

Unguarded spaces: Collective free improvisation and the locus of innovation

Danae Stefanou

Department of Music Studies, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
dstefano@mus.auth.gr

Abstract

Historical and aesthetic accounts of free improvisation often constellate around specific local “scenes”, situating the springboards for collectively improvised music within radical or progressive offshoots of free jazz, avant-garde and experimental music. Although such tendencies have already been criticised for obscuring crucial political and racial sub-agendas in favour of neat or reductionist narratives, ideals such as that of forward-looking innovation still serve to enable dominant discourses and judgments of value. This paper investigates the spatial connotations of this forward-looking ideal, and argues that it rests upon an essentially centric, dualistic assumption of innovation as a step either away from the given confines of a centre, or towards a hitherto restricted territory.

In an effort to deconstruct this duality, the presentation takes a close look at the *modus operandi* of free improvisation collectives and affiliated initiatives, with a case-study reference to 6daEXIt, an ensemble / collective based in Thessaloniki, Greece. Members of 6daEXIt operate in-between public and institutional spaces, and freely alternate between positions of individual autonomy and collective identity during sessions, workshops and performances. Critically evaluating the mechanisms through which such a collective subverts notions of performativity, institutionalization, singular authorship and product-based impact, this paper reflects on the implications of innovation, experimentation and freedom within a self-regulated, non-directive context.

CV

Danae Stefanou is a Lecturer at the Department of Music Studies, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She studied musicology and piano performance (MA, Nottingham – PhD, London), and worked as Research Fellow and Visiting Lecturer at Royal Holloway, University of London. Danae has published articles in international periodicals such as *JRMA* and *JIMS* and appeared as a solo and ensemble performer in a variety of European venues. She is a member of several improvisation ensembles and collectives in Greece, including 6daEXIt, La Situation Conga, Seul à 3 and the duo Acte Vide, which also hosts weekly improvisation workshops in Athens.