

Chapter 5 : Creativity, collaboration, and communication in improvised music

5.1 Five characteristics of group improvisation

R. Keith Sawyer, a leading scholar in the field of creativity research, defines five characteristics of group improvisation as follows (2003:102-114):

- An emphasis on creative process rather than creative product
- An emphasis on creative processes that are problem-finding rather than problem-solving
- The comparison of art to everyday language use
- The importance of collaboration, with fellow artists and with the audience
- The role of the ready-made, or cliché, in art.

In chapter 2, the author's aim was to draw dividing lines between viewpoints that emphasize process over product. To support this argument, the author drew distinctions between the improvised, contingent, and momentary elements of musicking as process, as opposed to the emphasis being placed on the notion of the musical work as to some extent existing outside time. This is not to suggest that a work, as fixed through musical notation, somehow exhibits less creativity than its improvised counterpart, but that the work and event distinction is a useful and necessary one in the understanding of the particular problems raised by improvised music in general, and Thompson's Soundpainting in particular.

The author has suggested that this conception raises certain issues with regard to defining the difference between composition and improvisation. When Thompson defines Soundpainting as "live composition," for instance, professors of composition insist that this definition is a contradiction in terms (section 4.1.4.2). In their view, according to

Thompson, composition has to be repeatable, editable, and in other ways subject to revision after the fact, characteristics that are absent from spontaneously created music by definition.¹⁷⁹ Such criticisms, in the author's view, clearly depend on the distinction between music as work and music as event. One might also consider this distinction as one between written language and speech, in which composition is analogous to writing, and improvisation to conversation.

Sawyer's emphasis on the problem-finding element within improvisation (as opposed to problem-solving) rests on a conception of unscripted improvisation that brings to the fore its collaborative and emergent qualities (2003:105):

An improvisational performance is also, of necessity, a problem-finding process—albeit a collective one. For comparison, consider a traditional theater performance, perhaps a play by Shakespeare, where the actors start with a script, with memories of past performances by other companies—the long tradition of Shakespearean theater. This type of performance is at the problem-solving end of the spectrum, because the 'problem' is well-specified: to create a successful performance of the script. In contrast, in improvisation the actors have to create everything: the dramatic elements emerge from the dialogue, in a problem-finding process that is collaborative and emergent.

Although Sawyer in this case is referring to scripted and unscripted performances in the theatrical context, this distinction has similar resonance with such performances in music. A typical instance of a scripted musical performance is a symphony concert (in which the musical score stands for “the script”), while the free jazz of the 1960s lies at the other end of the spectrum, in which the performance is, to all intents and purposes, unscripted.

Emergence is an important concept for Sawyer's theory of improvisation. As defined by Hopper in the context of the linguistic sign, an emergent

¹⁷⁹ The author returns to this definition of Soundpainting as "live composition" in section 6.2.2.

grammar has the following characteristics (1998:157, emphasis in original):

Signs whose form and meaning are subject to communicative acts are held to have a structure described as emergent. This means that a sign's form (that is, both its external aspect and the use to which it is put) is provisional, and is dependent, not on an essential inner core of constant meaning, but on previous uses and contexts in which the current speaker has used or heard it. Grammar has the same provisional and context-dependent property as the sign. An approach to grammar that adopts this postulate is referred to as *Emergent Grammar*.

Hopper's thinking on emergence has clear implications for improvised music in general, and Soundpainting in particular. These are brought to the fore when he examines the relationship between emergence and structure, in which he characterizes structure as fluid and open (*ibid.*):

The notion of emergence is a pregnant one. It is not intended to be a standard sense of origins or genealogy, not an historical question of how the grammar came to be the way it is, but instead, it takes the adjective emergent seriously as a continual movement toward structure, a postponement or deferral of structure, a view of structure as always provisional, always negotiable, and in fact, as epiphenomenal, that is, as an effect rather than a cause.

In this sense, the jazz musician's development of a vocabulary of individual utterances in the context of a repertoire (standards or the blues, for example) tends to predispose him or her toward a view of these elements of the repertoire as fixed and eternal, rather like the work-concept in WEAM. In fact, much of the manner in which musicians like Thompson and the Art Ensemble of Chicago are playing (in the Barthean sense) with historical forms is deliberately ironic, thereby interrogating precisely the fixed nature of these forms. Furthermore, the ludic element of such encounters with the repertoire highlights a dialectical play between rhetoric and structure, as expressed by Clifton (1983:211):

This dialectic between rhetoric and structure, freedom and control, outside and inside, can be further explored by considering the way in which the members of this dialectic play with each other. This has already been suggested to some extent with the realization that

rhetoric can frequently have pretensions about being structural. The rhetorical gesture wears a mask, so to speak, and momentarily assumes the role of structure. Structure, meanwhile, allows this to happen.

Although Clifton is describing this dialectic with reference to sonata form in WEAM, there seem to be convincing parallels between the nature of this game and the jazz language-game. In neither case is structure as fixed and immobile as one might assume at first listening, and there is a degree of room for the negotiation of individual subjectivity, whether literally or figuratively.¹⁸⁰ The author has suggested that the tactics of signifyin(g) and timbral play in turn point to a dialectic between the individual musician and the group, and it seems clear that these have a rhetorical function.¹⁸¹

Sawyer's third defining characteristic of improvisation, regarding the comparison between art and everyday language use, is based on his observations regarding improvising actors and jazz musicians, in which both sets of participants (2003:107) "compare their ensemble interaction to conversation." Drawing on the theories of Dewey and Collingwood regarding the connections between art and language, Sawyer qualifies this comparison by suggesting (*ibid.*): "But for both Dewey and Collingwood, art is like language only in a certain sense; it is like language as used in everyday social settings—the *pragmatics*, rather than the *syntax* of language."

In similar fashion, the author has argued (2.1.6.2) that certain types of improvised music exhibit similarities with Wittgenstein's pragmatic notion

¹⁸⁰ It is noteworthy that analysis refers to musical themes in sonata form as "first subject," "second subject," and so on. Mithen highlights this anthropomorphism by suggesting: (2006:275): "Even when listening to music made by instruments rather than the human voice, we treat music as a virtual person and attribute to it an emotional state and sometimes a personality and intention. It is also now clear why so much of music is structured as if a conversation is taking place within the music itself, and why we often intuitively feel that a piece of music should have a meaning attached to it, even if we cannot grasp what that might be."

¹⁸¹ Gary Burton (Mattingly, 1991) explicitly links his game plan for improvisation with conversation.

of the language-game, as manifested in his closely related idea of language as use.¹⁸² For Silverstein (in his introduction to Sawyer's study of the creative and emergent properties of conversation) Sawyer's strategy is to extend the concept of pragmatics into the metapragmatic realm, in which signs as mediators for interaction play a central role (2003b:ix):

Among humans, of course, bodies do more than move through spacetime in the cause-and-effect, or mechanically 'pragmatic' world of physical and biological reality. Human bodies create signs—for example, speech phonations that constitute utterances with well-formed grammatical properties; movements of bodily extremities traced in space that constitute gestures; and conventional inscriptions of these that then circulate as interpersonal communicational artifacts in sound, sight, and touch. It is in this realm of signs that problems of emergence and creativity arise, for our actions are not merely mechanically pragmatic, but, as it turns out, 'metapragmatic' as well.

By interpreting the sign as a product of human activity, Silverstein suggests that Sawyer elevates sign-creation to the realm of metapragmatics by situating such activity in the world of social events (*ibid.*):

Through our dynamic and ongoing use of signs in interaction, we signal to each other not only the pragmatic. We signal to each other what kind of social event we (frequently unconsciously) presume has been going on and will have been going on—note the complex anticipatory retrospection!—between or among us in an interval-moment, such that our pragmatic signs—were the presumption intersubjectively in force—might unproblematically be effective among us in moving such an event along.

Everyday conversation, for Sawyer, contains greater and lesser degrees of improvisation, the extent to which improvisation is permitted being both context-dependent (the place and social space in which the conversation

¹⁸² According to this interpretation, one might speak for instance of a style of music like "Dixieland" as being a general case of a language-game, a particular performer's style as being a rather more specific case thereof, and eventually describe a given performance as being a quite specific example of this idea. Some postmodern music juxtaposes elements from different styles in ironic attempts to cross the apparent boundaries between styles, hereby interrogating the role of the canon and the community in limiting the artist's freedom of movement between such boundaries.

takes place) and a function of the perceived social relationship between the participants (as exhibited in the degree of formality or familiarity in the language usage). Conversation, whether relatively formulaic or free, contains the added implication of interaction between participants to manage the direction of the conversation. It might be argued that jazz musicians, who sometimes begin their solos by imitating a musical phrase that the preceding soloist has concluded with, also use this element of turn-taking. In addition to providing continuity from soloist to soloist, this practice suggests a collaborative and conversational emphasis. As Sawyer claims (1999:192): "Everyday conversation is also collaborative, because no single person controls or directs a conversation; instead, the direction of its flow is collectively determined, by all of the participants' contributions."

In his discussion of primate communication, Mithen highlights the musicality of this process by foregrounding the rhythmic and melodic qualities, as well as its dependence on synchronous and turn-taking procedures (2006:120-121):

Finally, a key feature of the gelada and gibbon communication systems is that they are musical in nature, in the sense that they make substantial use of rhythm and melody, and involve synchronization and turn-taking. Again, depending upon how one would wish to define 'musical,' this term could be applied to non-human primate communication systems as a whole.

It is noteworthy that in the field of conversation analysis, as Wennerstrom claims, timing is everything, and this leads to a situation in which the pauses in conversation (the silences) assume an importance equal to the direction and flow of the conversation itself (2001:167):

In particular, conversation analysts have always paid close attention to the timing of talk. One of the most important observations offered in the CA tradition is that there is relatively little silence in conversation. Although it may vary somewhat from culture to culture, even a second's silence may begin to sound like an awkward pause in the context of a lively conversation. Participants are skilled at synchronizing their turns so that, for the most part, one speaker has the floor at a time, with one turn latching on to the next or overlapping

only slightly. Thus, with a strong research focus on the junctures between turns of talk, pause length has always had a high priority as an object of study in this tradition of analysis.

The importance of synchronization and turn-taking for the purpose of communication, as reflected for example in the conversational micro-interactions between two close friends, is writ large in the context of relations between participants in process-related artistic fields like jazz improvisation and improvised theatre. Part of the joy and exhilaration of such improvised performances lies (paradoxically perhaps) in the acknowledgement of the possibility of failure, as Crispell (section 4.2.1.4) has noted in this regard. To safeguard against such failures (such as when an actor "dries"), jazz musicians tend to develop a vocabulary of stock phrases, the kind of phrases that Baker (1987a:43-47) categorizes as public domain whole-tone and diminished patterns respectively. As Sawyer (2003:112) claims:

Ready-mades are even more important in jazz improvisation. Some of the most famous jazz improvisers relied on a large repertoire of stock phrases; one of the most creative improvisers of all time, Charlie Parker, drew on a personal repertoire of 100 motifs, each of them between 4 and 10 notes in length.

Steinel (1995) describes such motifs as "cells," usually four-note groups, which are susceptible to manipulation by means of operations like Retrograde, Inversion, and Retrograde Inversion. Coincidentally perhaps, these are the same procedures used within orthodox serialism, such as that of the Second Vienna School of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern. Sawyer (2001) highlights a potential tension between the acquisition of a personal vocabulary of musical patterns and the need for innovation as follows:

Jazz musicians frequently discuss an internal tension between their own personally developed patterns—called *licks*—and the need to continually innovate at a personal level. Musicians practise and perform the same songs repeatedly, and can often express themselves more effectively when they have a predetermined set of musical ideas available. However, if this process is carried too far, the improvisational nature of the performance is compromised. Jazz

musicians are aware of the tension between the need to develop ideas in advance and the potential for a gradual evolution to patterned rigidity.

For Kenny and Gellrich (2002:118), in speaking of the "spontaneous rhetoric" of improvisation, this storehouse of material is internally constrained with reference to a knowledge base, defined as "the internalization of source materials that are idiomatic to individual improvising cultures."

5.1.1 Creativity myths

Sawyer (2006b:18-27) examines no less than nine commonly held and persistent myths, which seem to contribute to the mystification of the creative process. Terming these "creativity myths," Sawyer traces their historical origins and suggests, ultimately, that these myths unnecessarily complicate what is for him a fairly straightforward and consequently unmysterious process. This conceptualization of the mythic element of creativity is pertinent to the author's discussion of Soundpainting, because it is all too easy to assume that the creative process is ineffable, and therefore resistant to analysis. For Sawyer (2006b:19): "Creativity can be explained without invoking an unconscious muse. Rather than a mysterious unconscious force, the explanation of creativity lies in hard work and everyday mental processes." The author examines four of these myths, which are germane to the examination of Soundpainting as a collaborative exercise in spontaneous musicking.

5.1.1.1 Creativity as a product of the unconscious

As Sawyer claims (2006b:18):

The psychoanalytic conception of creativity has many similarities with the ancient belief in divine madness, because they both emphasized the passive role of the creator's mind. Rather than life breathed from God, the creative inspiration arrives from the unconscious.

Sawyer ascribes the origins of this particular myth to the Romantic era and links it additionally to psychoanalysis. The exploration of the unconscious was one of the key agendas of Surrealism, which sought, through the method of automatism, to bring the hidden operations of dreams and the unconscious into the open. André Breton defined surrealism as follows (in Nadeau 1968:89):

Pure psychic automatism, by which an attempt is made to express, either verbally, in writing or in any other manner, the true functioning of thought. The dictation of thought, in the absence of all control by the reason, excluding any aesthetic or moral preoccupation.

LeBaron (2002) discusses the relationship between Surrealism and improvised music with reference to the postmodern project, and, in emphasizing the fixity of the genre-boundaries within jazz, draws a somewhat scathing response from Lewis (2004a:21):

LeBaron's account, however spurious in its attempted revisionism, draws (perhaps unwittingly) upon a particularly complex stereotype of African-American music-making that treats 'jazz' not as a fluid, contested, dynamic genre with porous borders, but as a body of received, unchanging methods, with hermetically sealed histories, and most crucially, an always-already supply of blacks who, regardless of background, interests or affinities, are genetically bound to the embodiment of the stereotype.

The problem for Lewis appears to be with LeBaron's unproblematically historicized view of jazz. It might be also be argued that the emphasis on creativity as dependent on the operations of the unconscious mind unduly privileges the psychoanalytic element in the creative process. Moreover, in so doing, this myth places creativity beyond the individual's control, turning him or her into a passive receiver of divine or unconscious inspiration, and thereby erases any notion of agency mediated through the creative process. It is plainly not the case that Thompson's engagement with Soundpainting (whether considered as a language or a system) is somehow accidental; on the contrary, he has spent a great deal of conscious effort in designing, and communicating his musical ideas by means of clear and unambiguous signals, which are the very antithesis of

the stereotypical understanding of improvised music as spontaneous and created “in the heat of the moment.”

5.1.1.2 Creativity as representing the inner spirit of the individual

This particular creativity myth has deep-seated ramifications for entrenching the uniqueness and individuality of the composer, and reinforces Attali's pessimistic portrayal of the increasing specialization of the roles of composer and performer (section 5.5.3.2). As Sawyer asserts (2006b:19-20): "In the Renaissance, some scholars began to argue that creative art represented the inner spirit of the individual, and today, most Americans tend to think that creativity is the unique expression of some inner force of the individual."

It might be argued that this emphasis on the individuality of the composer's work reaches its high-water mark in the modernist period, in which the performers are instructed merely to function as passive interpreters of the composer's intentions. This tendency is also bolstered by the cult of the conductor as star, and the need for the assertion of the individual rights of the composer as the sole author of the work, the basis of modern copyright law.

5.1.1.3 Creativity as spontaneity

The author has questioned the commonly held definition of improvisation as “spontaneous” (section 4.1.1). Elliott likewise interrogates the concept of spontaneity in his discussion of Coltrane's landmark 1959 recording of his composition *Giant Steps*. Elliott, while characterizing Coltrane's solo as "one of the most revered improvisations in the history of jazz," foregrounds the extent to which this apparently spontaneous piece is exactly the opposite (1995:169):

The originality, complexity, and speed of Coltrane's music making is astonishing. It is important to realize, however, that this is not

spontaneous music making in the sense of thoughtless, unpremeditated, unstudied or unconscious activity. It is the opposite. Coltrane's solo is thoughtful, premeditated, studied, and conscious. What Coltrane achieves in *Giant Steps* is firmly rooted in Western tonal music and the bebop jazz tradition specifically. Moreover, to musically think-in-action at such a rapid tempo, Coltrane had to develop an extraordinarily high level of musicianship. Indeed, as part of his musical preparation, Coltrane reproduced and studied the improvisations of his predecessors in great detail.

Giant Steps avoids traditional functional harmony by dividing the harmonic structure into three distinct key areas (B major, G major, and Eb major respectively), which are then subjected to the conventional melodic tactics of statement, variation, and repetition. Tirro analyzes the complex structure of *Giant Steps* in some detail while noting its significance to jazz history as follows (1993:47):

No saxophonist after Charlie Parker has been more admired or imitated than John Coltrane, and no Coltrane composition has had a more lasting effect than *Giant Steps*. At a time in the history of jazz when harmonic rhythm was slowing down under increasing pressure from the developments in modal theory and practice, Coltrane recorded his *Giant Steps*, in which the chords fly by relentlessly. Performed at a blistering tempo, the sixteen-measure structure is filled with twenty-six chords, almost two per measure. Further, the chords do not progress in the most familiar patterns (the circle of fifths, I-IV-V-I, I-VI-II-V-I, etc.), and they require harmonic improvisation on nine of the twelve possible root positions—B, C#, D, Eb, F, F# G, A, Bb (all the notes of the twelve-tone scale except the augmented triad C-E-G#).

The premeditated element in Coltrane's solo is the systematic application of permutations of pentatonic fragments (mostly based on the 1 2 3 5 scalar pattern), as well as occasional linear material, which enable him convincingly to negotiate the deceptive resolutions that characterize this composition. What is evident from Elliott's discussion is that Coltrane not only developed a systematic approach to improvising in this instance, but also engaged with the implications of the canon of Western tonal music in general, and the bebop language in particular. It seems beyond doubt that this was an altogether conscious engagement with the complex melodic and harmonic problems of the piece.

5.1.1.4 Creativity as originality

Sawyer's discussion of the originality myth, which presupposes that art must exhibit originality to be classed as truly creative, hinges on the linguistic shift in meaning of the term "original." As he claims (2006b:24):

The idea that art should be original and should break with conventions is less than 200 years old. In the Renaissance, art was considered to be one of two kinds of imitation. The imitation of nature was original imitation; the imitation of other works of art was ordinary imitation. When the term originality was first coined, it meant newness and truth of observation—not the sense of a radical break with convention as we mean today. The most original artists were those who best imitated nature.

Sawyer examines the notorious case of Duchamp's exhibition of a urinal as artwork to illustrate how this tactic problematized the prevailing conception of what could be safely categorized as art, and concludes that creativity may be defined as the search for balance between "imitation and innovation," while foregrounding the role of the conventional and traditional in the creative process (2006b:24-25):

The sociocultural approach shows that all creativity includes elements of innovation and tradition. There is no such thing as a completely novel work. To explain creativity, we have to examine the balance of imitation and innovation, and the key role played by convention and tradition.

Taken together, Sawyer's examination of these common creativity myths exposes a number of underlying assumptions that have conspired to make the process apparently beyond the reach of the average person. According to these myths, artists are unique and special individuals who may or may not be divinely inspired madmen (or women), who spontaneously produce works for the consumption of an ignorant but adoring public. These mythologies share something with Adorno's view of jazz and popular music as "opiates of the masses," to which the only antidote was modernist music. However, the privileging of the individual creator as a result of these mythic constructions tends to overlook the

community's contribution to the realization of what Sawyer characterizes as "group flow."

5.1.2 Individual and group flow

Berliner's monumental *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* is a landmark study concerned with the means by which jazz improvisers acquire and develop their musical vocabularies. His description of the experience of improvisation describes a context in which communication takes place at a very high level (1994:394):

Journeying together through the medium of performance, musicians assist one another in entering an incomparably intense realm of human experience where thrive diverse overlapping domains of sensitivity and knowledge: intellectual and 'intuitive': aesthetic and emotional: physical, sensual, and spiritual: private and communal. Once touched by such experiences, improvisers retain them united as their principal goal, the standard for all performances.

Highlighting the communal nature of the jazz experience, Berliner captures the essence of the group dynamic in the context of improvised jazz. Brilliant as this description may be, it describes jazz improvisation of the highest order, where any deficiencies in technique and vocabulary evaporate in the moment of creation. It seems to the author that what Berliner is describing is the same as what Csikszentmihalyi has theorized as the state of flow, or optimal experience. He defines this concept as follows (1990:71):

We have seen how people describe the common characteristics of optimal experience: a sense that one's skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand, in a goal-directed, rule-bound action system¹⁸³ that provides clear clues as to how one is performing. Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant, or to worry about problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted.

¹⁸³ To what extent it is possible to categorize Soundpainting as a system in accordance with this conception of "a goal-directed, rule-bound action system" forms a central thread of the following chapter.

An activity that produces such experiences is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what they will get out of it, even when it is difficult,¹⁸⁴ or dangerous.

In engaging with any form of musicking, there is certainly an element of risk-taking, requiring the courage of one's convictions as an individual to place oneself in the public arena. The consequences of failure in these circumstances range from embarrassment to termination of employment, and musicians develop tactics for managing risk, as Crispell has remarked (section 4.2.1.4). Once the difficulties have been overcome and the newcomer gains experience (and acceptance by his or her peers), the way is open for ecstatic musical experiences such as Csikszentmihalyi describes.

While not disavowing this depiction of optimal experience, Sawyer highlights a key difference between his thinking and Csikszentmihalyi's concept by suggesting that it describes flow mostly with reference to the individual's experience. Sawyer extends this concept to include the notion of communal optimal experience, which he terms group flow (2003:43, emphasis in original):

When a group is performing at its peak, I refer to the group as being in *group flow*, in the same way that an individual performing at his or her peak often experiences a subjective feeling of flow. The concept of group flow is related to Csikszentmihalyi's flow, but with a critical difference. Csikszentmihalyi intended flow to represent a state of consciousness within the individual performer, whereas group flow is a property of the entire group as a collective unit.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ This point perhaps accounts for why musicians will endure the sometimes trying day-to-day circumstances of orchestral life because of the emotional reward of playing music together under flow circumstances.

¹⁸⁵ This notion seems to be an animating principle in many types of improvisational activity, as Sawyer's work in diverse areas of this activity indicates.

5.2 Collaboration and competition in improvised music

Blom's systematic survey of collaboration (2004) describes the different ways and contexts in which the sharing of musical ideas may take place:

Within a definition of collaboration as cooperation, there are many different, often opposing ways in which a collaborative outcome can be reached. Some collaborations are for the short term and occur between people, often virtual strangers, who come together for a relatively brief duration while many collaborations are 'highly intimate interactions spanning months or years so that personal traits and temperaments take on major importance.'

A collaboration can be fixed (e.g. a company putting on a play), or open-ended (chamber music or jazz groups). Collaborator interactions may be intimate or remote, ranging from constant face-to-face communication, to people who have never met (Gilbert and Sullivan, for example, who rarely met, preferring to conduct their collaboration 'at arms length via intermediaries.'¹⁸⁶

Proceeding from this viewpoint, then, one must classify Soundpainting as somewhat less open-ended than a typical chamber music or jazz group. There seem to be three key differences between a typical Soundpainting event and that of a chamber or jazz group:

- Soundpainting requires the performers to acquire an understanding of the gestures in advance (typically, through a workshop led by an expert)
- Soundpainting in most cases does not require the existence of a score or textual map as a mnemonic device
- Soundpainting is not limited to collaborations between musicians. This is what Thompson means by "universal," not the contingently produced music, but the applicability of the signals to performers from different disciplines.¹⁸⁷

Some amplification of these points may be useful at this stage, as follows:

¹⁸⁶ Blom's enclosed quotations originate from Abra and Abra (1999).

¹⁸⁷ The Soundpainting environment is not limited to musicians, but includes the work of other artists such as actors, dancers and mimes, for instance, and therefore the gestures are of necessity multi-disciplinary or rather trans-disciplinary.

Instance one, in which the signals are acquired in the context of a workshop, suggests the need for a certain amount of verbal explanation on the Soundpainter's part. Although the signals are for the most part intuitive and transparent in performance, a degree of familiarity with their meaning ensures consistent responses from one performance to the next, results that are to some extent independent of the musical competence of the ensemble. This is quite different from free jazz, where the aim and object is to create something altogether new in the moment without recourse to a formalized system of signals.

This instance suggests the operation of a kind of a musical social contract, somewhat different from (but no less binding than) the kind of contract undertaken by musicians in a symphony orchestra vis-à-vis their acceptance of the conductor's authority as the final arbiter of the interpretation of a work.¹⁸⁸ In the case of orchestral musicians, this acceptance of the rules of the game is directly connected to their employment prospects, and moreover, they have been subject to a very elaborate and rigorously controlled rite of passage (by audition) to gain employment in the orchestra in the first place.

Instance two (the absence of a score as mnemonic device) marks the parting of the ways between participants in many Soundpainting events and Blom's classes of open-ended collaboration (as in practitioners of chamber music and jazz respectively). It seems reasonably obvious that the majority of chamber groups, whose intention or *raison d'être* is the interpretation of works from a given historical period, will refer to the score of a given work during rehearsal as a set of instructions for the realization of a performance. Their adherence to the score (or a particular edition thereof) is both a fact of life for them as well as a measure of the authenticity (or otherwise) of the performance. Additionally, however, in

¹⁸⁸ The author is indebted to Richard Vella for this observation.

the case of a performance by a string quartet, for argument's sake, there will be a set of agreed-upon cues initiated by the leader that will serve to indicate changes of tempo, dynamics, entry points, and so on.

As such, then, the signals within Soundpainting are both inter-disciplinary (in that they function within the boundaries of the discipline in question and therefore the <long tone> gesture to a musician means something different to a dancer or an actor) and transdisciplinary (in that through this process of interpretation they are applicable within different artistic disciplines). Thompson has stated his affinity for the Broadway musical as a genre incorporating divergent activities (i.e. those of conductor, musician, actor, dancer, lighting engineer, and so on) and it is perhaps originating from this complex production style that some of the transdisciplinary concerns of Soundpainting emanate. The direct influence of musical theatre as a discipline is evident in, for example, Thompson's *PEXO Symphony*.

Collaborations may be very hierarchical, or be horizontal and more democratic. When a collaboration is homogeneous, each participant performs roughly the same service. Leonard Bernstein made the observation that 'collaboration can get to the point where you are not sure who wrote what.'¹⁸⁹ However, a collaboration of many can often be viewed from the outside, as having been created by one person, and Richard Rodgers notes that many have this perception of the landmark musical *Oklahoma!*

In *Oklahoma!'s* case, as Blom notes, despite the democratic nature of its creation, someone had to take the ultimate responsibility for the finished product. In the realm of the Broadway musical, the staging is an intricate and complex operation, which demands clearly demarcated roles for each participant. Sometimes collaboration allows for a more fluid approach, as Blom indicates with respect to the composer Meredith Monk (enclosed material in Duckworth 1995:367):

Meredith Monk says that the way she and the members of the

¹⁸⁹ Blom's enclosures originate from Abra and Abra (1999).

ensemble work has 'a real give-and-take kind of quality to it.' She likens her vocal collaborative process with ensemble members, to the way a choreographer works with bodies and dance—'I can have people try something and I can hear it. Then I can revise it, hear it, and then revise it again.'

In the bebop period, the competitive element reached its peak in the *machismo* atmosphere of the onstage "cutting contest," in which musicians strove to demonstrate technical superiority over their peers. The tension between this individualistic element and the fact that these performances took place in the context of a group (quartet, quintet, and so on) is to some extent defused in the free jazz era, in which the emphasis deliberately returned to collective collaboration. The author suggested (section 4.1.4.4), following Ake, that this sentiment may have been the animating factor behind Coleman and Cherry's deliberate choice of instruments that deflated the *machismo* image of the jazz musician as virtuoso technician.

Prévost highlights another problem for collaboration across boundaries as follows (1995:34): "Lending music to another form of expression, e.g. film or dance, may lead to a dilution, a deflection or even a deformation of the musician's ideas. This dilemma is at the heart of all creative collaboration." What he is suggesting is that collaboration contains within itself a degree of compromise, which some musicians are willing to engage with for the purposes of the collaborative process, and others not.

5.3 Communication in improvised music

Davidson (1997:209ff), in her discussion of the sociocultural elements of a given performance, brings to her argument the notion of the existence of underlying "sociocultural rules which dictate and give value to the composition and its performance." She mentions such variables as the use of particular scale systems, a model aesthetic, the size of the ensemble, and the "specifically defined inter-performer, inter-audience, and performer-audience behaviours" which she goes on to define as a set of "overriding sociocultural factors which shape the processes and

behaviours brought to the performance context.”

Taken together with Iyer's definition of communication "as process" (section 3.1), that is, "as a collective activity that harmonizes individuals rather than a telegraphic model of communication as mere transmission of literal, verbal meanings," Davidson's "overriding sociocultural factors" may be seen as ritualized according to the performance conventions of the musicking in question, and dependent upon the discourse of non-verbal communication. For Davidson and Correia (2002:243):

The nature of the social mediation that goes on among performer, coperformer, and audience in the construction of the performance and the critical role of the body in shaping this have received very little attention in the psychology research literature. One relevant study is on the singer Annie Lennox. Analysis showed that in addition to the specific movements related directly to the communication of the song—such as coordination signals and expressive gestures about the narrative content of the songs—some other types of movements were used purely for audience display or showing-off purposes. These involved a deliberate attempt to involve audience participation and had nothing to do with the song's narrative.

For Bateson, non-verbal communication is about establishing relationships (2000:418-419):

It seems that the discourse of nonverbal communication is precisely concerned with matters of relationship—love, hate, respect, fear, dependency, etc.—between self and vis-à-vis or between self and environment and that the nature of human society is such that falsification of this discourse rapidly becomes pathogenic.

Hodge and Kress (1988:1), emphasize the necessity of situating semiotics as a discipline within the field of the social:

In its (semiotic) terms, everything in a culture can be seen as a form of communication, organized in ways akin to verbal language, to be understood in a terms of a common set of fundamental rules or principles.

For these authors, the idea of a semiotics divorced from the contingencies of human existence and the practice of everyday communication is flawed.

As they suggest (1998:4):

Each producer of a message relies on its recipients for it to function as intended. This requires recipients to have knowledge of a set of messages on another level, messages that provide specific information about how to read the message.

Bateson, in discussing the schizophrenic patient, examines the conventional diagnosis of "ego weakness" and defines it as a fundamental inability on the patient's part to read signals. He states (2000:194):

I now define ego weakness as trouble in identifying and interpreting those signals which should tell the individual what sort of message a message is, *i. e.*, trouble with the signals of the same logical type as 'This is play.'

Bateson continues his remarks on the schizophrenic as follows (2000:194-195):

He is unable to pick up the more abstract labels which we are most of us able to use conventionally but are most of us unable to identify in the sense that we don't know what told us what sort of message it was. It is as if we somehow made a correct guess. We are actually quite unconscious of receiving these messages which tell us what sort of message we receive.

It is evident that many language-games depend for their success on the correct reading of such meta-messages.¹⁹⁰ For Hodge and Kress, such language-games as joking or the employment of ironic language depend on such "messages about messages" (1988:4):

A simple example is a 'joke,' a statement which might by itself prove offensive to the recipient. The message-maker however relies on the fact that the reader knows that such a statement, perhaps with other signals of 'joke' attached, is 'not to be taken seriously.' The operation of irony is another well-understood case of a second-level message

¹⁹⁰ As Small claims (1998:58): "Bateson calls these messages about messages *metamessages*, and they are important in the understanding of activities such as art and games, which seem on the one hand to be lacking in survival values yet are practised with the utmost seriousness by all members of the human race."

regulating the function of a message.

It is possible that such language-games may indeed be misinterpreted, and as they state (*ibid.*):

The recipient of course may not have knowledge of that level of message—a situation common in cross-cultural interaction—as when a member of an ethnic or racial minority chooses not to treat an offensive statement as 'a joke.'

Small, in an interlude from *Musicking* called "The Language of Gesture," describes the operations of biological communication as follows (1998:57):

Bodily posture and movement, facial expression, and vocal intonation provide in the more complex animals a wide repertory of gestures and responses by means of which information about relationships is given and received. In complex and contradictory creatures like human beings these gestures can deal with a number of complex and contradictory relationships all at once. Gestures from me may indicate to you at one and the same time that I love, and hate, and fear, and am dominated by you, that I should like to strike you but intend to nurture you.¹⁹¹

Small (1998:56) regards these gestures as means of enhancing information that is fundamentally concerned with relationships between creatures (human or otherwise). These relationships are to do with basic issues regarding survival and the kind of information being conveyed:

Bateson's answer is that although the means of communication are extremely varied, what is necessary for an organism to know always concerns a relationship: how the perceiving creature relates to the outside entity that is being perceived, and vice versa. Is it predator, for example, is it prey, is it offspring or a potential mate? And thus should I flee it, or attack it, or nurture it, or mate with it? It is clearly of vital importance for the creature to have the right answers to these questions.

Similarly, Wittgenstein insists (PI §539) that, until the context of a particular picture is established, its meaning is open to various

¹⁹¹ Small (*ibid.*) concludes by saying: "Such complexities of relationship are not unknown in human life, as any watcher of soap opera will testify."

interpretations:

I see a picture which represents a smiling face. What do I do if I take the smile now as a kind one, now as malicious? Don't I often imagine it with a spatial or temporal context which is one either of kindness or malice? Thus I might supply the picture with the fancy that the smiler was smiling down on a child at play, or again on the suffering of an enemy.

The picture of the smiling face in this case is rendered meaningful not only by the spatio-temporal circumstances but also by what is going on beyond the picture-frame, and what kind of relationship is thereby brought into focus. This has a clear bearing on musical performance contexts, in which, as Davidson (1997) and Reason (2004) have argued, there are a complex set of non-verbal signals that serve to contextualize the individual's status within the continuum of individual-group relations, and to add meaning and value to that which he or she is "saying." Beyond the musical picture-frame of improvised music, so to speak, bodily signals and gestures may be seen as conveying as much information as is contained in the music itself.

5.3.1 Shannon's theory of communication

Claude Shannon, considered as one of the pioneers of communication theory, laid the groundwork for a so-called mathematical model of communication in a 1948 technical paper. Shannon's main concern, in the infancy of digital technology, was to design a relatively error-free system for long-range telecommunications. In this regard, Shannon was not particularly interested in the human, or linguistic, element, and based his work on signal theory within digital electronics. The significant points about Shannon's theoretical model, for the purposes of this study, are that his objective was to eliminate as far as possible noise from the system, and that, because he was concerned solely with uninterpreted data (pure information), it is a depiction of a uni-directional system, in which no room is considered for feedback.

Feedback is defined by the father of **cybernetics**, Norbert Wiener, as

follows (1966:55): "In its simplest form the feedback principle means that a behaviour is tested with reference to its result and success or failure of this result influences the future behaviour." Wiener's definition of this principle lends itself well to a model of Soundpainting as a communication system in which the responses of the participants have an effect on the Soundpainter's actions. The definition of cybernetics as a study of regulating mechanisms within biology and engineering can likewise plausibly be mapped onto orthodox conducting as regards the conductor's primary functions: regulating the musical flow of the performance and acting as the interpreter of the composer's intentions. It is noteworthy to consider that Thompson himself prefers to conceive of Soundpainting as a language rather than a system; the author discusses some implications of this conception in chapter 6.

5.3.2 Cybernetics and the virtual orchestra

During the course of the twentieth century, Norbert Wiener, Gregory Bateson and others (such as Ashby and Vygotsky) developed a body of work in the area of systems theory, known as cybernetics. In cybernetics, the area of inquiry is with the mechanisms of regulation in all manner of self-organizing systems via such notions as feedback and the role of the "steersman," from which term is derived the name of this field of study. It seems plausible to suggest that cybernetics provides a systems model for musical organizations, from the symphony orchestra to the improvising ensemble (whether free or organized, like Soundpainting). Under the aegis of systems theory fall such musical experiments as Nancarrow's compositions for player pianos, Antheil's *Ballet Mécanique* (1927), and McLurkin (2002) and Miranda's work (2003) with robotic orchestras, as documented in Sawyer (2006b:102-104).

In discussing the latter two experiments, Sawyer refers to the theory of group intelligence known as distributed cognition, in which musical decisions are negotiated collectively using artificial intelligence models.

Describing McLurkin's experiment at MIT's Artificial Intelligence Lab, Sawyer defines this as a case of distributed cognition, as follows (2006b:103):

The robots worked together to make collective decisions about how to split a song into parts, so that each robot would know which part to play on its sound chip. This simulated orchestra didn't need a conductor or an arranger to play together; that would have been centralized cognition, and McLurkin's orchestra was a classic example of distributed cognition.

In cybernetic terms, this is likewise a case of a self-regulating system, with the control element distributed among the participants, rather than centralized in the figure of the conductor, as in the orthodox symphony orchestra. In describing Miranda's 2003 experiment at Sony's Computer Lab in Paris, Sawyer notes how, in this case, the virtual orchestra (consisting of ten "performers") was programmed to listen and respond to the melodic sequences created without a score to follow (2006b:103-104):

But rather than perform an existing score, Miranda used the theories of distributed cognition to have them collectively create their own original score. Each player was programmed to be able to generate a simple sequence of musical notes. But more important, each player was programmed to listen to the other players, to evaluate their novel sequences, and to imitate some of them with variations. Miranda then left his virtual orchestra to 'rehearse' for a few days; when he came back, the orchestra had produced haunting melodic streams. This was collaborative, distributed creativity; the melodies were created by a group of 10 virtual players, independent agents that worked together to create.

The element of responsiveness that Miranda's orchestra is programmed to achieve is fairly routine in the context of improvised performance, in which human performers have a greater freedom of choice of responses, which are construed as grammatically appropriate according to the stylistic constraints of the performance genre. As Kenny and Gellrich note (2002:118):

Referents, however, are associated with or specific to a particular performance: the external, culturally supplied forms that assist with the transmission of improvised ideas. These points of departure

include a range of musical and nonmusical (i.e., graphics) stimuli that, whether sounded or not, ultimately become deeply embedded in a musician's internalized creative resources. The musical referents of jazz, for example, are its cyclical, often 32-bar song structures, its chords (and rules that govern treatment of their extensions), and its characteristic rhythmic patterns. Two of the referent's most important functions are its ability to limit improvisational choices according to appropriate guidelines and its role in building perceptual paradigms for listener appreciation.

As these authors further assert (*ibid.*):

In contrast to knowledge bases, which performers are not typically aware of during performance (because they are internalized and automated), referents influence improvisers more directly, providing the formal and musical material unique to each improvisation. However individual one artist's interpretation of the jazz standard 'Body and Soul' may be, for example, it is still likely to share many similarities with another artist's version, thereby providing a perceptual degree of similarity for listeners. The same cannot be said for each artist's knowledge base, which may be as unique as each musician's experiences and personalities.

The distinction that these authors are proposing, that is to say, between the musician's individual knowledge base and the more socioculturally conditioned set of referents, is a useful one for Soundpainting, as it maintains a division between the psychological acquisition of idiosyncratic language and the social context through which such individual utterances are mediated: in short, between the speaking subject and the communal sociolinguistic space in which the subject may be said to speak.

Considering the ubiquity of music in contemporary culture, DeNora's definition of what she terms "musically configured space" (2003:119) reveals the element of control implicit in such musical activity:

Music—its production and its reception—is inevitably located somewhere. That 'somewhere'—musically configured space—is where we can begin to situate music as a technology of 'control.'

This 'somewhere' may exist in reality, as in a live performance, or in a relatively more mediatized context, such as the recording studio, radio, the Internet, or television. As a consequence of this mediatization, it might be necessary likewise to theorize the possibility of a 'virtual control,' one in

which the setting of boundaries takes place in an invisibly policed space. The question now arises: in the case of live performance, who is "in charge" of this musically configured space? In other words, how is music negotiated within this 'somewhere' to which DeNora is referring? To what extent are the operations of autocracy and democracy apparent, and how are such issues resolved?

To some extent such questions are resolved with reference to Bourdieu's notion of the social space, in which operate the hidden mechanisms of control and distancing (1991:235):

The categories of perception of the social world are essentially the product of the incorporation of the objective structures of the social space. Consequently, they incline agents to accept the social world as it is, to take it for granted, rather than to rebel against it, to put forward opposed and even antagonistic tendencies. The sense of one's place, as the sense of what one can or cannot 'allow oneself,' implies a tacit acceptance of one's position, a sense of limits ('that's not meant for us') or—what amounts to the same thing—a sense of distances, to be marked and maintained, respected, and expected of others.

If it is the case, as argued by both Small (1998) and Ramanna (1998, 2005), that musicking takes place similarly within a defined and circumscribed social space, then within the context of the symphony orchestra, the conductor is the obvious authority figure, who maintains order and respect within the orchestral hierarchy. It is his or her responsibility not only to manage the musical results obtained in the performance, but also to maintain the implicit markers of rank and responsibility within the social organization of the orchestra itself.¹⁹² The conductor's physical separation from the orchestral players (a function of proxemics within the social space of the concert hall) further reinforces his or her position of authority.

¹⁹² This responsibility is often in fact assigned to the orchestra manager, who is in charge of disciplinary matters within the orchestral hierarchy.

To realize a performance within the WEAM tradition, a rigid hierarchical organizational structure is necessary for the symphony orchestra to function properly. In this case, whatever the implications may be for the personal happiness of the participants, "everyone knows their place,"¹⁹³ and, despite the opportunities for unfairness and abuse that this scenario makes possible, it is difficult somehow to imagine things being otherwise. Whatever successful experiments have been carried out with conductorless orchestras, these are very much the exception rather than the rule.¹⁹⁴

5.4 Musically configured space: power and hierarchy

Marc Duby: How do you see the future? Do you see it positively? Do you have any feelings that it could go wrong? Or that things can go wrong, go backwards?

Pauline Oliveros: Well, I think I'm most concerned how things are wrong right now, in this moment. I mean you have, as far as I'm concerned, a division: and on the one side you have those people who are committed to money and power, and on the other side is people who are committed to harmony and balance and the love of humanity. And, you know, what do you choose? Do you choose money and power and a straight line to death and destruction, or do you choose (laughs) humanity, or harmonious relationships, which are not based on money or power, but on love, and love of life?

In any case, the future can go either way.

¹⁹³ With regard to job satisfaction, Seiffter (2001) describes the consequences of this state of affairs: "Paul Judy reports that when Harvard Business School professor J. Richard Hackman studied job attitudes among people working in 13 different job groups, he discovered that symphony orchestra musicians ranked below prison guards in job satisfaction. Further, when asked about their satisfaction with opportunities for career growth, symphony orchestra musicians fared even worse, ranking 9th out of the 13 surveyed job categories. Clearly, although the results of an orchestral performance can be exceptionally uplifting, the means of attaining the results are often anything but uplifting to those whose job it is to achieve them."

¹⁹⁴ Small (1998:85) cites the example of the Persimfans Orchestra in 1920s Soviet Russia as a democratically managed orchestra, which functioned without a conductor. The present-day Orpheus Chamber Orchestra is similarly managed (Seiffter 2001).

(Author's interview, Johannesburg, September 2005)

For Blom, hierarchical collaborations contain implicit power relations (Abra and Abra 1999:285-286):

When a collaboration is heterogeneous, some opinions have priority over others 'with extreme instances becoming virtual tyrannies.' These hierarchical relationships are concerned with power and dominance. When devising the musical *West Side Story*, for example, despite the collaboration of such names as Bernstein, Sondheim and Laurents, 'director/choreographer Jerome Robbins had the final say.'

DeNora's view of musically configured space as reflecting the operations of a technology of control (section 5.3.2) can be theorized in conjunction with Bourdieu's notion of the social space. A relatively prosaic interpretation of these ideas of space is to consider the actual performance spaces in which various musical genres take place. In *Musicking*, for example, Small's thick description of a symphony concert locates the composer, musicians and audience in a Geertzian web of networked relationships.

For Small, "the song remains the same," whatever style of music is under review: following Bateson, Small conceives of musical events as "about" relationships between human beings who proclaim their identity through the temporary community of the group. This proclamation holds, the author suggests, as much for the performers and conductor (as in the WEAM field or the bandleader or Soundpainter, as the case may be), as for the members of the audience. Under such circumstances, issues of leadership, collaboration, and organizational structure come under the spotlight, so to speak.

Kenny and Gellrich, in comparing children's play with the improvised

performance of Miles Davis, as discussed in Smith (1998), find parallels in the relative absence of overt control in each case (2002:128):

A similar relaxation of authoritarian control in improvisation is discussed by Smith (1998), who investigated Miles Davis's creation of a ritualized performance space. Davis's success as a mentor and bandleader was based on similar principles to those exhibited by the children, especially his ability to exploit the semistructured possibilities of group creativity. Just as a lack of predictable control provided a point of focus for the children making up *Snow White*, musicians in Davis's groups were impelled, through Davis's refusal to provide certainty, to engage in a heightened form of group cohesion and creativity.¹⁹⁵

Musicking may take place in a real acoustic space or may be modified *post facto* by means of contemporary recording technologies. It was suggested at the height of Weather Report's powers that the band were using the studio as an additional musician, so important was the deployment of such technologies in the forging of the band's sound. The unique bell-like clusters on Josef Zawinul's *Milky Way*, the opening track of their eponymous debut album, were produced by electronically altering the volume envelope of a grand piano on which Zawinul played widely spaced chords with the sustain pedal held down. Obviously such a piece could not be performed live, and as such represents a product that could only be realized in the recording studio.

This electronic transformation of the timbral characteristics of an acoustic instrument was foreshadowed by composers within the field of *musique concrète* such as Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry¹⁹⁶ as well as Cage

¹⁹⁵ These authors' conclusions with respect to Davis's procedure exhibit a fascinating paradox (*ibid.*): "In the absence of traditional hierarchical (top-down) leadership structures, on the one hand these musicians were freer to actively participate in creative contributions, while on the other they needed to listen and defer to one another's projections more closely than before. Not surprisingly, these interchanges gave rise to a subtle and efficient form of communication that paradoxically focused even greater attention on Davis himself than before, cementing his pivotal role as group mentor and instigator of new ideas."

¹⁹⁶ Henry's re-discovery by contemporary electronic musicians in the trance genre is documented in Taylor (2001:69-71).

and Stockhausen. The tedious and unwieldy procedures in realizing such electronic compositions involved a disproportionately large amount of time spent physically editing magnetic tape.¹⁹⁷

Digital technology, which basically operates on numerical representations of "digitized" sound, drastically reduces such editing time, thereby raising a new and different set of technological problems for the composer in this field. These advances in the transformational ease and power of computers for such manipulations also have served to open up the field of music creation and production to anyone who can afford the asking price of a reasonably powerful computer and its attendant software. This state of affairs (despite its sometimes negative repercussions for live performers) can be seen as a healthy scenario, as it suggests a move in the direction of a democratization of musicking—a move not without its price, as Lucy Green (2001:3) notes:

The relative paucity of music-makers by contrast with the plenitude of music-listeners today is not the result of pure chance. Sound recording and reproduction technology, the expansion of the music industry and mass media into major international concerns, and the Internet have made music ever more accessible, widespread and even unavoidable for the listener. But whilst the music industry and the media have increased music's availability, they have simultaneously dictated norms of performance and composition that result from such high levels of capital investment as to be virtually impossible for amateur musicians to attain.

Green's point regarding the normative role of the music industry and the media is a vital one, but this applies mostly to record companies run under

¹⁹⁷ For example, to lower the pitch of a given sound by an octave the tape is played back at half its original speed, analogously with the laws of physics. Reversing a sound requires playing the tape backwards. Given that some compositions of this period sometimes comprised thousands of such manipulated sounds, it is not surprising that digital technology, which operates on binary data "representing" the sound within a computer and is consequently virtually instantaneous in these operations, has been so quickly and whole-heartedly accepted by the electronic music community. There is debate about the "warmth" (or lack thereof) of digital, especially among fans of analogue recording, valve amplifiers, and vintage synthesizers—in short, "old-fashioned" technology.

the aegis of big business. The democratization of the tools of the recording trade as spearheaded by the rise in availability of such tools as "virtual" instruments on various computer platforms has led to a revolution in the sheer number of recordings by tiny¹⁹⁸ independent companies which do not need a huge budget to market a product designed to be sold at local level, small-scale gigs or made available via the Internet.

Within the field of improvised music performance, the hierarchical structures are somewhat less rigid as compared with those of the orchestra. The nearest equivalent to the symphony orchestra in the jazz genre is the big band, which, in its heyday of the 1930s, generally functioned without a separate conductor. In the big band format, the musicians are also placed in sections, according to their function, as in rhythm section, saxophone section, trumpet section, and so on, but, mostly for economic and logistical reasons, a separate conductor was seldom seen to be necessary. Duke Ellington, for example, would lead his band from the piano and seldom moved from this position.

In Ellington's case, the sheer longevity of his band (and the early pressure on him to acquire arranging skills quickly, on the job) enabled him to write completely idiosyncratically for the individuals within the band. Although Ellington was clearly the bandleader, his ongoing collaboration with Billy Strayhorn sometimes made it difficult for the public to distinguish exactly whose arrangement they were listening to, so thoroughly had their individual styles merged. Duke recognized that the famous "Ellington effect" was a product of the collective skills of the musicians involved in the realization of his goals, and, significantly perhaps, was one of the few bandleaders able to sustain his orchestra in the lean years immediately following World War II.

¹⁹⁸ Many of these are one-man operations, their products produced in home studios on low budgets.

If Duke Ellington may be said to represent one of the most distinctive voices in innovative, mainstream jazz arranging, from which the relatively free (at times chaotic-sounding) work of Sun Ra is very far removed, they nonetheless share an abiding interest in (and chose to formulate their musical ideas through) the big band format. For Ra, this format was society itself writ small (Szwed, cited in Heble 2000:139, n6):

From the music he had experienced, big bands were living microcosms of government; the big bands best represented society, and harmonious relationships between people. The bands' history showed what could be done. But bands also showed what could go wrong. When soloists were lured away from bands by promoters and turned into 'stars' of small combos it promoted self-sufficiency and destroyed initiative, creating chaos in black communities.

Clearly Ra's wariness at such scurrilous promoters' tactics stems from a belief that the interests of the group are of higher moral import than the needs of the individuals concerned. Both Ellington and Sun also believed in the spiritual power of music: for Ellington, a deeply religious man, his later composing becomes more and more explicitly linked to his Christian faith,¹⁹⁹ whereas, for Sun Ra and his Intergalactic Research Arkestra, in service to his Astro-black mythology, music forms the indispensable accompaniment to his slogan: "Space is the place!"

The fluid organizational structure of a Soundpainting event, while locating the authority for the proceedings in the person of the Soundpainter, both draws from and ironically comments on the taken-for-granted divisions of labour within the more rigid conventions of the orchestra and the big band. Space in this case is an index not only of sheer proximity, but a metaphor for the power relations that vest authority in the conductor or bandleader.

¹⁹⁹ As Graham Lock (1999:3) states: "If Ellington, unlike Ra and Braxton, has not been deemed mad, it is probably because his utopianism has largely been channeled through conventional religious forms, most extensively in the three Sacred Concerts of his later years, examples of an African American tradition of affirmative music that can be traced back to the slaves' spirituals."

5.4.1 Social topology and organizational structure

According to Bourdieu (1991:229-230):

To begin with, sociology presents itself as a *social topology*. Accordingly, the social world can be represented in the form of a (multi-dimensional) space constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution constituted by the set of properties active in the social universe under consideration, that is, able to confer force or power on their possessor in that universe. Agents and groups of agents are thus defined by their *relative positions* in this space.

It seems feasible to conceive of musicking as taking place within an instance of Bourdieu's multi-dimensional space. In improvised music, in which identities are open to negotiation within a proxemic and musical space, an important part of the formation of Bourdieu's "social universe" is conveyed through the organizational structure of the group itself. Collier (section 1.5.3) has explicitly linked the organization of the symphony orchestra with that of a government-approved model of the ideal society, in which everyone is "in step" with the orders emanating from above. For Hodge and Kress, this state of affairs is maintained through the operations of what they define as a logonomic system (1988:4):

A logonomic system is a set of rules prescribing the conditions for production and reception of meanings; which specify who can claim to initiate (produce, communicate) or know (receive, understand) meanings about what topics under what circumstances and with what modalities (how, when, why).

In the context of the turbulent 1960s, jazz, and especially free jazz, subjected such logonomic systems to close scrutiny, and musicking was viewed in some cases as the site of struggle for the right to speak, and thereby to gain control of the signifier. The control of the logonomic system of the symphony orchestra is vested in the conductor, as Collier notes, and this has clear implications for Thompson's method, which, in many ways, playfully interrogates the social and musical dynamics of the concert hall. As Sherwood (1999) suggests, even Thompson's use of the term "orchestra" has subversive implications:

Even his definition of 'orchestra' pushes the limit. The Walter Thompson Orchestra seems to have developed from a jazz/big band group into an extended family of singers, actors, dancers, even painters, who sometimes share the stage with his core of about twenty musicians.

One of the hallmarks of Soundpainting is its flexibility with regard to the size and instrumental combinations of the ensemble. Thompson himself notes (1996:9):

One of the wonderful aspects of Soundpainting is that an ensemble may comprise any number of musicians performing on any combination of instruments. It can be used with more traditional combinations such as SATB choruses, jazz big bands, string quartets, symphony and chamber orchestras, or with an ensemble of 20 guitarists, an ensemble made up of 5 drummers; or an ensemble of 1 guitar, 4 trombones, 1 vocalist, 3 accordions, 1 laptop player, and 6 flutes.

Within the more traditional framework of the jazz language-game, the most obvious organizational structure is that of the big band, which, as noted in the previous section, shares some similarities with that of the orchestra. Bolstered by arranging methods that cater for such combinations of instruments (Pease and Pullig 2001), this "classic" combination tends to be part of the canon-formation of jazz historiography, especially when based on an unproblematically conceived chronological history of performers and their groups. In principle, an improvising ensemble may consist of any number of instruments, combined in any number of ways, as Thompson's remarks about potential Soundpainting combinations illustrate (1996:9).

In mainstream arranging practice, however, as the group increases in size and potential complexity of timbral possibilities, the arranger's skills become increasingly focused on managing the acoustic and timbral space allocated to each instrument so as to allow for the right balance for the instrumental combination at hand. This is musically configured space at its most "scientific," in the sense that following the procedures as outlined will always yield a result in accordance with the physical laws of the harmonic

series, on which in turn is based the system of tonality that is prevalent in mainstream arranging for big band of the common practice period.

Heble (2000) has extensively theorized a concept of dissonance as a trope for the expression of identity in the music of Duke Ellington, wherein Ellington's deployment of this device acts as a form of signifyin(g) against the harmonic blandness of Tin Pan Alley and, by extension, its hijacking of African American music. For Ellington, this quiet but firm protest is couched purely in musical terms; in the later ferment of civil rights in 1960s America, the protest is much rougher-edged and overtly political.

5.4.2 Improvising big bands

The quintessential organizational structure for mainstream jazz large ensembles is the big band format, and, while a comprehensive survey of its complex history is beyond the scope of this discussion, a few salient points regarding this format are deemed of significance. As already noted (section 5.4), the big band is organized into sections (like the orchestra), which principle allows arrangers in the jazz idiom to make use of sectional writing, in which call and response patterns between sections are a typical procedure. Given its size, the big band is an uneconomic proposition at the best of times, although in its heyday (in the swing era of the 1930s) this format represented all that was innovative and was seen as emblematic of American jazz.

The principles of arranging that apply to the big band format have been codified into procedures for managing the wide range of timbral and dynamic possibilities available in this genre, and there is a correspondingly wide range of idiosyncratic contributions from arrangers who are willing to take on the challenge of writing in an idiomatically correct, yet innovative, manner for this format. Once again, a balance needs to be maintained between the arranger's individual style and the accepted conventions of the genre. Such problems have been solved by exemplars of the style like

Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and others in the classic period, while more contemporary stylists like Dave Holland and Maria Schneider have extended the harmonic sophistication and timbral possibilities of this format to reflect a more modern sound.

The possibilities for improvisers in this format are typically fairly limited, at least in its mainstream version, in the sense that it is not designed as a vehicle for extended soloing. A typical mainstream big band arrangement tends to incorporate scope for a few choruses of solo improvisation, because the central focus in this style is generally the interaction between sections, whether antiphonally (call and response) or in the form of the classic "shout" chorus, in which a unison or harmonized phrase is stated by the trumpet, saxophone, and trombone sections together, usually immediately following the last solo.

Although there are many examples of innovative writing for big band emanating from the United States, which may fairly claim to be the originator of this format, it is in Europe that a different big band tradition has developed, in the work of such composers and arrangers as Alexander von Schlippenbach (Globe Unity and the Berlin Contemporary Jazz Orchestra) in Germany, the bassist Barry Guy²⁰⁰ in Britain, and the expatriate American Steve Lacy in France, to name a few.²⁰¹ Although it is impossible to generalize about such a group of artists, they may be said to share an easier willingness to integrate the compositional procedures of the avant-garde into the traditional framework of the big band, which in turn suggests that the genre-boundaries (or linguistic borders) between experimental music and jazz were less clearly defined in Europe than in

²⁰⁰ In England, the bassist/composer Barry Guy founded the London Jazz Composers' Orchestra in the early 1970s "partly as a UK response to the possibilities set in train by Carla Bley and Michael Mantler with the Jazz Composers' Orchestra Association."

(Source: <http://www.shaf.ac.uk/misc/rec/ps/efi/mljco.html>).

²⁰¹ The list is of necessity highly selective, but one should also mention Graham Collier, Mike Westbrook (UK), and Chris McGregor (SA).

the United States. In any case, the danger of falling into such essentialist generalizations is to some extent avoided through the simple fact that many of these bands by the 1980s or so had become truly international, with members of many nationalities taking part.²⁰²

The organizational problems of managing the tension between free improvisation and the historical constraints (and political implications) of the big band style are complex, to say the least.²⁰³ Van Heerden is alert to the hegemonic implications of this problematic history in examining the links between sport and jazz (1996):

The big band resembles a sports team, having to work as a 'team' along with star players (soloists), and having to compete with other bands. Sport in turn encapsulates the corporate ethos of capitalism. It has been suggested that the rise of jazz superstars goes hand-in-hand with the growing absorption of black Americans into American mainstream capitalist society.

Lewis suggests, in defining improvised music as "a social location inhabited by a considerable number of present-day musicians, coming from diverse cultural backgrounds and musical practices, who have chosen to make improvisation a central part of their musical discourse" (2004b:110):

Working as an improviser in the field of improvised music emphasizes not only form and technique but individual life choices as well as cultural, ethnic, and personal location. In performances of improvised music, the possibility of internalizing other value systems is implicit from the start. The focus of musical discourse suddenly shifts from the individual, autonomous creator to the collective—the individual as part of global humanity.

²⁰² For example, the personnel on the eponymous Berlin Contemporary Jazz Orchestra recording includes players from Japan, the United States, and Canada, as well as a nucleus of regulars from both the former German Democratic and Federal Republics. Thompson himself divides his time between the United States and Sweden.

²⁰³ Carla Bley's sprawling "chronotransduction" *Escalator over the Hill* (1971) is a remarkable early instance of potential solutions of this problem.

5.5 Deconstructing noise and silence

"Without music, the prehistoric past is just too quiet to be believed."

(Mithen 2006:4)

The author considers the relationship between sound and silence as a central metaphor in musicking. In this context it may be said that musicians articulate utterances against the background of a musically configured space, in which is enacted and dramatized a continuum of musical and social relationships, between musicians and collaborators in the moment, between musicians and the audience, and finally between musicians and the canon of their respective language-game.

Todd Jenkins, in introducing the first volume of his monumental *Free Jazz and Free Improvisation: An Encyclopaedia*, discusses Thelonious Monk's idiosyncratic contribution to jazz improvisation in terms of Monk's "dramatic" use of silence as follows (2004a:xxxvi):

He made especially good use of silence as a dramatic device.²⁰⁴ His compositions often sounded as if Jackson Pollock had flung black spots of ink onto a blank manuscript page. The stilted, uncomfortably edgy *Evidence* is a prime example; unfamiliar listeners almost need to follow along with the sheet music in order to pinpoint the 'one.'

Jenkins suggests further that Monk's approach to composition, while not cast in an ostensibly "free" mould, presages, in some important respects, the concerns of free improvisation. For Jenkins (2004a:xxxv):

Monk's experience could serve as a virtual blueprint for the patterns that developed in the free community. He had his own personal sense of rhythm, chordal logic, and melodic structure, which not only made him an instantly recognizable player but reduced the number of

²⁰⁴ Heble (section 4.1.4.4) has noted a similar process at work in the music of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, in which the expectations of the audience are frustrated by painfully long silences.

compatible sidemen to the barest handful.

It is important to note how Jenkins emphasizes the "personal" elements of Monk's highly individual style with respect to rhythm, harmony, and note choices. These idiosyncrasies, for Jenkins, contribute toward making Monk's sound "instantly recognizable," a point that, once again, highlights the complex and not unproblematic representation of the individual within the jazz world.

5.5.1 Sound and silence as aesthetic oppositions

There exist many clichés in the recording industry to market a particular style of music, and, for a time, the German-based recording company ECM²⁰⁵ used the slogan: "The most beautiful sound next to silence" as their motto or trademark. This slogan is in keeping with the generally contemplative, low-key nature, which identifies much of their catalogue, and sets up an imaginary tension between "beautiful sound" and "silence" as its *modus operandi*.

The first problem is to identify exactly what is meant by "beautiful" sound, as this clearly invites the listener (or consumer) to partake of a set of aesthetic assumptions on the nature of beauty as provided by the record company. It is worth noting that the ECM catalogue allows for a range of "product"²⁰⁶ from the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Circle (examples of atonality and free jazz) to the generally much "safer" recordings of such artists as Keith Jarrett and Pat Metheny, whose compositions tend to be situated in a relatively tonal environment and exhibit a much more traditional approach to their formal structuring.

²⁰⁵ ECM stands for Editions of Contemporary Music and is the brainchild of Manfred Eicher, formerly a bass-player.

²⁰⁶ Used in the ungrammatical sense of the recording industry's main *raison d'être*, the selling of musical commodities, termed generically "product" and not "products."

Secondly, the opposition of sound to silence does not account for the problem of defining what sound is, and to what extent the organising imperatives and proclivities of composers come into play. Is all the music in the ECM catalogue in this view defined as "beautiful sound"? This argues homogeneity of intent on ECM's part that is belied, as stated earlier, by the range of musics that co-exist (uneasily, one might suspect) within their catalogue. What exactly is meant by "beauty," a term not without its ambiguities,²⁰⁷ and as Umberto Eco argues persuasively in a different context (2004), for many, based on a tradition of Western scholarship and philosophical discussions bound up in a somewhat partisan framework?

John Cage's notorious silent piece of the 1950s, *4' 33"*, for better or worse, is one of WEAM's great conundrums. To compose a piece for piano (or other instruments) in which no actual music is performed is surely evidence of "The Emperor's New Clothes" syndrome, and evidence (to some) of Cage's palpable lunacy. Cage himself discusses an imaginary staging of the piece in a somewhat facetious manner (1966:276):

I have spent many pleasant hours in the woods conducting performances of my silent piece, transcriptions, that is, for an audience of myself, since they were much longer than the popular length which I have had published. At one performance, I passed the first movement by attempting to identify a mushroom which remained successfully unidentified. The second movement was extremely dramatic, beginning with the sounds of a buck and a doe leaping up to within ten feet of my rocky podium. The expressivity of this movement was not only dramatic but unusually sad from my point of view, for the animals were frightened simply because I was a human being. However, they left hesitatingly and fittingly within the structure of the work. The third movement was a return to the theme of the first, but with all those profound, so-well-known alterations of world feeling associated by German tradition with the A-B-A.

Nicholas Cook (1992:11ff.) discusses this anecdote in some detail, pointing out its somewhat tongue-in-cheek tone and its allusion to

²⁰⁷ Witness the inherent contradiction in the title of one of Monk's compositions: *Ugly Beauty*.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's experience at Sleepy Hollow. Cook realizes the serious intent behind the apparent quackery in saying: "Yet the point he is making is a serious one: anything can be heard as music, Cage is saying, if the listener chooses to hear it that way."

5.5.2 Noise, signifyin(g), quotation, and the postmodern

McClary has described (section 4.1.4.4), with regard to the notion of signifyin(g), the manner in which this practice is mediated through the performers' choice of funky and masked sounds. The difference between acquiring what might be termed basic musical skills through imitation (section 4.1.2) and commenting self-reflexively, or ironically, on one's situation within the social order (and thereby, enacting agency) is described by Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., with reference to "the relationship between signifying and quotation," as cited in Metzger (2003:50, n11):

Musical Signifyin(g) is not the same, simply, as the borrowing and restating of pre-existent material, or the performing of variations on pre-existent material,²⁰⁸ or even the simple re-working of pre-existent material. While it is all of these, what makes it different from simple borrowing, varying, or reworking is its transformation of such material by using it rhetorically or figuratively—through troping, in other words—by trifling with, teasing, or censuring it in some way.²⁰⁹

Jenkins views Monk's transformation of standards and their accompanying harmonic structures as a means of recasting them "in his own image," clearly pointing toward the potential establishment of musical identity through such procedures in the process (2004a:xxxv-xxxvi):

Monk would habitually cluster notes together in hurried wads of

²⁰⁸ The persistence of the standard in jazz is a clear instance of Floyd's idea of "variations on pre-existing material," while the contrafact (in which the original melody is transformed beyond recognition while maintaining the formal and harmonic structure) may be seen as a subversive political tactic.

²⁰⁹ Floyd's remarks on troping may be seen as elements of a complex musical language-game. Similarly, Soundpainting may avail itself of any or all of these tactics in the course of performance.

conflicting tones, take long pauses before the next fusillade, or jump up on a whim for one of his peculiar shuffling dances. He was a pioneer in bypassing traditional chord structures, as his recastings of standards like “Just You, Just Me” or “Memories of You” reveal. Monk reshaped musical traditions fearlessly in his own image, using portions of them as scant starting points for wherever his heart and hands led him.

A hallmark of Monk's playing is his use of highly dissonant clusters, which add a noise element to his harmonic approach. In highlighting the problems inherent in mapping such clusters from piano to guitar, Gary Wittner²¹⁰ highlights some of the unique and characteristic elements of Monk's playing style (such as the use of chords that include seconds). It is worth noting that Heble (2000) considers the musical dissonances in the work of composers like Duke Ellington and Sun Ra as metaphorical tropes, which serve to dramatize the tension between private and public selves in a revealing way. This tension is played out, in turn, against the background of the search for an original voice (Heble 2000:92-3):

Interestingly, many theorists of improvisation are explicit in seeing a connection between improvisation and identity, between artistic processes and agency in self-representation. Improvising percussionist Eddie Prévost, for one, states flatly that 'improvised music is a music of self-determination' (quoted in Smith and Dean, 63). Tom Nunn, in his recent book *Wisdom of the Impulse*, similarly suggests that the practice of free improvisation often has as its impetus 'a search for one's own "original voice" where specific restrictions of form, style and technique can be dropped, leaving space for the deeper, more intuitive personality to express itself.'

Ironically, the search for this original voice may involve recourse to quotation of "other" material, which is assimilated into the distinctive personal language of the improviser. The topic of quotation in musicking, and its varied range of tactical purposes, is a vast one, and well beyond

²¹⁰ As Wittner notes in this regard (1999:6): "It should be mentioned here that the guitar, though capable of many possibilities, was at an inherent disadvantage in this project. Monk had a maximum of ten fingers available (not to mention the occasional elbow), while the guitar is limited to six strings. In addition, the use of chords with seconds is a large part of Monk's harmonic vocabulary, and these are not nearly as playable on the guitar. I did, however, include as many of these types of voicings as was practical."

the scope of this current work. However, as it is a key feature of improvised jazz and Soundpainting, the author wishes to highlight a few features of its deployment. As Floyd has suggested, the transformation of existing material in the course of improvisation may have a rhetorical or figurative purpose, in which the improviser "comments" on a salient musical element, or its associations with another genre, often in an ironic or humorous fashion.

For Monson, such rhetorical tactics are evidence of what she terms "intermusicality." This term has obvious links with the poststructuralist notion of intertextuality (section 3.1.2), but for Monson (1996:97), the musical quotation "embodies the conflict between tradition and innovation in jazz performance as well as the larger question of how instrumental music conveys cultural meaning." Drawing from Bakhtin's work in language, Monson defines both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies in intermusical practice as follows (1996:99):

On the centripetal side are forces of centralization, unification, authoritativeness (hegemony), and standardization; on the centrifugal are those of decentralization, disunity, and competition among multiple social voices. Bakhtin sees these forces intersecting in any particular speech utterance, which has aspects that affirm the general category and those that are highly particular to the moment.

In the words of Bakhtin himself (1981:272):

Every utterance participates in the 'unitary language' (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces). Such is the fleeting language of a day, of an epoch, a social group, a genre, a school and so forth. It is possible to give a concrete and detailed account of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language.

Bakhtin's view, while sharing something of the Saussurean notions of *langue* and *parole*, goes further in exposing the tensions and contradictions within such a "fleeting language," and Monson astutely applies Bakhtin's dialogism to the problem of boundaries within music. As

she suggests (1996:99): "The idea that the centripetal and centrifugal are dependent on each other for their mutual definition in ways that vary over time is an important part of the story."

For Bakhtin (1981:293-294):

Language, for the universal consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral or impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from here that one must take the word, and make it one's own.

Jenkins's remarks about Monk (2004a:xxxv-xxxvi) can be seen as appropriate in Bakhtin's sense of "taking the word and making it one's own," if one merely substitutes musical notes for words in the above quotation. Notes and words are different phenomena, admittedly, but Jenkins and Monson are talking about the metaphorical, and not the literal, manifestations of language. Monson defines intermusicality with reference to examples of musical irony or parody from jazz practice, beginning by comparing John Coltrane's version of the show tune *My Favorite Things* with what Gates categorizes as its "vapid original." Gates characterizes Coltrane's version as an instance of formal parody in claiming (1998:909):

Another example of formal parody is to suggest a given structure precisely by failing to coincide with it—that is, to suggest it by dissemblance. Repetition of a form and then inversion of the same through a process of variation is central to jazz. A stellar example is John Coltrane's rendition of "My Favorite Things" compared to Julie Andrews's vapid original.

In considering the various types of transformation ("of form, harmony, and groove") that Coltrane applies to the piece, Monson notes how (1996:107): "In time, Coltrane's versions of the tune became the symbol of an increasingly open direction in improvisational aesthetics and an example frequently cited by musicians and audience members who wished to

emphasize the way in which jazz versions of standards frequently surpass the originals in musical power." Comparisons are odious, as the cliché goes, but it seems slightly unfair to valorize the jazz version by bracketing the purpose and context of its original Broadway counterpart. Monson is alert to this conflict of interests, and states (1996:105): "I wish to emphasize my awareness that the African American versions are not inherently 'better' but relative to a particular aesthetic, which many non-African Americans share as well."²¹¹

Monson perceptively suggests the possibility of Coltrane's interpreting the original in an ironic light in noting (1996:117):

Since the lyrics would have been on the song sheet music the song plugger brought to the quartet, Coltrane would have been well aware of the emphasis on white things in the lyric—girls in white dresses, snowflakes on eyelashes, silver white winters, cream-colored ponies. In 1960—a year of tremendous escalation in the Civil Rights movement and a time of growing politicization of the jazz community—there was certainly the possibility that Coltrane looked upon the lyrics with an ironic eye.²¹²

It is important to note, in this regard, that Korsyn (2003) regards irony as the governing trope of what Attali describes as "composition." The author discusses salient elements of Attali's political economy of music in the following section, while suggesting at this point that Gates's ideas of irony and parody have something in common with Hutcheon's ideas on postmodern architecture, when she claims (1989:12):

²¹¹ Suggesting that Coltrane's version "means" more than the original has the potential, in the author's view, of leading to a problem as expressed by Roger Scruton, who criticizes deconstruction's extreme scepticism with regard to the "meaning" of a text (2005: 40):

'Deconstruction' tells us that there is no such thing as objective meaning, since meaning is the product of interpretation, and interpretation is always misinterpretation. Many critics seize on this global scepticism about meaning as a basis for denying that one work of literature can be more meaningful than another. There is no special reason to teach Shakespeare rather than Donald Duck or Barbara Cartland, when objective meaning attaches to none of them.

²¹² Monson concludes by suggesting (1996:117-118): "Even if he didn't, however, the potential for an ironic interpretation on the part of his listeners and fellow musicians is clearly present."

Postmodernism has called into question the messianic faith of modernism, the faith that technical innovation and purity of form can assure social order, even if that faith disregards the social and aesthetic values of those who must inhabit those modernist buildings. Postmodern architecture is plural and historical, not pluralist and historicist; it neither ignores nor condemns the long heritage of its built culture—including the modern. It uses the reappropriated forms of the past to speak to a society from within the values and history of that society, while still questioning it. It is in this way that its historical representations, however parodic, get politicized.

Hutcheon's view of postmodern architecture (with respect to "the reappropriated forms of the past") has clear bearing on how the individual jazz musician deals with the negotiation of identity in relation both to history and the community. It is clear that Monson sees Coltrane's *My Favorite Things* as speaking to "a society from within the values and history of that society, while still questioning it," in Hutcheon's terms, and, further, whether intentional or not, it is likewise clear that Coltrane's ironic view of the piece has the effect of politicizing it as an outcome of his particular quest for self-expression.

Although the subject matter of Clifton's *Music as Heard* is mostly concerned with the compositional practices of WEAM, his view of the composer as ironist is relevant to the present discussion (1983:269):

By using music to present a flawed and absurd world and the artificiality of standards of conduct, the composer as ironist affirms a belief not only in such a world, but in something higher and less open to ridicule. Irony is possible because the latter belief grounds the former, and the ironical statement emerges in a situation whose form and meaning are opposed.

In the case of Coltrane's "playing with" *My Favorite Things*, the ironic element in his transformation of this piece can be seen as an example of composition, in Attali's sense of the term (see following section). Although the piece is still recognizable, the extent (and radicalism) of Coltrane's transformations suggests the possibility of regarding it as an altogether new composition, to the degree that Coltrane and the quartet as a collective have appropriated it through the tactic of signifyin(g).

With respect to Attali's concept of noise, the author suggests (after Cumming's notion of timbral iconicity) that noise in this instance is made manifest in the quartet version through Coltrane's choice of the soprano saxophone as the incarnation of his personal voice. This is additional to the elements of rhythm, harmony, and form that Monson identifies, and is a crucial element in defining the hallmark sound of the performance. Considering the short space of time separating this 1960 recording from Coltrane's later, completely free and ecstatic recordings, such as *Ascension* (1965), this need for self-expression may be seen as the animating force, and is definitely utopian in Clifton's sense of a belief (1983:269) in "something higher and less open to ridicule."

5.5.3 Noise in the political economy of music

For Attali (2003:138):

Free jazz was the first attempt to express in economic terms the refusal of the cultural alienation inherent in repetition, to use music to build a new culture. What institutional politics, trapped within representation, could not do, what violence, crushed by counterviolence, could not achieve, free jazz tried to bring about through the production of a new music outside of the industry.

The twentieth century (sometimes known as the Age of Information) was to see many great changes in all kinds of communication technology, and, in the field of music, developments and improvements in recording technology led to an ever-increasing availability of new possibilities for composing, manipulating, archiving, and distributing music. The advent of digital technology, whose power and ease of use is unrivalled as compared with the previous analogue-based tape technologies, had the effect of making very sophisticated equipment and procedures available to the general public at comparatively low cost. These and similar developments had a profound and lasting effect on music's place in society. By way of an example, the practice of digital sampling forced a review of existing copyright law, and, in turn, suggested a re-evaluation of

the composer's place in society.

Korsyn's case study (2003:125-130) of Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, identifies four governing tropes as underpinning rhetorical devices in Attali's account of the corresponding stages in the political economy of music. These are:

- Sacrifice (metaphor)
- Representation (metonymy)
- Repetition (synecdoche)
- Composition (irony).

In the context of improvised jazz and Soundpainting, which clearly draw on music from the African American tradition, Gates asserts the ascendancy of the signifyin(g) trope as a means of highlighting notions of agency and individuality. Korsyn's study identifies further tropes with regard to Attali's concept of musicking as a metaphor for the social.

5.5.3.1 Sacrifice (metaphor)

In Korsyn's view, the primary function of music at this stage of Attali's schema is to disguise, or at least suppress, the violent origins of society. Music's state of innocence is reflected in two defining characteristics of this stage of evolution: firstly, that music is not separated from the body, and secondly, that music does not have exchange-value, and therefore cannot be bought or sold.

5.5.3.2 Representation (metonymy)

Korsyn interprets Attali's second stage according to the metonymic trope, in which music acquires exchange-value through a "fall into commodification" (2003:127):

In contrast to the metaphoric fusion of ritual, the governing trope in this new stage is metonymy, the trope of differentiation and reductive part—part relations. The fall into commodification introduced a

division of labor not found previously: the roles of composer and performer were increasingly differentiated; the audience and musicians were separated, not only through the introduction of distinct performance spaces but also through the star system; the body was exiled from music, since 'acrobatics was confined to the circus' (Attali 2003:72).

The consequences of this stage in the evolution of music are devastating, in that the body is banished from the musicking process, making way for an increasing specialization and differentiation of the roles of composer and performer. The star system (combined with the establishment of systems of copyright and ownership) privileges the individual over the collective, and, as Korsyn concludes (*ibid.*): "In this reduction of music to money, the whole is reduced to a part that is related by contiguity, not by metaphoric resemblance."

5.5.3.3 Repetition (synecdoche)

Attali describes the role of music in the network of repetition²¹³ as follows (2003:5):

Fetishized as a commodity, music is illustrative of our entire society: derivatize a social form, repress an activity of the body, specialize its practice, sell it as a spectacle, generalize its consumption, then see to it that it is stockpiled until it loses its meaning.

Attali describes commodity fetishism in terms which resonate with Debord's idea of the society of the spectacle, although Debord is even more scathing about the role of "stardom" in this process (2006:§61):

²¹³ As Corbett observes, with respect to Attali's term "repetition" (1995:220): "Jacques Attali leaves his use of the word 'repetition' ambivalent; it could mean either intertextual repetition (chorus structures, refrains, regular meter) or repetitions of the entire text (regular airplay on the radio or use of the repeat button on CD machines). We should also leave the meaning of repetition unfixed, since the above modes of meaning making do not constitute a system per se. They do not have formal characteristics. They are illusive, polymorphous. The creation of meaning cuts across textual instances (songs, phrases, genres, styles, modes, formats) and masks itself by forming audible regularities."

The individual who in service to the spectacle is placed in stardom's spotlight is in fact the opposite of an individual, and as clearly the enemy of the individual in himself as of the individual in others. In entering the spectacle as a model to be identified with, he renounces all autonomy in order himself to identify with the general law of obedience to the course of things.

In Debord's words are heard the death knell of the notion of the individual as a possibility. The individual participant becomes either the indentured servant of the spectacular order, or is reduced to the role of passive consumer of music as soap opera, an infinitely substitutable and interchangeable vacuum from which no sound escapes. The connections with postmodernism seem obvious, especially in the light of Hutcheon's idea of postmodernism's "conflictual response to literary modernism," defined in these terms (1989:15):

On the one hand, the postmodern obviously was made possible by the self-referentiality, irony, ambiguity, and parody that characterize much of the art of modernism, as well as by its explorations of language and its challenges to the classic realist system of representation; on the other hand, postmodern fiction has come to contest the modernist ideology of artistic autonomy, individual expression,²¹⁴ and the deliberate separation of art from mass culture and everyday life.

Similarly, Radano defines Anthony Braxton's relationship to modernism as emblematic of Gates's "signifying trope," as follows (1993:26):

For Braxton, modernism has had a liberating effect, serving as a means of expressing ideas and impulses central to the African-American tradition. He has affirmed what Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has called the 'signifying trope' of African-American creative expression, moving in multiple dualities that subvert notions of closure, binariness, and determinacy as he creates a multiply referring, contradictory whole.

Throughout his discussion, Korsyn notes Attali's pessimism with regard to the steady decline of music's value in society, from which position it is only redeemed in the final stage of composition.

²¹⁴ There seems an evident resonance with Sawyer's creativity myths as discussed in section 5.1.1.2.

5.5.3.4 Composition (irony)

In its final stage (or network) as composition, music emerges as a form of utopia. This is an ironic narrative network in the sense that music liberates itself not as a return to its origins but exists now on a higher level. Attali's four stages of music as narrative therefore preclude the possibility of a return to the original state of Grace, in which music was uncontaminated by commodification. The ironic or compositional level, into which music is now emerging, puts music at the forefront of human activity as a predictive tool. As Korsyn notes (2003:125-6): "Attali believes not only that music and society are interimplicated but that music can be prophetic, heralding developments that a social formation may later experience."

Despite the book's ambitious scope in strategies and its (sometimes disputed) influence on American musicology, Korsyn is quick to remark that Attali's optimism regarding technology's potential as a helpmeet for human liberation is evidence of a romantic or utopian strain (2003:130): "Attali seems to share McLuhan's faith that electronic media will produce a retribalization: in contrast to the primacy of the visual in print culture, electronic media will recapture the primacy of aurality, producing a global village." What Korsyn's case study exposes is a conceptual framework underlying Attali's view of music as mythic narrative, a framework which in turn accounts for his optimistic view of music as existing without exchange value and functioning as a tool for predicting the future.

Deutscher is more sceptical about technology's role in general in this future retribalization, maintaining that Attali's imaginary primeval community never existed in the first place (2005:63):

The paradox of contemporary times is our belief that technology can restore for us lost immediacy: lost because we live in a complex and separated community. It seems to us that modern technology—air travel, the phone, the electronic chatroom—is able to bring us back together. But we never had the full community some like to think we lost. We were always at a kind of distance (geographical, emotional,

political, generational, cognitive) from each other. And we never accomplish the instantaneity we think is promised by new technologies.

For Leyshon *et al.*, Attali exposes the connection between music and binary oppositions (1998:2-3):

By adopting the term 'noise' as the central problematic for his study, Attali immediately recognizes the social role of music in the establishment and maintenance of binary opposites recognized as fundamental to the social construction of modern consciousness: order and chaos, human and non-human, civilization and barbarism, culture and nature. In the cultural politics of sound, deployment of the term 'noise' to distinguish between music and nonmusic acts as a very powerful ideological signifier. For a sound to be classified as 'noise' places it outside understanding and beyond culture in the realm of pure materiality, a world of sound waves and audio frequencies, pitch, and timbre.

This reading of Attali brings to the forefront music's complicity with the hegemonic tendencies of the social order. In this conspiracy, classifying something as noise is not simply removing an irritant that obscures clear communication, but also serves as a means of marginalizing whatever the dominant ideology regards as a threat to the established order. The distinction between music and non-music functions hegemonically, in the sense that capitalist interests, like recording companies, have the power to dictate what is marketed and what is not. In terms of this distinction, one might say that these companies literally have the power to silence the opposition. It is not accidental, therefore, that "progressive" artists tried to create alternative modes of production, taking upon themselves the tasks of recording, packaging, marketing, and distributing their music.

Musicians like Charles Mingus, Sun Ra, and many others formed independent companies, tactically operating outside the rules of the marketplace in a doomed attempt to wrest control from the majors. By organizing themselves into collectives, many such musicians attempted to work against the competitive and individualistic strain within jazz. For Attali, this battle was fought purely in economic terms (2003:138):

Free jazz, which broke completely with the cautious version of jazz that had gained acceptance, ran into implacable monetary censorship. Certain record companies in the United State (sic) went so far as to adopt the policy of no longer recording black musicians, only whites who played like blacks. Thus free jazz very quickly became a reflection of and a forum for the political struggle of blacks in reaction to their insertion into repetition. Attempts were made, rallying all of the colonized forms of music in opposition to the censorship of the official industry, to establish a parallel industry to produce and promote new music.

This parallel industry, which grew to fruition in the 1960s, harnessed the utopian ideals of community and benevolent anarchism with the noble intention of finding a voice for those who could not, for various reasons, obtain recording contracts with "legitimate" companies. Often these ideals were linked to educational initiatives, especially in the decaying inner cities of America, in which spaces musicians sought to win back their right to self-expression at home, in the communities from which they sprang.

Attali's analysis, in retrospect, over-simplifies the issue somewhat by ignoring the fact that while the free movement was mainly allied to black rights, there were also white collectivists who championed the cause of universal liberation. Thus musicians like Charlie Haden (Liberation Music Orchestra) and Carla Bley (Jazz Composers' Orchestra Association) also formed (and continue to run) orchestras and collectives with strongly politicized overtones, whose music draws on a variety of sources, such as Kurt Weill and the music of the Spanish Civil War.

In conclusion, for Corbett (1995:220):

The infra-semantic level of music is the unnamed basis of Attali's analysis. It is music's political-economic situation in culture. I hesitate to call it a 'function' of music, since it not only indicates music's activity within culture—its effects—but it also suggests the way music is produced, the way that it constitutes its subjects, the way that music can be known about, the manner in which power manifests itself in relation to music—that is, how power is invested in music and how power is wielded on music.

5.5.4 Cage, noise, and the aleatoric

For Clifton (1983:205):

The idea of play as constitutive of reality, or (and this amounts to the same thing) of reality as something which is played, forms the ontological core from which the specific play forms of music may be considered. The general heading of *ludic* embraces all forms of controlled play, including, of course, all situations where the control is disguised.

Cage himself was fascinated by the musical potential of noise, as this 1937 statement indicates (1995:3):

Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at 50 m.p.h. Static between the stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them, not as sound effects, but as musical instruments.

Cage's manifesto regards all sound (including noise and, obviously, silence) as part of a continuum of available possibilities for composers. The futurist credo of Luigi Russolo celebrated noise for its own sake, and he designed a series of noise machines (such as the infamous *intonorumi*)²¹⁵ to celebrate a misplaced faith in modernism. Nowadays, ensembles like Einstürzende Neubauten make use of electric drills, anvils, and other industrial machinery as integral parts of their musical soundscape, and it may be said that any lines of distinction between what is classified as music and non-music have been irretrievably problematized, if not erased altogether.

Cook confirms this viewpoint when he states (1992:11):

From this point of view, composing music becomes not so much a matter of designing musically interesting sounds as such, as of

²¹⁵ Osborn discusses these futurist tactics and inventions in some detail. (Source: <http://www.futurism.org.uk/music.htm>).

creating contexts in which sounds will be heard as musically interesting. This idea is reflected not just in avant-garde art music, but also in the broad and inclusive range of sounds that is to be heard in contemporary pop music; listeners, it seems, will tacitly accept virtually any sound as being potentially musical, provided that it appears in an appropriate context.

Appropriately contextualized sound is the key point, and the author is reminded of Van Heerden's observation (section 4.1) regarding the decontextualization of jazz, wherein he views it as both background music and propaganda. Clearly, there is a vast array of "things" that may be construed as noise factors, and the elimination of the electronic interference of noise was one of the chief objectives in Shannon's theory of communication.

5.5.5 Soundpainting, noise, and the avant-garde

For Robin Kelley (1999):

The term avant-garde obscures as much as it reveals. There have been many self-proclaimed avant-garde movements in music and in the arts more generally, and depending on how one defines avant-garde or the specific historical context in which these movements emerged, one might argue that jazz's unique position as neither "folk" culture nor a product of mainstream Western arts institutions, combined with its ever-changing improvisational character, renders the entire genre avant-garde. Or one could point to the apparent, although largely unacknowledged, role that black improvisational music has had on American and European avant-garde composers such as John Cage (Lewis 1996).²¹⁶ If we simply limited our scope to avant-garde developments in jazz itself, one could easily include the work of Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, or Thelonious Monk at particular historical junctures.

By noting the element of cross-pollination in jazz wherein black improvisational music has been seen to influence avant-garde composers like Cage, Lewis (2004b) ascribes this to the existence of what he terms Afrological and Eurological perspectives. In speaking of these interactions,

²¹⁶ A revised version of this article is published as Lewis (2004b).

Kelley (1999) suggest that these form a crucial element in the forging of an avant-garde community of practice, which Torff (2006:169, emphases in original) describes as follows:

Sociocultural theory pays particular attention to one form of cultural mediation—the efforts made and encouragement given by other people. The growing interest in *socially shared cognition* refers to the study of how people come to engage in shared belief. Apart from knowledge people hold through direct observation, all knowledge is the result of entering into a shared belief with a group of like-minded others called a *community of practice*.

Torff's notion of the community of practice is relevant to both the WEAM and jazz contexts, in which practitioners tend to specialize in the fluent manipulation of elements of their respective language-games (with or without recourse to notation). A side effect of this specialized process of language acquisition, the author suggests, is that it is fairly unusual to find performers who possess equal facility in the vocabulary of these different genres. Orchestral musicians who improvise convincingly in the jazz realm, and, conversely, jazz musicians who can play the WEAM repertoire comfortably in an orchestra, are comparatively rare.²¹⁷

Such musicians manage to combine a high degree of cognitive and "linguistic" skills with a correspondingly high level of technical facility, whether singers or instrumentalists. With regard to Lewis's notion of Afrological and Eurological perspectives, such musicians show evidence of familiarity with both traditions as well as knowledge of the musical and philosophical debates and issues (in Bourdieu's terms, the struggle for cultural capital) played out in these fields. Soundpainting no less demonstrates how a community of practice is formed within a subset of improvising practitioners who share familiarity with at least the language-games of jazz and WEAM. Selinger describes such practitioners in the following terms (*Deconstructing Haydn*, CD notes):

²¹⁷ Keith Jarrett and Wynton Marsalis provide stellar (and immediate) exceptions to this generalization.

For me, the pre-planning mostly involved choosing the right musicians to make up the group. Ideally it seemed to me that there should be a good balance between 'classical' players and experienced improvisers. Of course, the best would have been to have excellent players who are well versed in both settings, but this was not practical, so I tried to make sure that every section had at least one experienced improviser. That I did accomplish this is a testament to the changes in the thinking of musicians today, and the willingness of good musicians to try something new.

As Vella points out, this willingness to take part in an experiment and to take the time to learn the Soundpainting gestures, implies no less of a social contract than that entered into by orchestral musicians. In this contract is implicitly acknowledged a faithfulness to Thompson's vision of a new method for spontaneous musicking, in which the content of individual utterance is determined by the Soundpainting gestures themselves, and in which the relationship of the individual performer to the group is conceived of in the context of the various traditions from which such statements emerge.