'There it is, another code ready to be used'. **Repurposing** *comprovisation* [Lecture-Recital]

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ABSTRACT

There it is, another code ready to be used' is a notational environment and a system for improvisation on any instrument of the saxophone family (with or without live electronics) developed by Dimitris Papageorgiou. The project is the result of an artistic research study launched in June 2018 as part of Dimitris' postdoctoral fellowship at the Centre for Artistic Research, UniArts Helsinki. Acknowledgement goes to saxophonist Francisco Sánchez Díaz for his invaluable suggestions. The first part of this lecture-recital will explore Dimitris' developing theory through practice and will attempt to translate 'com-provisation' as *syn-schediasmos* (GR: *συν-σχεδιασμός*) by proposing 'composition' (*synthesis*) as a phenomenon enacted by all participants in an ecology of components, and by suggesting 'improvisation' (*autoschediasmos*) as a performance practice that manifests a process of discovering akin to that of 'wayfinding' and drawing (*schediázo*: 'to draw'). Echoing Jonathan Impett's proposition of notations as "forms of soft-technology," the presentation will suggest that notations, rather than compositional products or fields of authoritative acts, can be thought of as another component within a dynamic system of correspondences between people, instruments, and technologies. From this basis, the presentation will proceed by documenting the notational and live electronics methodologies, strategies and design frameworks explored during the development of '*There it is, another code ready to be used'*, in addition to the demonstrating of examples by Francisco. The aim is to examine ways in which this notational environment: 1) provides for the improvisational fact to come about while enacting the notations' materiality and inscribed affordances, with the sounding-figure emerging through gestural synergy, attentive listening, and the performer's physicality; and 2) aligns the theory with the practice of 'comprovisation', repurposed here to be understood as *syn-schediasmos*. The lecture-recital will either begin or close with a performance (ca. 10 minutes) of the system (with electronics).

[Lecture transcript. Unedited perusal version]

Slide 1

Dimitris: Good morning. Hello everyone. Before we start, we would like to thank the Performance Studies Network 2020 programme committee for accepting our proposal. We would also like to thank the University of Surrey and the PSN 2022 committee for hosting the event and for the wonderful organisation. We would also like to extend our thanks to John, the music technician, for helping us to set up earlier this morning.

The heading of our presentation is: *'There it is, another code ready to be used'*. **Repurposing** *comprovisation*. The italicized, first element of the heading is the title I have given to a notational environment and a system for improvisation on any instrument of the saxophone family that I have been developing since 2018 and while working closely with Francisco. The purpose of our lecture-recital today is to present some of the technical aspects of this notational environment and to also perform an 'improvisation path' that Francisco has developed from the system. The second element of the heading—that is, 'Repurposing *comprovisation'*—aims to encapsulate several theoretical themes and lines of thought that I have been exploring the last, approximately, ten years via my practice-led research enquiries.

I think that a good way to start the discussion is by presenting some of the key dimensions of my artistic-research and my practice, and in a self-effacing manner. Although I do prefer to identify myself as a musician, for the sake of argument I could perhaps draw some lines between the practices that constitute the research area I am interested in. I am a violinist/improviser exploring the field of free improvisation. I am

also a composer—in the 'conventional sense' of the term (if you don't mind me using that phrase for now)—exploring the areas of instrumental, electroacoustic, and electro-instrumental music. The theoretical dimension of my artistic research attempts to trace the ways in which the discipline of music conceives the notions of composition and improvisation as well as the modes in which the area in-between these two objects of study can be negotiated and conceptualised.

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With that said, I think that we can generally agree with George Lewis (2020) who writes that free-improvisation resists codification due to the lack of any defining structure or idiom. It seems to me, however, that the practice of free improvisation is not devoid of method. A key **'techno-logy'** of free improvisation that I find particularly interesting and which I have been experiencing and exploring via my improvisation practice—and I am using the word **'techno-logy'** here as in the rhetorical accounts (logos) that harbour the techne and technique of its praxis—can be traced in the ways in which (free) improvisers describe and develop a reciprocal, action-reaction sounding relationship of correspondence with their instruments. Derek Bailey (1992) has described this as 'instrumental impulse'. Evan Parker as 'biofeedback' (Hopkins 2009). Malcolm Goldstein (1988) as "the interplay between ... the violin and the gestures of the violinist." For Bailey, the idea of 'instrumental impulse' involves a sensitive tracing of "the tactile element [and of] the physical experience of playing [with the] instrument," going along with its resistances, listening, and opening up to alterity while following the instrument's will. As Marcel Cobussen (2017) comments, the instrument here embodies the role of another actant within a [performer-instrument] feedback relationship of interaction, resonance, and resistance.

Francisca Schroeder and Pedro Rebelo (2007) expand on the ideas of tactility, interaction, and resistance by framing the relationship between a performer and her instrument—and crucially, outside improvisational contexts—as "a multimodal participatory space, rather than one of control." That is, "a sensory space navigated by [...] constantly acting on feedback from an immediate environment [...] [where] one sensory modality [...] has the ability to modulate and/or influence the other." For Schroeder and Rebelo this means that "the performer only becomes acquainted with the 'thing' at hand by being able to test boundaries, negotiate subtleties and uncover threshold conditions."

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It is exactly due to these lines of thought that instead of the word *improvisation* I prefer to use its Greek equivalent, the word *αυτοσχεδιασμός* (*autoschediasmos*). Although the Latin origin of the word improvisation denotes 'the un-foreseen'—as in a problem that has unexpectedly emerged and requires our attention—the root of the Greek **autoschediasmos** can be traced to the verb *σχεῖν* (*schein*)—meaning *to have*, *to hold*—and to the verb *σχεδιάζω* (*schediázo*)—meaning *to draw*—as well as to the noun *σχεδία* (*schedía*)—a wooden raft used to travel over water.

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And it seems to me that the Greek word **autoschediasmos** directs our attention to what Schroeder and Rebelo call the **'thing' at hand** and invites us to think the relationship between a performer and her instrument as an aggregate of intimately tied actants that draw the improvised journey in '*with*-ness' and in a process of 'wayfinding', echoing Tim Ingold (2000, 2020). For Ingold (2015, 2020), this '*with*-ness' implies an 'in-between-ness': A relational milieu and a line of becoming within 'the midstream of correspondence' where people and things 'carry on together and answer to one another'.

With that said, during my PhD studies at the University of Edinburgh (Papageorgiou 2017), I was exploring ways I could align the τρόπος (*trópos*)—that is, the way, mode, manner—of my solo violin improvisation practice with a sign-system so as to generate notational environments for exploration and experimentation. Echoing Jonathan Impett's (2016) proposition of notations as 'forms of soft-technology' what in effect I was conceptually aiming at was to develop a notational code—or rather, an 'interaction-ware', if you like—which, instead of representing, it would, on the one hand, produce relations and interface this [performer-instrument] feedback relationship; and on the other, it would environ a 'sensory space' with the aim to encode and 'en-sound' the 'techno-logy' of free improvisation. In this regard, the notation had to, first of all, function as a kind of a backdrop that would correlate the instrument and the body of the performer. At the same time, it also had to act as an interface—a "liminal threshold in-between" (Hookway 2014)—that would face both sides of the [performer–instrument] relationship, connoting an environment to be mapped and probed in a process of *autoschediasmos*.

I find important to mention that the design and notational methodologies I experimented with during those years and towards exploring these two conceptual aims in the context of making a notational system for strings, have also been applied in the notational project for the saxophone I have been working on since 2018. Following on from this, the design methodology for the system we are about to present involved **1/** the de-accumulating of gestural mechanisms, **2/** the decoupling of the various activities of sound production pertinent to the specificities of the saxophone, and **3/** the creation of dissociated structures comprising events of variable temporal duration. From there, one is able to notate evolutionary constraints for each independent sound production activity and to re-assemble these into 'symbolic-configurations'.

The first element of the notational scheme is a tablature structure used to notate fixed fingerings and common practice patterns that can be found in relevant saxophone fingering charts, in addition to dissociating each finger so as to notate 'opening-and-closing-of-keys' fingering actions and gestures. In this way, the system affords the notating of specific tones, microtones, and multiphonics, while also functioning as a script for a 'fingering-choreography', if you like, that may involve:

1/ **'Pitch-*bisbigliando'*** alternative fingerings in the form of gestural shapes; 2/ **'Multiphonic-*bisbigliando'*** – a technique that Francisco suggested where the *bisbigliando* fingering gestures are applied to all keys that are not depressed by the fixed multiphonic fingering; and 3/ '**Register-*bisbigliando'***. For the latter, I subdivided the saxophone range into five registers, and after examining the microtonal fingering diagrams within these regions and for all four saxophone instruments, I notated the common set of opening and closing of keys as a fingering gesture, with the intention to explore sonorities that might result from mixed fingering patterns.

The metrical structure of the *bisbigliando*, 'fingering-choreography' gestural shapes is given as graphic rhythmic notation combined with a sign of the form **X[Y]**. The timeframe (T) of all independent fingering actions is given by the formula: $X \leq T \leq Y$ aiming to denote the minimum and the maximum duration that the notated keys can either remain open or closed. While developing the system I identified four basic timeframes for the 'fingering-choreography' component, qualitatively listed in terms of fingering speed. For each timeframe a median value has also been identified so that Francisco could practice the dissociating of fingers by following a fixed pulse, before exploring the minimum and maximum durations given each time.

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The second element of the notational scheme is, what we call, the 'sound-production' component. And this involves symbols that aim to denote combinations of breathing techniques, embouchure changes, differences in lip pressure as well as possible ways in which the tongue can touch the reed in order to produce certain sonorities. In this way, one is able to notate different qualities of air-noise performance techniques as well as transitions and oscillations between air-noise and normal tone.

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The third element is, what we call, the 'phrasing-events' component. This involves the notating of articulation events and gestures on a single live stave. It is important to note, however, that these gestural shapes not only aim in representing the physical dimension of articulation (as in tonguing to produce a tone) but they can also be understood as aggregates of dynamic and metrical events that 'phrase' the resultant sonorities.

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To put it differently, if we are to think that there is a process of coupling through interference and an operation of summation between the 'sound-production' and the 'fingering-choreography' components, then the 'phrasing-events' and the notated articulation gestures can be understood as *envelopes* that shape the emergent sonorities via a conceptual multiplication process.

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The metrical structure of 'phrasing events' is given as graphic rhythmic notation combined with a minimum/maximum timeframe aiming to denote both the duration of the enveloped sonic events, and the duration of pauses. At the bottom of the slide here you can see a possible way (a snapshot in-time, if you like) the 'phrasing-events' component of this circle can be actualised.

In this sense each 'symbolic configuration', can be understood as a virtual space of possible sonic outcomes that actualise through gestural synergy, attentive listening, and the physical experience of playing with the instrument, while directing performers' attention to the dimensions of resonance and resistance as attributes that guide the discovery and the 'researching' of improvised musical pathways from within each circle.

And I think that now is good point to pass the time to Francisco who will be demonstrating his practicing strategies using as an example the 'symbolic-configuration' you can see on screen.

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Francisco: The approach I followed to practice the system has been to first focus on the independent elements and then to explore combinations between them. In this way, I was able to familiarise with the complexity of each 'sound-configuration' and to test the limits of each circle in order to make it my own. Once the materials are practiced it is time to 'let go' and to improvise with each circle.

Taking the circle here as an example, I would first start with the 'sound-production' element to understand how I can adjust my embouchure in order to produce the air-noise techniques. Then I would explore the oscillation between air-noise and normal tone while keeping my fingers fixed to a pitch.

[Demonstration no.1: Air-noise / normal tone oscillation with fixed pitch]

The next element is the 'fingering choreography'. In the example here, the circle shows all possible key combinations in the register F#4 to C5. As preliminary work, I would explore the microtones in this register area to familiarise myself with all possible sonorities. I would then focus on each separate hand exploring the opening and closing of keys as given in the circle while using normal tone. Then I would practice both hands together using the median timeframe to

explore combinations that would allow harmonics, multiphonics and other sound possibilities to emerge. Once I understand how the independence of fingers works, I would start exploring the minimum and the maximum timeframe.

[Demonstration no.2: Fingering choreography with normal tone]

The next element is 'phrasing-events'. In the circle here we find long 'phrasing-events' like *tenuto* and *flutter tongue*, and short 'phrasing-events' like *staccato* and *tongue ram*. My approach would be to practice first how the *tenuto* and *flutter tongue* shape the combined 'sound-production' and 'fingering-choreography' with a maximum timeframe of six seconds. Then I would introduce pauses and the short 'phrasing-events' of *staccato* and *tongue ram*. After I understand how all techniques come together and I discover the sound possibilities I stop thinking the techniques and follow my intuition, listening to the unexpected and reacting to the saxophone's voice.

[Demonstration no.3: Free play of the circle]

Back to you Dimitris.

Dimitris: Thank you, Francisco.

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The formalisation and the logic of the system has led to the formation of a conceptual three-dimensional space in an attempt to empirically map all currently developed 'sound-configurations'. And we can think of this 3D space as the macro-environment of the system that can be used to conceptualise 'improvisational paths' between different circles.

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With that said, the slide here illustrates the notational devices I devised during my PhD studies towards notating scores for 'improvisation paths'. And these notational structures aim to communicate, through linguistic descriptors, types of modulation and transition between 'sound-configurations'.

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Here you can see an 'improvisation path' I have been developing since 2020 employing these notational devices. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, this path is still work-in-progress, and we hope we will be able to perform it live some point soon.

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Here you can see a path that Francisco has sketched and developed from the system. And this is actually the score of the improvisation piece we are going to perform in a couple of minutes.

Our performance is going to also involve live-electronics and the setup you can see here. And although there is not enough time to discuss the audio-software program I have developed in Max in depth, I find important to share with you a couple of thoughts that influenced its development.

The last three years or so, I have been directing my electro-instrumental music practice towards, what is increasingly being called, 'eco-systemic' approaches in electroacoustic music, involving the coding of complex systems constituted of interrelated feedback mechanisms. At a technical level, I have been exploring ways in which the principles of the developed notational environments—that is, parametrisation, time-variant statistical distribution, and synergy—can be modelled into low-level information processing algorithms and closed feedback systems. With that said, although the patch we are going to be using today veers more towards what John Croft (2007) has identified as the 'responsorial paradigm', there are a couple

of modules within that can be understood as a first small step towards encoding the dimension I just described.

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I would like to close the first part of our presentation by sharing a couple of thoughts pertaining to the second element of the heading—that is, 'Repurposing *comprovisation*'—and to introduce the word and the notion of '*syn-schediasmos*'.

I could perhaps start by confessing that the word *comprovisation* is a term that I have endorsed in the past to describe my practice. However, the last four years or so, and while reflecting on the terminology of my artistic research, I became increasingly unsatisfied with this particular word. The reason for this is that relevant scholarly and practice-led work on *comprovisation* proceeds by conceiving composition and improvisation as two static and fixed notions that form a typology of distinction. On the one hand, we have *composition* that is associated with a notational practice linked to a 'composer-as-author', and on the other, we have *improvisation* that is considered a contingent medium that relates to the non-notated. From there the *comprovisation* elision is presented as a hybrid practice situated somewhere between these two extremes though crucially anchored on notation, and in particular, on whether 'compositional' (as in, 'notational') approaches demonstrate biases towards repeatability or contingency.

In my view the word *comprovisation*, as a conscious hybridization, should, first of all, attempt to amalgamate composition and improvisation into a single conceptual mechanism, and secondly, to direct its description outside an understanding of 'notation' as 'composition'. It is in this state of affairs, that I find myself translating and repurposing the word *comprovisation* as '*syn-schediasmos*' (Papageorgiou 2019): A compound of the Greek prefix *syn-* and the word *autoschediasmos* we explored earlier. Interestingly, the Greek prefix *syn-* and the Latin prefix *con–* that can be found in the semantically parallel words *synthesis* and *composition*, originate from the prepositions *sún* and *cum* respectively, both meaning '<u>with</u>'. In this regard, *comprovisation* as *syn-schediasmos* aims to diagrammatise settings of relations and ecologies among components (people, instruments, notations, and technologies) as 'aggregates of intimately tied actants' that <u>draw</u> the compositional journey in '*with*-ness' and in a process of 'wayfinding'.

With that said, it is still unclear to me who is the 'composer' of the piece of music we are about to perform. Though, to paraphrase Nicholas Cook (2018), I think that the 'composer-as-ghost' can perhaps be traced somewhere in-between this relational milieu of '*with*-ness' and correspondence.

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[RECITAL]

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