This study lies at the intersection of two projects both in Musicology and Social Sciences, i.e. an ethnography of New-York-based well-renowned improvisers and an investigation of electronic practices in free improvisation. Throughout three studio sessions, two solos of Jim Black and Satoshi Takeishi and one duo of Todd Capp and Mickey Holmes, we explored improvisers’ approaches to electronic interactions with percussion.

To study improvisers’ effective and accompanying gestures (Delalande, 1988), we edited the filming of their performances with four cameras according to an analysis method of action modalities (de France, 1989). In order to collect improvisers’ self-evaluation on the musical result, we filmed their reactions and recorded their descriptions when they were watching their performance (Theureau, 2003). We also asked them to explain their choice of electronic setup, use of sampling, and sound treatment. This experimental procedure was inspired by Guido Lukoschek’s film about the Wayne Shorter Quartet.

In keeping with the different levels of our methodological approach, our results include video excerpts from the performances, feedback sessions and interviews, and an analysis of the improvisers’ approaches to electronics in improvisation. For all three sessions, we observed that the improvisations were developed through an accumulation of different temporalities generated by the use of pre-recorded sounds, loops and immediate sound treatments. Specifically, Satoshi Takeishi discussed gestural challenges of performing with electronic controllers for an audience; Jim Black explained his need to extend the sonic possibilities of a drum set with an interface that would give him access to melodic and harmonic expression; Todd Capp expressed interest in reacting to electronic sounds that are generated randomly by other performers or by the audience and Mickey Holmes shared his affective relationship with his sounds and electronic devices that he assembled together for this specific session.

This interdisciplinary approach allows researchers 1) to generate outstanding performances, 2) to realize films from these performances, 3) to reveal details on musical gestures when performances are brought into being, and 4) to enhance observations with instantaneous feedback from the musicians.

Bibliography