Chapter 4 : Towards a language-based model for improvised music

4.1 Introduction: Music and/as language

> Marc Duby (MD): What you said was: 'An open language is dynamic.'
> Pauline Oliveros (PO): Yes, it's dynamic, and it changes, and it's inclusive of the vernacular, and of invention of new ways of saying things.
> MD: How do you see that applying to music?
> PO: Well, I mean we have codified systems, for example, like traditional jazz, with chords and bass line, and the language has a certain kind of rhythm, and if you're not doing that, you're not doing traditional jazz. It's a closed form. I mean, jazz has continued to evolve and change, but there are these traditionalists who have closed it off. I mean there are communities that treasure and value that particular expression of musical language, and so anything that comes in to change it, well, it's rejected. And that's a closed system.
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> (Author's interview, Johannesburg, September 2005)

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the various ways in which jazz improvisation is metaphorically linked to spoken language, with a view to examining some of the conventions that underpin this practice. The author will also examine questions relating to the nature of improvisation in this field with regard to tensions arising between the individual jazz musician and the norms of other musicians with whom he or she is interacting, as well as the nature of this interaction in relation to the audience's reception of such musicking. Such issues throw into relief the nature of the Soundpainting event as a case of nearly free improvisation, and help to situate Soundpainting at a point on a continuum between organization and total freedom, one of the tenets of the 1960s free jazz movement.

Pauline Oliveros's view of "traditional" jazz, for example, makes explicit a comparison between this form of musicking and language on the basis of its rhythmic characteristics, thereby categorizing this type of music as a "closed system." Oliveros, contrasting this with open languages, which are

characterized by their dynamic nature and their incorporation of vernacular elements, suggests that such languages are vehicles for "new ways of saying things." Both Monson (1996) and Sawyer (2003) find this analogy at work in the comments of jazz musicians regarding successful interactions in the moment, and the metaphor of jazz improvisation as a form of conversation is a pervasive one in interviews conducted by these and other authors.

In similar fashion the American free jazz pianist Cecil Taylor states (Funkhouser 1995): "What I am doing is creating a language. A different American language." Taylor's view of language contains within it positive implications of ownership and responsibility, but also the suggestion that his creation of this new language is somehow different from the American languages that have come before. For Jost (1994:68), Cecil Taylor was to see little financial reward for this controversial position: "Musical maturation, the acquisition of a personal language, was marked by an utter lack of financial success. Most of the groups Taylor formed in the Fifties broke up without ever having had one engagement worth mentioning." In case there should be any doubt as to the courage of Taylor's convictions, Jost (*ibid.*) goes on to mention that: "Between jobs, Taylor had to take on all kinds of makeshift work as a cook, record salesman, dishwasher, and so on."

Van Heerden, on the other hand, views (from a somewhat postmodern point of view) the situation of jazz in society as irretrievably “decontextualised,” deriving its function more or less willy-nilly from its social context (1996:14): "Jazz, like every other cultural artefact, like every other language, has been cast adrift in a sea of decontextualisation, irrevocably removed from its source, functioning as background music one moment, propaganda in the next." Indeed, in today’s “information-saturated” era, the term “Jazz” lends its aura of exotic allure to such

diverse products as French men's colognes and Japanese motor cars.[118] Nonetheless, despite his rather pessimistic outlook on contemporary culture, Van Heerden still regards jazz itself as a language.

The Chicago bandleader Sun Ra, in a 1970 interview with Tam Fiofori, describes music as follows:

> Music is a universal language. The intergalactic music in its present phase of presentation will be correlative to the key synopsis of the past and to the uncharted multi-potential planes outside the bounds of the limited earth-eternity future. The intergalactic music is in hieroglyphic sound: an abstract analysis and synthesis of man's relationship to the universe, visible and invisible first man and second man.
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> (Jost 1994:181)

This statement of Ra's is a case of taking the analogy between music and language too far and is not in keeping with the diversity of worldwide musical practices. It is all too easy to demolish Ra's argument simply on the grounds of the sheer variety of these musical styles and the cultural practices in which they are embedded. Rather than positing music as a universal language, one has to consider the less palatable prospect that there is a plethora of musical styles (and associated value-systems) competing for the attention of the consumer, which line of argument suggests a fragmentation of musical practice, and therefore a multiplicity of language-games in operation, not only within jazz, but in most genres of music. Ake (2002:7) confirms this sense of fragmentation in stating:

> Contemporary players, listeners, critics—even record companies and radio stations—often seem uneasy about the immense profusion and diffusion of jazz styles, attitudes, performance venues, and institutions.[119] But what I hope to demonstrate is that the questions now confronting today's various jazz communities echo many of the

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[118] As in Yves Saint Laurent and Honda, for example.

[119] Defining jazz styles in general, and specific jazz performances in particular, as instances of language-games seems a useful tactic in resolving this problem of "profusion and diffusion," as Ake elegantly puts it.

> same conflicts and tensions experienced throughout the music's history.

Two points arising from Ake's statement have bearing: firstly, he is talking about jazz styles specifically, not music in general, and secondly, he suggests that these conflicts and tensions are not necessarily symptomatic of the present day. He is arguing that these conflicts and tensions are part of the history of jazz itself, and, in a profound sense, have always been there.

One of the most useful features of the analogy between jazz and language, perhaps, is the notion that language is a powerful means of negotiating, and indeed affirming, identity. Jazz improvisation is viewed, in the context of this thesis, as a vehicle for the negotiation of identity in terms of the kind of musical and timbral play that is characteristic of the jazz idiom. Ake (2002:3) defines "identity" as referring "to the ways in which jazz musicians and audiences experience and understand themselves, their music, their communities, and the world at large," and it is in this sense that the various language-games within the jazz idiom are understood and defined, as vehicles for the negotiation of identity and agency, circumscribed by various canons, sets of rules, and implicit and explicit inter- and intra-musical relationships, in which the audience is allowed to indicate its approval or otherwise of such negotiations.

One of the key features of jazz is, of course, its emphasis on improvisation as a means of expression. This entails the acquisition of a highly specialized set of skills that have little to do with the popular conception that improvisation is a form of "spontaneous composition," that one "makes it up as one goes along," and so forth. The author suggests that, on the contrary, much jazz improvisation is the very opposite of "spontaneous," and that the acquisition and development of such skills is a lifelong process of hard work and intense preparation. Spontaneous musicking should be seen in this light as depending on a vast amount of "embedded" knowledge and skills, individually acquired and collectively

articulated in the context of the jazz combo performance.

For Wishart, language can be defined in terms of utterance (1996:240):

> In most normal cases, however, where human beings are heard to produce sounds, then we will tend to impute intention to the sonic event. We will hear it at some level as an utterance. In particular, whenever the human voice is used as a source of sound in whatever context, the concept of utterance will enter at some level into our apprehension of the event.

With regard to Wishart's statement, utterance may be seen as language in action in context, indicating a degree of similarity with the Wittgensteinian notion of the language-game. Wishart continues by further defining utterance in the following terms (*ibid.*):

> In general, sounds produced by individual creatures may be taken to indicate or express something about internal state, reactions to environmental events, responses to utterances by other creatures and so on, becoming more involved, convoluted and to some extent detached as we move up the cerebral hierarchy, finally reaching the etiolated heights of artistic manifestation. At whatever level, the sense of utterance, whether as indicator, signal, symbol, sign or semantic or semantic-syntactic stream, enters into our perception of the events.

What Wishart implies is that, as communication through utterance takes place at various levels throughout "the cerebral hierarchy," a language (such as birdsong, for instance) does not have to contain human-specific semantic content in order to communicate something.[120] To the author, Wishart's line of thinking has a further important implication: humankind has a bias towards meaning that tends to privilege verbal or written systems as possessing more authority than their "subsidiaries," as in kinesics and paralanguage.

As Bateson states (2000:418):

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[120] It seems reasonable to conclude that Wishart's notion of utterance might also include music, as he defines this idea in fairly wide terms.

> Both kinesics and paralanguage have been elaborated into complex forms of art, music, ballet, poetry and the like, and, even in everyday life, the intricacies of human kinesic communication, facial expression, vocal intonation far exceed anything that any other animal is known to produce. The logician's dream that man should communicate only by unambiguous digital signals has not come true and is not likely to.

The failure of the logician's dream of unambiguous communication indicates the possibility of manipulating information so as to mislead others. It is not accidental that information obtained from a polygraph[121] is not admissible as legal evidence in court, for it is possible for a highly duplicitous person to disguise their bodily reactions to the questioner so as to manipulate the truth-content of their verbal responses: in short, to get away with lying.

As Wittgenstein rather tersely puts it (PI §249):

> Are we perhaps over-hasty in our assumption that the smile of an unweaned infant is not a pretence?—And on what experience is our assumption based? (Lying is a language-game that needs to be learned like any other one.)

Defining lying as a language-game avoids the moral issue of the "inauthentic" behaviour of the liar, in which, according to the social context, he or she deceives through dissembling, which in a sense is a particularly negative way of considering the profession of acting, which likewise depends on the adoption of a stage *persona*, according to the requirements of the script. The notion of characterization is essential to the pursuit of acting, and is described by Pierce in a musical context as follows (1995:285):

> The term *characterization* is familiar in theater as an actor's detailed development and delineation of a role. Applied to music, it indicates the performer's discovery, full sensing, and then delivery in sound of the essence of a musical moment, as if it were a character in the

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[121] The polygraph (or "lie-detector") measures the increased bodily stress levels when someone who is under interrogation tells a lie, or makes a false statement.

> midst of a play's action. The physical, affective, and attitudinal bearing of that musical moment, when thus realized, is freed to act and to ramify. It then breathes life and color into tones and gives aptness to pacing. The music sounds spoken, the declamation vivid. It rings true.

Pierce's definition of characterization implies the difference between the onstage and offstage performer, in the sense that the onstage performer adopts the *persona* of a musician, a role that may or may not be "mediatized," depending on the proxemics of the given scenario. Improvising musicians may find themselves performing in any number of musical or social spaces, whether the jazz club, concert hall or stadium, and their utterances may be addressed to a group of sixty, six hundred or sixty thousand people at a time.

4.1.1 Defining improvisation

The focus of this section is firstly to define the term "improvisation" and to consider the kind of skills required to become a competent improviser. On the way, a model of the jazz language is suggested, with a view to examining the limits and possibilities of the analogy between jazz and language. As defined by Steve Lacy (1994:72):

> Improvisation (play) is an invented (found) made-up, discourse.
> A story, a picture, a dance, an action, a poem, a scene, a game, a structure, a set of gestures, an opinion, an oath, a prayer, an apology, a discovery.

The Encarta World English Dictionary contains the following two-part definition of the term “improvisation”:

> 1. something performed or done without any preparation or set text to follow
> 2. the skill or creative process of creating and performing something without any preparation or set text to follow.

In fairness to the compilers of the dictionary, they are not attempting to describe improvisation in anything but the broadest terms. Nevertheless, improvisers in music might take exception to this insufficiently technical

definition of their art. The problematic phrase in both definitions is “without any preparation,” by which the compilers perhaps hope to convey something of the spontaneous character of improvisation. The author suggests that “preparation” for most musicians takes place away from the performance arena in solitary practising, precisely to develop the “skill or creative process” which despite its ostensibly spontaneous appearance has actually taken a great deal of preparation.[122]

In this sense (that is, of a loose use of the term “preparation”) this initial definition fails in all but the most general terms adequately to describe what takes place during the improvisation process. The art of improvisation demands for practising musicians a great deal of time and energy spent listening to music, practising so as to master the idiosyncrasies of their chosen instrument, understanding and absorbing the stylistic and historical characteristics of their musical genre of choice, and, in short, preparing themselves for their careers as musicians. While the necessity of preparation obviously holds true for all kinds of music, the author suggests that what is fundamentally different for many musicians working in the field of improvised music is the emphasis on individual creativity, and, thereby, on individuality itself.[123]

Van Heerden (1996:14) puts this elegantly in stating: "By virtue of the emphasis placed on improvisation, jazz admits of individual contribution and self-expression that is sometimes at odds with the necessarily conservative norms of the community, including the community of musicians." So saying, he highlights a key tension in jazz as well as society, that between the individual’s need for self-expression and the demands of the community from which the individual originates.

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[122] It is assumed here that the compiler of this dictionary definition has in mind for the term “preparation” the more commonly used term “rehearsal.”
[123] As Hall states (1992:233): "Unlike the dictionary definitions of the term, I hold that improvising is the domain of the expert, rooted as it is in knowledge and experience. It is far removed from the 'spur-of-the-moment' implications associated with the word."

Given jazz musicians' privileging of the "voice of the subject," it might be instructive to consider the "sound" of Miles Davis as compared to that of Louis Armstrong (or Keith Jarrett to Bill Evans) as surface structures, which, despite poststructuralism's emphasis on intertextuality and the consequent swirling nature of the textual event, are to some extent defaced by the undoubted presence of the individual. Within this type of musical space, the speaking subject returns, if only as one voice among the many who lay claim to this contested territory.

The Encarta World English Dictionary defines "improvise" as follows:

> 1. to act or compose something, especially a sketch, play, song, or piece of music, without any preparation or set text to follow
> 2. to make a substitute for something out of the materials that happen to be available at the time.

The second part of this definition highlights a less typical usage of the term, akin to Lévi-Strauss's metaphor of ***bricolage***. Nachmanovitch's account (1990:89) of *bricolage* in his experience as a performer amplifies this second sense of the term "improvise" in this hypothetical state of affairs:

> Equipment breaks down, it is Sunday night, the stores are all closed, and the audience is arriving in an hour. You are forced to do a little *bricolage*, improvising some new and crazy contraption. Then you attain some of your best moments. Ordinary objects or trash suddenly become valuable working materials, and your perceptions of what you need and what you don't need radically shift.

The Oxford American Dictionary also includes this dual sense of spontaneity and *bricolage* in defining the term "improvise":

> 1. create and perform (music, drama, or verse) spontaneously or without preparation.
> 2. produce or make (something) from whatever is available.

The author returns to the concept of the "set text," in arguing that this set text for improvisers (playing standards, for example, as opposed to

improvising freely) may be type of a mental map of the territory, rather than a physical piece of manuscript paper (section 4.2.1.2). It will be argued that improvisers use this map as a navigational tool literally to know where they are relative to the contours of the harmonic progression, as played in the ***head*** of the piece in question. The author proposed this contour-based concept for improvisation in 1987, with special reference to the music of Thelonious Monk.

Coker (cited in Ostransky 1977:48) mentions five main factors that influence a jazz improvisation:

> Five factors are chiefly responsible for the outcome of the jazz player's improvisation: intuition, intellect, emotion, sense of pitch, and habit. His intuition is responsible for the bulk of his originality; his emotion determines the mood; his intellect helps him to plan the technical problems and, with intuition, to develop the melodic form; his sense of pitch transforms heard or imagined pitches into letter names or fingerings; his playing habits enable his fingers to quickly find certain established pitch patterns.

Discounting the gender bias evident in Coker's discussion of these factors, this is quite obviously written as a description of a jazz soloist, and a virtuoso at that. His list of requirements portrays an individualistic, crypto-romantic jazz virtuoso as somehow divorced from the musical conversations going on around him or her.[124] By separating the performer from the communal discursive framework in which live jazz operates (that of other musicians, rhythm section (Monson), the discourse of place (Ramanna), the audience (Davidson), Coker arrives at a portrait of the "ideal" jazz musician.[125]

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[124] In so individuating the musician, Coker suggests the monastic space of the practice room, rather than the communal ambience of the club or concert-hall.
[125] With regard to Coker's notion of "playing habits," the author recalls an experience from his stint with Bruce Cassidy's free improvisation group, *The Body Electric*. In the author's work with this group, he ceased playing bass at one point (to thwart patterns arising purely from muscle memory) and moved to keyboards, in an attempt to frustrate and hopefully overcome the ingrained and persistent habit of "thinking like" and "sounding like" a bassist. Dependency on "habits" can tend to be a two-edged sword when they become clichés, in this

The central dynamic at play in the contested space of musical performance may be seen as a dialectical continuum of relationships between the performer, his or her colleagues, the audience, and the "tradition," in which the performer's individuality is mediated with or without the sanction of the community. This continuum also encompasses (at any given moment in the course of performance) an underlying tension between competition and collaboration, by no means limited to the field of jazz improvisation.[126]

4.1.2 "Playing by ear"

The author has suggested (in chapter 2) that semiotic approaches to the analysis of music tend to operate more successfully in the realm of notated music, where the operations of the symbolic language are easily accessible through the text itself. This semiotic strategy, however, mediated as it is through the score, forms a less effective approach to the analysis of improvised music, whose instantaneous nature does not readily lend itself to symbolic analysis.[127]

The practice of acquiring musical skills by ear by means of personal contact, records, and radio, as an informal vehicle for learning[128] is highlighted by Oakley in his discussion of the Delta blues singer, Robert Johnson, as follows (1976:219, emphasis added):

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case.

[126] The WEAM *concerto* generally is modelled on this dialectic between individual soloist and orchestral group, as are the call and response patterns prevalent in many types of musicking (preacher to congregation, and so on).

[127] Despite the obvious value of transcription as a learning tool for improvisers, musicians outside the Western art music tradition tend to acquire their musical skills firstly by ear, and then later in the process develop the skills of musical literacy, as in reading and writing music as a means of negotiating the symbolic language of notation.

[128] This method is obviously a different type of learning from the student's engagement with written music as a means of language acquisition.

> Robert Johnson stands at the crossroads[129] of several musical traditions. Having learnt much of his music directly from Son House and Willie Brown—who were anxious for him with avuncular concern—he inherited strong elements of the Delta blues tradition. But at the same time, whether through personal contact or through records, he also shows traces of other musical influences as diverse as Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell, Hambone Willie Newborn, Skip James, Kokomo Arnold, and his own great hero Lonnie Johnson. Having assimilated what he wanted—and he would also pick up any hillbilly tune, popular song, ballad, 'sweet music' from the radio—he transmuted it into his own personal expression.

Oakley stresses the value of personal contact in Johnson's formative years as well as the influence of records and radio in his quest to forge a personal sound. The prevalence of this informal method of learning music is borne out by Lucy Green, whose book *How Popular Musicians Learn* argues the existence of a wide gulf between aurally-based skills acquisition in the early stages of the development of such musicians and their later engagement (or not) with music's more "academic" elements (2001:60, emphases in original):

> Children not only copy the behaviour of adults and other children, but they also make copies of objects which they find in the environment. Here, the object in question is music, and its main form of existence for most people most of the time is in recordings and broadcasts in the home, school, college, at work, at social gatherings and in other public places such as shops. Live music is encountered much less. By far the overriding practice for the beginner popular musician, as is already well known, is to copy records by ear.

It seems reasonable to argue that one of the most distinctive elements of musicianship that the listener acquires in this way is the relatively direct nature of the individual's "sound," which is conveyed not only through their phrasing, note-choices, and so on, but crucially through a timbral fingerprint, on a level that conventional musical notation cannot translate.

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[129] The crossroads is a powerful symbol in Johnson-mythology, as in the place where he sold his soul to the devil to acquire his musical abilities. McClary (2000) relates this symbol to a perceived sense of anxiety in Johnson's work, in the sense that his vocal timbre represents the hidden fear of the crossroads, and its dangerous implications for a Negro caught there after the curfew.

Green emphasizes the individual and solitary character of this method of language acquisition in observing (2001:60-1):

> It seems an extraordinary fact that many thousands of young musicians across the world have adopted this approach to learning over a relatively short space of time—covering a maximum of eighty years since sound recording and reproduction technology began to be widespread—outside of any formal networks, usually at early stages of learning, in isolation from each other, without adult guidance and with very little explicit recognition of the ubiquity of the practice across the world. All this, despite the fact that it is a historically unique way of learning music, unknown to humankind prior to the invention of sound recording and reproduction technology.

Dunbar-Hall's review of Green's book summarizes the divide between popular and academic musical practice as follows (2004:1):

> To date, much theorizing about music education has been derived from Western canonic ideals, and these canonic ideals have been applied to all musics. In this way certain methods of teaching music in schools have become accepted as standard and acceptable; often these bear little relationship to how music is learnt, or played, in the world of day-to-day music activity.

He goes on to summarize the problematic place of notation for the popular musician in stating (*ibid.*):

> Notation is an ambiguous component of popular music practice: some use it, some do not, some want to understand it, some already do. To think in these terms (clearly derived from popular music practice) is to question an almost universal precept of music education systems, that students need to learn to read and write in music notation.

With these central notions in mind, namely, that there is a divide between the process of skills acquisition for popular musicians that academia is doing little to address, and, further, that academic institutions accept almost universally the necessity of music literacy as a teaching strategy for the training of musicians, it seems clear that imitation is a vital stage of the process in the day-to-day world of popular music-making. Clark Terry (in Steinel 1995:9) describes this process in the jazz field as: "Imitation, assimilation, and then innovation."

In jazz improvisation theory, the concept of the chord scale defines a set of relationships between vertical (harmonic) structures and horizontal (melodic) ones.[130] This concept allows the improviser the choice of playing inside the changes, where the available notes are made up of chord tones, using harmonic tensions (which may or may not be resolved), or playing outside (where the improviser makes use of chromatic approach notes which are neither chord tones nor harmonic tensions). These note choices range by definition from wholly consonant ("inside") to mildly dissonant (harmonic tensions) to highly dissonant, in the case of chromatic approach notes. A central element in the language of conventional (tonal) jazz, the chord scale method provides a way for jazz musicians to "make sense"[131] as improvisers by making the stylistically appropriate grammatical move in Wittgenstein's terms.

Jazz harmony (within the Tin Pan Alley, standards framework) is based on the classic hegemony of the dominant-tonic relationship. This implies that more traditionally oriented jazz musicians regard this framework as a "given" or axiomatic system, outside of which nothing makes sense. Tonal jazz, like WEAM, then uses the notion of the key-centre as its organizing principle, and likewise depends on an underlying metaphor of tension and resolution.[132] In this way, speakers within these systems of musical organization may each be said to make utterances according to the rules of an over-arching language-game, that of tonality itself.

Since the chord scale method operates in terms of the relationship between melodic and harmonic elements, it seems evident that once the

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[130] In Saussure's terms this can be defined as a synchronic and diachronic relationship, or as that between paradigms and syntagms. See also Jaffe (1996), Pease and Pullig (2001), and Sawyer (2003).
[131] The author uses this term in both senses of "finding meaning" and "making some sort of logical meaning."
[132] The ability to manipulate this network of rules with skill and fluency is very demanding on the musician's concentration and linguistic ability, and such skill is greatly admired by jazz musicians.

harmonic structure becomes indeterminate (through spontaneous manipulation or transformation), the usefulness of this method becomes open to question. Once the apparently "axiomatic" connection between the horizontal and vertical relationship of melody and harmony falls away, and with these the central pillar of tonality, a new communal and collective grammar may need to be negotiated and invented in the moment.

Nowhere in Coker's definition (section 4.1.1) does he allude to the necessity for communication or collaboration; his ideal jazz musician takes up a somewhat solitary position, detribalized by his own virtuosity perhaps. Incidentally, this kind of picture of the jazz soloist as a Romantic genius is bolstered by much of the record-cover iconography of the time, as in portraits of the heroic Coltrane, the brooding Miles, the eccentric Monk, the intellectual Paul Desmond, and so on.[133]

4.1.3 The social semiotics of improvisation

Reason, in describing the location of meaning in the context of improvised music, considers the moment of performance from a socioculturally sited vantage point when she states (2004:73):

> Unlike musics invested in providing the listener with a completed version of a musical score or text in performance, improvisation provides an opportunity to engage with an expansive musical environment during the performance, wherein the nature of the text is open and subject to the energy or “vibe” of the audience. In many cases, this vibe is powerful enough to affect and direct many of the parameters of an improvisation, such as how long to play a particular phrase or motif and whether to play loud or soft, fast or slow.

Herewith Reason introduces some important variables into the definition.

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[133] Such iconography also forms part of jazz's canon-formation, in which is emphasized the individual's contribution to the canon. Such imagery disregards the communal nature of jazz recording and performance, in which such individuals are supported in the realization of their musical vision by accompanists, known as "sidemen" in jazz parlance.

By contextualizing the performance space in which improvising takes place, her theorizing allows for synergy between performers and audience. By suggesting that the text in such performances is open, she further asserts that meaning is not only communicated in purely musical terms, but also by means of a set of paralinguistic clues through which such meaning is generated (*ibid.*):

> In such an environment, sources of meaning cannot be limited exclusively to sonic morphologies such as the order of notes, orchestration, timbre, and the like; meaning is also located in the ways in which improvisers situate their bodies, change their facial expressions, and use their voices to accompany notes, gestures, silences, or phrases.

Reason brings on board the vital embodied performance elements missing from audio recordings: postures, bodily attitudes, and facial expressions, in short, the embodied elements of the performance. The return of these elements to the discussion suggest that, despite the poststructuralists' questioning of the very notion of subjectivity, the circumstances of the performance and its context point to this fact, simply stated: musicking is above all an act situated in the body in the moment of performance, whether requiring the presence of an audience for its completion or not.[134]

In worst-case scenarios, inattentive or hostile audiences can also negatively affect any performance, a not uncommon occurrence in WEAM's chequered history.[135] The bitter in-fighting over the new artistic offerings of modernism suggests, in fact, the idea of the accepted language being forced to its limits, towards the ***aporia*** that Barthes and

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[134] Reason's thinking on this topic is echoed by Nicholas Cook's idea of performance as suggesting, in the same manner as prayer, the ritualistic presence of an imaginary audience for its fulfilment.

[135] The author has in mind the polarized audience reactions to the music of Debussy, Stravinsky and others, especially the Futurists, which ended in riots. and suggests that these composers were stretching the hitherto accepted boundaries of the language-game of the time.

Derrida speak of.[136]

After patronage and support from the establishment fell away as a support system for creative endeavour, the artist was free (in theory) to express musical ideas without overt submission to a centralized political or religious authority. The author is suggesting that, as occasioned by historical events like the Reformation and the French Revolution, the economic and moral power implicit in the *droit de Seigneur* gradually moved its locus from the monarchy and church to the state and eventually to the "temporary community" of the ordinary concertgoer.

Composers were now free to express their innermost feelings without the necessity for approval from the traditional wielders of power. The next step, that of questioning the very foundations of language (whether everyday speech or artistic expression), was a logical one, and, for critics such as Jameson and Lyotard, represents a central concern within the modernist project. The ideology of the old order itself was under siege, not only on the literary front, but also in film (Dali's *Le chien Andalou*), painting (where Braque and Picasso's works critically reframed the foundations of Renaissance perspective), ballet (Diaghilev's staging of *Le Sacre du Printemps*), poetry (Appolinaire and e.e. cummings) and music itself, where the Second Vienna School of Schoenberg and his pupils Berg and Webern called for a re-structuring of the hitherto axiomatic assumptions of tonality as a system of organisation.

4.1.4 Jazz and signification

Singer's 1997 essay *Velocity of Celebration: Jazz and Semiotics* examines jazz performance from a semiotic perspective, as his following three points

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[136] Derrida's aporetic points of arrival often seem to occur at the limits of language where these boundaries are finally revealed to as like illusory mirages to thirsty travellers, disappearing as they approach them.

regarding the connections between signification and jazz confirm:

> 1) There is a system of unstated, predetermined rules a jazz musician must comprehend and utilize to be a successful improviser, this system of use or competence is parallel to the system of internal coherence in speaking, 2) jazz performance involves an intimate relationship between artist and audience. Like speaking, there are verbal and visual clues the soloist gives the other musicians and which all the musicians give the listener, and 3) in jazz, the musician and the listener interpret their feelings from the music. These feelings are created as *ad-hoc* responses to an environment of jazz.

Singer's first point, regarding the connection between jazz and semiotics, emphasizes the system of rules which govern such performances, suggesting thereby affinities with Wittenstein's notion of language-games (section 2.1.6.2). As Hacker (2005b) claims, for Wittgenstein: "Language use is a form of human rule governed activity, integrated into human transactions and social behaviour, context-dependent and purpose relative. Analogies between games and language, playing games and speaking, justify it."

With respect to Singer's second point concerning the relationship between the performer(s) and the audience,[137] his "verbal and visual clues" may be construed as operating on the level of Batesonian paralanguage and kinesics. Between musicians in performance, as the author suggests, these clues may suggest turn-taking for soloists, changes in dynamics, opportunities for call and response (trading "fours" between the ensemble and the drummer), map (or "geography") indicators such as "head in" or "out"), sign, coda, and so on. Musicians in such performances, as these ideas indicate, respond to such signifiers in ways not fundamentally different from those of musicians in a string quartet or symphony orchestra.

Singer's idealized description of the relationship between artist(s) and

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[137] Reason elsewhere theorizes this interaction as the "vibe" (section 3.4).

audience fails to take into account what Hall has theorized as proxemic categories of distance, which complicate such relationships with regard to displays of power and authority. For Hall, there are four main indices of such displays based on their degree of relative distance, which are categorized as intimate, personal, social, and public. In keeping with the image of the all-powerful orchestra director, the conductor's role is classified as public, in which the degree of physical distance and separation from the orchestra tends to reinforce his position of authority.

Chris Smith suggests a quite different possibility with respect to Miles Davis's direction of his group during live performance. In this case the signs are left open to interpretation through being deliberately ambiguous (1998:262):

> Miles wanted a quality of attentive musical flexibility that would lift his players to the level of co-composing interpreters; that would encourage them to respond to the improvisational moment with his own alert flexibility. Communicating in an intentionally ambiguous and non-verbal fashion meant that Miles's players were forced to engage with him by interpreting what they thought such communication demanded.

Soundpainting, although it likewise operates in a relatively non-hierarchical fashion, does not allow for the "intentionally ambiguous." Thompson, unlike Miles Davis, insists on precision of gesture, and provision is made within the language for feedback from the ensemble in cases where the signs are ambiguous or nonsensical.[138] The semantic content of Thompson's signals is intended to be unambiguous as signifiers, although the results of the interpretation by the performers may be construed as appropriate (or "legal") within a fairly wide or narrow range of hermeneutic options, depending on the parameters of the signal that the Soundpainter is initiating.

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[138] The <performer doesn't understand> and <performer can't do this> gestures (Thompson 2006:45-46) provide opportunities for feedback from performer to Soundpainter.

These comments confirm, once more, in the light of Thompson's conception of Soundpainting as a language, its affinity with the rules of orthodox conducting, although conductors tend to have greater leeway in their paralinguistic style. A certain amount of ambiguity is allowed for in orthodox conducting as a component of the conductor's personal expression. The simple fact is that some conductors indicate the beat quite clearly, and others less so, and this becomes a situation for orchestral musicians to interpret as best they can.

Returning finally to Singer's argument, the author is compelled to question his use of the term "feeling." This is a somewhat problematic term in the context of an academic article, and Singer fails to define exactly how such emotions are conveyed. Is this act of interpretation the same for players and audience in some final or compelling way? His discussion begs the crucial question of how such feelings come to be construed as universal and how it can be determined whether they are the same for the musicians and the audience, or for individuals in either group.[139]

4.1.4.1 Signifyin(g) and rhetoric in improvised music

Lewis considers the tactic of signifyin(g) within the bebop era as firstly manifested in the beboppers “playing” with the repertoire as follows (1996:94):

> Often this material was appropriated from the popular show tunes of the day, linking this material with earlier jazz styles. The musicians often 'signified on' the tunes, replacing the melodic line with another, then naming the new piece[140] in an ironic signifying riff on Tin Pan Alley as well as upon the dominant culture that produced it.

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[139] Although emotion seems undoubtedly to be a component of music which has some relevance to the listener, current theoretical debates around this issue seem to grapple with the problems of defining and measuring the emotional content of a given piece of music.

[140] David Baker uses the term "contrafact" to refer to such compositions.

The concept of signifyin(g) originates with a literary study by H. L. Gates called “The Signifyin(g) Monkey” (1989), in which he argues the case for an interpretive strategy based on African folklore. Gates includes elements of mythology, discourse, and the notion of troping as a theory of reading that has obvious bearing on musical practices that originate from this tradition (1989:903):

> My theory of interpretation, arrived at from within the black cultural matrix, is a theory of formal revisionism, it is tropological, it is often characterized by pastiche, and, most crucially, it turns on repetition of formal structures and their differences. Signification is a theory of reading that arises from Afro-American culture; learning how to signify is often part of our adolescent education. That it has not been drawn upon before as a theory of criticism attests to its sheer familiarity in the idiom. I had to step outside my culture, to defamiliarize the concept by translating it into a new mode of discourse, before I could see its potential in critical theory.

For the bebop musicians, challenging this role of musician as entertainer meant, ultimately, developing strategies to challenge the stereotyping of black musicians as happy-go-lucky clowns. As DeVeaux states (1997:62):

> As black musicians traded on their musical culture for personal gain in the marketplace, they inevitably found themselves boxed in and belittled by pervasive racial stereotypes. The Sambo image was immune to direct assault, for to renounce the stereotype was to risk renouncing the black cultural identity it mocked. Besides, it was useful as a form of protection, a mask that could be worn to deflect white hostility.

Here DeVeaux highlights the protective camouflage of the Sambo image and its mask-like aspect. In American society at the time, to be black meant automatically to be part and parcel of a dispossessed underclass whose strivings for self-betterment ultimately were sanctioned and controlled by those in power. This in turn necessitated the adoption of signifyin(g) strategies, which played into the hands of the dominant ideology, while at the same time asserting blackness and individuality within the culture of the underclass itself.

4.1.4.2 Music as communal activity

In contrast to solo performance, which is relatively rare in improvised music, Soundpainting usually involves a group of indeterminate size, ranging from small to large, and incorporating performers from other disciplines as well. This suggests that there is a communal element operating in terms of musician-to-musician interaction, in addition to the relationship between the musicians and the audience. In different genres of music, this relationship is formalized to a greater or lesser degree, according to the rituals of the context. The author returns to these communal elements in chapter 5, and next considers some ways in which the relationship between the individual and the community is demonstrated in various styles of music.

4.1.4.3 Call and response

The reciprocal relationship between individual and group may take the form of musical utterances, which manifest themselves in the widespread practice of call and response, metaphorical dialogues between individual and community.[141] As McClary argues, the place of music in African-based societies differs from the Western tradition in being primarily defined as an activity, and, secondly, music is an expression of the entire community (2000:22-23):

> Music holds a place of privilege in most African and African-based cultures, and it differs in many crucial respects from the European tradition. First, music is defined as an activity—something that exists only in as much as the community is involved in making it happen. It is far more oriented toward performance than producing objects, and performances are understood as the means whereby the community enacts consolidation. Second, while some individuals specialize in virtuosic performance, all members of the society participate in the

[141] A fairly typical example is the classic jazz standard *Basin St. Blues*.

> making of music: it is a communal expression—as the hymn[142] says, "free to all, a healing stream." Accordingly, many African and African American genres are characterized by the convention of call and response, in which soloists are legitimated by the sonic embrace of the group.

McClary's analysis emphasizes music's nature outside "the European tradition" as an activity, perceptively situating the practice of call and response within the community. According to the rules of the given language-game, the individual leads the ensemble by (as it were) opening the meeting to which the ensemble, or congregation, responds. This move is by no means unique to the jazz game, and forms a central strategy in African music, wherein the history of the tribe is often expressed through music. Murray, while noting the conventional element in such practices, compares their musical manifestations with the ritual of the church service in stating (1979:98):

> Nothing is likely to seem more spontaneous than call-and-response passages, especially in live performances, where they almost always seem to grow directly out of the excitement of the moment, as if the musicians were possessed by some secular equivalent of the Holy Ghost. But as is no less the practice in the Sunday Morning Service, the responses are not only stylized (and stylized in terms of a specific idiom, to boot), but are almost always led by those who have a special competence in such devices. After all, no matter how deeply moved a musician may be, whether by personal, social, or even aesthetic circumstances, he must always play notes that fulfil the requirements of the context, a feat which presupposes far more skill and taste than raw emotion.

The practice of call and response is a central dynamic in jazz and other types of improvised musicking, especially the blues, both of which genres having clear connections to what Lewis (2004b) has termed the Afrological perspective. In addition to this practice (which both dramatizes and ritualizes the relationship between individual and group), the employment of alternative methods of sound production (as in the use of a wide range of variations of intonation and timbre for expressive purposes and the very

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[142] McClary is discussing a 1959 recording of the hymn *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross* by the Swan Silvertones.

choice of instruments themselves) forms a crucial step in the direction of forging a musical identity. Some of these tactics are discussed in the following sections.

4.1.4.4 Intonation as an affective device

With reference to Ornette Coleman's composition *Lonely Woman*, Ake describes Coleman's "playing" with intonation in the following terms (2002:70-71):

> 'Perfect intonation,' in the sense of agreeing upon and maintaining a consistent location of a pitch center—a source of pride for 'professional' musicians—is not the goal here. Martin Williams (1993:240) described it this way: 'Intonation is a matter of context and expression to Coleman. 'You can play sharp in tune and you can play flat in tune,' he has said, 'and a D in a context representing sadness should not sound like a D in a passage of joy.'

Coleman's contextualized notion of intonation (that is, where it is used for affective purposes) can easily be misconstrued as simply out of tune, and lays him open to the kind of criticism as typified by James Lincoln Collier when he states (1981:462-463, emphases added):

> Any jazz musician can play out of tune at times, especially if he has been drinking heavily, and he may occasionally miss a chord change or fumble his way through a tune with which he is not familiar. But it is rare for a jazz musician of much experience to fail to hear that he is playing incorrect changes. The simple truth is that most professional jazz players can correctly identify the chord changes of a tune on first hearing, provided they are not too unusual, and improvise a suitable solo to them. The fact that Coleman could not understand what he was doing wrong tells us something about him.

In point of fact this passage tells us more about Collier's ideology of "right" and "wrong" than it does about Coleman's playing. From whose point of view, it has to be asked, is Coleman actually "playing incorrect changes," and what exactly are Collier's criteria for establishing this moral imperative? Collier's argument depends on the conventional underpinnings of tonal jazz, with its ideology of tension and resolution, consonance and dissonance, ultimately an ideology of right and wrong with respect to

"suitable" note choices. It is above all things a hegemony of the mistake, through which Collier aims a blow at Coleman's credibility as a musician.[143]

Collier goes on to suggest, all the while protesting that he is not using the term in a deprecating way, that Ornette Coleman "must be seen as a primitive artist." Comparing Coleman to the painter Le Douanier Rousseau, Collier defines this type of artist as follows (1981:463): "A primitive artist is one not trained in the standard tradition, who develops his method and manner independent of the main line," and concludes (*ibid.*, emphasis added):

> There seems, thus, to be an element of chance, or randomness in Coleman's improvising, and at a time when classical composers are deliberately introducing chance elements into their work, we can hardly fault Coleman for this practice, even when it is not always intentional.

Despite Collier's criticisms, which clearly emanate from a rigid interpretation of the jazz language-game, one might consider the possibility that Coleman is "playing" with intonation in Barthes's sense of exploring the polysemic potential of sound, a tactic not lost on composers of experimental music. In similar fashion, both free jazz and Soundpainting allow for free play with the ideologically sanctioned hegemonies of equal temperament and the *Klangideal* so as to open the way for individual and collective expression.

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[143] As Werner states with regard to "wrong" notes (1996:126-127): "There are not, and never have been, any wrong notes. If you live near the ocean, you may hear a seagull squawking in one key, a dog barking in another key, the roar of the ocean out of tune with the other two sounds, and birds singing in clashing rhythms with all of these, and you'll say, 'Beautiful!' But if human beings pick up instruments and do the same thing, the average listener won't be able to stand it! Why? Because his mind says, 'This is supposed to be music.' The very concept of music is superimposed by humans. Beneath this concept lies the greater reality of sound, and beneath that, the fabric of the entire universe, vibration."

4.1.4.5 Toy (and little) instruments

In retrospect, the violence[144] of the reactions against Coleman's early style might seem excessive, but the vehemence of this reaction once again highlights the conflict between the norms of the more conservative upholders of the jazz tradition and a given individual's right to self-expression. Collier (1981:465) goes on describe the well-documented controversy around Coleman's appearance at the Five Spot:

> The Five Spot gig threw the jazz world into turmoil. At first few musicians liked the music, or even pretended to understand it, and some were outspoken in their contempt for it. It did not help that Coleman was playing a plastic alto, and that Cherry was using a pocket trumpet, a half-sized instrument that plays normally. It looked as if they were playing on toys.

Sheer perversity aside, Coleman and Cherry's embracing of "toy" instruments is significant for Ake (2002:71) in so far as it suggests a conscious questioning on these musicians' part of what he has theorized as the "distinctly competition-based jazz aesthetic" of the time (2002:66):

> The unusual instruments that these musicians selected also bear consideration. Coleman relied on a white plastic alto saxophone, while Cherry chose to play a pocket trumpet, an instrument that looks, and often sounds, like a mutilated version of "the real thing." That neither player used the typically sought-after expensive "axes"[145] in their performances affected not only the sounds they produced but undoubtedly the reception of those sounds as well.

Ake goes on to suggest that the bebop era had fostered a particular construction of masculinity, as typified by its focus on virtuosity as an end in itself, its fast tempi, and the increasing complexity of its harmonic structures. The attitude of Coleman and Cherry towards the community, as

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[144] As Anderson asserts (2002:138-139): "While Coleman broke atttendance records at Manhattan nightclubs, disgusted black patrons in Chicago abandoned drinks at the bar in their haste to leave. Some even aimed imaginary rifles at Coleman in mock execution as they exited past the stage."
[145] Jazz slang for instruments.

read through the ironic self-deprecation of choosing such instruments, must be seen as ambiguous, proclaiming a stance of "difference" in an obvious and visual way. Heble finds similar evidence in the case of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, who call into question the ideology of genre-boundaries by playing a wide range of unorthodox instruments in a quite "self-conscious fashion" (2000:73):

> Familiar historical genres in music—ballads, marches, blues and gospel numbers, even rock, ska, and funk—are, throughout the ensemble's repertoire, reencoded, parodied, undermined by painfully long silences, and often disrupted by a self-consciousness that takes the form of sounds and noises from any of a number of 'little instruments' which have become the trademark of the new Chicago school: car horns, conch shells, whistles, sirens, street-corner noisemakers.

In conclusion, these tactics of choosing "inappropriate" instruments and the AEC's employment of "little instruments"[146] are ironic methods of interrogating all manner of ideologically grounded assumptions about musical practice, as well as establishing identity in a mildly subversive way. Apart from the element of *bricolage* that this type of ironic "play" suggests, Certeau characterizes such *tactics*[147] (within the context of the subversive practices of everyday life) as exhibiting an interrogation of power relations (1988:38):

> Lacking its own place, lacking a view of the whole, limited by the blindness (which may lead to perspicacity) resulting from combat at close quarters, limited by the possibilities of the moment, a tactic is determined by the *absence of power* just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power.

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[146] As Ake claims (2000:73): "By subsuming familiar, historically laden sound sources within the context of a newly articulated musical idiom, the ensemble unsettles any assumptions we might have about ready access to the past."

[147] Certeau contracts the resistant element of the tactic with the hegemonic one of the *strategy* as follows: (1988:35-36, emphases in original): "I call a *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relationships with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed."

When Thompson makes room for another Soundpainter and there are two of them directing two groups within the ensemble simultaneously, as occurred during the performances in Paris, an ironic commentary (or sub-text) on the conductor as wielder of power is being enacted. This is another case of a tactic, as described by Certeau, one in which the Soundpainter ironically acknowledges the ambiguous attractions of power and control.[148]

4.1.4.6 Timbral play and agency

In discussing Attali's view of musical production as a political force, Leyshon *et al.* suggest (1998:2):

> Music for Attali is a source of identification, a shared symbol of collectivity, and a means of generating and enforcing social conformity. The dynamics of musical production are inherently social and political, coercive and collaborative, concerned both with identity formation and the establishment and maintenance of social groupings.

With a view to answering Attali's question of how the dynamics of musical production are linked to identity formation, the author invokes the notion of "timbral iconicity," as theorized by Naomi Cumming. She defines this term as follows (2000:124):

> Timbral iconicity is so basic as to be scarcely avoidable. When listening to a performer, you do not hear his or her sounds as disembodied, but as humanly produced (with or without electronic modification), and as carrying a load of onset noise[149] and shaping which gives them their 'active' characteristics. Taking it for granted

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[148] Cross, discussing Xenakis's compositional methods, has noted how (2003:146): "*Duel* and *Stratégie* used game theory—each work employed two conductors who 'compete' with one another." Thompson (section 6.1.1) acknowledges Xenakis as an influence on the development of Soundpainting.
[149] Cumming (2000:119) defines "onset noise" as the impure frequencies occuring at onset and in the continuing surface friction during the production of a sound.

> that the instrument has a limited range of potential sounds, it is in the particular performer's choices within that range that interpretive interest may be found.

Cumming's definition includes the notions of embodiment and individuality, as revealed in the act of concentrated listening. Similarly, in the jazz and popular music context, listening reveals identity, negotiated through a complex set of timbral characteristics through which the given musician makes himself or herself known, which form that musician's aural "fingerprint" or "signature." The range of timbral possibilities that are construed as acceptable is to some extent dependent on the grammar of the musical style in question.[150] As Wishart notes (1996:258):

> The use of the voice in modern Western popular music presents an interesting case. Whereas in the classical tradition the singer strives towards the perfection of a particular kind of voice which is a social convention and is felt to be transferable from one work or one expressive context to another (liturgical, concert, etc.), popular music projects the idiosyncratic features of the individual singer's voice.[151] The audience is assumed to be more interested in music as a personal utterance rather than as a socially conventionalized utterance.

Wishart continues by defining such personal utterances in the context of what he refers to as "totemic song-structures," as follows (1996:259):

> Often such personalised utterances will be expressed through widely-known popular and often totemic song-structures.[152] This is taken to an extreme in the case of blues, where an almost claustrophobically rigid structure of music and text is used as a vehicle for sophisticated gestural expression. This is akin to the highly articulate gestural articulation of 'stock phrases' in vernacular speech where the linguistic content can be the least significant communicative element.

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[150] For instance, WEAM's notion of the *Klangideal* (section 1.5.4) allows for a more limited range of options as to what is aesthetically acceptable than popular music and jazz.

[151] Simon Emmerson (the editor of Wishart's book) considers this idiosyncrasy, and the Barthean idea of the "grain of the voice," as closely related.

[152] Such totemic song-structures form a central component of the jazz vocabulary, where performers are expected to know standard forms (blues, 32-bar song form, and so on) by heart. The author further examines this vocabulary in section 4.1.2.

Although instrumental music in jazz by definition excludes the voice, Wishart's key ideas of idiosyncrasy and sophisticated gestural expression are negotiated in this style of music, the author suggests, in a wide range of tactics of timbral play, which serve to make one instrumentalist distinguishable from another. In an "iconic" sense, as reinforced by the visual iconography of jazz (section 4.1.2), such aural signatures are especially significant for canon-formation in jazz.

By manipulating sound itself as a means of self-expression, Miles Davis, for example, distinguishes himself from any of a number of comparable masters of the trumpet, and thereby stakes his claim to individuality. Such timbral play (and the related notion of the aural signature) forms a marker borne out informally by such conventions as the musical Blindfold Test.

The jazz magazine *Down Beat* ran for many years a series of Blindfold Tests, in which musicians were asked firstly to identify, and then to criticize, a given number of recordings by various artists. Radano (1993:149) sets the scene as follows:

> *Down Beat*'s reporting from the period suggests a general concern—if not a preoccupation—with the heightened erosion of mainstream common practice and the insistent survival of free jazz. Elder musicians such as Albert Nicholas, Lenny Tristano, Teddy Wilson, Zoot Sims, and Tommy Vig, were, for example, predictably unimpressed with free playing, voicing, in frequently nostalgic recollections, a preference for the music of the past. Still, their comments were encouraged and faithfully reported in 'The Blindfold Test' and elsewhere, as much, one suspects, to bolster magazine sales as to perpetuate a conservatively framed vision of the jazz tradition.

"To perpetuate a conservatively framed vision of the jazz tradition," in Radano's terms, is to subscribe to *DownBeat*'s editorial ideology of the time, which sets these participants' sense of nostalgia for the past in stark opposition to the forward-looking and exploratory character of the free jazz musicians. This media-generated antagonism is perpetuated to this day in the conflict between so-called progressive jazz musicians and one of the

self-appointed guardians of the tradition, in the figure of Wynton Marsalis (Nisenson 2000). Notwithstanding the ideological complexity of such issues, in the Blindfold Tests themselves, it remained possible for the interviewee in many cases correctly to identify individual musicians on the basis of their sound alone.

It is notable that the element of timbre within the dynamics of musical production can be rendered in graphic form as bands of frequencies by means of computer software.[153] A key problem for improvisation research is that spontaneously created music operates without reference to the conventional symbols of notation, in precisely the area where orthodox notation is at its least rigorous: with regard to the nuances of individual timbre.[154] What the student improviser focuses on in transcribing a jazz solo, for instance, tends to be the idiosyncratic note-choices of the musician in question, rather than the timbral "play" with which the musician is engaged. In this regard, McClary situates this playing with sound in the context of the African-American tactic of "signifyin(g)" (2000:24-25, emphasis added):

> Henry Louis Gates Jr. has theorized this practice[155] as “signifyin(g),” whereby the creative artist exhibits prowess and imagination and yet simultaneously reinscribes the cultural habits and structures that preserve both community and communication. “Signifyin(g)” takes on many shapes, from the troping of familiar songs or stories to the use of a wide range of funky or “masked” sounds that incorporate elements of noise (deliberately exploiting complex vocal sounds, playing guitar with a bottleneck, and so on).

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[153] Using similar techniques, forensic criminalists make use of voice-print analysis to identify the timbral characteristics of a particular speaker.

[154] This is not to suggest that nineteenth-century composers did not have a very profound understanding of orchestration or blend, but this is concerned with the combination of different timbres than the application of notation to individual ones. A precise symbolic language for capturing the more radical possibilities of tone colour did not appear on the scene until the twentieth century, and these notational devices are most suited for esoteric and specialist "extended techniques." See, for example, Coan's invention of specialized notational symbols in his 1995 transcriptions of Michael Brecker's saxophone solos.

[155] That is, the practice of allowing for individual improvisation against the background of cherished, historically sanctioned grammars.

McClary goes on to link this practice, in her discussion of the musical practices of the Swan Silvertones vocal group, with the lead singer's employment of falsetto as an affective device (section 4.1.4.2): "He sings not just for himself but for his listeners, who perceive him as one who testifies for all." This process of synecdoche (in which one stands for all) is "guaranteed" in two ways: the singer's signifyin(g) is accompanied by the "velvety, well-rehearsed voices" of the backup singers (the individual's expression thereby supported by the community) and the recording technology of the time, which allowed him and the backup singers to deliver the hymn at a fairly soft (intimate) dynamic level. Their ability so to deliver, for McClary, "could not occur without the mediation of miking[156] technologies."[157]

Walser draws a distinction between two conceptions of meaning embedded in the terms "signification" and "signifyin(g)" (or, as he puts it, signifyin') when he writes (1995:168):

> Signification is logical, rational, limited; from this perspective, meanings are denotative, fixed, exact, and exclusive. Signifyin', conversely, works through reference, gesture, and dialogue to suggest multiple meanings through association. If signification assumes that meanings can be absolute, permanent, and objectively specified, signifyin' respects contingency, improvisation, relativity—the social production and negotiation of meanings.[158]

In relation to Soundpainting, McClary's discussion of the Swan Silvertones dramatizes firstly the relation between individual and community, a central problematic in jazz studies. Similarly, in Thompson's language, the signals

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[156] As in placing microphones to achieve a desired sonority, or timbre.
[157] This is another case of the influence of technology in creating a particular sonic space.
[158] Walser concludes by saying (*ibid.*): "We might compare the way a dictionary prescribes meanings with the ways in which words constantly change meaning in actual usage by communities of language users. The difference is like that between ***semantics*** and rhetoric: signification assumes that meaning can be communicated abstractly and individually, apart from the circumstances of exchange; signifyin' celebrates performance and dialogic engagement."

allow for dialogue and interplay between the individual improviser and pre-arranged but fluid <groups>,[159] as the Soundpainting event unfolds. With respect to McClary's second point regarding the manipulation of timbre, Soundpainting signals such as <extended techniques> explicitly call for the deployment of a wide range of unorthodox timbral practices, which do not in themselves necessarily relate to her more politicized view of timbral play as a case of African-American "signifyin(g)" tactics.[160] Soundpainting, in terms of Walser's notions of relative fixity of meaning as exemplified in the difference between orthodox signification and subversive signifyin', can be seen as foregrounding signifyin' as an activity that, as Walser notes, "celebrates performance and dialogic engagement" (1995:168):

> In fact, the concept could be compared to literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas about dialogue in the novel, or to a variety of other twentieth-century philosophical interrogations of the nature of language and meaning, from Wittgenstein to the American pragmatists to the French poststructuralists.

4.1.4.7 The fourth wall

Ramanna's notion of "discourse of place" (1998, 2005) considers the important variable of the geographical situation of a performance as a potential influence on the musical results of the event. Further, his study closely examines the relationship of performers to audience as a variable in the success or failure of the musical event under discussion. In theatre, the fourth wall is construed as an imaginary line or barrier between the performers and the audience, enforcing thereby a fixed distance

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[159] The various <group> signals in Soundpainting (Thompson 2006:16-19) allows for the establishment of temporary sections within the ensemble. While in Soundpainting these signals may cater for the establishment of temporary sections, these differ (in their degree of "contingency") from sections within an orchestra, in which similar families of instruments are placed in close proximity, such as strings, woodwinds, and so on.

[160] In this regard Walser notes (*ibid.*): "As Gates himself insists, signifyin' is not exclusive to African American culture, though it is in that culture that signifyin' has been most fully articulated theoretically, not only by scholars but also in folklore and song lyrics."

contributing to the ritualistic element in such performances. In the concert-hall, this combination of ritual and proxemics plays a central role in the creation of a temporary community, whose manner of responding to the music are governed by the social conventions of the genre.[161]

In the context of music composition, Williams (2001:38) mentions Pauline Oliveros as a case of a post-Cage experimental music composer who ”attempts to break down the distinction between audience and performers and encourages participants to construct events from their own experiences.” In an interview with the author (Johannesburg 4 September 2005), Oliveros concurred with Williams's view, and mentioned examples of her compositions that interrogated not only the traditional relationship between performers and audience, but also the "appropriate" sites for such performances. In her view, the idea of the concert-hall as a neutral space for performance was somewhat naïve, as it overlooked the idea that such spaces contain within them a spatial enactment of power relations.

In the context of free improvisation, Prévost considers the audience as a variable in the equation as follows (1995:27):

> The effect of an audience's presence upon AMMmusic gives this situation a sharp focus. The musicians are aware of a further refinement in their perception of the materials and situation in which they must work. It feels a bit like a player playing with someone looking over his shoulder and enquiring of his every move. Yet ultimately he knows that he must get beyond this very personal response if he is to do justice to the work in hand.

As Sherwood notes in regard to Soundpainting (1999):

> Thompson's goals make him very much at home with today's new media blends—from visual installation and performance art to classical music's migration into jazz-like improvisations. He says his orchestra's rehearsals and performances are "in the moment," changing according to the dynamics of the audience and players.

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[161] See Davidson (1997) and Small (1998) for discussions of this topic.

Thompson's acknowledgement of the audience's potential to influence the direction of a Soundpainting event is borne out by his inclusion of a number of signs that allow for the performers to interact with the audience. A good example is the <heckle> signal, wherein the performers reverse the traditional roles of audience and performers by indicating disapproval of the audience's performance, rather than the other way round. In addition, as part of the ensemble's performance in Paris, Thompson interacted with the audience by turning towards them and signing some rudimentary gestures for them to interpret. These examples suggest a humorous inversion of the audience's traditional role as more or less passive consumers of the performance, and ironically interrogate some of the politics of concert-hall etiquette. These examples serve to indicate Thompson's agreement with the view that performance is a collective and collaborative effort, presupposing to some extent an understanding of the relationship between performers and audience as dynamic and contingent.

4.1.4.8 Improvisation and freedom

Improvisers within the jazz and free jazz fields are often seen as concerned with the somewhat problematic notions of freedom and self-expression. The author has suggested (earlier within this chapter) that such tactics as the particular instruments chosen by musicians (Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry), their attitude to the repertoire and its implicit role in canon-formation in jazz (Art Ensemble of Chicago), and the place of timbral play in identity politics, dramatize these issues.

As Monson suggests, the metaphor of improvisation as freedom was to find a particular resonance with musicians and the wider community in the context of the civil rights struggle of the 1960s (1998:149):

> Improvisation has often taken been as a metaphor for freedom both musical and social, especially in jazz. The image of improvisation as freedom became especially pronounced in the jazz world of the early 1960s when the free jazz of Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Albert Ayler, and others catalyzed aesthetic and political debates within the jazz community and music industry.

While the aims of free jazz in this period are inseparable from the social context from which the music emerged (and are therefore irretrievably politicized), a rather different situation emerges with regard to the place of improvisation in the context of experimental music. In general, within such music there appears to be a distrust of notions of freedom, and composers are concerned with the elimination of "the speaking subject" on ideological grounds that are in contrast to the aims of self-expression so much an integral part of the jazz aesthetic.[162]

Stockhausen, for example, has shown a high degree of antipathy towards any music with a regular pulse (a characteristic of most traditional jazz and popular music), while Pierre Boulez (section 2.1.3.3) has exhibited the not altogether successful desire to purge random elements from his music. Jazz, and especially free jazz, tends to privilege the "random" as part of an aesthetic in which the notion of the individual (and individual utterances) plays a central role. In this regard, a key difference between such practices is the place accorded to composition within them. A commonly held view of composition is that the composer practices his or her craft in isolation to create works, which are characterized by their susceptibility to revision before they reach the outside world as finished products. This approach is different from that of improvisation in general, and free improvisation in particular, which by definition cannot be revised because it is spontaneously created, and as such exists only in the moment of performance.

On the basis of this distinction, Thompson's characterization of Soundpainting as live composition raises problems for those who subscribe to a more orthodox conception of composition. Thompson characterized the salient problems around these issues of definition in

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[162] For contributions to this debate, see Anderson (2002), Borgo (2002), and Monson (1996, 1998).

correspondence with the author as follows (3 April 2006):

> Also—on another note, and quite interesting to me, many composers have made a point of letting me know they don't think of Soundpainting as composing—because it can't be repeated, edited (the next day) and other ridiculous notions of what makes a composition. I have discussed and argued Soundpainting is live composition—a composing medium differing from what we think of as traditional composition. This has been an ongoing discussion with professors of composition whose conservatoires I have visited. These same composers argue improvisation is not composition—also something I strongly disagree with.

As Thompson himself comments, "If you know the system [of signals] well, you can respond immediately to something [that the performers improvise on stage]. And the performers know how I compose…. So they might have a sense of the signal before it comes."[163] Through Soundpainting's gestures is enacted a more elastic conception of composition as based in the moment, in which individual utterances are shaped by the Soundpainter's responses to the free expression and interchange of musical ideas.

Monson (1998:149) also poses a number of challenges facing the development of what she terms "an ethnomusicology of improvisation." These include what she describes (*ibid.*) as "interlocking contexts that include aesthetic modernism, spiritual transcendence, transnationalism, the civil rights movement, and African independence." Key and Rothe relate this problem to the historical developments that led to the emergence of the United States as a nation, and further note the complicating influence of the mass media (the Debordian spectacle) in this situation (2001:38):

> As a relative newcomer to nationhood, and as a nation based more on abstract principles than historical associations or ethnicity, the United States offers no ready marker of national identity. As a result, Americans from the earliest days of the republic have tried to define

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[163] Thompson interview with Topper Sherwood (1999).

> the American identity—and American artists' have been some of the most compelling in this dialogue. Yet the same factors that have made American musical culture the most vibrant in the world have placed its musicians in a double bind. The sounds that have come to be identified as 'American' have come from class and ethnic sources outside the mainstream of 'high culture.' Thus popular musicians struggle to be taken seriously, and serious composers struggle to reconcile the genres, techniques, and resources of a European-developed art with their native popular music. Since the beginning of the 20th century, urbanization and the mass media have both confused and enriched the issue.

4.2 Language acquisition in improvised music

Pauline Oliveros (2004:50) defines the act of improvisation as follows:

> In music, theater, dance, and the visual arts, improvisation includes acting from inner intelligence and/or impulse without premeditation from the whole field of available possibilities, as well as acting with vocabulary within more prescribed forms.

Oliveros here distinguishes between two kinds of improvising activity, one based on unscripted "inner intelligence and/or impulse," with the second kind situated in the more prescribed (or scripted) realm, incorporating the notions of vocabulary and prescription. This concept of vocabulary as an essential element of improvisation, for Oliveros, is related to the rules of the game under consideration, implying the not unsynonymous terms control and structure.

Some totemic structures within the tonal jazz language, such as the blues, "rhythm changes," and 32-bar song form, provide evidence of the existence of axiomatic systems or Wittgensteinian grammars, which determine the rules of that particular language system. According to Wittgenstein's concept, a grammar is normative, in so far as it lays out the conditions for a given language-game to be regarded as “meaningful.” In musicking, McClary's "temporary community" provides the conditions that support as well as sanction individualized utterances.

Starting from Oliveros's concept of prescribed forms suggests a degree of

negotiation of space within power relations at work in even the most apparently democratic and collaborative climate. These issues are explored in detail in Heffley (2005), with regard to democratic ideals and their influence on the development of free jazz in Europe.

Bailey's comments on vocabulary in musical practice are relevant to this discussion since they highlight the manner in which this vocabulary develops, over time and with the gradual formation of a sense of familiarity with "a common stock of material" (1992:106):

> The analogy with language, often used by improvising musicians in discussing their work, has a certain usefulness in illustrating the development of a common stock of material—a vocabulary—which takes place when a group of musicians improvise together regularly. With a successful improvising group the bulk of their material will be initially provided by the styles, techniques and habits of the musicians involved. This vocabulary will then be developed by the musicians individually, in work and research away from the group, and collectively, in performance.

Sloboda (1985), cited in Philpott (2001:32-46), identifies nine basic similarities between music and language as follows:

1. Both are particular to humans
2. Both contain the potential for infinite combinations of possibilities
3. Both can be learned by listening to models
4. Both use vocal and auditory sound processes as their natural medium
5. Both involve the use of notational systems
6. Both require necessary skills to be received and absorbed before they can be used
7. Both share some universality of form across cultures
8. Both can be examined in terms of phonetic, syntactic and semantic structures
9. Both contain an underlying structure over which various transformations can take place.[164]

Sloboda's comparison between music and language is also relevant to improvised musicking, in which the place of notation is to some extent contested, as the author's discussion of the informal methods of language

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[164] Philpott here compares the work of Chomsky with that of Heinrich Schenker.

employed by popular musicians has shown (section 4.1.2). The focus of this section is primarily on Sloboda's sixth point, concerning the reception and integration of the requisite skills for music and speech. The author's aim here is to consider the methods used to acquire improvisational facility and later to suggest that there may be parallel processes at work in the acquisition of music and language skills. It is suggested, therefore, that improvisers are not born, but made, in the sense that improvising demands the kind of thoroughgoing preparation that paradoxically allows it to appear spontaneous.

As Eric Clarke (1988:1) has stated: "Playing music is an activity that is comparable in cognitive complexity to speaking a language, and comparable in its demands on motor control to playing a sport like tennis." While not explicitly linking music to language on a semantic level at least, Clarke is suggesting here that musical activity requires a two-fold development on the performer's part, demanding both cognitive and motor skills for the performance to take place.

Clarke goes on to say (1988:1-2):

> Continuous reference to a large body of musical knowledge is required in music performance if the result is to be fluent and intelligent, making it difficult to maintain a definite distinction between the cognitive structures of abstract musical understanding and those embodied in a motor programme for musical performance.

What he is alluding to initially is the repertoire that musicians tap into—the store of shared linguistic elements encompassing such notions as genre, stylistic vocabulary, appropriate phrasing, and so on, which will obviously in turn depend on the tradition from which the music springs. This tradition in jazz (as suggested earlier by van Heerden) is inherently conservative because it is based in the value-system of the community, thereby creating the tension between the improviser's need for self-expression and the norms and values of the community.

Looking at these criteria, one wonders if Clarke's distinction between

cognitive and motor skills is not a somewhat artificial one (as he himself admits), in the sense that musicians acquire and develop these skills more or less in tandem, by which is meant that there is a symbiotic process taking place here. In practice it seems unlikely that a beginner musician will separate out these skills in a self-reflexive way by saying to themselves: “All right, enough practising my instrument for today. Now I’m going to focus on transcribing a solo.”

Although the act of transcription may take place away from the chosen instrument, it seems plausible that the musician will at least check the accuracy of the completed version on some instrument or other, thereby confirming the initial cognitive act in the realm of the kinesic as muscle memory. Moreover, many of the skills that the fledgling improviser works on develop both cognitive and motor skills (such as practising on their instrument of choice, memorization, and imagination).

Mark Gridley (1997:19-20) lists a set of skills necessary for jazz improvisation as follows:

- Near-effortless command of an instrument
- A good acquaintanceship with harmony
- A quick and keen ear for pitch and rhythm
- A good memory for sounds
- A repertoire of hundreds of tunes and chord progressions
- The ability to recognize chord progressions quickly.

Gridley continues by listing four skills to do with what is often termed musical literacy, namely:

- The ability to read music
- The ability to sight-read music
- The ability to make up an original tune and correctly notate it
- The ability to listen to someone else’s music and then correctly notate it.

Following the work of Berliner and Monson, the discussion is focused mainly on the acquisition of musical skills within the jazz idiom, some of which is instinctive (aurally-based) as in playing along with recordings or acquiring real-time knowledge on the bandstand in the course of

performance, while a large proportion of which (following the acceptance of improvisation studies into academe) is based on textual study (methods for studying improvisation).

The author's aim here is to highlight the instantaneous, heuristic, trial and error basis of the first approach, while emphasizing the more contemplative or reflective nature of the second: on the one hand, the art, and on the other, the science, of improvisation. It should also be stressed that these processes are not mutually exclusive but feed and reinforce each other on a continuous basis as improvisers develop their skills over time.

The parallels between the acquisition of language skills in everyday life and a similar process in music are neither tenuous nor accidental, and are borne out by the way in which some jazz musicians explicitly link musical practice with communication, and especially the metaphor of story-telling, pointing thus to the connection between a great improviser and the custodian of the history of the tribe. For instance, Danny Barker (in Shapiro and Hentoff 1966:243) explicitly links a performance by Bessie Smith to the evangelical tradition of the American South when he states:

> When you went to see Bessie and she came out, that was it. If you had any church background, like people who came from the South as I did, you would recognize a similarity between what she was doing and what those preachers and evangelists from there did, and how they moved people. The South had fabulous preachers and evangelists. Some would stand on corners and move the crowds from there. Bessie did the same thing on stage.

Oakley highlights an ambiguity in this image of the blues singer as preacher when he states (1976:50):

> Many black people would have been, and still would be, offended by the idea that the blues singer 'spoke' for them, in much the same way that others would reject the spokesmanship of the preacher. Nevertheless, there did exist what almost amounted to a blues community. Its significance was in the processes of communal creation and participation in a shared culture, and within that world most singers regarded themselves as entertainers. But the idea that

> blues were the expression of deeply felt emotions made the music more than simply entertainment.

McClary's discussion of Bessie Smith's performance of *Thinking Blues* highlights the importance of the process whereby the community and the performer make use of mutually intelligible codes in stating (2000:47): "She invokes and brings into being a temporary community that bears witness to and empathizes with her subjective expression, made intersubjective by her use of shared codes." Elsewhere, but also in the context of the blues, Oakley highlights the ambiguous nature of this community (1976:216-7):

> For large portions of the community the blues was still the devil's music, the music of immorality, licentiousness, eroticism, whisky-drinking, juke joints, low life, violence, a source of corruption and the harbinger of social corruption. And to many blacks salvation was to be found in ridding from the Race its stereotyped image of irresponsibility and unreliability.

Cook views the process of signification in ethnomusicology as a series of negotiations between performers and the audience in stating (2001:13):

> The contemporary performance studies paradigm that has developed primarily in the context of theater studies and ethnomusicology stresses the extent to which signification is constructed through the very act of performance, and generally through acts of negotiation between performers, or between them and the audience.

Cook's emphasis on the "negotiability" of signification is in line with Reason's concept of the degree of interaction between the performers and the audience as a variable in the success of the performance. In other words, a performance of live improvisation differs, by virtue of its spatio-temporal context, from a similar performance in a recording studio, where the technology allows for editing (replacing "mistakes," changing the sonic balance, and overdubbing extra parts) after the fact. In this situation, there is no live audience present to create a "vibe" of approval or otherwise, and the negotiation of signification is mediated through the technology of computer-based digital audio software.

In the different contexts of live performance and the recording studio, then, it is apparent that different performance territories or spaces provide different responses from the musicians: in the live situation, music is being performed (created) spontaneously without the possibility of review, while the space of the recording studio allows for editing after the fact with the aim of documenting a near-perfect performance.

4.2.1 The repertoire

Jazz is the only music in which the same note can be played night after night but differently each time.

Ornette Coleman (1964/2002)

As a working definition of the repertoire, one might suggest that this takes the form of the canonic history of significant musicians, as well as the body of work, the improviser engages with in the course of his or her development. In jazz, this is subject to some extent to the vicissitudes of fashion, as a result of which musicians fall in or out of favour, sometimes to be re-evaluated or re-discovered with the benefit of hindsight. This notion of the repertoire is closely connected to Oliveros's idea (section 4.2) of a prescribed vocabulary (in jazz, for example, "standards" and the blues), which form the core of the language.

The author here examines some elements of the jazz repertoire that call to mind Sloboda's earlier point (9) (section 4.2) regarding the underlying structures of music. The need to examine how form is constructed and negotiated in jazz's tonal realm becomes apparent in the light of the increasing "assaults on its foundations" mounted by the free and post-free players following the 1960s.

4.2.1.1 The blues

McClary, while acknowledging the difficulty of locating a "main stream"

within twentieth-century musical practice, sees the blues as the bedrock on which is built many widely different styles of music. She cites such musicians as Blind Willie Johnson, Ma Rainey, James P. Johnson, Duke Ellington, Hank Williams, Little Richard, Queen Ida, and Thelonious Monk, as well as such later disciples of the blues as Led Zeppelin, Janis Joplin, the Beach Boys, James Brown, and John Zorn. This partial list of artists encompasses a stylistic gamut from country music to soul, Zydeco to free jazz, rock 'n' roll to gospel, stride piano to heavy metal. For McClary (2000:33): "As much as these musics may differ from each other, they unite in engaging with the conventions of the blues."

As McClary further states, the blues is less an expression of feeling than an engagement with a set of conventions:

> Contrary to a popular belief that regards blues as some kind of unmediated expression of woe, the conventions underlying the blues secure it firmly within the realm of culture; a musician must have internalized its procedures in order to participate creatively within its ongoing conversation.[165]

Two primary conventions underlying the blues are its harmonic/metric structure and the opportunity for musicians to engage with it on a level of idiosyncratic timbre. The blues framework has crystallized over time into a twelve-bar format with a more or less fixed harmonic progression as underpinning. This takes the form of a three-line structure, each phrase consisting of four bars, starting on the tonic for the first phrase, moving to the subdominant area (generally followed by the tonic) in the second phrase, and moving to the dominant in the last phrase. McClary takes the example of *St Louis Blues* (composed by W. C. Handy and performed by Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong) as "a schematic model for the blues procedure" (2000:39):

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[165] McClary's view of the blues as "ongoing conversation" confirms once again the possibility of interpreting music on a sociolinguistic basis.

Line 1:	I hate to see	the ev'ning sun go	down,
(Bars 1-4)	I	IV	I7
(V7/IV)			
Line 2:	I hate to see	the ev'ning sun go	down,
(Bars 5-8)	IV	IV	I
Line 3:	It makes me think I'm	on my last go	round.
(Bars 9-12)	V	IV (or V)	I (V7)

Figure 4.2.1.1: McClary's analysis of *St Louis Blues*.

Albert Murray explicitly links the polysemic nature of blues playing to theatricality and ritual in the following description (1978:87):

> Blues musicians play music not only in the theatrical sense that actors play or stage a performance, but also in the general sense of playing for recreation, as when participating in games of skill. They also play in the sense of gamboling, in the sense that is to say, of fooling around or kidding around with, toying with, or otherwise having fun with. Sometimes they also improvise and in the process they elaborate, extend, and refine. But what they do in all instances involves the technical skill, imagination, talent, and eventually the taste that adds up to artifice. And of course such is the overall nature of play, which is so often a form of reenactment to begin with, that sometimes it also amounts to ritual.

Jost's analysis of Ornette Coleman's blues composition *Tears Inside* (from the 1959 recording *Tomorrow is the Question!*) includes a transcription of three of Coleman's improvised ***choruses*** in conventional notation. Jost notes a number of significant points about the piece and Coleman's approach to the blues as follows:

> The harmonic development is reduced to the most rudimentary changes, and in this respect the piece is more like early forms of folk blues than bebop blues,[166] with their many substitute chords.

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[166] The difference for the two categories of blues rests in the greater harmonic complexity in bebop's re-inscription of the blues. The regular practice of harmonic

Jost finds evidence not only of an underlying thematicism in Coleman's improvisation on this piece, as well as an attempt to return to the simplified chordal structure of earlier formats of the blues. Coleman engages with a far more rigid version of the blues, which recalls Wishart's comments (section 4.1.4.5) with regard to the place of utterance within what he characterizes as "totemic" song-structures.

4.2.1.2 Standards: the language of the tribe

In discussing the making of the first *Standards* album with Gary Peacock and Jack deJohnette, Keith Jarrett (in Lange 1984:63) recalls: "*Standards* was, believe it or not, the opening to the classical thing, like a stop-off in American Songwriterville, trying to pay back some of my debt to the kind of music I felt Gary and Jack and I had as a kind of tribal language that we all grew up with."

Jarrett here pays homage to the standard, what van Heerden (1996:28) has defined as: "a commonly-used vehicle for improvisation, as opposed to an entirely original piece." Many such standards have their point of origin in Tin Pan Alley, the songwriting quarter of New York City, and first see the light of day as popular tunes or quite commonly as show tunes emanating from Broadway. It is also possible for original tunes (such as "Take Five") to acquire the status of standards, often by virtue of becoming jazz "hits," or for jazz musicians to annex popular hits and thereby accord to them the legitimation of this status.[167]

In a typical post-1940s jazz performance, the initial statement of the

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substitution in bebop led to a far more complex set of chord changes than was practised by practitioners of the folk blues, which tended to stay more closely with the original harmonic schema, as per McClary's model.

[167] See for instance Miles Davis' treatment of *Human Nature* by Michael Jackson as well as Cyndi Lauper's *Time after time* on the recording *Live Around the World*.

melodic theme of a standard jazz tune[168] is usually followed by a series of improvised “choruses”, in which each soloist is given the opportunity in turn to construct a musical statement based on the ground of the changes (the chord progression) of the piece in question. In the jazz vernacular, this is usually referred to as "running the changes." The solos are then rounded off by a final re-statement of the ***head***. The piece may or may not conclude with a coda section in the form of a last time ending or a repeat and fade section.

This conventional performance method, present mainly in traditional (or "mainstream") jazz, bebop, and much jazz since the 1950s, is in contrast to the earlier procedure in some New Orleans jazz (or “dixie”) where the soloist tends to re-state an embellished version of the theme as a solo while accompanied by the other front-line instruments in a type of freely embellished counterpoint to the melody.

The emphasis in much bebop and post-bop music is thus on the harmonic structure as the focus of improvisational activity, and not on the creation of an elaborated version of the melody. This focus on the harmonic implications of a jazz piece suggests that closure is "weaker" than in the case of WEAM, where the dynamic structure of exposition, development, and recapitulation is maintained by moving away from the tonic key as laid out in the exposition, journeying further away in the development, and returning to the original key in the recapitulation section. This telic approach (Heble 2000, McClary 2000) is one of the animating principles in sonata form, in which transformations are carried out in accordance with the presentation of a melodically identifiable subject (more generally, first and second subjects).

Jazz usually tends to exhibit a much simpler harmonic structure, which for the most part remains constant, and the focus here is on the way in which

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[168] Known among jazz musicians as the “head.”

the soloist engineers melodic transformations against a more or less stable chordal background. In the case of a jazz group who perform "standards" as a way of earning a living, the author suggests here that while the "music" may not be in evidence on the bandstand, they are working within the parameters of a mutually agreed-upon blueprint of how to get from point A to point B. This blueprint may take the form of a strategy of interpretation arrived at through intensive rehearsal and discussion of the music in question or the shared understanding (through aural familiarity with the piece they are playing) of the shape and flow of the music.

It is claimed (Ephland 1996:18) that the trio led by the American jazz pianist Keith Jarrett never rehearse and never discuss a programme (or "set list" in jazz parlance) in advance before they perform, and that Jarrett's piano introductions often are the only clue to the accompanists (usually Gary Peacock, double bass and Jack deJohnette, drums) as to which piece they are about to play.

> JE: But, when the three of you play a concert, don't you at least huddle just before you go out to agree on the first number?
> KJ: We actually don't even do that.
> JE: What about sign language on stage?
> GP: Not really. Keith will begin to play something, and you just keep listening and listening.

It is perhaps paradoxical that some improvised music derives its apparent quality of spontaneity from intense rehearsal. The double bassist Chuck Israels (in Berliner 1994:289) has this to say about working with Bill Evans: "People never understood how arranged Bill Evans's music really was. Sure, it was free and improvised. But the reason we could be so free is that we already knew the beginning, the middle, and the ending."

Standards are the bread and butter of the improvising jazz musician and form a transnational and translinguistic common repertoire enabling musicians literally to "meet on the bandstand," with their instrumental or "story-telling" ability the means of communication. They form a "ground"

through which musicians who speak different languages in everyday life can communicate in a musical (non-verbal) fashion.

This ground of communication is formed not only by the melodies and chord progressions of the piece in question but the conventional structural and tactical manoeuvres tacitly agreed upon during the course of its performance. In some instances procedures are based on etiquette and the sense of allowing someone to finish "saying their say." For example, a common decision point here is when soloists are not indicating clearly (through the paralinguistic clues of eye contact or body language) whether they intend to continue on soloing into the next cycle of the harmonic changes. The next soloist has to interpret the signs of the end of the first section of the solo by ear in this case, as in whether the phrase in question sounds to their ear resolved or unresolved.

The direction and shape of the phrase, its dynamic intensity, and degree of rhythmic complexity often will give clues as to this decision, as well as if the note ends on a chord tone or a melodic tension.)[169] A downward direction in the melodic shape combined with a decrease in either dynamic and/or rhythmic activity will suggest that the soloist intends concluding the solo. Experienced musicians will know when the soloist is about to finish and will also know where they themselves are in the changes so as to allow for the possibility of the soloist's overlapping into the beginning of the next section and then taking over at the correct harmonic if not formal point.

4.2.1.3 "Rhythm changes" and the contrafact

Lewis describes the characteristic transformational tactics of bebop

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[169] Landing on a chord tone, the author suggests, may indicate the achievement of relatively greater tonal stability suggesting thereby that the soloist is "winding down," whereas the use of a melodic tension as a point of arrival is more ambiguous.

musicians as follows (1996:94):

> Bop improvisers, like earlier generations of jazz improvisers, used 'heads,' or precomposed melodic material, as starting points for a piece. Bop heads, however, as Gridley (1994:165) points out, 'resembled little or nothing that the listener had heard before.' In a further abstraction, bebop improvisers felt no obligation to use the melodic material of the 'head' as material for improvisational transformation. Instead, the underlying harmonic sequence, usually subjected to extensive re-working by the improvisers, became the basis for improvisation.

One of the favourite vehicles for this kind of improvisatory practice was the Gershwin composition "I Got Rhythm," whose origin and popularity as a Broadway show tune, and its compliance with the 32-bar AABA song form style, defined it clearly as a product of dominant culture. In addition, the B-section of the tune uses the kind of harmonic formula with its extended chain of II-V's, which provided the bebop musicians with ample scope for demonstrations of chromatic finesse. By altering the plain secondary dominants in the bridge to allow for a more chromatic approach, the bebop musicians subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) re-inscribed a commentary on the melodic blandness and harmonic simplicity of the original piece. In fact this composition has survived in its purely harmonic form as what have come to be called "Rhythm changes."

The bebop musicians of the 1940s created a new musical language by privileging harmonic over melodic structures. For Tirro (1993), this approach is typified in Coleman Hawkins's recording of *Body and Soul*. Their new music demanded attention for its artistic value, rather than as entertainment, and they adopted various strategies to realise this goal.

Firstly, their emphasis on the diminished fifth interval, which divides the octave into two equal halves, can be seen as a move away from harmony based on thirds. As Heble claims (2000:37):

> If Bird was, at the time of his playing, seen as an anomaly, it was precisely because he played notes in his improvisations which nobody had dared to acknowledge expect perhaps as passing

> harmonies. The flattened fifth, for instance, the devil itself in music, became a stylistic device that characterized much of what Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and other boppers were doing.

Secondly, their adoption of tempos outside what was commonly accepted as "danceable" highlighted their intention of creating music for listening rather than partying. In the third place, the bebop musicians deliberately avoided familiar melodies, in favour of a much more angular approach to note choices. Where familiar melodies were used, they were often removed from their original context and deployed as ironic or tongue-in-cheek quotations.[170]

The fourth area of emphasis lies in a new conception of rhythm, wherein drummers moved the statement of the pulse from the bass drum to the hi-hat and ride cymbals. In this context, the bass drum was now used for accenting ("dropping bombs") rather than stating the time explicitly. This move allowed for far more subtle nuances in the interpretation of time, which in turn allowed the soloist a greater flexibility. In the fifth place, the beboppers' adoption of such highly stylized elements as dress code[171] and language suggested the formation of a social group designed to prevent the appropriation of their music by commercial (read white[172]) interest groups.

> Pop songs and the blues have served as launching pads for jazz improvisers almost from the beginning, but Parker and his confederates radicalized the procedure by disguising the material they appropriated almost beyond recognition, in an abstract of sleek harmonic lines and daredevil rhythms that gave the impression of blinding speed even at moderate tempos.
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> (Davis, in Woideck 1998:176-7)

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[170] The author has in mind Charlie Parker's inclusion of melodic fragments from Bizet's *Carmen* during his performance at Massey Hall, Toronto.
[171] Thelonious Monk's bamboo-framed dark glasses and the uniform of the "zoot suit" come to mind here.
[172] Parker's mentorship of the young Red Rodney, a white trumpeter, proves the exception rather than the rule.

Baker defines the contrafact as (1987c:1) "a tune which is based on an extant set of chord changes" and goes on to outline its usefulness as follows:

> The contrafact was valuable for a wide variety of reasons. During the bebop era the working performer was expected to function without music much of the time and to be familiar with a common body of tunes and changes which were virtually public domain. Many of the tunes which served as bases were tunes which were a part of the basic repertoire of the bands in which the beboppers served their respective apprenticeships and were consequently very familiar to them.[173]

A contemporary example of this practice is found in Steve Swallow's 1997 CD *Deconstructed*, on which the track *Lost in Boston* is a melodic ***trope*** on the changes of the standard *It's wonderful*, and *Deconstructed* (the title track) is in turn superimposed on the harmonic framework of *Undecided*. Swallow's tactic in this instance reveals an ironic awareness of postmodernist techniques of pastiche and irony, as in the tongue-in-cheek titling of *Name that tune*.

4.2.1.4 Pedagogical methods for improvisation

Steve Lacy, the American soprano saxophonist who spent much of his life resident as an expatriate in France, has this to say regarding the importance of focusing one's attention on the materials of musical study: in other words, on what to play (1994:14, emphasis in original):

> I remain a convinced 'materialist': working intensively on a given material is perhaps the best way to progress and eventually to find your own style, by getting to the bottom of someone else's style. Of course Monk's music is so interesting that I never got tired of working on it and digging into it. Evidently appetite plays a large role in this story. You must find something difficult and stimulating to work on, and stay on it long enough to reap the benefits. It can be the music of Bach, Beethoven, Webern, Ellington, Parker, Tatum, Monk, many

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[173] As a matter of interest, Baker (1987c:1-2) cites no less than 48 contrafacts based on "I got rhythm."

other masters; it depends on your interests and needs.

Lacy's *Findings*, apart from being a very complete (as well as practical[174]) treatise on improvisation specifically for the soprano saxophone, is somewhat exceptional, in that its primary focus is on developing a general technical vocabulary for the instrument and less on the rule-following element of what is appropriate for a given style. Similarly, Marilyn Crispell's 2002 instructional DVD, *A pianist's guide to free improvisation: Keys to unlocking your creativity*, is less concerned with the rules of a particular jazz language-game than with the necessity for communication in the practice of free improvisation. As she states, with respect to "the art of playing with another person" (2002: chapter 22 ff.):

> Now this is a whole different ball game from playing on your own, as you can imagine, and it involves a different kind of listening. Here we're not just in conversation with ourselves, we're in a conversation with another person, and we don't really know exactly what they're gonna do—so it's like jumping on a trampoline (or something) without a safety net, or walking on a tightrope without a safety net; you could really fall on your face, but that's what makes it really interesting and wonderful.

Crispell, whose pedigree as a player includes extended periods as pianist with Anthony Braxton, mentions five tactics to safeguard against the risks of proceeding without a safety net as follows:

1. soloing and accompanying, in which one instrument becomes the dominant voice
2. the practice-room concept, where there is no necessary musical connection established
3. call and response, in which the players respond to a given musical statement by employing this approach
4. disruption, in which the musicians try to disrupt and erase a given musical statement
5. using a narrative beginning and ending technique over a fixed harmonic background, or pattern.

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[174] Lacy provides technical information relating to the instrument itself like fingering diagrams for obtaining high harmonics, as well as concert and transposed scores of original compositions.

Crispell's interest in free improvisation is exceptional for subverting the telic impetus of much tonal jazz, and, while space does not permit an exhaustive survey of improvisation methods (as in texts for learning to improvise), the author wishes to highlight the manner in which many of these texts generally presuppose the student's aim to be the mastery of the materials of tonal jazz. It has been suggested in this regard (section 4.1.2) that the concept of the chord scale applies largely to the dominant ideology of tonal jazz. Most's *Metamorphosis: Transformation of the jazz solo* (1980), in which various melodic exercises are superimposed on to existing harmonic structures, works in a fashion which reinforces Baker's idea of the contrafact. A section of Most's treatise is based on the progression of Charlie Parker's *Blues for Alice*, in which the exercises progress from very simple melodic shapes to more elaborate and oblique chromatic shapes by using specific categories of note choices based on underlying harmonic schemes.

4.2.1.5 Third Stream

Third Stream music is defined as that which attempts to fuse the rigour of Western concert music with the improvisational quality of jazz. Given the rules of the game of both fields, this is at best an uneasy fusion. Whereas classical music sets timbral purity as its *sine qua non*, this immediately creates an aesthetic conflict with the jazz musician's insistence on individuality and freedom. Classical musicians are trained to follow very closely the nuances of the symbolic language, and, for the most part, the improvisative impulse is frowned upon. For jazz musicians, the emphasis is placed on the ability to create music *extempore*, and this is mainly what other jazz musicians tend to admire when they enthuse about a given musician's skill. There are musicians who have the ability to transcend these differences, but they tend to be exceptionally flexible in terms of their approach to both fields.

In an interview with Anil Prasad (2002), Eberhard Weber had this to say regarding his 2001 recording *Endless Days*:

> AP: You told the musicians on the new record 'You can play everything as long as it doesn't sound like jazz' to encourage a sense of freedom and openness.
>
> EW: [laughs] I love these provocative phrases. When I told the musicians these phrases they laughed, knowing very well what I meant. 'Don't you worry, it won't be jazz' they said. They know that improvisation is also jazz, because improvisation, harmonically, doesn't exist in classical music. So, in the end it was jazz. But I wanted to avoid the typical noodly and doodly jazzy stuff. They immediately understood.

The American Paul McCandless, the fourth member of Weber's quartet, is a multi-instrumentalist (bass clarinet, oboe, and soprano saxophone), a classically trained musician whose approach to phrasing and sound, in this instance, exemplifies an erasure of both swing and individuality. McCandless's "straight" aesthetic operates in the dual areas of rhythmic feel ("time") and timbral iconicity (intonation and tone colour); eighth-notes are played "as written," notes are executed directly "on pitch," and McCandless's "sound" is befitting of the general chamber music atmosphere of the recording.[175]

Weber's deliberate avoidance of the more overt stylistic elements of the "American" jazz language can be seen as metonymic of the problematized discourse of jazz in Europe, by which the author means not a simple "us and them" mentality, but rather in the sense of a text being both a rewriting and a revision of every other text. This discourse is not hostile, at least in the obvious sense that Europe has opened its doors to many American expatriate musicians (Sidney Bechet, Duke Ellington, Dexter Gordon, Steve Lacy come to mind), but there is sometimes a slightly strident element in some writers' view (Gridley et al.) that "If it doesn't swing, it isn't jazz".

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[175] As these hallmarks of avoiding a jazz-like idiom are in keeping with Weber's desired aesthetic ideals for this recording, these remarks should not be construed as criticisms of McCandless's "lack of swing" or other ostensibly "anti-jazz" elements in his playing.

In the United States itself, the Third Stream is exemplified by such recordings as Gil Evans—*Birth of the Cool* and *Sketches of Spain*, Claus Ogerman—*Cityscape*, Michael Brecker Quindectet—*Wide angles*, and especially the work of the Modern Jazz Quartet. The cool element of this music is also typified by the West Coast jazz of such musicians as Gerry Mulligan, Paul Desmond, and, to a lesser extent, Dave Brubeck. Gioia (1998) argues that the "cool" school originates with session musicians in Hollywood film orchestras playing jazz in their free time.

4.3 Towards a model for improvised music

Wittgenstein's theories of language have bearing on the author's discussion of Soundpainting, in so far as they emphasize the rule-following procedures of language, as well as its contingent and contextualized nature. The author has argued that these theories are applicable to musicking in general, and are well suited to the analysis of improvised music, no less subject to rules (in the case of traditional jazz) than WEAM. From these rules emanate a system of "right" and "wrong" note-choices and a theoretical foundation of rules of tension and resolution, which (within the framework of the tonal jazz language-game) recapitulate this central metaphor of WEAM.

The interactions between musicians and their audiences expose both the ritualistic character of such practices and their obedience (or otherwise) to the rules of various language-games (whether those of WEAM in general, or the various "dialects" within the over-arching jazz language-game itself).

Within the jazz realm, the central dynamic of the individual in relation to the community is interrogated and negotiated by means of what Gates has theorized as tropological practices, in which the individual's choice of instrument, attitude to the canon, and using timbre as a means of expressing individuality, all form a category of tactical manoeuvres serving as metaphorical ways of negotiating these issues, with or without the approval of the temporary communities created in the course of performance.

4.3.1 Language-games in improvised music

It seems evident that musical activity can be seen as a form of discourse. Whether this musical discourse operates in any way similarly to language (that is, baldly put, if music means anything), while a fascinating question, is not likely to find its resolution within these pages. One is wary (despite whatever advances may have occurred in neurochemistry in the twenty-first century) of such eighteenth-century concepts as *Affektenlehre*, which laid claim to a necessary connection between musical content and its emotional effect on the listener.

What the author suggests rather is the potential of analysing music as a metalinguistic phenomenon or a metalanguage-game, borrowing from Wittgenstein. This idea of metalinguistics has clear parallels with Prévost's concept (1995:36) of meta-music, which he defines as "music as praxis." Corbett theorizes the paradoxical operations of another kind of "metalanguage" within orthodox musicology, wherein theoretical terms of WEAM like "harmony," "tension," and "resolution" are legitimated as part of a system of codes (1995:218):

> Musicology serves as the best example of a determinant musical metalanguage. In Western classical music a chord change is analyzed as having meaning in relation not only to other music that surrounds it, but to a body of knowledge outside sound, even outside written music—that is, previous analyses. The transparency of terms such as tension, resolution, harmony, and cacophony is in part a result of their origin as words; that is, they are theoretical terms to

> begin with—developed in relation to the abstract concept of functional harmony—that are subsequently given legitimacy in their enunciation as music, a process that then erases the writing through which it was produced.[177]

Lucy Green sees the term "ideology" as more or less supplanted in recent times by the term "discourse," and goes on to define ideology as having three main consequences for musicological (and other) scholarship. Although she seems to be at pains to avoid an overtly Marxist interpretation of the term, she views ideology's over-arching tendencies as towards reification, legitimation, and the perpetuation of social processes, through the operations of the reifying and legitimating processes she mentions (2003:4):

> In short, rather than a crude concept of ideology as a set of imposed falsehoods inducing a straightforwardly 'false' consciousness, it is more helpful to understand ideology as a set of common-sense assumptions which contribute towards making our social relations seem natural and justifiable: ideology helps to explain our world to us, it grows out of human experience and is shared, in various ways and with various consequences, by large numbers of people from different social groups making up a society. But at the same time, through the processes of reification and legitimation, ideology helps to perpetuate social relations 'as they already are.' Therefore, ideology usually operates to the advantage of the most powerful and better-off groups within the society.

This notion of ideology seems to be the animating rationale behind the kind of Blindfold Test as described by Radano, in which those more or less conservative members of the jazz community are asked to assess the work of such people for whose music they might reasonably be expected to feel a natural antipathy (precisely because of their media-created mantle as guardians of the tradition). On the other hand, much of the free

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[177] Corbett's conclusion demonstrates how the ideological concepts of WEAM are equally applicable to the legitimating practices of tonal jazz (*ibid.*): "Thus, we have a coded system that is given a semantic level through a complex system of denial. Meaning is metalinguistically pasted on; music theory fills the position of semantic referent in the musical language; the words of theory speak through the music they seem to animate."

music as played by such musicians as Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Albert Ayler and others, emerged during the social ferment of the 1960s and was sometimes explicitly linked with political agendas such as civil rights, the problem of identity within White-dominated society for many African-American artists and musicians, and the notion of liberation.

Radano describes the gradual acceptance of free jazz by the establishment in the following terms (1993:149):

> Many critics, on the other hand, had come to terms with free jazz by the late 1960s, and spoke favorably of performances that advanced Coltrane's stylistic innovations and Coleman's reinterpretation of the organically evolving, interactive nature of ensemble playing.

4.4 Towards an ethnomusicology of improvisation

As a provisional agenda towards this task, the author attempts now to summarize the salient points of the above discussion. The first difficulty is to define the terms "jazz", "free jazz", and "improvisation" satisfactorily. In considering the types (or *genera*) of music which allow for improvisation as a central organizing principle, it should be borne in mind that the exclusion of this practice from WEAM is a relatively recent and short-lived phenomenon, arising from the elevation of the score to the status of autonomous object, which concept in turn allowed for a range of critical approaches like Schenkerian analysis and so on. For Attali, this elevation is bound up in his examination of the political economy of music.[178]

Secondly, the problem has to do with the nature of these *genera* themselves, and, crucially, with the circumstances in which these musics are performed, propagated, and consumed. Steps towards a universal theory of improvisation are dogged by the realisation that each genus

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[178] The author discusses Attali's concept of noise in section 5.3.3.

contains within in it its own set of procedures that, in turn, sanction or condemn the artistic products as evidenced by a particular historical period. Wittgenstein's idiosyncratic use of the term "grammar" is an especially useful analytical idea as it suggests a close relationship between language and its associated rules for making sense. This leads to the conclusion that tonal jazz improvisation as a musical activity is concerned with axiomatic systems of tonal organisation leading to the chord scale method as a way of producing "the right noises." So, for each genus of improvised music, it seems logical enough to state that there obtains a set of rules, limits, boundaries, or "grammars" for making "sense". McGowan (2002) considers these grammars as "dialects," thereby reinforcing the metaphorical links between music and language that seem to pervade musicological discourse.

Now the question emerges: given the new types of technology available in this brave new postmodern world, are the style-boundaries between these new and readily available musical and artistic styles still safe and impermeable? Or are the classifications of musical productions currently even more problematized by postmodernism's agenda of breaking down the boundaries themselves? Multi-disciplinarity more than ever seems now the order of the day, and one might suggest here that this has necessitated a fundamental re-evaluation of the very idea of discipline as being hermetically sealed off from the demands of others, like some esoteric Medieval guild-system.

What emerges from the above discussion is the impossibility of finding any universal model for analyzing improvised music. Given the wide variety of musicking practices available today, the interdisciplinary character of much contemporary performance, and the advent of highly sophisticated technologies for manipulating music itself, the author suggests that “playing” with the hallowed forms of music is a part of postmodernism’s response to the formerly rigid style-boundaries that had existed in the past. Each language-game within musicking, in the author’s view, has to be considered on its own merits, according to its own rules, and therefore

Wittgenstein's notions point to contingency, rather than a full and final settlement of what constitutes the nature of musical meaning.