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***Moving Forward: notes on participation, diversity and social mediation in the NIME community***

**Original Paper Title: Fourteen Years of NIME: The Value and Meaning of ‘Community’ in Interactive Music Research**

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**Commentary**

The “community of practice framework” outlined in our paper is one of many lenses available to better understand the value and meaning of community in the context of NIME. Regardless of the specific methods employed, NIME (as a conference and as a maturing community of interest) is now at the stage where it must urgently reflect on its motivations, values and future priorities. As a “community-of-communities”, NIME’s mix of disciplines, methodologies, outputs and proclaimed openness to diversity has been widely celebrated. It is clear that the diverse and ad hoc nature of NIME has provided an effective starting point for bringing together cross-disciplinary expertise around the necessarily interdisciplinary field of interactive music technologies. However, the lack of coherent vision and critical reflection across NIME’s various interest groups acts to marginalize or exclude individuals and collectives whose practices are not already supported by dominant social norms. Not all actors in NIME are speaking from the same position of power, and an openness to diversity does not automatically result in other voices being heard.

The need for a broadening of focus beyond questions such as design implementation to include “questions of power, authority, legitimacy, participation, and intelligibility” [1] is exemplified by an increase in reference to philosophy of technology, critical theory and social aesthetics at NIME’s parent Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI). We argue that both NIME and CHI have much to gain from a more widespread adoption of “aesthetic and cultural reasoning” [2], particularly if our aim is to foster an inclusive community that more accurately reflects the growing diversity of social practices which adopt and adapt technologies for creative and political ends.

Recent attempts to raise the visibility of marginalized groups within NIME [e.g. 3] have resulted in conversations which begin to productively address the power dynamics at play in our broader community. Although it is clear that NIME is mediated by wider social inequalities (e.g. gender, ethnicity and class), it is likewise mediated by institutional structures that privilege different methods of knowing and doing. The decreasing representation of practice-based research in the NIME literature, in place of “technical and scientific reporting”, has been recently documented by Gurevich [4]. He further argues that the current tension between these research paradigms is unnecessary, yet remains inevitable without clearer explication of “what could constitute legitimacy within the PBR community”, and how this contingent and heterogeneous approach might “interface” with the more established and generalizable principles and methods of science. Similarly, Green [5] argues that practice-led research can be “complementary to quantitative, controlled-condition methods” by augmenting the “generality of observation” found in these methods “in order to contend with musical practice in local, socially entangled, contentious and noisy complexity.” Green laments that, despite the great potential NIME offers for a productive interdisciplinary convergence, NIME attempts to engage with music performance with little recognition of the “wider issues” of performance practice.

For us, it is clear that *performance* is the biggest casualty caused by a lack of rigorous critical reflection and communication across different areas of the NIME community. While new musical interfaces, systems or sensing devices are performed with each year, those from past conferences are at best recalled through anecdotes or as paper citations. Very few technological developments survive outside of NIME, or even within NIME over time. We suspect the primary cause is a lack of connection to sustained and emerging real world performance practices, and a lack of engagement with academic and professional communities that sustain these practices. The “N” in NIME itself is perhaps partially to blame, in that it resists the long-term development of performance pedagogies, repertoire and critical discourse necessary for the legitimisation of a performance community within the wider NIME community. It is noteworthy that NIME’s self-proclaimed continual quest for novelty aligns with larger institution prioritises that privilege innovation and impact over actual content and substance.

Finally, if the musics produced by and through the innovations of our NIME community are to have wider artistic legitimacy, we must actively expand our genealogy beyond the canon of the European and American avant-garde. As Green [5] has well argued, NIME could facilitate a move towards “a pluralist aesthetic of electronic musicking” through more formal reflection on, and “sharing of”, the diverse musical practices that inform and motivate our research.

**References**

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[5] O. Green. Leonardo Special Section: Practice-Based Research and New Interfaces for Musical Expression: The Situation of Practice-Led Research around NIME, and Two Methodological Suggestions for Improved Communication. Leonardo 48:5, October 2015.

**Short Bios**

**Dr Adnan Marquez-Borbon** is a Mexican improviser, instrument designer, sound artist, and researcher. Currently involved in the interdisciplinary project: 'Into the Key of Law: Transposing Musical Improvisation. The Case of Child Protection in Northern Ireland'. The music released under his name synthesises electronic music, jazz, free improvisation, and ethnic musics. His alter ego, *duplex helix*, produces beat-based music influenced by Hip Hop and various electronic music genres. He is a cofounder of the Mexican improvisation collective Generación Espontánea and the multimedia collective N0R73 (now OpenL4B.Norte\_Hackerspace). duplexhelixmusic.wordpress.com

**Dr Paul Stapleton** is an improviser, sound artist, instrument designer and critical theorist originally from Southern California. He is currently a Senior Lecturer at the Sonic Arts Research Centre, Queen’s University Belfast, where he teaches and supervises research in performance technologies, improvisation and site-specific sound art. His album FAUNA with saxophonist Simon Rose has received acclaim from critics such as Ken Waxman (Jazzword), Jean-Michel Van Schouwburg (Orynx), Mark Corroto (All About Jazz), and Marc Medwin (New York City Jazz Record). Paul also co-directs the Translating Improvisation research group with Sara Ramshaw and the QUBe music collective with Steve Davis. www.paulstapleton.net

**Photos**

attached