justifies herself as ‘an old biddy’ who is unaware of the latest technology, but maintains her supportive role relationship to Pauline (Y) (“I don’t know what that means, but it sounds great!” (3:249)). Y is also vocally old but excited about this technology. In contrast to her age and faltering, doddering voice Y’s talk becomes filled with expert, technical jargon, and this creates another absurd juxtaposition. Her nattering on about Bill further develops her as on a par with X’s grandma. Z’s silence throughout the Phase is Justified by the plot, since he happily plays low-status to his grandma, standing behind her, and looking meek throughout. Each character Endows others, supports others’ Endowments of them (i.e. allows themselves to be changed) and Justifies themselves throughout the Scene, so that all roles complement and support one another. Even the Block ‘changed his name to Isaac’ does not disrupt this pattern, since it is taken care of by Y in his Justifying line (‘hold no grudges’ (3:260)), picking up on X’s apology in the previous line, and closing the (presumably Second World) War reminiscences Exchange.

In the opening of **Scene 4: Bubble Gum and Nature**, X’s questions (“What is that?” “Who are you?” “How are you going?”), and her statements (“I can’t see you” “But pretty, very pretty”) and her own Justifys in the explanation (“Sorry I didn’t mean to
skip over the top of your head”), all serve to elicit Justifys from Y (E4_4:21-4). This is appropriate for this Scene, as the Bird is an unusual character, and X, in adopting the curiosity of a little girl, is in a natural position to explore Y’s character. X Justifies her own prior action in the Scene, that of skipping; however when Y’s Bird starts to take a lead role in the questioning, her responses become short, and she appears shy. This is an indication of the degree to which emotional footings for the characters underpin their behaviour and their reality on stage and are centrally important in both audience reception and communication of stage reality.

There are two parts to the next Phase (see E20 above), both concerned with Justifying. The first is the run of questions that ‘Sally’ answers very quickly, in a little-girl manner, as if shy and hesitant to open up to a stranger. After Bird squawks [E20_4:41]’ the Scene shifts to X questioning Y about his problem. The first part of the Phase has X Justifying, abruptly and inexpansively, while Y’s justifications by contrast take on an adult, almost analytical and whimsical register (“I live in hope that one day…” [E20_4:55]). X and Y’s Justifys stem from their characters’ emotional footings.

Justifys can make an appeal to authority for their force. Z’s character in Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2) spends much time displaying his fixation about X and Y not taking the top off the spa bath. He finds many reasons to include this thought, in order to heighten suspicion and increase tension about the corpse hidden there. Y’s Justify (L169) in response to Z invokes the scientific law of gravity as immutable and unavoidable, and this heightens the sense that the revelation of Z’s crime is inevitable, and that the truth will come out as inevitably as the wife’s half dissolved corpse will from the spa bath, if they turn it upside down. This Justify plays on the psychological fears of Z’s character Noah, and sets it against law, a law motif that will later be realised as the Police (named as ‘friends of ours… in a… certain facility’ (L297-9)), who will arrive to arrest Noah at the Scene’s end. In the universe of the improvisers’ minds, the law of the land becomes elegantly conflated with the law of gravity.

Justifys like these show improvisers working on an almost subconscious level in creating punning links between the meanings of words and their semantic connections (wrong, law, law of physics, “something’s not right”, a murdered wife, making holes in the floor, “that ain’t right”, Police, arrest). This central cohering mechanism shapes

296 The implication therefore that emotionally unfounded characters are less real supports Young’s (2001) critique of some shallower forms of contemporary improvisation.

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Open Scenes at a subconscious level, and lets the audience witness a group of creative minds working in concert in their sketching of a fictive social world moment by moment.

The cohering power of Justifys is everywhere in evidence in this Scene. Later, as Z and Y are trying to fix wheels onto the spa, the absurd idea of the big wheel and the little wheel which Z creates on his return (L189) (itself a motif that may have carried over from the previous Scene, as ‘the big bird trapped inside a little bird’) becomes the emotional focus for Z’s displacement behaviour. The wheels are the means to solve both the problem of the corpse and the wood, a fusion that is logistically though not morally satisfied when Z dissolves the wood alongside his half-dissolved wife later on (L280); yet the ‘wheel’ of justice comes full circle at the end when he is inevitably caught for his ‘wrong’ actions. Z’s guilty behaviour, elicited by Y’s punning conflation of the big and little wheel with a penny farthing to which Z responds with a snappy and suspicious “No!” (5:200), entirely missing the joke, further Endows Z as guilty and psychologically in denial about his crime. His ‘No!’ is clearly a Block, yet given that his character is itself trying to block the knowledge of the murder he has committed from getting out, his ‘No’ response is perfectly justified and entirely in keeping with his character.

As was seen through the data, the play of Justifying and Endowing show these two Impro Poetics to be intimately linked, in that they flesh out the Scene’s key motifs and character objectives, and cohere the Scene’s Offers. Endowing and Justifying put flesh on the bare bones of character, situation and objective, and serve to present improvisers and audience with real mental objects that they can concretely deal with in the Scene. Where Offers - and in particular Deictic Offers - serve to sketch out the realm of the Scene, Endowing and Justifying create the means through which objectives are manifestly realised, through the characters’ further definition of objects and fields (spaces, realms), while also reflecting back on and defining the characters who make them.

4.6 Narrative-Focused Moves: Extending, Advancing and Reincorporating

297 See Tannen, 1990, p.33. Goffman rather uses the term alignment to describe this double-edged quality to Endowment (Goffman, 1974)
Extending and Advancing are both narrative-oriented moves used continuously by improvisers to tell the story of each of the Open Scenes, while Reincorporation of earlier established Offers enables improvisers to weave the objectives of the characters together from the middle to the end of the Scene.

4.6.1 Extending

Extending the moment enriches and encodes more details into a Scene about that moment. It halts the story at a particular stage, so that the improviser can develop a clearer picture or deeper relationship with the current Offers or actions. For example:

[Example 33] [E33 _2:44-6]

*Scene 2: Samuel’s Big Night Out*

44. YX: (exit)

45. Z: (Z comes on stage on all fours and begins conversation with mimed dog Samuel) Hey Samuel! I saw your work back there and I liked it. I liked it, man. You bit that guys’ leg, you tore off his pants. There’s a lot in you buddy, there’s a lot in you. And you know what I think, I think you should come to our initiation ceremony here tonight. My name? Well, my name is Bonzo, and I’m the President of the Vicious Leg-Eating Dog Association, me and you we’re going to have a big night out Samuel what do you think? Yeah? Yeah? Yeah, let’s roll on it. (Z does a quick sideways roll on the floor.) Yeah, good one, Samuel, all right. Now, I’ll just untie you with my prehensile thumbs. Here, let’s go, we’re in for a big night out.

46. (Z exits stage on all fours.)

Here Z was Extending on the alliance created between himself as President of the Vicious Leg-Eating Dog association (a Justify), and Samuel the dog, his possible new recruit. The ‘rolling on it’ adds humour to the Scene, but also Extends on the idea of creating a pact between Z and the mimed dog Samuel. Details surrounding identity (eg the Dog Association) are Extended on, and the untying of Samuel is Justified by the thumb reference, a *lazzi*- like extension of the action for a few moments to add further reality to the Scene.

Where there is no action however, Extending often overlaps with other Moves, like Endowing and Justifying. For example, where in *Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow*
Pages X forces Y to Justify where he got the robotic legs from, and how he made the
devices (3:267-8), Y is called upon to Extend upon and Justify this idea. Although this
is not part of the ongoing action of the Scene, it is part of their conversation, which
develops the relationship of Frank’s Gran and her long lost sister Mrs. Smith. Y is
Extending on a legitimate concern of X’s, since she can’t walk:

[Example 34] [E34 _3:267-8]
Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages
267. X: How does that work?...
268. Y: …legs for bipeds.

Extending can be called upon in a Justifying Move by another speaker challenging in
this way, or it can be offered in the flow of the dialogue, or else it can be initiated by
the improviser.

Another case of an Extend which delayed action and therefore played with audience
suspending occurred in Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2):

[Example 35] [E35 _5:177-86]
Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)
177. X: (pause) I think maybe ….
186. Y: … take the wood, is he?

Here X Extends the opening of the spa cover to stretch out the tension, as the
inevitable revelation is at hand for the characters and the audience. This is then
followed by dialogue that seeks to Justify the physical action just performed, but
actually we are seeing an Extension of the idea of the discovered corpse in the spa in a
way that is quite lazzi-like.

Later in The Wrong Floor (take 2), the spa full of acid was Extended upon by the
effect of the acid drops on the wooden floor. This heightens the reality of the
situation, and furthers Z’s guilty Endowment:

[Example 36] [E36 _5:246-57]
Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)
246. Y: And where the droplets have fallen, there seems to be a sort of
smoking hole…
257. Y: Mm
The need to Extend the acid motif was significant, as the only definite predication of the spa being full of acid hitherto was in the mention of the smell in the bathroom. X’s moral predication “That ain’t right” (5:251) maintains the ambiguity of the dramatic irony for Noah, since what “ain’t right” can refer to making holes in the floor of someone else’s house, or dissolving your wife in a bath of acid. As the logical synonym of ‘wrong’, it also links to the GAT nicely.

Extends are used throughout *Holiday in Eastern Europe* by Y to hoodwink X, by X to get Y and Z into trouble (1981, p.94), and by Y and Z to Justify the wreck of a car.

### 4.6.2 Advancing

Advancing Offers are Offers that advance the story to its next step. Improvisers used Directive Offers, Action Offers and Plot-Management Offers to Advance the storyline through the Scenes where they needed to be moved along. Generally they result in simplistic and unrealistic lines, as their primary function is plot-based. They often have a deictic character to them, and almost always occur at the borderline of Phases:

For example:

[Example 37] [E37 _1:10-18]

*Scene 1: The Ice Cream Cone*

10. Z: Cos my tongue’s stuck in it.
11. X: Oh!
12. Z: *(muffled)* Erm. Perhaps you could find some sort of urm unsticking device?
13. X: Ay?
14. Z: Unsticking device!
15. X: Oh, an unsticking device!
17. X: Oh OK, yeah, can-
18. Y: *(enters as walking salesman)* Get your unsticking devices!

[Example 38] [E38 _3: 67-81]

*Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages*

67. Y: Why don’t you give them …
81. X: …Hello?!

[Example 39] [E39 _3: 219-34]
*Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages*
219. Y: (moving off) I’m just going …
234. Y: (off-stage) Hello?

[Example 40] [E40 _5:23-5]
*Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)*
23. X: Can you think of …
25. X: …Noah down the road?

[Example 41] [E41 _5:172]
*Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)*
172. Z: (quickly) Now don’t take the top off…

[Example 42] [E42 _6: 40-62, 68-9, 118-20, 197]
*Scene 6: Holiday in Eastern Europe*
40. Y: (to Z) You must go and cut roof off car.
197. Y: (turning back to X) I was telling you the sto-ry!

[Example 43] [E43 _7:42-7]
*Scene 7: The Camel Test*
42. Y: So I want you to want you to – I’ll leave you alone for a moment, I want you to get to know the camel, so you can, choo-
47 (Y exits)

All these simple lines make fairly mundane plot Advances in order to keeping the story moving forward, develop momentum in the pace or assert (individual or common) character objectives.

Creating a necessity for an Advance in the Scene and then stalling that progression can be an effective way of generating audience expectancy and suspense. The audience find themselves ‘sitting on the edge of their seats’ waiting for the actual Advance to occur, however this suspense can only last so long, and has to be timed
carefully\textsuperscript{298}. In the following excerpt, Y creates dramatic irony for the audience and for X, since this Advance implies that only Y is unaware in the Scene that Z is in disguise and is not a camel:

[Example 45] [E45 _6:72-97]

\textit{Scene 7: The Camel Test}

72. Y: Cos er, I didn’t mention, but ah…. part of the ah… familiarisation process involves you trying a little bit of camel meat.

73. X: Oh right.

74. Y: And should you-

75. X: From… that camel?

76. Y: Yeah why not? We don’t like to slaughter a whole camel, it’s a bit of a waste so we tend to like just cut a slice off of it, as if they were on a rotisserie… and fry that up

77. X: Just like a kebab?

78. Y: Yeah, just like a kebab.

79. X: Yeah no I-

80. Y: We call them kemabs though.

81. X: Yeah I think that’d be fine.

82. Y: All right well here’s a sharpened butcher’s knife \textit{(draws huge knife from sheath and hands her knife)}

83. X: OK \textit{(taking knife)}

84. Y: Why don’t you go and take a slice?

85. X: OK

86. Y: I’ll just ah you know be out back getting the grill hot OK?

87. X: OK.

88. Y: \textit{(Y leaves stage)}

89. X: \textit{(turning to Z, brandishing knife)} I’m sorry, how many non-zeroes?

90. Z: A wholllllle \textit{(nervously avoiding knife)} … well only one one zero, like like like like six zeroes and one non-zero.

91. X: Like a seven? Seven’s my lucky number!

92. Z: Well we would \textit{want} to be lucky, but yeah.

\textsuperscript{298} On this, Gene Hackman’s Willy Wonka character points out the irony of this situation as one of the children, Augustus Gloop, becomes half stuck in a pressurised chocolate tube, when Hackman says “the suspense is killing me… I only hope it will last!” \textit{(Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory}, dir. Mel Stuart, MGM, 1971). Hitchcock is of course the renowned master of this technique, establishing the inevitability of an ‘Advance’ within the narrative, but stalling its execution.
93. X: OK
94. Z: If we can do that er- we can do that, we can do that-
95. X: OK
96. Z: (louder) If we can do that (quieter) can we put the… (indicating the knife X is still miming in her hand, with emphasis) really sharp knife away?
97. Y: (calling from off) Just call me when you’ve got the meat ready!

Y has gleaned this opportunity for an Advance that will play with audience expectation and dramatic irony, and then Extends this expectation by the frequent reference to sharp blades and hot oil.\(^{299}\)

Advances derive purely from the exigencies of the plot or the character’s objective. Since Advances are integrally related to Extends, we deal with them in further detail in the following section.

### 4.6.3 The Homeostasis of Advancing and Extending

Advancing and Extending seem to offset and balance each other to regulate the pace of the Scene. Improvisers often stalled an Advance to explore an Extend, develop the character’s predicament, or teased the audience’s expectation of an imminent Advance (Scene 5). As soon as an Extend was taken as far as dramatically possible without losing the thread of the suspended Advance, the Advance was permitted. For instance, Y used the rule of three to ask irrelevant questions about which sort of ‘unsticking device’ X wanted for Z to remove the ice cream (“White or brown?” “Hot or cold?” “small or large?”). X, realising this was the ploy after the first of Y’s stalling replies, responded by answering to the choice instantaneously. Extends thus often appeared to be introduced as a way of regulating the pace of narrative flow, and by extrapolation, grounding the Scene in the detail of the current fictive reality (see E20_4:61 ff.).

Simple stage entrances and exits also frequently signal Advances. In *Holiday in Eastern Europe*, Y’s series of instructions to Z on how to modify the car is an Extend nested within the Advance of the sales pitch to X. It is interesting to note how the Offers follow, as it were, ‘free-associatively’ (1981, p.118). We move from tourist, to

\(^{299}\) L76, 82, 84, 86 by Y; L89 by X; and L90 and 96 by Z
the rental car offer to convertible (Scene 6:34-7), and this prompts Y’s nested Extend instructions to Z on how to cut the roof off and make it into a convertible (Scene 6:38-63). Similarly X’s entrance at the beginning of this is an Advance, but when Y begins to tell X about the town this distraction becomes an Extend on Y and Z’s objective of renting the car. X’s entrance as the tourist in L16 stems from L15, that X, off-stage, picks up on and fulfils. This shows how skilled improvisers listen out for each other’s Offers, so they can find a route to Advance, where the way is not clear, or too predictable\(^{300}\). Y’s L68 then Advances to the absurd dialogue in which the most mundane features of the town (a bridge, a car driving along, a block of flats) are pointed out as wonders to the tourist.

The exigencies of the situation and the character’s objectives often cause improvisers to make an Advance:

[Example 46] [E46 _5:242-79]

Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)

242. (all re-enter, Y and Z carrying the spa)

279. (X & Y exit)

Y’s Advancing Move ‘Why don’t we leave you to it mate?’ [6:263], and X and Y’s exit, Advances the Scene nicely into the mad monologue by Noah to his half-dissolved wife [6:280]. Z’s ‘Yeah, erm, take your time when you’re upstairs’ [6:272] move is blatantly two-levelled, almost comically obvious, but supports both parties’ (X and Y on one hand; Z on the other) secret motives, and the necessity for the Advance. On X and Y’s return, the story is again Advanced, as X reveals to Z that the Police have been called once it is established that Z has ‘taken all the wood’ (i.e. dissolved it):

[Example 47] [E47 _5:281-316]

Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)

281. X&Y (X and Y re-enter)

316. XYZ:  (They all exit)

The Advance here affirms that the wood has been disposed of, and so X and Y, having satisfied this goal, can now tell Z that they have called the Police. Escorting Z

\(^{300}\) cf. Johnstone’s point on ‘interrupting routines’(1981, p.138), something X does throughout the Scene.
out to the Police is the final Advance of the story that concludes the Scene. Whilst this is revealed to Z obliquely, it is clear this obliqueness not only serves to maintain the two level idea, but create a mini-Extend before the final Advance at the end.

Aside from their individual functions, Extending and Advancing can act as mutual checks on one another. When one or other is too much in the ascendant, its opposite seems to take over. Extending grounds a Phase in reality and puts the brakes on the Scene’s forward movement; Advancing releases those brakes and relinquishes its anchors to a location or situation, so the story can progress forward to a new Phase.

4.6.4 Reincorporation of Shelved Offers

Reincorporated shelved Offers show Improvisers thinking retrospectively across the whole Scene. Through the middle and latter part of Scenes, Offers that had been marked as important and shelved reappeared. When they were reintroduced, they often re-entwined subordinately with the main thread of the Scene, emerged from the subtext back into the main text and supplanted it (such as was evident in Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)), or else were ignored and dropped altogether, for the sake of stage focus and narrative closure.

The constraints of Scene focus only allow for a certain number of Offers to be effectively operational within the Scene at any one time, and so this choice is made by the prevailing focus of the Scene at the time of the re-Incorporation. An improviser bringing a shelved Offer up a second, third and fourth time is no guarantee of its later Acceptance\(^{301}\). In Scene 2, Z’s Block of X’s Scene-prolonging Advance suggestion in L100 occurs so that the Scene can have its Offers re-incorporated back into it, and so move towards the closure of the Scene (Samuel has at this point been loved back into gentleness and kindness):

[Example 48] [E48 _2:98-103]

Scene 2: Samuel’s Big Night Out
98. Y: (to Samuel) Come back to human love
99. Z: He’s lost the fire.

\(^{301}\) In Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2), X’s biblical Endowment of Noah is not taken up, and the significance of his name is ignored.
100. X: We could erm, just hit him really hard. That usually makes him mean again.

101. Z: No we might catch the love

102. X: That’s true, that’s true.

103. Z: I think this, I think this one’s beyond us. We’ve lost this one to human love.

The ‘love’ (L101) functions as an antonym to the Vicious Leg-Easting Dog Association Offer, and so Z’s Block Re-Incorporates and further establishes this opposition, and thus Justifies the Block. This heralds the wind-down of the Scene towards its inevitable conclusion, the loving of all the dogs in the land, and provides a neat link back to the very first lines of the Scene.

A similar wrapping-up of Offers occurs in the final Phase of the techno-centric Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages:

[Example 49] [E49 _3:275-94]

Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages

275. X: Frank’s a good boy…

294. Y: …(starts typing at keyboard.)

The ‘integrated home office solution’, Frank’s desire to obtain one, the vortex, the pipe-cleaners, the picking up of Frank’s grandma, and Deirdre typing away on her laptop are all Offers from previous Phases that get re-incorporated here in the final Phase of the Scene. There were far more Offers to account for, owing to the Scene’s whimsical and wandering nature, but the central Offers were re-incorporated and its objectives met: Frank gets his office (we presume, unless he and his grandma vanish into a parallel universe), grandma gets re-united with her sister, and Deirdre can return to her email.

Re-incorporation does not exclusively have to occur at the end of Scenes. Quite early on in Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2) a Re-Incorporation is used involving a tea cup, which is quite unnecessary to the plot, yet adds further realism and reasons for interaction between the characters. Z has perhaps taken literally the Offer of Y’s “Why don’t you come round for a cup of tea” [L38] as an ingenious over-Accept (1981, p.97) of this Offer, since he has literally taken the cup (L119). The ‘cup of tea’ motif is re-Incorporated throughout: Y brings X a cup of tea right at the beginning when she is working on the floor (the ‘wrong’ floor (L8)); Z accidentally carries
round his cup back to his house when they go and get the spa in L119, nicely Justified by X in L123); and the Police are mentioned by X to Z as ‘coming round for a cup of tea… with you’ (L299 & 301) at the end, to which Z replies that he doesn’t want one as he’s already had one (L303), which is indeed quite true. These kinds of re-incorporated shelved Offers are not consciously registered by audiences, but form the subconscious weave of the piece that is on another level artistically satisfying.

Some elements of re-Incorporation have the element of a repeated routine. In Scene 1: The Ice Cream Cone, which is almost a five-finger exercise in Re-incorporation, the motif of the stuck tongue goes through three variations, before being ejected out of a “fortieth-storey”\textsuperscript{302} window. In Scene 6: Holiday in Eastern Europe, a similar repeated routine is used, and Y’s distraction device of storytelling to X about the town (and making US$10 on it), functions as a kind of routine re-Incorporation, whilst also orienting to the GAT.

Re-Incorporation is an essential element to create coherence (Fritz, 1982) in the storyline. It is particularly important for a ‘well-woven’ narrative line that Re-incorporation occurs at the end of the Scene, so that the Scene is perceived as structurally satisfying.

4.7 Responding Moves: Accepting, Yielding and Blocking

Improvisers made use of Accepts and Yields throughout, and also intelligent use of Blocks to create a measure of conflict, that befitted the characters and situations\textsuperscript{303}.

4.7.1 Accepts

Accepts reflect and support others’ Offers. This can be achieved in many ways. In Scene 3 Y folds Z’s Offer about Mr and Mrs Smith being “a myth” (L60), back into the next line and into the GAT, “the Yellow Pages” (L62). The line ‘but I found them’ has a slight Blocking sense, but what it Blocks is the tentative and negatively-weighted idea of them being ‘a myth’, and supports Z having heard of them before, as well as recycling the phrase from the GAT.

\textsuperscript{302} Z’s deictic Endowment, in Scene 1, L113

\textsuperscript{303} 1981, pp.97-8
Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages

57. Y: Mr and Mrs Smith.
61. Y: I found them… in the Yellow Pages.

The adjacency pair (Tannen, 1989, p. 77) uses what Tannen identifies as the ‘phonological repetition’ (ibid, p. 97) between lines of dialogue to create greater connection and acceptance between the adjacent lines. This can be a measure of the coherence that characters have with one another and manifestly exhibit. In [3:239-242] the rhyme between ‘Pauline’ and ‘seen’ in X’s line, which is then picked up again with the long ‘ee’ sound in Y’s ‘been’ (‘I’ve been gardening’), create a greater sense of an Accept that serves the function of coherence. In conversational speech such coherence marks a closeness of relationship between people (ibid, p. 97). Here the phonological repetition literally functions to cohere or bind the characters closer together. Syntactic preservation is also conserved in the repetition of the question, and also the repetition of ‘I thought’ and ‘I thought so too’. This syntactic matching fosters greater coherence and a sense of sympathy between the characters.

Interestingly, Accepts use phonological repetition to help to cohere even opposing characters across a Scene, for example, where Z is looking for Bird in Scene 4: Bubble Gum and Nature:

Scene 4: Bubble Gum and Nature

98 X: He- He’s not here.
99 Z: Really? Well what’s that! (Z pushes X to side to reveal Y standing behind)
100 Y: (bird squawk) Aa!
101 Z: Ha ha!

Here both the ‘ere’ sound (‘here’, ‘really’), and the ‘Aa!’ Vowel sound (‘That!’, Y’s squawk ‘Aa!’, X’s ‘Ha ha!’) use repetition of expletive and gestic sounds across speaker turns to create an Accept-like effect.
Another example of this agreement, which uses what Goodwin calls ‘Format Tying’,\(^{304}\) are the following three lines from the same Phase and Scene:

[Example 52] [E52 _3:48-50]

**Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages**

48. Z: On a phone?
49. Y: Well yes, back in the days when I needed a phone.
50. Z: Not any more!

Here ‘a phone’ is accepted and reincorporated in L49, and supported in L50. This process occurs again in [2:64-5], and is typical of the nature of the conversation that Deirdre (Y) and Frank (Z) are having, and Extending continually the idea of the virtual office further into absurdity until it becomes so virtual that even the chairs and desks are unreal.

Accepts can be purely phonic. All players made use of such utterances as ‘Yes’, ‘Yeah’, ‘Mm’, ‘Uh-huhn’, ‘Oh right’ and ‘OK’ as generalised Accepts. These stall for time, continue the emotional plane and ethos of the Scene, and maintain a phatic connection with the player/character making the Offer to which they are agreeing or assenting. In *Holiday in Eastern Europe*, X’s line ‘That’s interesting’ [6:90], spoken about the block of flats with a genuine intonation of bored politeness that still was concerned to appear interested in Y’s European country, creates humour by juxtaposition, and is also highly eloquent about the characters and their socio-economic relationship in the conversation at this point. Ironically, L193-213 of **Scene 7: The Camel Test** use the phonological repetition of the negative ‘No’, and ‘Know’ to Accept.

Sometimes players simultaneously Offer and Accept in instances where a question is asked. X repeats and confirms Y’s coining of the car name (‘Schwinker’\(^{305}\)), and Z elaborates and Extends the name further to ‘Schwinker Turbo’ [6:166-70]. Repetition and confirmation also serve to cohere and confirm the meanings of the statements that characters make, and these confirmations and repetitions function very much like Accepts\(^{306}\). Both the ‘looking at me funny’/’Oh camels are funny things’, and the

\(^{304}\) Goodwin, 1990, pp.177-85

\(^{305}\) A neologism not far from the german word ‘schwindler’, swindler, which is a fair description of Bill and Greg

\(^{306}\) See E7 7:1-48] above
verbal Accepting of Z’s non-verbal ‘smiling camel’ Offer are examples of Accepting as confirmation and consolidation of the prevailing reality and focus of the Scene. Without this confirmation, no reality can be established and agreed upon, and without this agreement, no story can be told. Confirmation and Agreement as a function of Accepts is an essential component of building, establishing and maintaining the reality of the Scene.

Accepts also arrive from the simple status levels of the various players, and reflect the control or influence they have at a specific moment of a Scene. In Scene 6: Holiday in Eastern Europe [6:292-9], Y takes on the mantle of expert about the car, and is therefore entitled to issue directives that X is forced to agree with, in the context of handing on expert advice. The humour of the use of this particular form of Exchange is of course that his advice is absurd and self-contradictory, which makes a further statement about the nature of the car that X is renting from him.307

Agreement of one character with another can also be a function of both characters having the same agenda, or working in tandem. This is very common in the data, and the shifting allegiances and alliances that occur within a Phase can show not only to ebb and flow of Yields, but also the precise moment at which one character is allied to another, by the response of their Accepts. In I Found it in the Yellow Pages [3:157-61], Y’s ‘All right’ [L161] is a simple acknowledgement of Z taking the lead in the story at this point. Whilst this appears to be an obvious point to make about Accepts, it is actually a crucial architectural feature of the Scene that the characters ally themselves with each other in the pursuit of common objectives.

Accepts (and phonological repetition) also function to signal intimacy between characters. Perhaps the closest of these is in the presentation of a married couple, for instance Troy and his wife in Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2). Here the opening lines show strong phonological repetition to signal their strong partnership:

[Example 53] [E53_5:19-30]
Scene 5: The Wrong Floor (take 2)
19. X: Yeah. S’all right. ..
30. Y: …mimes phoning Noah) Hello?

307 Note the unfinished, interrupted Offer/Extend of X about cars in the US that also guzzle petrol, built into X’s Accept in L298
In the first nine lines of the Scene, seven start with the word ‘Yeah’. The two other lines both have a strong Accept impulse behind them. Even the ‘can you think’ is Accepting and building on the validity and quality of the wrong floor that Troy has mistakenly laid. L10-11 are two different versions of Accepts ‘All right.’, and L12 is the execution of the Accepted action, the phoning up of Noah to invite him round.

Accepts can also come off the back of Blocks, and vice-versa:

[Example 54] [E54 _6:250-64]

Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages
250. Y: How have you been?
264. Y: …for the legless.

This entire conversation is filled with alternating Accepts and Blocks. X’s line ‘Asleep’ is taken as a Block, which X makes up for by initiating a new name. This is in turn Blocked by Y’s Offer of the change of name, however this Offer does Accept the idea of uncertainty about the name which was a prosodic feature of X’s question (as she is clearly hunting in her memory for the name.) X doesn’t entirely Block this Offer, but brushes over it with an unconvinced intonation, then attempts to build on it by an apology that Accepts the previous Offers very neatly. Y then Extends on this, then changes the subject with the Offer of a visit. This is then part-Blocked by X’s statement that she can’t walk. This Block is itself Accepted and then Extended upon. The entire Phase becomes a tennis match of alternating Offers and Blocks.

It is to Blocks themselves that we now turn.

4.7.2 Blocks

The improvisers were too skilled to accidentally or habitually Block each other’s ideas out of bad habit. However they occasionally deployed creative Blocking to explore conflicts that followed from the given circumstances of the character’s situation:

[Example 55] [E55 _3:85-94]

Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages
85. Z: Can you supply me…
94. X: I just know.
Here, X’s delaying block ‘No’ serves to extend the Scene into a number of Phases that have to be satisfied before Frank can have his gravity-defying home office. Z’s line ‘Oh. (pause) Why not?’ is an almost shocked reaction to X’s Block, and Z’s question indicates the Zachary’s genuine (i.e. non-fictive) wonder as to how this Block is going to be justified by Xena. X Justifies it through her character giving a kind of parental ‘ticking off’ of Frank, with X playing high status (1981, pp.33-74) to Z’s low status request for the office ‘just like Deirdre’s’. High status characters often take on the prohibitive roles as part of their authoritarian footing (Goffman, 1963). Thus for the character she takes on, X’s Block is entirely logical and natural.

Blocks can thus follow from character itself, and therefore not really be Blocks in that sense. Later in the same Phase, X continues her authoritarian stand where Z is asking Mrs Smith to send her the blue flowers for his grandma through the vortex:

[Example 56] [E56 _3:107-10]

Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages

107. Z: OK. Well…
110. X: … Something else.

These kinds of half-blocks persist throughout this and the following Phases, as they serve to heighten the obstreperous and demanding nature of Mrs Smith’s personality.

[Example 57] [E57 _3:124-51]

Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages

124. X: There we go …
151. … exit to the hovercar)

The Blocks here come from X’s instruction not to give the flowers to Y, and her non-committal response to the request for a transportation device. Y’s Block (that prevents Z from borrowing the hovercar) is clever, as it allows these two characters to travel together to the next locale, Frank’s grandma’s place. Z’s Offer to Y to come with him was unplanned – improvised - yet stemmed naturally and logically from the half-Block (or obstacle) that Y puts up to borrowing the hover-car.

Another example of a character putting up an obstacle to the action illustrates more clearly how this itself can spawn a whole new sequence of action and interaction. In the following, X’s Block (L263) supports the characterisation of Mrs Smith, yet this
Block has to be handled. It is, eventually, by Frank carrying her to the hovercar. However, until this occurs, the action and conversation challenges Y to come up with significant and relevant Offers:

[Example 58] [E58 _3:263-72]

Scene 3: I Found it in the Yellow Pages

263. X: Yes. You know I can’t walk, right?
272. Y: … unable to create in our factory.

The left field offer of the pipe-cleaners, while appearing to be helpful, acts as a kind of Block for the action, since it does not Yield. The challenge is to weave this Offer back into the narrative, which the two improvisers do with deliberately ‘hammy’ acting, over-stressing ‘Yes’ in their responses and tying them overtly back to the Scene’s objectives. The difficulty and amount of think-work that Y has to do to integrate and Justify X’s left field Offers back into the narrative he is fashioning is indicated by the mistake and self-correction he makes in L272.

Some Blocks are paralinguistic and non-verbal. The interruption of one Offer by another in Scene 4: Bubble Gum and Nature [E4_4:1-2], Y’s loud “Aa!” squawk functions as a Block to the action of the skipping little girl’s song by virtue of its loudness. It interrupts her behaviour, and makes a loud, shocking noise that steals the focus instantly. Blocking can be created by intensity itself - here it was Justified and incorporated back into the Scene as Bird’s ‘problem’ (Scene 4:49 ff.).

In Samuel’s Big Night Out, it was seen that relegating the importance of an Offer through explanation or Justification can also function as a kind of Block [E24_2:54-5]. Here it does not stop the action since it is within Z’s character and his objective to do this (L54-5).

The Wrong Floor (take 2) is a special case in point for Blocks. Since one of the characters has murdered his wife, he has to hint and Endow this fact whilst Blocking its overt expression. A definition of what constitutes a Block then is clearly dependant on context. For Noah to say ‘Yes I admit I did it, arrest me’ would apparently be an Accept, but completely Blocks the presupposition of Noah’s motivation and would contradict the reality of the Scene.\(^\text{308}\)

\(^{308}\) Johnstone also makes this point (1981, p.97) about Blocks.
Eventually this Block is given up, and Z yields to Y’s Offer that he has a wife at home. Even while the Block occurs, multi-functionality and use of levels of meaning does not stop, for as Noah and Troy are negotiating this Block, Y is re-Incorporating earlier Offers as substance and evidence to the point: Y’s accusatory line to Noah ‘What about that other one?’ (line 95) goes back to the X’s line 49 ‘Yeah, he’s not going to bring that other one is he?’ to Troy. This begins to grow the theme of the fourth character who will become the half-dissolved wife in the next Phase. Blocking is a natural and integral part of this Scene, and the improvisers play out and extend upon the predicament that Noah is in, with his friends in his bathroom, and him trying to hide the fact that his wife is lying dead in the spa [5:126-52 & 165-72].

Blocks, like Extends, can be used to purposefully stall an Advance. Playing for time by Blocking an Advance with an Extend occurs where X and Y are left alone with the spa which contains Noah’s dead wife. Using equivocation to draw out audience expectancy, X extends the time before they will actually ‘take the top off’ the spa and have a look.

Playing for time is also a major motif in *Holiday in Eastern Europe*, and takes up a large part of the Scene, but here, the Block by Z is quite brazen and overt. Again, in the hands of a tyro improviser, such an outright Block as ‘It’s not!’ [6:230] is forbidden; here, it is entirely within character, and appropriate for the situation. Blocks, in the hands of expert improvisers who can deploy them intelligently, cease to be Blocks and become strong attributes in the presentation of conflict situations and definition of character.

### 4.7.3 Yields

Yielding is what improvisers choose *not* to include on stage, and so is not in the transcribed or audio-visual data. Yielding is a movement of thought, a decision not to press ahead with one’s own Offer, for the sake of retaining a single focus on stage.
The Impro stage as a metaphor for the human short-term or working memory is suggestive. Ideas come and go, arising from outside or within, yet only a certain number of ideas can occupy the stage of working memory in the present moment\(^ {309} \). Ideas have to Yield to other ideas, in order for thought to remain sustained, sensible and logical. The stage as an analogue for working memory then becomes a kind of meeting-point for current ideas.

In the interview, subjective reports confirm that all three improvisers X, Y and Z frequently Yielded ideas, so that the Scene could go a certain way. It is always interesting to talk to improvisers after a Scene, as one realises just how many ideas were in Improvisers’ minds which could have borne fruit, and could have led the Scene down an entirely different path altogether. The history of the Scene that gets created is a mixture of those three minds’ contributions\(^ {310} \) and like history itself is determined by the shaping forces of the reality of the Scene in relation to the contributors to that Scene. Improvisers reveal themselves to be engaged in a continuous dialogue between their inner worlds and motivations and their awareness of the objective established facts (Offers) of a Scene.

This chapter has laid out the results, through looking at the functions of each of the nine Poetics within the seven Scenes.

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\(^{309}\) Cf. De Groot’s 1966 chess study on working memory in experts and novices

\(^{310}\) Johnstone presents this relationship between internal thought and external history graphically on the page when describing the narrative exercise word at a time story (1981, p.131) in the chapter on Narrative.
Chapter 5. Conclusions

The research determined a number of key ways that students were using the Poetics of additive improvisation in Open Scenes. These findings are first summarised (5.1), then tabulated (5.2). Following this, the Poetics are reformulated within the TOE model (the three realms that the Poetics appeared to be working in) and its implications discussed (5.3). This model is then transmuted into a multi-hierarchical (5-layer) cyclic model, which aims to capture two-dimensionally what appears to be happening in a four-dimensional OSAI Scene. This model also aims to sketch some of the inter-relationships between the individual Poetics, a goal identified by one of the conclusions. The generative and receptive features of Offers and Accepts are then generalised and simplified under a Taoist model (a two level, “Tao of Impro” processes) and Mandelbrot’s iterative equation of fractal geometry, through the concept of ‘cybernetic semantic iteration’ (5.4). Finally, the educational implications of these generalisations are briefly sketched (5.5).

5.1 The Poetics of OSAI: Findings

Offers
Offering by players proceeded naturalistically and at the normal pace of conversation, allowing the Scenes to develop in a realistic manner. Players made Offers that sprung from their own characters, and from the predicaments and situations that became mutually established. All characters made Offers grounded in naturalism, yet the Scenes also allowed for the flight of the imagination. Offers were made within the domain of fictive stage reality. Five types of Offers were found to be at work in the Scenes, reflecting the parameters of that fictive, representational reality.

1) Opening Offers followed directly on from the GAT, acting almost as Accepts to the GAT Offer. They defined time, place, location, character, relationship and

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situation sometimes within a few seconds of the Scene’s opening. Sometimes Opening Offers delayed incorporation of the GAT, or approached it tangentially. This effect of delayed gratification was very satisfactory to watch, as it showed the improvisers serving the suggestion, by memorising and orienting to it and only then explicitly introducing it at a strategically delayed point in the Scene. Sometimes the GAT became a keyword or topic word for the whole Scene, and was reinterpreted through association on a number of semantic levels, and phonetic levels.

2) **Deictic Offers** were found to be a subset of Endowment Offers. Deictic Offers were used with dexterity by the improvisers to establish time, location and direction, in order to define the stage space’s fictive locale. Deictic Offers always functioned in tandem with a Move that furthered the character’s motive or objective in the Scene. Characters were always ‘doing something’, and expressed motivation even as they pointed out salient features of the environment. Deictic Offers also functioned to motivate a relationship Endowment.

3) **Expressive Offers** were found to signal character predicaments that were not immediately obvious (Scene 1.) In more developed Scenes, Expressive Offers allowed improvisers to explore characterisation for its own sake, while working through the situation established within the narrative. Evidence of this occurred in Scenes 3, 5 and 7, where light was shed on the character’s inner worlds through the use of monologues, asides between characters and non-verbal behaviours. Status relationships were also explored in this way, or through the use of stage

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312 Perhaps, though, echoing Gestalt psychology, their coherence and unitary power are also to some degree a function of the viewer’s imagination filling in these missing elements. Where to draw the interpretative line between what improvisers define on stage and what is implied or left open for the audience to interpret would call for an entire study in itself to be undertaken; yet, as is shown below, the Taoist model provides an extremely powerful way of explaining the improviser-audience relationship also.

313 as Open Scene Impro players would serve the audience in a professional Impro show.

314 E.g. Scene 5: ‘wrong’ and judicial and physical ‘law’

315 Scene 5: ‘law’ ‘floor’ ‘spa’.

316 This was evident particularly in Scenes 2 and 6

317 This was used to good effect early in Scene 5 where the character of Noah’s wife was referred to anaphorically as ‘her’ and ‘she’, creating a question mark about her exact identity.

318 1981, pp.55-70
While all three improvisers developed interesting characters, Z’s performances in particular stood out for the way in which he was able to inject bizarre, left-field and/or low status characters into the Scenes.

4) **Pure Imaginative Offers** often derived from the logic of the Scene, but took the Scene on a flight of fancy, or explored a contradiction or hypothesis deriving from the Scene’s given circumstances. These followed from the Scenes’ givens and so did not jar (even the absurd plot device introduced by Z in Scene 4 was satisfactory.) Johnstone’s edict of trying to combine naturalism and pure imagination was balanced confidently.

5) **Closing Offers** were always deliberately used, and showed improvisers controlling the Scenes’ shape, and working together to bring them to a satisfactory ending. Moreover, improvisers were seen to be skilfully linking Opening and Closing Offers together to give a sense of completeness and well-roundedness to the narrative, and tie the Scene back again to the GAT. Improvisers showed considerable skill at handling this over the longer Scenes, even as the Closing Offers of the first two shorter Scenes were somewhat contrived. This showed the improvisers thinking of a Scene ending and possible Closing Offers well in advance of the actual end.

Offers formed the backbone and fundamental source for a Scene’s meaning. The five types of Offers were seen to fulfil some or all of the following purposes:

1) **Opening Offers**
   a. Accepted the GAT
   b. Indexed time, place, character, action, emotional tenor, relationship to other, object or location (including weather condition) as a fundamental basis or starting point for the Scene
   c. Dived directly into the action, got straight into the process of improvising, the core stage business

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319 1981, pp.57-62
320 Characters required the narrative fabric of the Scene to be established by all three improvisers first, however. See 1981, p.138 – ‘interrupting routines’
321 eg. Z’s subtextual Block to X’s delaying Offer at the end of Scene 2 [E48_2:101-103].
322 Scenes 3, 5, 6 and 7 were all over 10 minutes in duration
d. Captured the fictive reality of the actual stage area and controlled its meaning from the beginning of the Scene on

2) Deictic Offers
   a. Defined space, nearness/closeness and movement of objects in space
   b. Implied emotional connection to space, objects, others
   c. Defined time of day, year
   d. Defined weather or other environmental conditions
   e. Advanced the plot, or reset the Scene location
   f. Endowed features of relationship to other, or characteristics to other improvisers, that implied a sense of social situation
   g. Endowed characteristics or detailed features to objects
   h. Endowed qualities to their own character by implication or directly (e.g. “It’s not going to hurt is it? You know I’m quite sensitive to pain”).

3) Expressive Offers
   a. Allowed for pure physical expressiveness to occur, without thought for its final meaning, in expressing an emotional or motivational state of being
   b. Allowed character-energies\(^ {323}\) to be channelled ‘mindlessly’ onto the stage, whether they ‘made sense’ or not
   c. Explored the pure physicality of the expressive voice and body on stage\(^ {324}\)

4) Imaginative Offers
   a. Explored the ‘what if’
   b. Ran words and ideas together to create neologisms
   c. Created plans and solutions to problems, some of which were nonsensical, but always from a serious emotional footing and ground of belief, no matter how absurd\(^ {325}\)

5) Closing Offers

\(^{323}\) cf. the notion of Jung’s archetypes or sub-personality structures coming to the fore on the open stage (see Sections 2.3.8 and 2.3.4-5 on this above)

\(^{324}\) after Copeau

\(^{325}\) *Ipso facto*, since this is a key feature of absurd drama and comedy
a. Created a contrived, ‘pat’ ending, that summed up the plot, tied loose ends together, finalised a major objective or action, or created a sense of finality of a stage in the cycle of the life of one or more characters
b. Linked back to the GAT, to bring the Scene full circle

While this was not part of the study’s focus, it became clear that improvisers tended to be specialists in particular kinds of Offers and their purposes.  

Endowing

Endowments were used to introduce a new character into the Scene, define an on- or off-stage character, define a relationship or the relative status levels within a relationship, define a mimed animal or object, or point to the subtextual realm of the Scene. Endowments could occur physically as well as verbally, using implication. Endowments served as a ‘forwards bracket’ or ‘frame’ about their object. Where there was a conflict or contradiction in subsequent Endowments, these contradictions were sensed as needing to be Justified by improvisers. Sometimes a deliberate conflict of Endowments occurred, as in Scene 2 (‘Samuel’), or surrounding the car in Scene 6, (which was almost a technical exercise in Endowing and Justifying), which created the naturalistic sense of a conflict of two or more people’s differing views on a situation.

As mentioned above under Deictic Offers (to which Endowments are closely connected, since Endowing is really a kind of Offer in response to another Offer), it was found that Endowments could index a number of contextual zones in the fictive space. Some of these included:

1) Time

326 A gender interpretation might find that the female improviser Xena more often tended to ‘hold the fort’, i.e., set the Scene and maintain it, where male improvisers tended to be keener to find objectives in the present scene or phase and move the story forwards to a new scene or phase. This was not always the case on this occasion however, as Yaron, a male improviser, often grounded the Scene and made it stable, often occupying himself with some minor stage business and maintaining that for some considerable time, and Xena, a female improviser would occasionally disrupt a Scene or caused some change to the status quo to occur. Again, such a basis for interpretation is beyond the framework of the present study, but would be a useful and informative approach to OSAI.

327 Goffman, 1974
a. Historical and/or cultural dramatic style  
b. Of year (i.e. season)  
c. Of day or night  

2) Place  
  a. Role definition of location (e.g. at the nightclub, in the personal office)  
  b. qualities of location determined by sensory description (feel, sight,  
     taste, smell or sound in ambient surroundings)  
  c. Objects in space - named  
  d. nearness/closeness and/or movement of objects in space  
  e. function of objects  
  f. qualities of objects determined by sensory description (feel, sight,  
     taste, smell or sound of them) and direct handling of mimed objects  
  g. weather conditions  
  h. “emotional field”, ethos  

3) Character  
  a. Old/young  
  b. Job role and status  
  c. Relationships  
  d. Gender  
  e. Class and/or nationality  
  f. Social Stereotype  
  g. Emotional state  
  h. Physical features, peculiarities or deformities  
  i. Animal endowments (e.g. “Bird”, “Bonzo”)  

4) Action  
  a. Pace  
  b. Use of stage space and placement  
  c. Levels  
  d. Movement  
     i. Movement type  

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328 Brandi’s (2003) link between humans and animals is pertinent here, in her discussion of the mask 
and trance aspect of Improvisation  
329 A Labanian analysis of movements has not been undertaken here, but would prove a useful 
commentary on the physical script of the Scenes
ii. Rhythm and pattern of movement
iii. emotional tenor behind movement
iv. thought / motivation behind movement (functional, expressive, ‘Machiavellian’)

e. Link to plot and objectives

5) Relationship

a. to other
   i. positive/negative/neutral
   ii. emotional/functional/incidental
   iii. blood/non-blood tie
   iv. implying a social situation, shared action or location

b. to object
   i. functional/aesthetic
   ii. emotional pitch
   iii. groundedness

c. to location
   i. functional/expressive
   ii. emotional pitch
   iii. groundedness

d. to environmental features e.g. weather condition

e. to self
   i. self-view
   ii. self-talk
   iii. self-expression
   iv. emotional state – eg. at ease/ ill at ease

Note that Relationship also created a sense of reflexivity on the Endower, intended or not, since the Endower’s motivation as that character became part of the equation that comprised the relationship endowment.

**Justifying**

Justifys functioned exactly as Endowments above, except as a ‘backwards bracket’, defining their object retrospectively, where the Scene’s fictive reality required such a definition to be made. Justifys, more than Endowments, also created a window into the world of the Justifier, to show their vested interests in the reality they were trying to define, and the emotional footings from which they sprung.
Justifies fulfilled identical definitions as those listed above for Endowments, though this was the less common Move.

**Extending**

Because the improvisers were so adept at creating stage reality through Endowments, Justifies and Deictic Offers, their ability to Extend an action, moment or conversation was correspondingly highly developed. Improvisers Extended a moment and delayed an Advance where they were knowingly aware of the effects of dramatic irony. Conscious Extending in this manner seemed to be a mark of a skilled troupe, as all players were clearly thinking in broader narrative terms, controlling the flow of their creative Offering to mesh in with the narrative structure that is emerging. They therefore seemed to have the confidence to delay the resolution or forward movement of a Scene, without ‘losing the plot’, literally or figuratively. This, as Johnstone has remarked, takes a kind of ‘telepathic understanding’\(^{330}\) between players.

Extending occurred in the areas of objects, people, actions and the location or surroundings by the following responding physical or vocal actions:

1) **Objects**  
   a. Examining an object, adding detail (eg texture) to it  
   b. Making the object change, develop or become animated

2) **People**  
   a. Finding an excuse that halts forward motion of an action or the answering of a question  
   b. Asking questions, doing a series of Q&A  
   c. Raising an issue or objection  
   d. Distracting attention to outside the conversation  
   e. Changing the subject within the conversation  
   f. Creating a parallel topic or parallel conversational action (eg. Telling a story while a car is being modified in “Holiday in Eastern Europe”)

3) **Action**

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\(^{330}\) 1981, p.102
a. Creating a pattern to an action (eg Z’s fixing and modification of the car, the “Schwinker turbo” in “Holiday in Eastern Europe”)
b. Finding obstacles to the action
c. Adding detail to the action that distracts or temporarily suspends it

4) Surroundings
   a. Being in the location, further defining it
   b. Picking out features of interest in the locale (e.g. in “Holiday in Eastern Europe”)

For Extending involving conversation with other characters, this occurred most frequently where this was an innate part of the character and their situation (e.g. “The Camel Test”, “The Wrong Floor”)

**Advancing**

Advancing involves moving the narrative on to the next step. Because all improvisers were focused on the progress of the narrative, opportunities for Advancing could be negotiated and then made. Sometimes an Advance was artificially or single-handedly introduced (eg Zachary’s blunt Advance in Scene 4) where the Scene was read by that improviser to be requiring such an Advance. Advances tended to be artificial, plot-functional and plot-marking Moves and therefore frequently departed from character naturalism; this did not appear a problem however, as this narrative function needed to be addressed for the Scene to make sense, and to move forward towards objectives. Some Scenes were able to Advance whilst still remaining naturalistic (Scene 3), while others used them to comic effect (Scene 7).

Advances occurred to
1) Change the action on stage
2) Change the location
3) Change the time
4) Propose the execution of an objective (common or individual)
5) Create a new objective or changed objective
6) End the Scene

Extending and Advancing (somewhat like Endowing and Justifying) appear as two sides of the same coin, and both were balanced with each other, so that Scenes remained both grounded in reality and forward-moving.
**Reincorporating Shelved Offers**

Improvisers paid homage both to the GAT Offer and each other’s Offers by Reincorporating shelved Offers regularly. This created a coherent and satisfying narrative. Shelved Offers were also reincorporated by individual players where they had been rejected or left undeveloped. Reincorporation required the use of story memory by improvisers.331 Sometimes Reincorporated Offers would be modified, giving the sense of development and change in the storyline. Major Reincorporated Offers became motifs that defined the whole Scene.

**Accepts**

Improvisers all Accepted each other’s Offers, and worked off each other’s contributions. Accepts are crucial to the internal communication system and coherence of an Impro Scene, since ‘an Offers is only as good as its Accept’,332 and all three improvisers proved themselves to be highly adept at listening and processing the ongoing Scene and Offers of the other players, whether they were on-stage or off. Sometimes Accepts made were simple phonological (“Mmm”, “Yeah”, “Nnnh”)333 or syntactic334 utterances used to cohere the characters phatically. This demonstrated that players were both at ease in each other’s physical presence and able to remain in the fictive situation (nicely evident in Scene 5.)

Accepts accepted the reality that was proposed by the prior Offer. Moreover they added to the Offer by:

1) Finding a reason for them  
2) Adding more detail  
3) Suggesting a use or further purpose for the content of the Offer  
4) Indexing the meaning of the Accept into the realm of phatic communion (the generalised “yes”)  
5) Mirroring the syntactic, lexical, semantic or phonological content of the Offer  
6) Supporting or saving “face” of the other character

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331 1981, pp.112-3  
333 See Rod Gardiner’s excellent work in this area  
334 See Tannen, 1989 and Goodwin, 1990 on this
7) Finding an exception to the Offer
8) Blocking the Offer’s surface propositional content, while agreeing with (and further establishing) its presuppositional content

**Blocking**

Blocking is an automatic and unconscious ‘passive aggressive’ psychological habit, one which untrained improvisers tend to fall into. Here, none of the improvisers unconsciously Blocked each other’s Offers. However, Blocking was used consciously to good effect, and the improvisers made use of ‘surface level’ Blocking to create conflict situations arising naturalistically from the character’s personalities (Mrs Smith in Scene 3) or their predicaments (Noah in Scene 5, the Eastern Europeans in Scene 6). Improvisers also used Blocking selectively to delay an Advance, and heighten audience tension and expectancy.

**Yielding**

The coherence of all the Scenes was a function of the improvisers continually Yielding Offers to one another, or cross-weaving interrupted Offers into each other’s subsequent Offering. No player tried to ‘bulldoze’ a Scene; where they took the lead, they would then Yield focus within a few turns, and allow the Scene to develop co-operatively again. The skill of Offering and Yielding/Accepting within a continuum was seen to reflect the talking/listening balance that occurs in a normal conversation. Higher status characters tended to Yield less, as befitted their role, but were nevertheless equally affected and changed by the ongoing stream of Offers. Overall, Yielding and Accepting provided the glue that allowed the thread of Offers to flow through the Scene and become established as its reality.

### 5.2 Summary Table of Functions

The overall functions of the Poetics as they appeared within the seven Scenes of OSAI are here summarised in table form:

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335 1981, p.98
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poetic</th>
<th>function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offer</td>
<td>GAT; Given by the audience/researcher, this Offer was used as the centre round which the Scene orbited - semantically, thematically and also phonetically. Opening; Set the Scene, established physical and ontological space for the characters, set the pace and mood of the Scene Deictic; Used throughout the Scene to handle the surrounding elements of the fictive universe on the stage. Expressive; Used throughout the Scene to give a window into the inner world’s of the characters. Xena, Yaron and Zachary all used Expressive Offers to shed light on their own characters’ mental states. Imaginative; Used throughout the Scene to engage more deeply with the fictive elements, or to play with them in a familiar way, or to manipulate, combine or find logical or linguistic contradictions between elements. Closing; An artificial narrative device sometimes used to end a Scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endow</td>
<td>Used as a type of Offer to manipulate the narrative corridor, character ontology, or as spatio-temporal deixis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justify</td>
<td>Used as a reverse Endow (used in the lay sense extensively in Scene 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend</td>
<td>Giving increasingly detailed Endowment, halting the narrative, extending conversations and grounding realities on stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance</td>
<td>Moving the Scene along to its next logical step in the story, or towards a character objective or common group objective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-Incorporate</td>
<td>Creating a satisfying sense of closure towards the last Phases of Scenes by re-introducing earlier important Offers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>Creating reality of characters’ inter-personal congruence on stage; enhancing credibility of the fictive content of the Scene and its relationship dynamics; aids clarity of social situation for the audience to understand and participate in a shared improvised world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block</td>
<td>Surface-level Blocking used tactically and with awareness of the subtext where character’s situation required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield</td>
<td>Used throughout, subtextually (a purely mental, non-transcribable action of omission, and of redirecting of inner objective to match the ongoing outer situation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 Core stage business: TOE

Open Scene Additive Improvisation allows its participants to develop hypothetical Scenes using an iteration of Offers and Accepts that serve to organically weave out a story, stemming from the grounded reality of motivated characters in situation. OSAI practice allows players to think up and explore hypothetical stories and characters. The communication and empathy manifested on an interpersonal level, and narrative understanding, character groundedness and self-expressive skills in evidence on an individual level, remained in balance throughout the seven Scenes. To this end, the nine Poetics of additive improvisation provide an analytical tool to reflect on and develop skills in Open Scene Impro. It can be inferred from the data that the communal building of Scenes through the use of these nine Poetics in OSAI practice can therefore enhance corresponding skills of memory and creativity, objective awareness and (inter-)subjective groundedness, and the ability to connect with self and others in its participants.

We can interpret the abilities and paradigms within which the nine Poetics functioned as existing within three overarching fields: the Teleological, Ontological and Epistemological.

5.3.1 Teleology: Three key aims in OSAI

Characters have objectives, and these form the main cord that pulls the Scene towards its ending. These objectives, or Aims336, can be thought of as existing within three spheres: the Nominal, Functional and Relational.

Nominal Aim

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336 The term ‘Aim’ implies that actor and character purposiveness have a clear direction, but not necessarily a fixed goal, as is implied by the term ‘objective’. Since the exact end-goal destination is open to negotiation right up until the very last moment of a Scene, the notion of an immutable objective is not appropriate in OSAI. This is not to say that actors do not create clear-cut objectives for their characters, only that such objectives can easily be altered, dispensed with, exchanged or reversed with an equal measure of conviction by the actor, in order to maintain cohesion with both the inner character and the outer unfolding Scene. The broadness and flexibility of the term ‘Aim’ is thus here preferred.
The Nominal aim within an Impro Scene is the action of naming and defining aspects of the reality within it. It is this process that defines the crucial centre of the Impro Scene, since Improvisers enter onto an empty stage and have before them, literally, nothing but an empty space and an audience from whom to obtain a suggestion for a Scene. The Poetics associated with this aim are the Offer and Endow and, to a lesser extent, Justify. The act of Offering defines the key art of the OSAI Improviser, and reflects what Heidegger described as the mental pointing (or index-) finger\textsuperscript{337}, when discussing the crucial role of language in the creation of reality\textsuperscript{338}. Offering thus literally ‘points out’ fictive elements within a Scene (either of location, situation, time of day, character, action or mood), sketching them before the audience’s and fellow improvisers’ minds, and moving forward in time and fictive space on that basis, held in memory, as an established proposition. For improvisers, the interaction of such ‘pointings’ becomes a composite chain of moments of such holistic, performative pointing, that allows reality to be accreted mutually through time.

A motivated character only actualises and realises themselves at the moment of such pointing, through backward inference, and the explication of this meaning provides a trail of clues that fellow improvisers and audience alike follow, filling in the spaces Gestalt-fashion, in building the chain of the narrative, and weaving its various strands together. Such nodes, links of the chain, or moments of pointing, comprise the individual acts that such an analysis as Burton's privileges (1981)\textsuperscript{339}, to a greater or lesser degree of success. Spoken language itself as the 'mental pointing finger' can convey the idea that good additive improvisers are able to use this facility, this ‘finger’ to paint and sketch a canvas of the dramatic situation quickly and confidently, and in agreement with each other’s historical assertion of the substantive facts of the situation so far enacted and held in memory.

The capacity of Improvisers to use this facility appears central to their ability to contribute to a Scene, while the accretion of Offers into the historical reality of the Scene makes use of deictic and anaphoric elements within the discourse world, to manipulate its constituent elements. Furthermore, character footing can be defined by using what artists term the ‘negative space’, that is, backwards implication from deixis. The definition of situation implies a definer of situation, as the negative space

\textsuperscript{337} the “Geistige Zeigefinger”. Heidegger, 1959, 1971, p123, using a notion originally borrowed from Jean Paul

\textsuperscript{338} A notion that Wittgenstein took as the foundation for all possible understanding of reality

\textsuperscript{339} And discourse analysis generally, which suggest a fruitful path for further study in OSAI.
around the object defines the object, and characters can create themselves by their reactions to externally projected events, even as they define the reality about them.\footnote{340}

The desire to name and the pleasure and play of language ties into very early developmental stages in child development\footnote{341}, and is predicated on a central (if not the central) motivation in OSAI.

\textit{Functional Aim}

The functional aim of a Scene is served by the two narrative Poetics of Advance and Extend, the former simplifying and streamlining the narrative, the latter adding complexity and depth. While Advancing can over-ride Extending, Extending can open up new narrative avenues that may alter the course of possible Advances in the Scene, and re-weight them in particular directions.

This aim gives form and expression to the human facility and need for story-telling and representation, and objective validation of events, as well as the seeking of real-world objectives and states.

\textit{Relational Aim}

The give and take of Offers through Accepts is crucial to weaving a broad socially-patterned narrative and sense of a mutually inclusive, socially-validated fictive world on stage. The three Improvisers X, Y and Z were adept at listening to one another, and of using presence and stillness as the ground from which each successive move in the Scene could be made.\footnote{342} Whilst Improvisers did use a variety of pace, the general ethos of the Scenes was one of social coherence, with next Moves seeming to fit

\footnote{340} We might note that \textit{Othello}’s Iago seeks to become an invisible definer of situation to Othello, that is, to define a situation to Othello and then vanish as if that thought had originated in Othello’s own mind, a typical Machiavellian tactic. OSAI improvisers however can deliberately draw attention to themselves as motivated characters by highlighting themselves as the originator of the definition.

\footnote{341} Piaget’s ‘preoperational stage’, the second stage in child development, from ages 2-7 (Piaget, 1926; 1928)

\footnote{342} It did not matter whether this aspect of ontology was directed towards a Nominal, Functional or purely Relational end.
logically into the narrative established to that point, in concert with the other two Improvisers.

As far as the relational aim was concerned this was due to the Improvisers continual listening to each other, and thinking along empathic, social lines at every step of the narrative. Whilst this did not preclude individual expression and left-field characters, the new elements introduced always found a validated place within the social fabric of relational dynamics that the Improvisers wove throughout all Scenes.

This aim ties into the human desire for contact, relational connection, and inter-subjective and interpersonal self-validation.

5.3.2 Ontology: Three Ways of Being

Improvisers demonstrated an innate sense of presence and character throughout all the Scenes. The felt sense was always that the characters were right for that Scene at that time. The sense of the different modes of being can be conceived in three ways: pure being, being-with-others, and being-in-situ.

1. Being
Improvisers displayed and expressed real human feelings, needs and interpersonal dynamics on stage, via the fictive situation. The fictive situation seemed to channel these affect relations, and this reality created the sense of truth on stage. The space of mutual listening further engendered a sense of unity and common reality within the Scene. Finally, all characters were well embedded within the fictive situation as it unfolded. This meant that each action stemmed from this truth, and could be accepted within the fictive reality, as ‘right’ for that moment.

2. Being with Others
Empathy and thinking across the whole Scene and space was essential for Improvisers to cause the Scene to cohere. Players seem to have the ability to be both tuned into the broader narrative, the current situation and themselves as individuals within that situation at the same time. This made creative (or ‘strategic’) Blocking possible, as the character always had a handle on the broader context of the Block. Empathy requires not a loss of self to other but a broadening of self’s awareness to

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343 See Arnold, 2005, p124-5, 126-7
accommodate the other in the Scene on an equal footing (even where roles may imply status gaps). Each player seemed to have the ability to feel and think through the context of the Scene. While this context-setting began with the GAT, it was given reality by the three Improvisers working in concert.

3. Being In Situ
The link between individual player and context was a fluid one: context shaped role (for example, the demand for the ‘American lady’ to come on in Scene 6 and the GAT creating the camel role in Scene 7); contrariwise, at other moments role shaped context (e.g. the entrance of Z as the bubble gum employee in Scene 4 altered the entire ethos of the Scene). The players’ exploration of fictive worlds via character and shared situation was achieved through Accepts and parallel objectives along the course of the narrative’s Advances. This obtained through the Improvisers’ belief in the situation on a personal and interpersonal level.

5.3.3 Epistemology
The knowledge worlds established through the progressive revelation of the narrative in OSAI is created through the movement of the Nominal teleological principle. That is, Offers and Endowments/Justifies set up the fictive world context, while Offer-Accept cycles create the fabric of the interactive relational world. Advance/Extends/Re-Incorporates create the narrative corridor through which the fictive Nominal world is revealed. This comprises the passage that the Improvisers take through the negotiated Nominal world. The narrative passage thus allows Improvisers to define the objective world context by subjective means, that is by affect reaction, either individually or mutually, which gives rise to the epistemological field that comprises the possible fictive World of the Scene.

Overall, improvisers used the Offer-Accept chain to establish relational congruence, create narrative objectives and character objectives and motivations, through the deictically Endowed World, established and manipulated through its integration within the Nominalised, historicised discourse universe of the Scene.

This can be schematised in Figure 1, for Improvisers A and B:
Figure 1: Schematisation of the co-linear Improvisation process – From Motivations to Myths

Deictic Fictive Universe
(& new/established plot streams)

Possible D.F.U.
(Improviser ‘reach’)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Endow</th>
<th>Offer (feeds back)</th>
<th>Advance (feeds back)</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Motivations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Motivations</td>
<td>Accept (feeds back)</td>
<td>Extend (feeds back)</td>
<td>Objectives Common Objectives</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A&B’s Mutual Relational Congruence

1. Ontological definition (being ‘in synch’)
2. Fictive Role definition (being ‘in-role’)

Narrative Corridor (current plot-streams)
In other words, the following zones of reality become defined:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Realm</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who we are</td>
<td>Relational Congruence</td>
<td>Being</td>
<td>Point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where we are</td>
<td>Deictic Fictive Universe</td>
<td>Ambient environment &amp; situation (fictive)</td>
<td>Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What we are doing</td>
<td>Narrative Corridor</td>
<td>Acting in parallel</td>
<td>Straight line</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Poetics’ placement within the TOE paradigm can be tabulated follows, with respect to the types of purposes each fulfil:

**Figure 2: Table of Predominant Functions of the 9 Poetics within the 3 Fields**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poetic</th>
<th>Teleology</th>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>Epistemology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offer</td>
<td>Nominal</td>
<td>Being In Situ</td>
<td>Deictic Fictive Universe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Being With Others</td>
<td>Narrative Corridor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relational</td>
<td></td>
<td>Relational Congruence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endow Justify</td>
<td>Nominal</td>
<td>Being In Situ</td>
<td>Deictic Fictive Universe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Being In Situ</td>
<td>Narrative Corridor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re- Incorporate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Being With Others</td>
<td>Relational Congruence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that this table clearly indicates that within the web of functions and fields, the Offer forms the crucial creative engine of OSAI. It is in Impro, as in the Bible, indeed “more blessed to give than to receive”\(^{344}\), since Offers contain within them all three

\(^{344}\) see also Meyer (2005, p10) on the “giving of gifts”, and Johnstone’s exercise in (1999, p58-9)
Epistemological realms. And yet, no Offer can have its existence without the space given by the Accept that receives it.

5.3.4 From Motivations to Myths and back: A Tentative Organic Inter-Connective and Cyclic Model of the Poetics

This study has thrown light not only on the specific uses of the nine Poetics, but, inchoately, on their inter-relationships.

The model given below in Figure 3 uses an organic and fluid-dynamic metaphor laid out in 2-dimensional space to describe the forces that shape the development of a 4-dimensional OSAI Scene. It attempts to represent a process that is synchronically functional (thus ontologically innate) and diachronically functional (thus ontologically manifest).

Information (as speech, action, and interpreted intentionality) moves in a continuum along its pathways from level 1 to 5 and 5 to 1 simultaneously, and accretes information as memory at each level. Each higher level tempers and directs the course of each of the lower levels, while each lower level can, through the course of time and altering of memory, alter levels above.

The process is a dynamic, cyclic flux, which spirals from the present moment, whose meaning is determined by the moments before it (top-down), yet is able to withdraw or change course from the established givens laid down in previous moments, and redefine those givens at any successive future moment (bottom-up).

Information/Energy vectors thus move both vertically up and down, and horizontally from side to side across the model.
Figure 3. A vertical/horizontal inter-relational organic model for describing the co-linear functionality of OSAI Poetics.

5. NARRATIVE LEVEL (historical memory; projected pattern; mythopoeic awareness)
A: (Establish) B: Extend/Advance A/C: Re-Incorporate (Closing Offer)

4. SITUATIONAL LEVEL (current ideational & sensory awareness of situation)
A: Endow / Justify B: Endow / Justify (Deictic / Imaginative Offers)

3. CHARACTER LEVEL (physical level/position, status, psychological state, motivational-emotional footing, objective)
A: Endow B: Accept/Yield/Block A/C: Block/non-Yield (Phatic / Self-Expressive Offers)

2. PHYSICAL / VOCAL LEVEL (action)
A: (Opening) Offer B: Accept/Yield/Block A/C: Accept/Yield/Block (&) Second Offer (&/or) Third Offer etc

1. INNER MOTIVE (being: energy and perception)
Ground of ‘Offering’, emerging out of Being, Being-In-Situ and Being-with-Others
5.4 The Tao\textsuperscript{345} of Impro and cybernetic semantic iteration

The symbol of the Tao offers a potent image, within a clearly defined context of the theatre stage, to understand what is going on inside the creative engine of an OSAI Scene. Clearly the data shows the extraordinarily close connection between Offering and Accepting, and as has been indicated by \textit{figs 1} and \textit{2} above, they are so intricately linked as to be almost inseparable. The field in which both occur is one of acceptance, and openness towards the Epistemological universe. Meanwhile, the teleological vector of the players’ presence on stage becomes inscribed within character objectives, objectives which are continuously being modified by the universal objective of maintaining connectivity with other players in (fictive) reality.\textsuperscript{346} Without such a ground of connectivity, no Offer is worth the breath it is spoken with. Thus the state of mind of improvisers is one of simultaneous receptivity and creativity, a Tao of Impro.

The Poetics then become the building bricks which help shape the Scenes through giving/receiving into concrete historical reality. These Moves seem to overlay this fundamental receptive-creative dynamic, and it is perhaps for this reason that Move definition was found not to be static or fixed, and could not be limited to a single definition or function. Closer analysis revealed discrete streams of thought from player to player, yet these streams were always intersecting, and on occasions being taken over by, or passed on to, another player. Offered Endowments were taken on as material for Justifys and Advances by other players. Accepts became part of a player’s Endowment, which was later re-Incorporated. Extends and Endowments of locale were continually being played off by characters with strong objectives, or clear narrative Advances.\textsuperscript{347}

How are we to communicate this understanding to others wanting to learn OSAI skills? A way forward in pedagogical terms may well be to teach these two fundamental dynamics, the “giving of gifts”\textsuperscript{348} (Offering) and the receiving of them (Accepting), in equal measure, inductively, through the various channels and

\textsuperscript{345} See Johnstone’s reference to the Tao in (1981, pp.19-20)

\textsuperscript{346} I would suspect that this prerogative tied in with a core evolutionary principle here, namely, that survival of the group ensures survival of the individual

\textsuperscript{347} At what point the underlying Tao-like dynamic, forms and concretises into the Poetics will require significantly greater research than this short thesis.

\textsuperscript{348} as Pamela Meyer puts it (2005)
parameters of an OSAI Scene. It would appear that when players focus on and remain focused on this fundamental and underlying exchange dynamic, as the players in this study appeared to do, the Poetics of OSAI will themselves fall naturally into line with such routine functions as serving the narrative, giving course to the characters’ impulses and interrelationships, defining the ‘givens’ of time, place and action, and so on (this may also explain why creative people are often notoriously inarticulate about their own creative processes.) In this way, structured and clearly-focused OSAI Scenes of fifteen minutes’ duration and longer would emerge from the players’ ontological state, without effort.

We can see the Tao-like process occurring at two crucial levels within the scene: the micro (the immediate present moment), and the macro (the controlling context of that moment.) This can be diagrammatised in a simple 2x2 matrix:

**Fig. 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offer</th>
<th>Accept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Yield</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order of priority, the data available in the moment of a Scene, always takes priority over the macrocosmic environment. However, if we arrange the table hierarchically, we get a ground-up picture, after the model in fig 3, with narrative context fulfilling an overarching, contextualising role:

**Fig. 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Yield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offer</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This simple matrix could hold the key to what is going on in the rapid and largely unconscious mental, emotional and physical processes of a skilled OSAI performer. Narrative forms the basis of ‘what Improvisers think is going on’ in a Scene. However, the process of Impro amongst skilled Improvisers is to continually alter and revise their ideas of what they think is going on, as the present moment moves forward. This is called ‘Yielding’. Since new Offers always spring from an expectation of and reaction to a situation (hence the old actors’ adage not to act but to
react, i.e. respond to a believed-in, self-projected set of given circumstances), and so to act from an understanding of the current Narrative they are in, then Yielding is the continual revision of this understanding, without which acting and interacting with other Improvisers in the troupe will become jarring and lose its fluidity and coherence.

This continuous ebb and flow – which, in bio-electrical terms, could well be what this process looks like – summarised in our 2x2 matrix in Figure 5 above, can be morphed into a more fluid circle form, giving the Taoist notion of active and passive energies, each working within the understanding of the other’s nature:

*Fig. 6: the Tao*

This Tao of Impro thus here both represents both the micro and macro levels (*Fig. 5*) at once. Yin, as Offering, merges into Yang, as Accepting, before either has emerged. Both have the understanding of the other as central to their own existence. This occurs immediately, and at the level of the yielded-to Narrative macro level, which is what the improvisers think is going on in the Scene.

Secondly, this exchange of Yin/Yang energy and information recurs iteratively in a Scene, via Offers and Accepts. Using one of the fractal mathematician Mandelbrot’s equations to stand for this process - and the semantic and illocutionary content of Offers and theirAccepts\(^{349}\) as the determinants - such as

\(^{349}\)That is, numbers deriving from the Mandelbrot set, i.e. ones that generate functions that do not veer off into infinity, viz the so-called ‘imaginary numbers’
\[ z_1 = z_0^2 + c \]

which gets iterated to

\[ z_2 = z_1^2 + c, \]

we can see a similar iterative process at work in the seven OSAI Scenes. Every Offer was swallowed by its Accept, that, somewhat after the sublimation process of the Hegelian dialectic, absorbed and digested that Offer to sublimate and synthesise both Offer and Accept into the overarching narrative level above. Using each successive iteration \( z_1, z_2, z_3 \) etc as the product and input for the next iteration\(^\text{350}\), a clear parallel with the Impro process of generation, growth and building of Offers through iterative Accepts delineated in fig 5, at the two levels of scene micro- and macrocosm, within the generalised notion of the Tao as a symbol for energy/information exchange, can be developed.\(^\text{351}\).

We might term this process ‘cybernetic semantic iteration’, since information contained within Improviser A’s Offer, when Accepted, gets repeated or iterated by improviser B, yet both the Offering and Accepting occurs within an understood, but negotiable, context that cybernetically guides the meaning of the holistic Offer-Accept process.

### 5.5 Educational implications: Impro Games and Open Scenes revisited

\(^\text{350}\) see Mandelbrot, 2004, p292-4

\(^\text{351}\) We can also see an analogy of these two levels with the Koch curve between the tendency to infinity of the one-dimensional line, to the fixed area of the triangle that remains within the limits of the two-dimensional area of a circle, as between the micro and macro levels of the Impro scene: the micro can extend to infinity, while the narrative context remains relatively fixed and finite:

\[ d_s = \log (N) / \log (l/r) \]

The iteration for the Koch curve is effectively visualised through the ‘Star of David’ iterative sequence. The iteration is \( (1 \times 4/3 \times 4/3 \times 4/3 \times \ldots \infty) \) and parallels the iteration of Offer/Accepts that occurs within the boundary of the Narrative/Yield context. See Gleick 1988, p98-100
It would seem to follow that any educational application seeking to foster the ability to generate Open Scenes from any GAT, requires teachers and learners to develop an innate and implicit understanding of, and living connection to, the complementary Tao-like dual processes of giving and receiving operating at the macro- and microcosmic levels, as their first port of call. This may require extensive work in non-Impro but complementary fields such as movement, mime, dance etc. and the engendering in students of a state of trust and a lack of self-consciousness, since belief is largely the key to audience and actor engagement alike.

To this end we can see that, at least for tyro OSAI improvisers, the parlour book games that many have criticised have a definite place insofar as they provide highly structured game-format environments by which students can grow their trust, acceptance and enjoyment of these foundational skills. With games as a bridge, OSAI can be seen as the pinnacle game structure, towards which all the games become meaningfully oriented. Students then gain skills from the games (whilst still enjoying them for their own sake), allowing the larger-than-self Tao-Impro process to become fully integrated in their stage actions, which then enables them to make a successful summit of this peak. However, before this can happen, more research needs to be done on the actual workings and nature of these Tao-like improviser processes from which good OSAI Scenes spring, than the initial beginnings represented by the present study.

352 No mean feat in even the most supportive of high school contexts, where peer pressure and self-image remain the premium currency amongst students (Johnstone (1999) touches on this point.)
353 A central concern in current educational research. The disengaged student is often in some way ‘disenchanted’ or unbelieving. The key to student engagement is therefore to foster a sense of belief.
354 See Section 1.1.2 for a tentative list of some of these functions
355 although in fact an Open Scene is not a ‘game’ as such, and is ‘structure’-less in the sense that it can incorporate or appropriate any structure it deems necessary to the dramatic telling of its tale, so long as the result is dramatically coherent in some way.
356 The organisation of these games into pathways towards OSAI may then provide a ladder by which students may move towards the goal of the non-structured Open Scene.
6. Addenda

6.1: Appendices (Hard Copy)

6.1.1: Appendix 1: Questions and areas requiring further Research in OSAI

This research has made an initial investigation into the field of Open Scene Additive Improvisation. It has established the use that improvisers make of Johnstone’s Poetics in OSAI, and has derived a model to describe tentatively the internal workings of an Open Scene.

Several important areas remain unclear however, and need to be studied further if the working of OSAI is to be made more transparent. These areas of further investigation in OSAI are:

1. The link between Old and New information in the Scene, and the iterative cycle of Offers and Accepts needs to be systematically and closely analysed, through scrutiny of a number of situated audio-visual stream-of-behaviour OSAI chronicles.

2. Scenes need to be globally and structurally analysed (i.e. in totum) and their Discourse Structures and hierarchies explicated (for example, the linking of Phase structures, the use of particular Exchange structures, etc.), within suggested, implied or externally adopted mythopoeic narrative contexts.

3. The tentative model of the contextualised ‘Now’ in OSAI scenes needs to be tested, validated, or most likely, revised, from appropriate perspectives (eg. socio-biological, ethnomethodological) that take in the research findings obtained from 1.

4. The notions of iteration and energy exchange tentatively pointed to by the metaphors afforded by the notion of the Tao and the work of Mandelbrot need to be applied systematically to a range of OSAI data, at each successive moment of interchange.

5. A Multi-case study needs to be undertaken, to look at regional, cultural or individual variations in its global practice, to see how (or if at all) any general principles get modified by altered social or cultural contexts.
6.1.2: Appendix 2: Simplified Glossary of Terms

OSAI  Open Scene Additive Improvisation
GAT  Given Audience Suggestion, from which the Scene must be derived
Offer  Any action or speech done on stage
Accept  To support or ‘accept’ the meaning of an Offer
Block  To undermine an Offer or stop the stage action
Extend  To delay or add detail to some element of a Scene
Advance  To move the Scene’s story on
Endow  Give a quality or feature to a person, place or thing
Justify  Name or Endow something that requires definition in a Scene
Yield  To give up one’s own idea for the sake of a single stage focus
Reincorporate  Reintroduce an earlier Offer that had been ‘shelved’ or memorised
6.1.3: Appendix 3: Alphabetical Bibliography

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