

**Response to Dr. Cavell's
Learning To Improvise: Jazz and the Psychoanalytic Process**

Gerald J. Gargiulo, Ph.D.*

1. Dr. Cavell's paper is clearly engaging and helps deepen our understanding of free association. There has been, in most of the literature either a very intellectual approach to free association, stressing its aspect of personal honesty as well as its difficulties (resistances) or, of late, a quiet abandonment of free association either under the rubric of more inter-personal sharing between analyst and patient, or acknowledging that classic analysis is on the wane, and concluding thereby that one/two times a week therapy does not lend itself well to free association.
2. Using the metaphor of jazz and her experience with the learning of jazz Dr. Cavell has addressed most of these issues. Free association is disciplined interpersonal play just as learning any musical instrument, including voice, is disciplined play. Speaking to this issue Cavell notes that "*Freud thought he had (i.e., completed a self-analysis). But what would probably be missing from a self-analysis is acquiring that ability to tune into another person.*" I would add here that we don't know what we are saying unless another hears us. Isn't that one necessary reading of transference? Meaning arises in community, not solipsistically, another one of Dr. Cavell's insights that she has written about – just as play arises in community – the community of

* © copyright 2008 Gerald J. Gargiulo

language, the community of rubrics and rituals. Free association is an invitation to play, a special form of play, certainly this is what Winnicott had in mind in his statement that first, we must teach the patient to play. I play, I believe possible, even with less frequent sessions of therapy.

3. When Dr.Cavell speaks of her teacher loosening her jaw to get it more relaxed, I can remember the experience well in my many years of studying voice. Her teacher was interpersonally relating in a forceful but not intrusive way. What a good model for those practitioners who pursue a more relational model. Relate, help with the mastery of freer thinking, freer musing, freer trust, but don't intrude. An analyst should speak enough of himself or herself to anchor care, trust and competence.
4. Dr. Cavell notes: "*One of the pleasure of listening to good jazz is discovering the melody inside an improvisation, as one of the real pleasure in a psychoanalysis is discovering the organizing phantasies around which have been built so many seemingly unrelated episodes of a life.*" And we do this best, I believe, when we analysts simultaneously listen to ourselves, our slips, our phantasies, our grief's, as patients talk – not focusing on resistance analysis, but rather on personal surprise; surprise for an analyst, surprise for a patient. Something like, *Oh....I heard Billie Holiday's pathos, but as I sing along with her, it becomes a bridge to my own pathos.* The ritual of analytic practice is a necessary discipline here. By ritual I mean something a little different than a frame, with all its possible decoding. The ritual of analysis, the technique of mastering

improvisation, of mastery placing the voice in singing, is all in the same service as Dr. Cavell reminds us.

5. Theodor Reik had no difficulty sharing his musings and spontaneous images; it always seemed to me that he was being generous by doing so. He invited a playful dialogue similar to what Dr. Cavell alludes to in her focusing on jazz improvisation, i.e., inviting a playful dialogue. And what is at the heart of a playful dialogue? It's the verbalized, or sometimes not verbalized, statements to a patient that he/she is being listened to with care that engenders the trust necessary for any self-knowledge to occur. So, for example, a shared humor moment at the end of a session, which Dr. Cavell speaks of, can engender, along the way, a quiet realization that one is heard without tedious exploration or reworking. Analysis only takes place on level ground, an obvious point I have tried to make in my own writings. Level ground does not mean one does not learn from one's teacher, level ground comes from mastering the technique well enough that self-forgetfulness is obvious since it's the melody, or the phantasy, or the dialogue that takes precedence. Just as improvisation is not an alternating power play, so also an analysis is not a disinterested listening. An analyst matches a patient with his/her listening and responding, or there is no play at all.
6. Relaxed discovery, wasn't that the point of the original five times a week analysis? Discovery doesn't mean obsessive observation – preconceived notions of who is doing what to whom. Improvisation is one avenue in jazz, in analysis its discovery. That is why I employ resistance analysis very sparingly.

7. Improvisation is sometimes letting go of the usual ritual. It is, for example, having a very disorganized patient, in her speaking, play the French horn during a session, consequent upon my invitation to do so, and my experiencing, as she played, her mastery and how all of her ego functions suddenly functioned beautifully. I can still recall how relaxed she was after, not frenetic; and, because I had heard her perform, with such beauty, I heard her words differently afterwards.
8. Finally there is a body element to jazz, to music, to play, to analysis also. In the Freudian tradition we really don't know what to do with the body. Referring to Wilhelm Reich, Dr. Cavell notes *"Feelings are locked up in the body. Free the body and you begin to unlock the feelings. The ability to let go in jazz happens the more tutored one's feeling is, but that tutoring itself is rooted in both feeling and knowledge. I think the feeling is primarily love. It is unfortunate that psychoanalysis is skewed toward aggression, when in my view love is even more hidden and repressed."*
9. By way of summary let me end by saying....it's the self-forgetfulness of the playing that lets one hear the song, but that self-forgetfulness is built on technique and trust. In analysis its trust that also builds the technique, so to speak, of free communicating, as long as an analyst, like Connie, Dr.Cavell's teacher, as well, I am sure, as Dr. Cavell herself, creates a playground where the spontaneity of communication, the element, as mentioned above, of surprise, lets both parties hear what is just behind the notes, what is just under the words, what is hidden in a tone of voice, or a momentary intrusion of humor, or sometimes, the unspoken sound of human sadness.

10. I want to thank Dr. Cavell for speaking outside the box, as it were, in her excellent discussion of jazz improvisation and psychoanalysis. I have tried with my words carry her melody, in a slightly different key.