

Instigation Quartets

A Look at The Effectiveness of Higher Level Improvisational Instructions as a Means to Foster Musical Diversity

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What are the *Instigation Quartets*?

- The Instigations Quartets (IQs) are a set of text based improvisation starters.
 - Higher level instructions
 - Intended only to set opening space for improvised episode
 - Allow for changing roles of ensemble members
 - Assignment of roles is part of the creative act

Origins

- The Instigation Quartets were originally written for a group called New Generation, which was assembled by Georg Graewe for two performances in Dortmund, Germany, on 30 September and 1 October 2010.
 - It was a large group with little rehearsal time, and needed pieces for smaller combinations.
- Group members: Almut Kuehne (voice, Germany), Sanne Van Hek (trumpet, Netherlands), Liz Allbee (trumpet, USA/Germany), Tobias Delius & Roman Siewicke (saxophones, Germany), Jeff Albert (trombone, USA), Claudia Kienzler (violin, Switzerland), Katrin Mickiewicz (viola, Germany), Helen Gillet (cello, USA), Els Vanderweyer (vibraphone, Belgium), James Campbell (cassette tapes, USA/Germany), & Quin Kirchner (drums, USA)

Instigation Quartets

These Improvisation Instigators are intended to be simple, efficient ways of beginning improvised musical episodes. The idea is only to set up a musical space from which to begin, not to dictate the entirety of an episode. Each musician should abide by the instructions until the opening space has been established, then each musician should proceed musically as she or he would with any other improvisation.

This version is written for four musicians, but can be adapted for more or less. Parts may be doubled or omitted as needed. If a drummer is present, the drummer can take one of the four parts, or improvise in addition to the four written parts.

-Jeff Albert

II #1

All four players begin together

Player 1 - Long melodic line

Player 2 - Repeating rhythmic pattern

Player 3 - Countermelody

Player 4 - Melodic fragments

II #2

Player 1 - Long tones

let P1 play alone for approx. 15 seconds

Player 2 - Bass line

Player 3 - wait a moment after P2 enters, then play an angular line

Player 4 - enter with P3, playing something to contrast P2

Why this format?

- Control opening “negotiations”
- Mediate any given player’s opportunity to defer to stronger personalities
- Push players away from comfort zones
- Tip the scale in the audience’s favor (at least by my aesthetic)
 - Allow for programming of a coherent and listenable “set” in performance
- I thought it would be a cool experiment

Performance History

- Dortmund, Germany - Domicil - 30 September 2010
 - IQ #1 - Almut Keuhne, Helen Gillet, Sanne Van Hek, Quin Kirchner
 - IQ# 4 - Els Vanderweyer, Tobias Delius, Claudia Kienzler, Roman Siewicke
 - IQ #3 - Liz Allbee, Jim Campbell, Katrin Mickiewicz, Jeff Albert
- Chicago, IL - Hungry Brain - 19 December 2010
 - IQs #1-4 - Jeff Parker (guitar), Joshua Abrams (bass), Quin Kirchner (drums), & Jeff Albert (trombone)

Performance History - cont.

- New Orleans, LA - Blue Nile - 22 February 2011
 - IQs #1-5 - Aurora Nealand (alto sax), Jeff Albert (trombone), Chris Alford (guitar) & Dave Cappello (drums)
- New Orleans, LA - Blue Nile - 29 March 2011
 - IQs #1-5 - Brad Walker (tenor sax), Jeff Albert (trombone), Jesse Morrow (bass) & Justin Peake (drums)
- New Orleans, LA - Blue Nile - 26 April 2011
 - IQs #1-5 - Aurora Nealand (alto sax), Jeff Albert (trombone), Helen Gillet (cello) & Doug Garrison (drums)

Performance History - V. 2.0

- New Orleans, LA - Piety Street Recording - 21 November 2011
 - Jeff Albert (trombone), Kidd Jordan (tenor sax), Joshua Abrams (bass), & Hamid Drake (drums)
- Chicago, IL - The Hideout - 8 February 2012
 - Keefe Jackson (tenor sax), Joshua Abrams (bass), Tim Daisy (drums), & Jeff Albert (trombone)

Instructions

- I left the instructions intentionally vague
 - i.e. “stumbling”, “snaky line”, “bass line”, “steady tempo, irregular pattern”
- The idea being that more vague instructions allow for more personal input from each individual performer

IQ # 4

- Player 1 - groove
- Player 2 - stumbling
- Player 3 - long melodic line
- Player 4 - compliment Player 3

IQ # 4 - Dortmund

- Player 1 - groove (Els Vanderweyer - vibes)
- Player 2 - stumbling (Tobias Delius - tenor sax)
- Player 3 - long melodic line (Claudia Kienzler - violin)
- Player 4 - compliment Player 3 (Roman Siewicke - alto sax)

IQ # 4 - Chicago

- Player 1 - groove (Joshua Abrams - bass)
- Player 2 - stumbling (Quin Kirchner - drums)
- Player 3 - long melodic line (Jeff Albert - trombone)
- Player 4 - compliment Player 3 (Jeff Parker - guitar)

IQ # 4 - New Orleans (February)

- Player 1 - groove (Aurora Nealand - alto sax)
- Player 2 - stumbling (Dave Cappello - drums)
- Player 3 - long melodic line (Jeff Albert - trombone)
- Player 4 - compliment Player 3 (Chris Alford - guitar)

IQ # 4 - New Orleans (March)

- Player 1 - groove (Justin Peake - drums)
- Player 2 - stumbling (Jeff Albert - trombone)
- Player 3 - long melodic line (Jesse Morrow - bass)
- Player 4 - compliment Player 3 (Brad Walker - tenor sax)

IQ # 4 New Orleans (April)

- Player 1 - groove (Helen Gillet - cello)
- Player 2 - stumbling (Jeff Albert - trombone)
- Player 3 - long melodic line (Aurora Nealand - soprano sax)
- Player 4 - compliment Player 3 (Doug Garrison - drums)

Despite our best efforts

- Sometimes, what we think is leading to diversity...isn't.
- From IQ#2
 - Player 1 - Long tones - let P1 play alone for approx. 15 seconds

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Variations in Density

- IQs have been successful in influencing differing densities of texture for beginnings of episodes
 - various performances of IQ #3 take from 1:30 - 2:00 for the full quartet to enter
 - IQ #5 encourages full group participation is a dense diverse texture from the beginning

With/Against

- The nature of the IQs encourage both playing in complimentary and contradictory modes
 - Instructions like “Compliment Player 3” or “Contrast Player 4”
 - Simultaneous directions like “Noise softly” & “Melodic fragments”

IQ #1 (v. 2.0)

- IQ #1
- All four players begin together
 - Kidd - Long melodic line
 - Hamid - Repeating rhythmic pattern
 - Joshua - Countermelody
 - Jeff - Melodic fragments



Conclusions

- IQs have worked well for me in terms of organizing improvised performances, but they don't protect me from my own (bad) habits
- Higher level improvisation instructions can help encourage diversity of practice over fully freely improvised episodes

Resources

- These slides, audio files, and pdfs of the IQs are available at: <http://research.jeffalbert.com>
- I'd like to thank the musicians who played this music, and my colleagues at Loyola University New Orleans, and Louisiana State University for their support and encouragement.

