

## Chapter 3 : Music as work and event

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### 3.1 Introduction: Spoken and written language

The author, building on the work of Wishart, Bateson, and Wittgenstein, compares the operations of language in its written form and its functioning as speech. This distinction leads in turn to a view of spoken language as contextualized, in other words, as depending on kinesic and paralinguistic features to convey the full force of its meaning. The author asserts that there may exist a theoretical or model parallel between the conception of music as work (with its roots in written language) and the notion of music as event (illustrating a form of speech in action). As Wishart claims (1996:13, emphasis in original):

For Plato, the *idea* of the object, which took on a new historical permanence in its notation in the written word, came to have more 'reality' than the object-as-experienced. The commonplace tables and chairs which we experience in the course of our everyday life were mere pale reflections of the ideal table and chair existing in some Platonic heaven. (This heaven in fact was to be found between the covers of books). This radically new stance reflects a permanent tendency of scribe-dominated cultures towards the reification of ideas and the undervaluing of immediate non-verbal experience, which has special relevance to the history of music.

Wishart builds an argument about the dominance of writing in Western culture, wherein he emphasizes the tendency of scribes to privilege the "combinatorial process" of written language over experience *per se*. Wishart himself is alert to the implications of this stance for musical study, in which ideas become reified and immediate non-verbal experience is marginalized. Wishart continues (*ibid.*):

Even for the average literate individual it might at first sight appear that what we can think is commensurate with what we can say, and hence to appear verbally confused or elliptical is easily interpreted as a failure of clear thought, rather than a difficulty of formulation of a perfectly clear non-verbal idea. For example, the idea of a good 'break' in improvised musical performance is clearly understood by

any practitioner but has never been reduced to a verbal description.

Wishart is suggesting here that to describe in words the "break"<sup>89</sup> in the practice of improvised music is an exercise in demonstrating the potential epistemological gap between a non-verbal activity and its description in verbal terms. What Wishart implies is that improvisers understand instinctively how to "make the right noises" in this regard, and any attempt to codify such procedures in terms of verbal or written language falls short of the reality of the activity as practised by musicians. It might be suggested, as Bateson has done, that this gap between activity and description lies in the nature of language itself (2000:373-374):

Verbal language is almost (but not quite) purely digital. The word 'big' is not bigger than the word 'little'; and in general there is nothing in the pattern (*i.e.*, in the system of interrelated magnitudes) in the word 'table' which would correspond to the system of interrelated magnitudes in the object denoted. On the other hand, in kinesic and paralinguistic communication, the magnitude of the gesture, the loudness of the voice, the length of the pause, the tension of the muscle, and so forth—these magnitudes correspond (directly or inversely) to magnitudes in the relationship that is the subject of discourse.

Bateson considers non-verbal communication as analogic, in which kinesic and paralinguistic factors such as the size of the gesture, where the voice is pitched, and so on, determine more about the relationship in question than a verbal description can adequately convey. Returning to Wishart's example from improvisation, it is clear that, in the practice of this type of music, playing a convincing break is not something that can be learnt from reading about it: musicians tend to acquire this knowledge from listening to other practitioners of the improviser's art.

In Wishart's terms, the difference between the digital nature of verbal

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<sup>89</sup> The break in jazz refers to the point in the score at which the ensemble stops so as to allow the soloist a space in which to make an unaccompanied solo statement. Dizzy Gillespie's piece, *A Night in Tunisia*, is a good example of this practice.

communication and its analogic counterpart lies in the nature of the meaning that these different types of communication aim to convey (1996:13ff.):

I am going to propose that words never 'mean' anything at all. Only people 'mean' and words merely contribute towards signifying people's meanings. For the scribe meaning appears to result as the product of a combinatorial process; broadly speaking, various words with more or less clearly defined reference or function are strung together in a linear combination to form sentences, paragraphs, etc., which have a resultant clearly defined meaning.

Wishart (*ibid.*) goes on to highlight the difference between the linearity of such combinatorial procedures that yield the units (sentences, paragraphs, and so on) of written language and what he terms the synthetic process of individual speech acts:

For the individual speaker, however, meaning is a synthetic activity. He or she *means*. Not merely the combination of words but a choice from an infinitude of possible inflections, tones of voice and accents for their delivery, together with possibilities of movement, gesture and even song, enter into the synthesis of the speech-act which attempts to convey what he or she means. In this way a speech act may uniquely convey quantities of information about the state of mind of the speaker and his relationship to what is said (for example irony and so on) which would be entirely lost if merely the words used were transcribed, but is certainly not lost on the person spoken to.<sup>90</sup>

Written language, in its emphasis on linear sequence, lends itself to contemplation as a carrier of reified meaning, in the same way as an "authoritative" edition of a score contains meaning for orthodox musicology. Wishart's conception of meaning as a synthetic activity suggests, however, that spoken language is capable of conveying a far wider range of nuance than the written word. Wishart's emphasis on the importance of the mode and context of the speech act suggests an affinity with the later Wittgenstein's notion of the language-game as being tied to

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<sup>90</sup> Wishart concludes by saying (*ibid.*): "It is clear that not meaning, but signification, resides in the words and that the mode and context of use of these significations all contribute towards the speaker's meaning."

its context (PI §546, emphases in original):

In this way I should like to say the words "Oh, *let* him come!" are charged with my desire. And words can be wrung from us,—like a cry. Words can be *hard* to say: such, for example, as are used to effect a renunciation, or to confess a weakness. (Words are also deeds).

Significantly for this study, Wishart includes musical activity as a means of adding value to a given speech act. It seems reasonable to conclude from the above discussion that there exists the possibility of distinguishing between two areas of musical attention: one, wherein the emphasis is on the study of music as object, and the other, where music is considered essentially as an activity. The study of music as object (the province of orthodox musicology) focuses its attention on the product, whereas, in considering the process of musicking for itself, emphasis is placed on the ways in which musical activity is used to articulate meaning. This emphasis on the processual character of musicking has important implications for communication, as Iyer suggests (2004:393-394):

In the 1990s a wave of important scholarship on African American music addressed some of the ways in which meaning is generated in the course of jazz improvisation. Much of this work focuses on the crucial role of interactivity and group interplay in the dialogical construction of multiplicities of meaning. Here one draws on a notion of communication as process, as a collective activity that harmonizes individuals rather than a telegraphic model of communication as mere transmission of literal, verbal meanings.

Iyer makes a vital point, recalling Bakhtin's theory of language in its employment of the concept of dialogism. Iyer's argument rests on a conception of communication as a collective and collaborative process, rather than what he terms "a telegraphic model," which presupposes a more rigid and unidirectional view of meaning and communication.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> The author discusses the nature of communication in improvised music in further detail in section 5.3.

### 3.1.1 Results and procedures

In an interview (Prasad 2002), Eberhard Weber emphasizes the importance of the finished product over the process of creation:

I'm only interested in results, not in procedures to get somewhere.<sup>92</sup>  
 In the good old days, when one had the chance to go to jazz clubs and there were jam sessions, some would go onstage, including myself. We would play some free improvisation or **modal** improvisation for a half-hour or so and it was really dynamic, wonderful and perfect for that moment. Then I would put the bass down and leave the stage. The musicians would look at me and say "What's going on? Why are you leaving?" I said "Because we just had a nice half-hour and it was perfect. If we continue, it's only going to be repetition." So, again, I'm not interested in playing, but having results. That's the big difference between me and other musicians.

Weber's focus on results, in his opinion, illustrates a "big difference" between himself and other musicians. His viewpoint is an atypical one for an improvising musician, opposed (as it appears to be) to so much of the radicalism of the free jazz aesthetic. These sentiments were echoed in a conversation with the author (Munich, 1980) in which Weber discussed his move from experimentation as a player in the 1960s German free jazz scene<sup>93</sup> to the kind of organized (formal) compositional structures evident in his first solo recording *The Colours of Chloë* (1974).

Weber made two significant statements regarding this move towards organization in this conversation. He felt that, in many respects, playing free jazz was a kind of hit or miss endeavour, which entailed a certain amount of "groping around in the dark to find something," and, as a result, that the artistic rewards therefrom were uncertain. In fact he spoke of a five per cent return on his investment of time and energy. Secondly, he suggested that playing this kind of music took a lot of practice and getting

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<sup>92</sup> Emphasis added. Weber's position (if it is to be taken at face value) is basically diametrically opposed to Soundpainting and free music.

<sup>93</sup> Weber worked mainly with Wolfgang Dauner and Volker Kriegel in this period.

to know the musical personalities of his fellow performers.<sup>94</sup>

This attitude of apparent dissatisfaction<sup>95</sup> with the random or repetitive elements of spontaneously created music led Weber into the managerial vector of composer/leader rather than accompanist, the more traditionally accepted role of the bass-player. Bass-players who also compose and lead bands, as Weber does, are relatively rare (Charles Mingus and Jaco Pastorius being the most immediate exceptions to this rule). As stated above, Weber's focus on results is an atypical one for an improvising musician; for many improvisers, the interest appears to lie in the moment-to-moment processes as they unfold, rather than the eventual outcome as determined by the composer.

### 3.1.2 Intractable questions

In beginning his analysis of Mahler's *Sixth Symphony*, Samuels (1999:1) notes how:

Musical works seem by turns to be anomalous amongst the arts because of their lack of linguistic articulation and referential content, or to hold the key to understanding the intractable questions of deconstructive intertextuality.

It is natural perhaps for musical analysts in some quarters to have directed their attention to the study of scores as the authoritative means through which composers make their musical intentions manifest. For example, Bowen (2001:429) states:

Musicology inherited both the aesthetic of music as work and the German symphonic repertoire to which it is best suited. Musicology has traditionally had difficulty with the 'music as event' genres (like

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<sup>94</sup> This point to some extent highlights the paradox that some freely improvised music requires hard work to sound apparently "spontaneous."

<sup>95</sup> Apparent, because at least four Weber recordings as leader (*The following morning*, *Later that evening*, *Orchestra*, and *Pendulum*) feature passages of music that are obviously improvised, either collectively or solo.

jazz), and ethnomusicology has absorbed most of these genres.<sup>96</sup>

To a certain extent this statement points to an underlying ideology of late modernism, which separates "serious" art (with its focus on musical works) from its less "reputable" counterpart in the fields of jazz and popular musics, for instance.<sup>97</sup> What Bowen is proposing (*ibid.*), however, is a useful distinction between music as work ("with the score as its inviolable sacred text"<sup>98</sup>) and music as event ("with the score as merely its blueprint"). The author suggests that in tonal jazz practice, for example in the field of small group improvisation, the score is mostly used in Bowen's second sense, as a blueprint, with relatively wide latitude for interpretation. In many cases of the "music as event" genre, the author suggests, the score is of secondary importance, if present at all.<sup>99</sup>

Developments in critical theory through the course of the twentieth century have called into question the possibility of a final and objective reading of a musical score.<sup>100</sup> Derrida and the poststructuralists insist on the reader's role in the establishment of meaning in a text, implying thereby that the cherished procedures of orthodox musicology are open to any number of

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<sup>96</sup> Bowen continues (2001:429, n15) by suggesting: "I would also venture that musicology has projected the concept of music as work backwards in time to genres and periods where it is largely inappropriate. Corelli, one imagines, would care more about the performing conditions, the unique style of the performer, the response of the audience, the sound of the instrument, and the overall impact of the performance than the critical edition on which it is based. For performer-composers like Corelli and Rossini, the integrity of the performance was more important than the integrity of the work."

<sup>97</sup> This line of thinking is especially evident in the writing of Adorno.

<sup>98</sup> The religious imagery suggests to what extent this mythology is taken as unspoken musicological dogma.

<sup>99</sup> People in these less formal styles of music will often rehearse and play the music by ear. Charles Mingus, for example, would sketch out ideas at the piano for his musicians to learn, and would seldom rely on a written score to convey his musical ideas. As Collier mentions (1981:443): "It became his practice to bring to rehearsal only sketches of the final product. He would play on the piano what he wanted each player to do and would discuss with him the emotional effects he wanted him to achieve."

<sup>100</sup> The author has suggested (sections 2.1.4 and 2.1.5) that a defining characteristic of both poststructuralism and the deconstruction project is a problematization of accepted notions with regard to the inviolability of the Text.

reasonable (and sometimes not so reasonable) interpretations. The crypto-scientific nature of these procedures (as typified by the apparently objective contemplation of the reified object of the musical score) is also interrogated by the philosophical procedures of critical theory, which call into question such hallowed concepts as objectivity, disinterestedness, and the full and final settlement of meaning as manifest in the score. As Bowen has suggested (2001:429), these "traditional" assumptions regarding fixed meaning are seen to operate in the historical study of the music of the German symphonic repertoire, which by definition, excludes non-Western musical practice.

Wishart (1996:261) is alert to the implications of what might be termed the "poetics of detachment" in stating:

The problem of detachment has particular significance in Western society. As an aspect of a professional pursuit, particularly the pursuit of science, it has proved highly socially fruitful. A detachment from the social sphere is normally (except in the case of politicians and military personnel) regarded as a form of mental illness. Mental detachment in science is useful because it enables us to develop instruments which may then be useful to the social body. Social detachment in the research which precedes an artistic work may also be useful in that it enables us to look at our materials in new ways. Social detachment in the artistic work itself, however, makes it intrinsically meaningless except as a solipsistic activity for the artist or an interesting intellectual game for analysts. There is a certain psychopathology in the scientific method when it is applied to other beings such as in the pseudo-science of behaviourism and in the pseudo-art of the notational formalists.

The repertoire-bound tendencies of formalist musicology focus on the symbolic language of musical notation, which is but one element among many complex contemporary musical practices. A musicology which aims to include the infinite variety of musicking as practised today faces a major crisis of confidence, as expressed in Cook and Everist (2001:v): "The history of musicology and music theory in our generation is one of loss of confidence; we no longer know what we know."

The question arises as to whether there is a way out of this crisis for



contemporary musicology. If so, the way is perhaps being pointed out by such writers as Small, who views the event of a symphony concert as a kind of ritual whose primary purpose is to make statements about relationships. For Small, the ritualistic elements of such an event extend beyond the boundaries of the score, and comprise extra-musical factors, which create the circumstances for the making of such statements.

The move into **social semiotics** (especially in ethnomusicology and jazz studies<sup>101</sup>) acts as a counterweight to a problematic tendency within formalist musicology, namely, its privileging text over context. In this regard, studies by Monson, Berliner, Chris Smith, Reason, Singer, *et al.*, focus their attention on the *gestalt* of the musical event, thereby bringing the human element back into musicological discourse.

### 3.2 Music as work: The semiotics of notation

The concept of a work of art, where this embraces, say, a work of music, a work of literature, or a painting, has not always been understood in the way it is today, and it stands in more than one relation to the different practices in which it functions. The relations between each art and its associated work-concept are not easily made subject to generalization, since in each case they are deeply historicized and are comprehended only by reference to the individual histories of the different arts.

Goehr's argument (1992:79-80) springs from her central idea of the work-concept, and further suggests that the differences of this concept in various artistic fields of endeavour are to some extent contingent, by virtue of being rooted in their individual histories. While alert to the possible dangers of over-generalization implicit in the notion of a universal, all-embracing work-concept, Goehr (1992:83) confirms Bowen's viewpoint regarding the repertoire-based rationale, which justifies the possibility of such an idea:

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<sup>101</sup> Social semiotics (in musical studies) seeks to situate musical events within the social framework in which they take place.

Theories of musical works have been formulated on the basis of examples drawn from the classical repertoire of the early nineteenth century. Beethoven is the composer, and his Fifth Symphony the work, most frequently referred to. Some theorists deliberately confine themselves to examples from this repertoire. We are not told why.

But it is revealing that examples drawn from early music, avant-garde music, often from folk, jazz, and popular music, but rarely if ever from the music of the nineteenth-century classical repertoire, are appealed to especially when one theorist challenges a definition offered by another theorist.

Goehr's "theorizing about theorizing" confirms the existence of an apparent conflict of interest between musicology with its work-concept and ethnomusicology, which draws from the practices of "folk, jazz, and popular music" to justify the different conclusions it reaches. The nature of the conflict that Goehr describes is an example of what Korsyn terms the Tower of Babel, in which musicologists literally are unable to talk sense to one another, because their methodologies and fields of interest have become so deeply divided that any form of meaningful dialogue is effectively precluded from taking place (2003:6):

When music becomes the object of academic disciplines as it is today, discourse can become a site of struggle among the factions and interest groups that compete for the cultural authority to speak about music. The expert critical and technical languages that these groups invent can foster a social bond among those who share them, but they can also alienate and exclude outsiders. This danger seems increasingly evident to many in the field.

It is not only in the field of academic discourse, however, that such alienation and exclusion take place. Ake suggests that, in the early days of **bebop**, not only the everyday discourse of verbal language (musicians' slang) but such exclusionary devices as tempo, harmonic complexity, and the nature of melody itself, were employed as tactical moves to draw lines between the closed circle of those beboppers "in the know" and their less hip counterparts (2002:66):

Early boppers developed their own 'mystery' language as a means of distancing themselves from unhip outsiders (white *and* black). Stage

demeanor was 'cooler,' less 'entertainer'-like, than that of many of their jazz predecessors. Meanwhile, jazz performances became increasingly virtuosic. Extremely fast tempos became commonplace, chord changes more complex, melodies longer, more intricate, and more angular than in the Swing era. As Lott<sup>102</sup> describes this early scene, 'At its hippest (and meanest), such a common language became a closed hermeneutic that had the undeniable effect of alienating the riff-raff and expressing a sense of felt isolation, all the while affirming a common purpose—even at the expense of other musicians.'

Bowen, whose range of musical activities includes conducting, composing, pedagogy, and playing jazz piano, to name but a few facets, suggests that works exist somewhat separately from both their associated performances and their scores. He classifies performances as events and scores as physical objects (which seems altogether reasonable) and contends that, despite being subject to the changing forces of creation and reception, works are relatively stable phenomena. As Bowen states (2001:425):

Music is a sequence of sounds, each of which appears only in the present, and which, therefore, has no persistent physical existence. While the sound of a musical performance is fleeting, however, the musical work exists even when the performers are silent, and this continued existence is due to human memory.

The author contends that this persistence of the musical work is not simply due to human memory, but also a side effect of a strongly entrenched view that attempts to perpetuate a distinction between "high" and "low" forms of art. In such a view, popular music exists merely to promote and maintain class-interests through false consciousness and the hidden machinations of capitalism, whereas WEAM (especially in its "modern" manifestations) has the moral imperative of raising consciousness through its complexity and difficulty. Writers such as DeNora (2003) and Krims (2003) have criticized this viewpoint as exhibiting both elitism and a misplaced faith in high art's ability "to educate the masses."

While it is true that the sound of music is fleeting, as Bowen maintains,

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<sup>102</sup> The citation is from Gabbard, *Jazz among the Discourses* (1995a:243-55).

one of the obvious consequences of the work-concept is its diminution of the role of the performer(s) in the musicking process. Not only this, but the work-concept brackets out the crucial elements of ritual and convention that animate such musical performances, to which Small is alert (1998).

As he suggests (1998:107):

All over the world today, in art galleries, palaces and museums as well as in opera houses and concert halls, objects that were originally made for the rituals of the rich and powerful, and occasionally the poor and humble, are today exhibited out of their original context, their original social function forgotten or obscured. This applies as much to paintings and sculptures, to masses and concertos, as it does to crowns, robes, masks, crucifixes and other, to us, more obviously ritual objects, for paintings, sculptures, masses and concertos too were originally intended for use in the rituals of their time, for display at special events and ceremonies. It is only works created since the middle of the nineteenth century or perhaps a little earlier that appear not to possess a ritual function and to have become simply isolated, self-contained works intended as the objects of disinterested contemplation (emphasis added).

The significant point here perhaps is that scores (as physical objects) are not just objects in the real world in the same category of "things" like rocks, sheep, or hovercraft. Williams puts this well in saying (2001:36): "Notation is not a neutral device that transparently records ideas formulated independently of it; it is an intrinsic part of the message and impacts on the way in which musicians conceive and perceive music." The notation of an intended performance, whether in the form of guitar tablature, medieval plainsong, or as in more contemporary examples like multi-serialism or the graphic score, has a bearing on the way musicians are supposed to deal with it.

At the risk of over-simplifying Williams's fairly complex argument, it might be suggested that it is grounded in a somewhat poststructuralist viewpoint, one that exposes the perils of ignoring the discursive component of musicking. Seen from a Foucauldian angle, notation has the added implication of excluding the less skilled "Other" from the performance practice of certain kinds of music. In reality, it seems fairly obvious that a musician who is unable to read music will not find employment in a

symphony orchestra. *Pace* Derrida's argument on the misplaced authenticity of phonocentrism and the claims to authority of the "speaking subject," WEAM's emphasis on such skills privileges the visual element of musicking, while other musical genres (such as jazz and improvised musics) tend to emphasize the aural component.

Nettl (1998:1) highlights the relatively lowly status accorded to improvisation in the history of musicology when he explains:

In the history of musicology, improvisation—sometimes defined as the creation of music in the course of performance—has played a minor role. Musicologists have been concerned in the first instance with composition, and less with the process than with the completed piece of music as set down by its creator. Affected by the research traditions of visual art and literature, they have concentrated on the finished work, analyzed the interrelationships of its components, and looked at its history, but rarely have they been concerned with the varying orders of creativity that may have led to the final product.

The marginalization of improvisation in some musicological discourse, as Nettl suggests, is due to its focus on the finished product, not on the creative processes that take place during improvisation. However, the burgeoning interest in jazz studies as part of academic discourse may be seen as a counterweight to this tendency of orthodox musicology, and a number of scholars<sup>103</sup> have made contributions to the study of what Nettl terms "orders of creativity" within various fields of improvised music, especially as manifested in performance. Nettl here highlights a challenge for contemporary ethnomusicology: how to turn the spotlight on to issues such as process as opposed to product? Is it possible, or appropriate, to apply scientific analysis to moment-by-moment processes?

It seems evident that there is a difficulty here, because, in so treating the creative impulse behind improvisation, musicologists have tended to overlook that their focus on composition as the be-all and end-all of

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<sup>103</sup> See especially Berliner (1994), Lewis (1996), Monson (1996), and Sawyer (1999, 2003, 2006b).

musical activity runs contrary to a pervasive historical trend. What the author is suggesting here is that improvisation has only lately been excluded from WEAM performance practice, and that until recently improvisation was actually the dominant practice in much musicking in the West. What such musicological discourse is examining is actually a fairly brief period in Western music history, in which the fetishization of the score as an authoritative index of the composer's intentions reaches epidemic proportions.

Bowman (1998:386) suggests, in examining Shepherd's approach to musical analysis, that the roots of this emphasis may lie within the difference between two sensory experiences of music: one visual, the other auditory:

In contrast to hearing and the corporeal, timbral experience that lies at music's heart, vision is a 'silent and inert sensory channel which allows us not only to distance ourselves from the phenomena of the world but also to interject ourselves into the world from a distance. It is the sensory channel which allows us, from a single point of view, to order discrete objects into their uniquely structured locations in space.'<sup>104</sup> Thus, visual experience, as phenomenologists have shown us, is an experience of distance and separation. Its contents are discrete and objective, permitting cool, contemplative scrutiny. And since vision's content lies at a comfortable distance from us, visual experience is an experience of self-containedness.

Bowman's argument has much to offer as a means of explaining this privileging of visual experience over its auditory counterpart. The anthropologist E. T. Hall (1992:224-225) has suggested that the activities of reading music and playing by ear in fact originate in two different areas of the human brain, the neocortex and limbic brain respectively.

In more general terms, Korsyn (2003:151) has noted "the tendency among ethnomusicologists to privilege live or improvised music over notated music." It seems apparent that the roots of these two processes of

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<sup>104</sup> The enclosed quotation is from Shepherd's *Music as Social Text* (1991:156).

privileging lie in the respective areas of interest, the provinces of musicology and ethnomusicology respectively. In the ethnomusicological domain, there does exist an inclination to favour the live element of musicking over its notated counterpart in WEAM, and this has obvious bearing on this particular study of Soundpainting as an apparently spontaneous phenomenon.<sup>105</sup>

Williams, in his discussion of the orchestra and the role of the conductor with reference to a poststructuralist notion of texts, continues by suggesting that (2001:38): “Performance, therefore, is a special kind of active reading, whether it derives from a written text or a set of assimilated codes (an improvisation).” One might ask at this stage, while agreeing with his point regarding “active reading,” in what way is orchestral performance deriving from a text (a musical score) independent of a different set of codes, hallowed by instrumental or vocal pedagogy and the weight of tradition from which neither of these sets of codes can altogether free itself?

The answer seems to operate on three fronts: on the one hand, it is fairly obvious that the codes vary depending on the kind of music under discussion, while, on the other, orchestral music needs the figure of the conductor as guide and interpreter of the composer’s work. Thirdly, there is the inescapable presence of the different grammars of notated and non-notated performance.

The difficulty of comparing the text and context of a symphony concert to a jazz concert, a marching band in Ohio to a Kabuki orchestra, or Gamelan music to plainsong, has the potential to lead to the kind of critical impasse as stated by Cook and Everist (section 3.1.2). Another element of musicology's crisis of confidence is described by Bowen who proposes the

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<sup>105</sup> The extent to which improvisation can be conceived of as "spontaneous" is a matter of debate, to which the author returns in section 4.1.1.

following solution (2001:424):

The awareness of musical works as neither stable nor fixed phenomena does not have to be paralysing: rather, the fact that musical works change through both the creation and reception of performances presents us with a fundamentally new field of study.

In tandem with the development of notation comes the exclusion of improvisation (or performer intrusion) into the “work.” Being represented in notational format, for Dahlhaus (1983) and Goehr (1992), is a necessary condition for the awarding of “work”-status to a composition. The more the symbolic language of music has developed in complexity of subtlety and nuance, the more its effect has been to exclude the non-specialist and increasingly to demand a higher level of technical ability on the performer's part: notation may be seen in this light (as does Williams) as a technology for controlling and empowering certain class-interests. In this light, the words of Dahlhaus (1983)<sup>106</sup> have relevance: he “tells us, flatly, that ‘the subject matter of music is made up, primarily, of significant works of music that have outlived the culture of their age’ and that ‘the concept ‘work’ and not ‘event’ is the cornerstone of music history.”

However, as much as notation has developed in precision as a vehicle for conveying the composer's ideas, it is in the area of timbre that the symbolic language of WEAM notation is at its weakest. This is in stark contrast to the improvising musician's “playing” (in the Barthean sense) with this musical element as a constructor of individuality, as mentioned by Berendt and Lewis (section 1.4.4). While the notion of the orchestral *Klangideal* suggests homogeneity and a conventionally acceptable sound to which all players must conform, in improvised music the focus on individuality of sound is an ideological construct which privileges the individual over the collective.

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<sup>106</sup> As cited by Small (1998:4).



As well as fixing the composer's intentions in a relatively final way, the score serves the purpose of establishing the composer's intellectual and financial rights and thereby legitimating the origination of the work. Goehr's mention of the borrowing of themes as well as whole movements from another composer in the period prior to the nineteenth century (as a fairly routine procedure) suggests that the notion of the necessity of ownership developed fairly quickly outside the relative security of patronage by the church or the court.

Once composers lost the security of patronage, the notion of individual ownership or authorship became paramount for economic reasons. Increasingly, scores and the associated mechanisms for engraving, printing, and distributing them became the stock in trade of the newly liberated composer. Here is seen the influence of technology on the production of music; the gradual decentralization of the composer's role to the point at which nowadays, by means of files exchanged via the Internet, there is no necessity for the collaborators to meet face to face except as mediated through digitized virtual identities.

The moves toward the notion of copyright as an individually-situated right under constitutional law further isolated the composer from the performer who was now viewed as the paint on the conductor's canvas, as an indentured servant: ultimately, as a malleable "something" to add form or colour under often problematic conditions of employment. As Spruce notes (2001:119-120): "The significance attached to the notation of art music resulted in the delineation and realignment of musical roles."

### **3.3 Music as event: The semiotics of performance**

Small deconstructs<sup>107</sup> a powerful assumption of some contemporary

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<sup>107</sup> Small (1998:14) uses the term in the sense of deciphering "the signals that are everywhere being given and received, and to learn the meaning not just of

historical and musicological approaches which postulate the existence of a category of musical works wherein is found "the essence of music and whatever meanings it contains" (1998:4). His perception of this state of affairs as deeply-rooted in musicological analysis contains important implications for this study which, as already noted, is primarily concerned with specific aspects of music performance, and a set of attendant associated philosophical and musical problems which arise from this orientation toward performance.

Small's *Musicking* (1998) proceeds from a so-called "thick description" of a hypothetical symphony concert and is a salutary attempt to deconstruct (among other things) the complex web of relationships bound up in such an event. The term "thick description" is defined by Scott and Marshall (2005) as follows:

Intensive, small-scale, dense descriptions of social life from observation, through which broader cultural interpretations and generalizations can be made. The term was introduced in the philosophical writings of Gilbert Ryle, and developed by Clifford Geertz in anthropology, especially in his celebrated study of the Balinese cockfight.

When described purely in physical terms, the action of winking may be construed as a surface event, a manifestation of a particular type of muscular reflex. For Geertz, this surface category of description is to some extent insufficient, as it separates the action from its social context. The strategy of "thick" description includes the underlying complex of social relationships, habits, and patterns of communication that allow a "constructed" meaning to be ascribed to this action, a meaning whose construction, in turn, is bound up in the circumstances in which the action takes place. The point is that "thick" description highlights the "contextuality" of such an action, whose content or meaning is dependent on the type of message embodied in such an admittedly prosaic and

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the musical works that are being played there but of the total event that is a symphony concert."

routine human action.

For Geertz, this view has implications for defining the scope and limits of "analysis," as follows (1983:9):

Analysis, then, is sorting out the structures—what Ryle called established codes, a somewhat misleading expression, for it makes the enterprise sound too much like that of the cipher clerk when it is much more like that of the literary critic—and determining their social ground and import.

Geertz is at pains to state at the outset of his discussion (1983:5) that his view of culture is grounded in semiotics, when he states:

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.

Geertz's view implies that conclusions drawn by the observer that have to do with the nature of a cultural act or event are at best provisional, and have to remain so, as they, and their accompanying codes, are not given to humankind *a priori*, but depend on what he memorably calls "webs of significance." Implicit in this elegant phrase are the two notions of entanglement and construction, a kind of anthropological Gordian knot of assigned meanings, rather than something that exists as a set of "givens."

It is apparent that this interpretation of culture as something constructed and provisional has implications for such critics as Small and McClary, who seem to view it as an antidote to a common tendency towards reification in Western thought. In this light, Lévi-Strauss's quest for the underlying structures of the myths of humanity and his assertion that they are built on a set of binary oppositions is fated to be exactly that: a quest, with little hope of arriving at an ultimate conclusion.

Through the technique of "thick description," Small (1998) establishes links between such factors as architectural structures, dress codes, and so on

(the network of rituals of the performance space of the symphony concert) and class-interests, thereby deconstructing assumptions about culture and ideology, as in: "We are here not just because we like to be seen partaking in this ritual, but because partaking in this ritual makes us who we are." He also notes that this methodology can be applied to any form of similar musical gathering: what is at stake is not so much the type of music being performed, but the common ritualistic character that such gatherings share.

For Clifton (1983:206-207):

The aim of ritual is to permit an experience of achievement or accomplishment. To this extent, it is far from purposeless: a composition is experienced as a personal acquisition. It is precisely the experience of acquisition which synthesizes the serious and the frivolous into a single experiential act whose function it is to grasp adequately and appropriately the opposite pole of that act: the phenomenal object. This synthesis is best expressed by ordinary language, in which we say that we 'play' a composition which is a work of art, or at least which is the result of someone's hard work.

The implications of these concepts for this study are of great import. Small's concept of "musicking" considers performance itself as an appropriate site for musical research, simply because, for him, the site of performance is where music actually takes place. Clifton views the ritual element in music as having a synthetic purpose, in which the opposites of subject and object are neutralized through "acquisition."

Re-siting music in performance calls into question the heretofore unrevealed assumption that underlies some contemporary musicological agendas: one that maintains an artificial binary opposition between work and event. This binary opposition has aesthetic implications as well. As Sundin suggests (2000:6):

The word 'aesthetics' is seldom used alone. Usually it is employed to describe or 'catch' certain activities or situations in our lives, such as playing an instrument, listening to music, watching a dance and valuing it—all situations expressing a relationship between a subject and an object. Many, including myself, would refer to say that a

relationship is between two subjects. The object becomes a subject when I am responding to what it is saying.

Small and Clifton both emphasize the primacy of art's ritualistic component, bringing to the forefront the idea that art is something that artists *do*, rather than an *object* that artists create for an audience (real or imagined) to contemplate. This view of art as activity has links for the author with the Wittgensteinian notion of philosophy as an exercise in thinking as opposed to a historically determined line of debates around issues.

### 3.3.1 What was performance?

The distinction between music as work and as event re-situates this discussion in the site of performance as activity. For the author, however, this is not an unproblematic move, because now the necessity very forcibly arises to define what exactly is meant by performance. In this light the title of this section deliberately echoes that of McClary's provocative question, in *Conventional Wisdom* (2001:63): What was tonality?

McClary argues, not uncontroversially, that common practice tonality is linked to the social formations within which it arose and therefore it reflects (or enacts) in musical form the dominant ideology of the Enlightenment. She focuses on tonality (2001:65ff) as "the convention that undergirds and guarantees all the others, discussing how it constructed musical analogs to such emergent ideals as rationality, individualism, progress, and centered subjectivity. Far from merely reflecting their times, these musical procedures participated actively in shaping habits of thought on which the modern era depended."

If what McClary says in this regard is true, then one should find evidence of a similar relationship in our own time, in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Despite the enormous advances in communication technology in the preceding century, fragmentation of the individual grows

apace. Poverty, disease, and the relentless destruction of humankind's environment seem insoluble problems.

The ideals of modernism, such as they were, have failed. For Adorno, tonality survives in popular music as an ironic reflection of the hidden machinations of the culture industry, fostering "false consciousness," as it goes on its merry way in service to an ideal of musical anaesthetization. Nostalgia begins to feed on itself and is regenerated only in the form of simulacra, pale shadows of a former vitality.

In Auslander's view, the dominance of television has given rise to a "televisual" society wherein the act of live performance exists in a somewhat adversarial relationship to the mass media (1999:23):

Television's specific ability to position itself as theatre's replacement has its origins in the claims of immediacy made on behalf of television throughout its development, and in television's claims to replicate theatrical discourse. What is true of the relationship between television and theatre is true, by allegorical extension, of the general cultural relationship of the televisual and mediatized to the live: the ideology of liveness that the televisual (the cultural dominant) inherited from television (the medium) has enabled it to displace and replace live performance in a wide variety of cultural contexts.

Watching a televised performance, however, implies a different kind of participation (at a remove from what actually takes place), on the one hand, and on the other, contains within such an act, the potential for repeatability, which is not possible in the case of an actual performance. Within the realm of the televisual, in this view, something is subverted: the instantaneity of the live event. This potential is exploited to the full in sports telecasting, an important feature of which is the action replay, wherein is recapitulated a particular moment or chain of events leading more often than not to a change in the circumstances of the game: a move leads to a goal or is narrowly prevented therefrom.

Participation in a community takes place at a mediatized remove: through a lens, brightly. For Auslander (1999:24):

Live performance now often incorporates mediatization such that the live event itself is a product of media technologies. The spectator sitting in the back row of a Rolling Stones or Bruce Springsteen concert or even a Bill Cosby stand-up comedy performance, is present at a live performance, but hardly participates in it as such since his/her main experience of the performance is to read it off a video monitor.

Philosophical debates in critical theory in the twentieth century, it is suggested, in the fields of poststructuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism, have held up the philosophical notion of the individual subject to close scrutiny. In interrogating a perceived dissonance between the public and the private "self," critical theory has called into question the nature of agency itself, in both the social and musical realms. The crisis in Cartesianism leads to a scenario wherein it is possible, or even necessary, for Cumming to speak of "intersubjective intelligibility," a term echoed in Monson's idea of "intermusicality."

The concept of society as a unified identity maintained over historical time, as modelled on the idea (on a geopolitical level) of the "nation-state," is also thereby called into question. Korsyn (2001:65) links this view to a particular idea of history as somehow unchanging and eternal when he says:

One assumption that historians rely on to engineer continuity in history is the idea of a stable, enduring background against which change takes place. This strategy neutralizes and domesticates change by positing a realm of stability as a balance to the world of historical contingency. Change becomes less disruptive, less threatening, because it is the only thing moving against an otherwise immobile historical background.

Some contemporary musicology, influenced by twentieth-century literary theory, seems to be moving rapidly away from this view of history as a continuum in which composers create music by annexing and discarding previous compositional procedures. The background against which artistic activity takes place is in fact far from stable or enduring, as it is subject to the same political and social upheavals that shape human circumstances.

Text and context are now seen as inextricably intertwined and the relationship between composer, performer, and listener comes alive against the discursive background of “mediation”: in what context and in which format is the music delivered and what power relations are thereby called into play?

### 3.3.2 "Saying something"

Monson sets the scene for her pioneering study of communication in jazz improvisation by employing a metaphor of musical communication as conversation as follows (1996:1-2):

When a musician successfully reaches a discerning audience, moves its members to applaud or shout praises, raises the energy to dramatic proportions, and leaves a sonorous memory that lingers long after, he or she has moved beyond technical competence, beyond the chord changes, and into the realm of 'saying something.' Since saying something—or 'sayin' something,' as it's usually pronounced—requires soloists who can play, accompanists who can respond, and audiences who can hear within the context of the richly textured aural legacy of jazz and African American music, this verbal aesthetic image underscores the collaborative and communicative quality of improvisation.

Many jazz musicians would concur with Monson's view. Jazz certainly seems to "say something," not only in apparently trivial instances of songs with narrative content and a singer (as in the case of some performances of the blues and other standard forms), but also in the realm of "pure" instrumental music. It is worth noting that the metaphor of jazz as conversation does not presuppose, for many of the rhythm section players that Monson interviewed, the presence of lyrics as a condition for its existence.

Small (1998:50-63), following Bateson, discusses the role of gestural paralinguage in biology, and this seems a useful concept for describing the visual and non-verbal supplements which are constructed in the course of live performance. These by-products of the communicative and collaborative process taking place in jazz improvisation (in the higher



orders) require an act of reconstruction on the listener's part when the music is divorced from its circumstances of live production and marketed as a recording from which these paralinguistic clues are missing. It would perhaps follow that the next best thing to being in the audience at a live performance is to watch a film or DVD of such an event. What this line of argument suggests is that there is a qualitative difference between being present at a performance and the activities of watching a filmed version of a performance (or listening to a CD thereof). Cumming brings out another implication of this state of affairs when she states (2000:21):

Paying attention to a performer's physical activity is important also in counteracting the sense of sound as disembodied, a sense that can come from listening to "piped" music, or to CDs whose technically altered perfection has removed the sounds of a performer's breath or of the obtrusive scraping of a bow on the strings. It is obvious that musical sounds are not, in origin, an impersonal or accidental event, that they do not come to exist in the disembodied medium of a CD without the action of a performer's body, but technological intervention can induce a partial forgetfulness of this fact.

Cumming goes on to highlight the disparity between a CD recording of the violinist Midori and her sound in a live performance, which led one critic to comment: "On this evidence the Midori who sells all those CDs is a creation of the microphone and the Sony engineers." Cumming here also is pointing at something rather more than mere "technological intervention" on the part of the engineers, but that such intervention has a powerful effect on the shaping of an identity through sound. The reviewer (Potter 1996a:74), by saying "the Midori," is in a sense alerting his readers to the existence of a set of "possible Midoris," at least one of which is the live performer in the flesh exhibiting characteristics of sound that are altered in a fundamental way so as to allow for the shaping of the recorded version of "Midori."

Korsyn is likewise alert to the disparity between live performance and what is presented as a product of the very different circumstances of the recording studio environment, when he says (2003:70): "I expect we have all had stunned moments of comparing live performances to the packaged,

glossy versions available on records and noticing that musicians sweat, grunt, breathe, and sigh."

It is a part of the aesthetics of concert hall performance, as noted by Small, to allow for a more limited range of bodily expression, at least among the rank and file members of the orchestra. Although they may be engaging with material that is technically difficult and physically demanding to realize, the etiquette of service to the work, and thereby the intentions of the composer, constrains the demonstration of such physical demands. Unless one happens to be the soloist in a concerto, or the conductor, the rules of engagement of the concert hall militate against the unfettered expression of such difficulties in paralinguistic terms, that is, by sweating, grunting, and so on.

However, in keeping with the hierarchical nature of the orchestra, the conductor or the soloist has a wider range of possibilities for paralinguistic expression available, again within the constraints of the etiquette of concert hall performance. Part of the mythology of conducting is the aesthetic of what might be termed the "grand gesture" of showmanship, in which the conductor manifests the physical, embodied symptoms of his engagement with the composer's intentions. Such larger than life gestures are available and form an undeniable part of the allure of controversy surrounding some celebrity conductors, whose attraction for the audience lies precisely in the extravagance of their conducting style. These gestures point in some cases to the conductor's negotiation of difficulties, deploying increasingly grandiose movements in keeping with both the increased scale of the piece and the larger orchestral forces under his control.<sup>108</sup>

As Horowitz maintains, with regard to the conductor as authority figure (1987:268):

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<sup>108</sup> As is sometimes evidenced by the behaviour of Hollywood film stars, it is but a short step from fame to power.

Adorno's understanding of the celebrity conductor as a twentieth-century fetish, functionally comparable to the monopoly lord or authoritarian dictator, is one version of this viewpoint. On a more prosaic level, music itself elevated the conductor's role. Both Wagner's enlarged orchestra and his Romantic ideal of the conductor-interpreter as orchestral nerve and brain center demanded more authoritative, authoritarian leadership.

That such leadership could also encompass excesses of personal behaviour is almost guaranteed by the operations of this *mythos*. For Antek, as cited in Horowitz (1987:181):

Toscanini's rage, somehow, always achieved a musical purpose. Childish, petulant, unreasoning as it was, we somehow respected and admired his capacity to be so moved and aroused by his feeling for the work. It was as though Toscanini, through his temper, through the fear, sympathy and resentment he inspired in the men, had made us all feel how important the music was to him and to us.

In the marshalling and control of such large forces, the conductor's concerns must also be seen in the light of "saying something," in Monson's phrase. Antek excuses, or rationalizes, Toscanini's outbursts because they are seen ultimately as in service to the music he is tasked to realize.

### **3.4 Music and the body**

The author suggests that the study of music in performance likewise benefits from such a contextualized approach as Small's, which takes account of the multivalent tactics of solving the problem of the individual's need for self-expression while also acknowledging the aesthetic norms of the community. Such an approach attempts to take cognizance of the multi-dimensional character of live performance, in which meaning is generated through a multiplicity of signifiers, not only aural/musical signs *per se*, but the elements of what Reason (2004:73) theorizes as the "vibe" of such performances:

In such an environment, sources of meaning cannot be limited exclusively to sonic morphologies such as the order of notes,

orchestration, timbre, and the like; meaning is also located in the ways in which improvisers situate their bodies, change their facial expressions, and use their voices to accompany notes, gestures, silences, or phrases.

Reason is describing precisely the paralinguistic elements that add value to such performances. In symphony concerts, by contrast, these elements tend to be suppressed, at least for the rank and file members of such organizations. Similarly, the audience's opportunity for participation in such ceremonies is circumscribed by the unstated boundaries of the conventions within which the symphony concert operates. By way of example, it is commonly understood in this situation that the audience applauds at the end of the complete work and not between movements, whereas in jazz the audience members may often signal their appreciation of an impressive phrase by clapping in the middle of the piece.

DeNora, in discussing music's role in a variety of everyday contexts (aerobics classes, neonatal units in hospitals, and the workplace in general), conceives of music as a "prosthetic" technology, which she defines as follows (2000:102ff):

Prosthetic technologies are materials that extend what the body can do—for example, steam shovels, stilts, microscopes or amplification systems enhance and transform the capacities of arms, legs, eyes and voices. Through the creation and use of such technologies actors (bodies) are enabled and empowered, their capacities are enhanced. With such technologies, actors can do things that cannot be done independently; they are capacitated in and through their ability to appropriate what such technologies afford.

DeNora considers how music facilitates daily tasks in such disparate contexts as grass cutting in Ghana, weaving in the Hebrides, and sea shanties, some of which are typified by the organizing principle of solo and chorus.<sup>109</sup> This principle obviously also underpins and animates such

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<sup>109</sup> "*Blow the man down*, for example, is composed of alternating solo and chorus lines. During the solo line, the crew rested. They pulled or hauled as they sang the refrain, thus engaging in 'strength' moves while exhaling" (2000:105).

American musical practices as the work song, in which demanding physical tasks are accompanied by similar patterns of call and response. These patterns, as McClary argues (section 4.1.4.2), are a central principle in much popular music and jazz; for her, they represent the relationship between the individual and the community writ large.

Broadly speaking, DeNora is considering in this instance the ways in which music may be said to enhance everyday activity by linking physical responses to the varieties of music that accompany them. Her interests in this discussion may be seen as concerned with how people interact with music as consumers. However, from a slightly different viewpoint, extending the concept of prosthesis into musicking itself is a useful starting point for the theorization of how musicians negotiate acoustic (as well as social and political) space. It is suggested that in this instance musical instruments, conductors' batons, microphones, scores, and amplification systems are all susceptible to being viewed likewise as prostheses. This line of argument places the emphasis on the creation and production of music as opposed to its consumption.

Eco (1999:362) distinguishes between *substitutive* and *extensive* prostheses on the basis that the first category does "what the body used to do but for one accidental reason or another no longer does," examples of which include artificial limbs, walking sticks, eyeglasses, and hearing aids. His category of extensive prostheses, those "which extend the natural action of the body," include such devices as megaphones, stilts, and magnifying glasses. DeNora's theorizing of music as a prosthetic technology is based on construing music as falling into Eco's extensive category. He also conceives of a third category of *magnifying* prostheses such as levers, telescopes, and microscopes, those that "do something that our body had perhaps dreamed of doing but without ever succeeding" (1999:362).

Considering a musical instrument as prosthetic raises two related questions: into which of Eco's categories does it fall, and, perhaps more

importantly, for what activity of the body does a musical instrument function prosthetically?

To answer the first question, one might suggest that instruments are not substitutive, in that they do not at first glance obviously make up for something lost or missing, and, as tempting as it may be to construe musical instruments and their attendant technologies as magnifying (adolescent dreams of rock stardom and the high volume levels of most rock concerts notwithstanding), they are perhaps best seen (as DeNora's concept of music itself suggests) as extensive. In such a case, the instruments musicians use to create music are more than mere "tools of the trade," as the music they create implies (for DeNora) the positive quality of enhancing everyday life.

As for the second question, the most immediately obvious answer seems to be that instruments act as extensions of the activity of singing. If one were to think of an alternative history of musicking in which the technology for inventing musical instruments was missing, the only means available for creating music might then be the human voice.

### **3.4.1 The instrument as extension of the performer**

The vibraphone invites overplaying almost by its very nature. The trumpet, by comparison, is at the opposite extreme: The visceral feeling of producing the tone is part and parcel of playing it. Each note counts. Moreover, horn<sup>110</sup> playing inculcates a natural instinct for restrained phrasing, if only because of the player's need to catch a breath of air.

As Gioia (1998:103) suggests above, the expressive qualities of musical instruments are connected to their physical construction. In discussing the vibraphonist Cal Tjader's uncharacteristically horn-like phrasing and

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<sup>110</sup> In jazz, the term "horn" refers to blown instruments (trumpets, trombones, and saxophones) as opposed to its WEAM usage as a shorthand for the French horn.

introspective playing style, Gioia makes in the author's opinion a false move of hasty over-generalization. Unfortunately, for every exemplar of restraint (he makes reference to the trumpet styles of Miles Davis and Bix Beiderbecke), there are the counter-examples of such emblems of machismo bravura as Dizzy Gillespie, Maynard Ferguson, and Arturo Sandoval, and many others, whose technical ability sometimes comes to the fore to the detriment of purely melodic concerns.

The mythology (or urban legend) in some jazz circles around Miles's embracing of the cool aesthetic because "he didn't have the chops"<sup>111</sup> to play bebop" is belied by his fluent bop-inflected solo on the 1953 recording of the pianist Bud Powell's composition *Tempus Fugit*. The piece is played around m.m. = 290 (hence the pun implicit in the title), and Miles negotiates the tempo without apparently raising a sweat or sounding rushed. Gioia continues (1998:103):

Little wonder that some of jazz's most concise melodists, from Bix to Miles, have been trumpeters. The trumpet has an almost built-in barrier to merely facile playing; instead it, more than the percussion or even string instruments, invites a centered Zen-like concentration on the melody line.

Gioia's suggestion, that the instruments he mentions have characteristic properties affecting how they are played, falls into a formalist trap of ascribing inherent qualities to inanimate objects. After all, it is only once the performer breathes life into an instrument that it produces sound in the first place. There is nothing in the attributes of the vibraphone or the trumpet itself that allows for this generalization, and Gioia appears to be confusing the canon of accepted styles with the innate qualities of the instruments themselves.

Naomi Cumming, whose early demise should be considered as a major loss to the field of musicology, wrote *The Sonic Self* first and foremost

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<sup>111</sup> Jazz slang for technical facility and strength.

from a performer's viewpoint. In this masterpiece, she systematically applies Peirce's theory of the sign to her experience as a classical violinist while emphasizing the pragmatic nature of his philosophy (2000:29):

In Peirce's terms, the material qualities of a sound are the sign vehicle, by which it comes to represent (to be a 'representamen,' or 'sign.')

The vocal grain it achieves is its 'object,' what it stands for. A third element is, however, required to account for this counter-factual relationship. Without interpretation, no material sound produced by a non-human instrument can be heard as a voice. In the third logical position there is, then, an 'interpretant.' It acknowledges two things: the conventions that allow a violin's sound to be heard as vocal in some contexts, and the act of recognition in a particular moment of listening.

Cumming is here theorizing the operation of a metaphorical strategy, which allows humans to speak of the "voice" of a performer, who is in fact *not singing*. Although one might take exception to her theorizing of non-vocal instruments as non-human, this distinction exposes the metaphorical operations that allow for the transposition of vocal qualities to instruments that do not possess them, and how this metaphorisation is fuelled in general by convention. Although Cumming's discussion mostly revolves around the field of WEAM and the classical violin, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that such metaphorical constructions abound in other types of musical activities. The operation of such metaphors makes it possible, for instance, for Ake (2002:71) to describe the playing of Ornette Coleman as "speechlike":

The horn players' inclination to "scoop" or bend notes, sharpen or flatten pitches, serves to accentuate the rhetorical quality of their phrasing. Indeed, Coleman and Cherry enact a remarkably speechlike instrumental style, comparable in this respect only to such great pre-bop players as Johnny Dunn, Sidney Bechet, and the great Ellington "growlers," Bubber Miley, Joe Nanton, and Cootie Williams.

Ake's connection between intonation and rhetoric is a vital one. Whether it is justifiable is obviously open to debate, a debate which hinges on the extent to which a purely musical concept like intonation (how in tune or not a note may be) can be used to describe a different type of performance, that is to say, rhetoric, which is a type of linguistic procedure whose



primary purpose is to persuade. Such a strategy, the author suggests, is possible because in this instance Coleman and Cherry's "playing" with the concept of pitch as a stable entity is as much performance as is the improvised speech of an impassioned philosopher in ancient Greek times. They are making a statement about who they are; they are, in Monson's terms, "saying something."

By making a metaphorical link between rhetoric and Coleman's sound, Ake is exposing another quiet protest, a questioning of the hegemony of equal temperament, which says things have to be so. The exaggerated violence of the reactions both for and against Coleman's music is an ironic tribute to, and acknowledgement of, his willingness to examine the roots of his own music.

A consequence of the discursive implications of the poststructuralist project is to realize that Coleman's detractors ("He's out of tune", "He doesn't know alto saxophone is a transposing instrument", and so on) are as much bound up in the unexamined ideology of their position<sup>112</sup> as are his supporters. The naysayers subscribe to the notion of the permanence of a hidden and historically contingent phase of music called tonality (for McClary, both underpinning and underpinned by the values of the Enlightenment). These values have been demonstrated by the history of the twentieth century to lead to the perfection and refinement of a staggering range of bestial practices that have seriously called into question these "pure" moral standards.<sup>113</sup>

Why this is important is because the tonal phase in music, aided and

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<sup>112</sup> This is where McClary's hegemony of tonality operates in jazz. Conservatories train jazz musicians to play in tune and to have disdain for those who don't. In Indian music, which has a vastly superior concept of intonation and its expressive capabilities, an explicit connection is made between intonation and affect, which Westerners mostly seem incapable of perceiving.

<sup>113</sup> Science, rationalism, and Fordism are a lethal combination, to which the victims of ethnic cleansing and collateral damage (and other such twentieth century euphemisms) bear mute witness.

abetted by the ideological operations of the work-concept, has become normative for other cultures and periods. Merely subscribing to a technocratic view of Coleman's music as "out of tune" robs it of its most vital component, its quality of human embodiment (and perhaps fallibility) and what it means to say in raising the question: "What if things were otherwise?" This debate may be fated to arrive at one of Lyotard's implacable *differends*, wherein the terms of engagement are so removed from one another that negotiation is literally "out of the question," and declaring a truce in the ideological war on language is "ruled out."<sup>114</sup> As an African American musician growing up in a racially divided country, Coleman as a signify(er), a human sign,<sup>115</sup> may be understood as "playing with" intonation to bear witness to his understanding of the contradictions of such a position.

### 3.4.2 The erasure of the body

Korsyn's deconstructive strategy reveals one of the paradoxical aspects of humankind's recently acquired ability to record and store information, that in so doing it has the potential *to erase the body*. As he claims (2003:70):

The relatively recent phenomenon of recorded music, which by now is the normative listening experience for most people, offers not only the possibility of idealizing music by denying its corporeal origins but also the opposite possibility of recognizing the physical and material aspects of music through this very absence.

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<sup>114</sup> It stands to reason that controlling (patrolling) of language is a very basic and persuasive exercise of power. 1984's propagandized world is censored by Big Brother via radio and television, a world in which Orwell's State-sanctioned *newspeak* (*doubleplusungood*, *thoughtcrime*, and so on) strip language of any communicative value.

<sup>115</sup> "There is no element whatever of man's consciousness which has not something corresponding to it in the word; and the reason is obvious. It is that the word or sign which man uses *is* the man himself. For, as the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign: so, that every thought is an *external* sign, proves that man is an external sign. Thus my language is the sum total of myself: for the man is the thought" (Peirce 1955:249).

As much as the nature of the technology (whether analogue or digital) used to produce LP records and CDs allows for this convenience, at the same time it is inevitable that this privilege of being able to revisit a musical event at will has a price. The price is that recording information at the same time transforms it, according to the properties of the materials used to store the information. The consequence of the physical limitations of the hardware used inevitably will result in a qualitative difference between the sound of a live concert and a CD recording of the same event.

This is the most basic level on which embodiment is compressed, on the level of physical sound itself. The experience of being captivated (or captive) at an impossibly loud concert is substantially otherwise from being able to control the volume of the same recording played back on one's hi-fi system at home. A further level on which embodiment is suppressed by recordings is an apparently very obvious (and therefore trivial) one. Audio recordings alone contain no visual clues as to how the performance looks. Why this is significant is because this suppresses the entire paralinguistic network of gesture, movement, and facial expressions, in short, the sign language of performance.

Listening for the first time to a CD of Keith Jarrett playing jazz, for instance, one is immediately aware of his tendency to break into a strangulated hoarse singing at moments of great emotional intensity in the music. To put it mildly, it is at times rather intrusive at first listening, rather like eavesdropping on someone's transports of *jouissance*. This Barthean term for the pleasure of the text carries within it a strong erotic implication: what the author suggests here is that this disembodiment idea of Korsyn's bears with it as well the possibility of disengendering the music at the same time.

Watching a DVD of the same performance, one understands, in the restoration of visual cues, more of the meaning of the performance than an audio recording can be expected to supply. The interactive nature of this

format allows for random access (just like the CD does) but other possibilities become available, such as being able to slow the film down, play it faster, and so on. In the case of a Jarrett performance, the DVD restores the ecstatic elements to the context; Jarrett dances, plays the piano from angles (with his entire body thrust virtually under the keyboard at times) that would horrify the most liberal-minded of classical piano teachers, and uses that oddly distorted voice to breathe life and shape into the phrases he is executing, as if, instead of playing the piano, he is playing a strange piano/voice hybrid. In so doing, Jarrett here makes explicit the thought pattern that suggests that the concept of phrasing on any instrument is a matter of managing breath.

Obviously this is a requirement for singers and instrumentalists who use their breath directly to create and manage sound. When the instrument is not made to speak by breath directly, as in percussion instruments and strings, the performer has to create the space through imaginary breath. Simply put, a singer singing a continuous note will sooner or later run out of breath, whereas someone bowing a violin to produce a similar sustained tone is not subject to the same physical limit, and could in theory sustain the note for a comparably much long period of time.

What is missing from the DVD (although on the informational level a qualitatively richer experience for the consumer) is what Reason has theorized (section 3.4) as the prevalent "vibe" of a live performance, the different experience of being there and being part of the temporary community around the event.

### **3.4.3 Musicking, physicality, and the mind-body problem**

The author has suggested that musicking may be seen as a form of engagement with a voice or an instrument, an engagement that takes place initially on the physical level. However, this is not a simple matter of common sense observation of what takes place during performance, but

as Geertz has argued (section 3.3), a matter of interpretation. The fundamental problem with the idea of musical works is the accompanying tendency to privilege the object of contemplation over the subject(s) that create such music, be they composers or performers.

Bowman, in discussing Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception, suggests that this may offer an alternative to the perennial mind-body problem of Western philosophy as follows (1998:260):

Like empiricism, rationalism assumes the existence of a world objectively there, behind the screen of appearances it is reason's job to transcend. So both rationalism and empiricism assume the existence of a gap in need of bridging, a sharp division between consciousness and what it is conscious 'of.' But for Merleau-Ponty, there is no troublesome divide between apparent and real, between the phenomenon and the 'thing-in-itself,' between the perceived and the known. For Merleau-Ponty, things are as they appear.

As Merleau-Ponty states in his essay *Eye and Mind*:<sup>116</sup>

Visible and mobile my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex or prolongation of itself; they are incrustated onto its flesh, they are part of its full definition. The world is made of the same stuff as the body.

What Merleau-Ponty is claiming is a fundamental antidote to the reifying tendencies of some orthodox musicology, which, in combination with the structuralist focus on pseudo-science, aims to erase the notion of subjectivity from the record-books of historical interpretation. Performers live in a real world in which they interact (and solve problems) on the most basic physical level, a level that a philosophical approach like structuralism tries very hard to suppress and marginalize. Merleau-Ponty's idea of the body-subject<sup>117</sup> is crucial to an inductive understanding of the performer's

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<sup>116</sup> Cited in Crowther (1993:4).

<sup>117</sup> As Bernasconi states (2005), for Merleau-Ponty: "The body is neither subject, nor object, but an ambiguous mode of existence that infects all knowledge."

world, in that it proceeds from the body outward into the world at large, rather than imposing philosophical (and often totalizing and essentializing) approaches from the outside inwards. As Bernasconi suggests (2005):

Merleau-Ponty's constant target was the subject-object dualism of Cartesianism, which arguably still continued to dominate Sartre's existentialism. Drawing on Husserl's notion of a pre-predicative intentionality and on Heidegger's exposition of human existence as being-in-the-world, Merleau-Ponty developed a description of the world as the field of experience in which I find myself.

The Australian flute player Jim Denley (in Bailey 1992:108) proposes an explicit link between improvisation and physicality in stating:

For the improviser the physicality of producing sound (the hardware) is not a separate activity to the thoughts and ideas in music (software). In the act of creation there is a constant loop between the hierarchy of factors involved in the process. My lungs, lips, fingers, voice box and their working together with the potentials of sound are dialoguing with other levels which I might call mind and perception. The thoughts and decisions are sustained and modified by my physical potentials and vice versa but as soon as I try and define these separately I run into problems. It is a meaningless enterprise for it is the very entanglement of levels of perception, awareness and physicality that makes improvisation.

In much the same way as Sundin's comments on aesthetics suggest a relationship between subject and subject (section 3.3), Crowther (1993) bases much of his aesthetic theory on the notion of the intersubjective relationship between the work of art and its perceiver. In so doing, Crowther explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to Merleau-Ponty's ideas.

Considering Merleau-Ponty's relevance to Soundpainting, the notion of a research methodology that aims to deal with the problem of embodiment has to consider the advantages as well as the problems (philosophical and musical) of situating music in the performers' bodies. An approach that encompasses the notion of embodiment is not self-evident or tautological; it represents a shift away from text-based musicology and its hegemony over some current issues in the field. To attempt to incorporate (no pun

intended) such concepts as:

- Musicians touch instruments
- Read a score (or not)
- Watch a conductor
- Hear (and listen to) each other
- Work in a given genre, environment (social factors).

into this dissertation seems fairly relevant. The activity of musicking tends, in this view, to encapsulate notions of embodiment, paralanguage, kinesics, and proxemics as pragmatic consequences of viewing musicking as process rather than product. These ideas may be seen as starting points for an analysis of improvised musicking, in which the work-concept is (for the most part) redundant, and which (because it is improvisational in character) may encompass a wide range of language-games in its negotiation of contingency and shared meaning.