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Improvisation in Contemporary **Art**

Edited by
Adel-Jing Wang & Leszek Sosnowski

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Alessandro Bertinetto*

Musical Authenticity as ‘Being True to the Moment’

Abstract

In this paper I argue that the specific musical authenticity of improvisation in different kinds of music (especially, but not only, in Jazz and Free improvisation practices) consists of what I call ‘being true to the moment’ and that since the artistic success of every musical performance requires performers’ attentiveness and responsiveness to the moment of the performance, improvisational authenticity is the epitome of musical authenticity.

I proceed as follows. Firstly I present Peter Kivy’s plural view of musical authenticity and discuss Julian Dodd’s view of musical improvisation as essentially inauthentic. Then, I articulate two notions of improvisational authenticity, ontological and expressive authenticity, which I develop by means of a third, and crucial, notion of improvisational authenticity: truthfulness to the moment, which is the specific way improvisation realizes a fourth kind of authenticity: artistic authenticity. Finally, I argue that improvisational authenticity is paradigmatic for the authenticity of musical performance as performance.

Keywords

Musical Authenticity, Improvisation, Musical Expressiveness, Musical Performance, Artistic Normativity.

1. Musical Authenticities

Scholars, musicians and listeners highlight authenticity as an important artistic value of improvised music.¹ But, is there a specific sense of authenticity that is valid for musical improvisation? I think that the specific musical authenticity of improvisation in different kinds of music (especially, but not only, in Jazz and Free improvisation practices) consists in ‘being true to the

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¹ See for instance Fischlin *et al.* 2004; Santi 2010; Sarath 2013.

moment,' i.e. in improvisers' attentiveness and responsiveness to the moment of the performance. Moreover, since the artistic success of every musical performance requires performers to be attentive and responsive toward the performance situation, I think that improvisational authenticity is the epitome of musical authenticity. Finally, I believe that the negotiation of the normativity of the practice in relation to the situation of the artistic production is an important aspect of artistic normativity in general, and that for this reason the 'truthfulness to the moment' of improvisation exhibits a key aspect of artistic authenticity. In order to argue in favor of these views, I will begin by briefly presenting the topic of musical authenticity.

For this purpose, it is advisable to start with Peter Kivy's conceptual articulation. Although Kivy refers to Western classical music, his analytical discussion is also a good starting point for reflecting on authenticity in reference to the broad field of improvisational practices. According to Kivy, the notion of authenticity can apply to music in at least four ways: 1. "faithfulness to the composer's personal intentions;" 2. "faithfulness to the performance practice of the composer's lifetime;" 3. "faithfulness to the sounds of a performance during the composer's lifetime;" 4. "faithfulness to the performer's own self, original, not derivative, or an aping of someone else's way of playing" (Kivy 1995, 6–7). The polemical aim of the book was the so-called "movement for historically authentic performance" and its strong defense of the *Werktreue* ideal:² the truthfulness to the text of the musical work.

Roughly, the first three notions of musical authenticity can be considered as expressions of the ideal of authenticity as truthfulness to the work. Kivy argues that this ideal is not a necessary criterion for the artistic quality of a musical performance. Rather, the artistic quality of a musical performance necessarily requires the fourth type of authenticity (which does not only concern musical performances, but works of art), through which performers achieve two of the most admired artistic qualities: *style* and *originality* (see Kivy 1995, 123). Kivy believes that expressive authenticity, as he calls it, is compatible with, and often even required by, respect for the composer's intentions, and he claims that authenticity is, generally speaking, a trade-off: if the rate of authenticity as fidelity to the author's intentions or to the historical sonority increases, that of expressive authenticity diminishes, and vice versa. Moreover, he denies that the artistically-better performance is necessarily the one that respects the composer's intentions. On the one hand,

² This ideal is supported for instance by Godlovitch 1998. For a critical musicological discussion see Taruskin 1995.

moral reasons in favor of respect for the composer's intentions can be balanced by other moral reasons, such as respect for the listeners. On the other hand, fidelity to the composer's intentions (assuming we can have access to them) is no guarantee of the best artistic quality of the performance of a work. Furthermore, Kivy criticizes the "historically authentic performance movement", because it is "a project aimed at collapsing performance into text" (1995, 277), and holds that the gap between performance and text is desirable, so that music remains a performing art.

To sum up, Kivy suggests on the one hand, that musical inauthenticity, as infidelity to the musical work as text, is neither a moral evil nor an artistic demerit; on the contrary, it seems to be ontologically required for the musical performance to be a performance. On the other hand, the expressive authenticity of the performers is necessary for the artistic quality of the performance.

I agree. So on this basis I will develop my thesis on the authenticity of musical improvisation.

2. Musical Authenticity and Improvisational Inauthenticity

While strongly defending performance authenticity as truthfulness to the work, Julian Dodd has elaborated on the idea that a performance not faithful to the work as a text, which in this sense is inauthentic, can be artistically successful. "Musical authenticity" may mean either "score compliance authenticity" (Dodd 2012, 1), which consists in rendering the score faithfully, and in "being faithful to the composer's work-determinative instructions" (2014, 281), or "interpretive authenticity," which, in Dodd's words, is "a kind of faithfulness" to the musical work, which consists in "evincing a deeper understanding of the work performed" and allows the abandoning of "ideal fidelity to the score" in order to achieve "a more successful performance" which is "true to the work by interpreting it in a way that displays insight into its nature" (2012, 10, 17, 9).

Leaving aside complications (in Dodd's formulation it remains for example unclear what the "nature" of a work is), the important point is that in any case musical authenticity, as faithfulness to the work, is incompatible with improvisation. In improvised music, authenticity is not a "performance value," Dodds argues, because "improvised music [is] music in which what really matters is coping with challenges in the moment rather than being true to the work performed" (2014, 281). In other words: "Where improvisation disregards the work as scored, interest for

improvisation overrides interest for the work as scored. In this sense, there is a tension between improvisation and score-compliance. We may call this the *i n c o m p a t i b i l i t y t h e s i s*.³

This thesis is generally right, I think, but some qualifications are in order.

First, as musicological and ethnomusicological research has now definitively clarified, many improvisational musical practices are not centered around notions like work and composition and “improvisation is better understood in terms of the learning and application of culturally acquired, socially mediated, and embodied skills.”⁴ In improvisational practices of oral traditions, Free Jazz, a free improvisation, there is no work to be performed. In this case, we cannot reasonably say that improvisation is inauthentic, in Dodd’s sense, because there is no work to be unfaithful to. The performance can neither be authentic nor inauthentic (in that sense). Authenticity, as truthfulness to the work, is irrelevant here, so we may call this the *i r r e l e v a n c e t h e s i s*. In these practices (Free Jazz, Free improvisation, and improvisation practices of oral traditions), it makes no sense to define improvisation in terms of deviation from the score and inauthenticity. Rather, the aesthetic dimension of these practices is understood if we grasp its historical, social, and cultural dimension.⁵

Secondly, recent empirical studies demonstrate that unintentional improvisation is unavoidable in performing a rendition of a musical work, even in the Classical tradition of performances of work-as-scored.⁶ Hence, if there are authentic renditions of musical works, then musical improvisation does not prevent a performance from being authentic. However, this remark does not imply an insurmountable difficulty for the *i n c o m p a t i b i l i t y t h e s i s*. One may think that unintentional, unavoidable improvisation is not relevant: we rather need reasons for admitting or rejecting the possible authenticity of *i n t e n t i o n a l* improvisation.

Thirdly, in some cases improvising *is* following the composer’s instructions for a correct performance of the work. In Western ‘classical’ music we can find examples of this in the practices of the figured bass, of the free *cadenza* or in the ‘open’ or ‘undetermined’ works of the *avant-garde*. In these

³ I thank an anonymous reviewer for this nice formulation I allow myself to insert in the text.

⁴ I thank an anonymous reviewer for pushing me on this point and for the nice formulation I allow myself to incorporate in the text.

⁵ See Treitler 1991; Berliner 1994; Nettl *et al.* 1998; Lewis 2004; Nettl *et al.* 2009. See also footnotes 9 and 14.

⁶ See Schiavio, Høffding 2015; Seddon, Biasutti 2009, 35.

cases the musical score prescribes improvisation as authentic means for performing the work. When improvisation is required by the musical work's instructions (according to a given musical practice), then improvisation is both a necessary condition for the correct performance of the musical work and is still an improvisation. Within these practices, authentic performances, i.e. performances compliant with the score, are improvisational (or, if you prefer, involve improvisation): so this limits the scope of the *i n c o m p a t i b i l i t y t h e s i s*. Of course the score's instructions and musical practice's conventions constrain performers' improvisational freedom. If the score of a Baroque work prescribes improvisation for 12 bars, and the performers improvise for 30 bars in a Free Jazz style, then the improvised performance is unfaithful to the work and, in this sense, inauthentic. However it would be inauthentic as a wrong (improvisational) performance, not as improvisation *p e r s e*.

In other cases, for instance a Jazz rendition of a tune, "performers do not wait for the composer's permission or prescription before becoming improvisers. They freely decide to improvise, taking advantage of the composer's work for their performing aims" (Bertinetto 2012, 115). Unfaithfulness to the work-as-scored is required by the artistic practice and, consequently, here improvisation is inauthentic. Yet, as Dodd thinks, *t h i s* kind of inauthenticity does not imply a default artistic demerit of improvised music. On the contrary, an authentic performance, as faithful to the scored work, would be contrary to the practice here: it would amount to playing the wrong game (although, as I will argue at the end of the paper, playing a wrong game can result in the invention of a new artistically successful game).

However, as Kivy has already shown, the semantic spectrum of the notion of authenticity is broad and diverse. So, my point is that both the *i n c o m p a t i b i l i t y t h e s i s* and the *i r r e l e v a n c e t h e s i s* do not rule out or hinder the idea that improvisation may be authentic in other relevant ways. Once we acknowledge other kinds of musical authenticity, we can defend the idea that musical improvisation and authenticity are not mutually exclusive and argue that a certain kind of authenticity is a key artistic value of musical improvisation.

I think that what I will advocate is valid for standard Jazz, in which improvisers can be expressively authentic, as explained by Kivy, although playing performances that, in Dodd's interpretation, are inauthentic with respect to the musical work (perhaps regarding tunes such as *M y F u n n y V a l e n t i n e*, *I n a S e n t i m e n t a l M o o d*, *M y F a v o r i t e*

Things, and 'Round Midnight I would rather speak more simply of 'composition' instead of 'musical work.' However, I have discussed the issue elsewhere (Bertinetto 2012)⁷ and here I will not discuss it any further). I am also thinking about improvisational performances that do not refer to compositions, as in Keith Jarrett's famous Köln Concert, 'Free' Jazz, and 'free'⁸ improvisation of different kinds (from Gruppo di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza and Musica Elettronica Viva to the new avant-garde scene of contemporary Berlin Echtzeitmusik and improvising Laptop ensembles, only to make a few examples), in reference to which the notion of inauthenticity with respect to a composition does not apply, because in fact there are no compositions (at least in the common sense of the word). However, I believe that my thesis can be extended to the use of improvisation at least within the history of Western music. Not only forms of Popular music of oral tradition and Rock (the kinds of music Vincenzo Caporaletti has called "audiotactile" (Caporaletti 2005), but also Medieval and Baroque music and Classical music (in regard, for example, to the cadenza of a concerto) culturally centered around the notion of a musical work.⁹ In all these cases where the music is improvised, improvisers can be more or less expressively authentic (in some cases; in others not, being inauthentic in Dodd's sense).

3. Authentic Improvisations

Improvisation can rightly be understood as authentic in at least three senses: ontological, expressive and situational-responsive. I will label this third kind of authenticity 'truthfulness to the moment.' Especially this last sense of authenticity constitutes the specific way improvisation realizes a fourth kind of authenticity: artistic authenticity. In this section I will deal with the first two senses, while in the next sections I will focus on the other two. I will suggest, first, to

⁷ Here I argue that, *pace* Davies 2001 and others, a jazz improvised performance of a tune is a performance of that tune. See Bertinetto 2016a.

⁸ An improvisation is free in the sense of being unconstrained by scores, themes and harmonic grids, but it is never *ex nihilo*: it feeds on traditions, practices, styles, exercise, habits, etc.

⁹ For the philosophical history of this notion see Goehr 1992. For different forms of improvisation in different historical musical practices see Gioia 1988; Rinzler 2008; Lothwesen 2009; Santi 2010; Guaccero 2013; Sbordonni 2014; *Saladin* 2014; Feige 2014; Guido 2017. See also footnotes 5 and 14.

consider 'truthfulness to the moment' as the specific meaning of improvisational authenticity and, second, to understand improvisational authenticity as paradigmatic for artistic authenticity.

(a) *Ontological authenticity*

In the field of philosophy of art, authenticity is commonly understood as that quality for which an artwork is materially the object attributable to a particular author as its producer. This kind of authenticity concerns the empirical question of the work's authorship. An authentic artwork is what it should be: it is the 'genuine' object, not its substitute. Therefore the authentic artistic object is identified by differentiation from other objects, such as copies (or falsifications) and cases of plagiarism, which occur when authorship is attributed to someone who is not the true, or authentic, author of the artistic object (see Dutton 2003).

Improvisation is authentic in this sense *d e f i n i t i o n a l l y*. For understanding this point, we may resort to the etymology of the word 'authenticity'. As simultaneous coincidence of invention and realization,¹⁰ improvisation is *o n t o l o g i c a l l y* authentic in the etymological meaning of the word. Consider, 1. *a u t h e n t e i n* and 2. *a u t h e n t i k ó s* respectively mean: 1. 'to accomplish something, oneself,' 'to do independently,' 'to bear authority on something,' and 2. 'being handmade.' There is surely nothing more handmade than an improvisation: improvisers don't do what somebody else prescribes them to do, but act autonomously, bearing authority on what they are doing. Of course, as previously seen, performers may improvise in order to follow a composer's instructions that set limits on the scope of their improvisation. Moreover, a performer often improvises while interplaying with other musicians and accordingly to the performance's specific and concrete situation. Finally, at times improvisers play without consciously deciding what to do (also because their intentions are developed through the action) (Bertinetto 2015, 10). However, the point is that—perhaps relative to what they improvise within the constraints set by a composer—improvisers (individually and/or jointly) are nevertheless *a r t i s t i c a l l y r e s p o n s i b l e* for what they do:¹¹ they are authors, not

¹⁰ I take this as a commonsensical minimal definition of improvisation, although I am perfectly aware that improvisation is not "creatio ex nihilo" and *d e f a c t o* the simultaneous coincidence between invention and realization is a matter of degree.

¹¹ This holds true even when artistic creativity, as exemplarily shown by improvisation, is due to the artist's lost of control of what emerges through her interactions with the material, the mental and the social environment of the performance.

merely interpreters. To sum up: if a musical performance is improvised, it is ontologically authentic in this sense: improvisers are the real producers of the music they perform.

However, this ontological authenticity of improvisation could be judged as not relevant enough for the artistic value of improvisation, in that it is too general: every improvisation, and even every action, is authentic in this sense. Moreover, etymology is not enough in philosophy. We must search for other ways for understanding improvisational authenticity.

(b) *Expressive authenticity and improvisation*

The meaning of authenticity that can be applied in a plausible and interesting way to improvisation is already available to us. I am referring to Kivy's notion of *expressive authenticity*. As "the faithfulness to the performer's own self" (Kivy 1995, 7), i.e. as the talent of musically shaping and/or expressing the performer's self, being true to it in concrete performing situations, *expressive authenticity* is one of the aesthetic ideals of musical improvisation.

The expressive authenticity of improvisation may be conceived of in contrast to musical expressiveness as a medium for revealing a musical work's emotional qualities or even the composer's emotional life. As defended by Clément Canonne (2013) (see Bertinetto 2016b), the expressiveness of musical improvisation is direct and immediate. Accordingly, musical improvisation is marked by the concomitance between the musical and the emotional flux underpinning the generation of the music of which the improviser is author. Hence, an improvised performance is *transparent*, in that it does not borrow the emotions expressed by someone else, but manifests the performers' emotions and moods in the moment of their arising in a specific situation.

However, nothing assures that what ensues from the artists' hearts, despite being 'naturally' authentic, is also artistically valuable. A manifestation of emotions may be authentic in this sense, but one may reasonably doubt that it is also artistically valuable. Indeed, like in other artistic practices, in improvisation expressiveness is not (at least, not only) a passive and immediate outpouring of feelings, but an active and articulated configuration through an artistic medium. As already argued by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1975), musical expressiveness, in particular, shows the dynamic development of emotions and feeling, while sonically shaping them through time. The specificity of musical improvisation, in this regard, is the possibil-

ity of musically articulating emotions and feeling as they develop during the performance. Not only that: the physical exteriorization of the affectivity through which musicians react to the expressiveness of the music they play affects in turn the expressive quality of the music generated. It is a process of *s e l f - s t i m u l a t i o n*: musical expressiveness stimulates affective reactions shown by musicians' corporeal expression, and this in turn stimulates the production of particular musical expressions, while coping with artistic challenges in the moment of the performance.

This seems to fit with the widespread view of improvisation as "the means by which we acquire selfhood," that is, as a means "of self-generation" as Vijay Iyer (2016, 88) writes. Expressiveness is not (at least not always) merely the revelation of the performer's inner life and, accordingly, the goal of musical improvisation is not uncovering or discovering some truer or authentic inner self (see Foster 2016, 222): it is rather the *s h a p i n g* of personalities, in interaction with other personalities as well as with (and within) the concrete situation of the performance and the cultural tradition of the musical practice at issue. It is the shaping of responsive artistic personalities: personalities that form themselves through the music they play, responding, in the moment of the performance, to others players and to the audience, to their own musical tradition, to the situation of the performance, and to the events occurring during its course.

Personalities develop through the actions performed by individuals. Authenticity, in this sense, is an ongoing work: it is not the simple expressive revelation of a fixed self, but the expression of the creative task of shaping a self through the actions performed. In a way, as Charles Taylor (2003, 62) defended, artistic creativity is the paradigm of this expressive shaping of personality, because an important part of the artists' work consists in taking responsibility for their artistic expressions and, in so doing, shaping an artistic personality (Bertinetto 2018, 97–98).

We can appreciate the relevance of this idea for improvisational authenticity if we connect it with the view of improvisational expressivity as shaping of the performer's self, i.e. with the idea that "personality is a central product of all improvisation" (Hampton 2016, 235). As a result, it is not farfetched to conceive of improvisation as the epitome of the artistic construction/expression of personality in real-time.

In conclusion, the correction of the *t r a n s p a r e n c y t h e s i s* by means of a *c o n s t r u c t i v i s t v i e w* of improvisational expressiveness explains how improvisation can be authentic in a relevant artistic sense. Improvisation presents on the stage the articulation of this exercise of crea-

tivity, which involves shaping and expressing creative personalities in their interaction with a specific situation. If a condition for the success of improvisation is undeniably to cope with the challenges in the moment, those challenges are artistic and expressive ones, not only technical ones. Authenticity, as an aesthetic quality, applies to musical improvisation specifically in this sense: improvisation is authentic when the musical performance expresses the performers' selves *u n d e r c o n s t r u c t i o n*, or, still better, in the moment of their construction and as an ongoing construction, in creative interaction with other performers and with a given situation.

4. Improvisational Authenticity as Being True to the Moment

Obviously the artistic significance of this expressive authenticity comes more to the fore in those musical practices in which improvisation has a greater scope. The expressive authenticity of improvisation has as such a specific aspect that differentiates it from the expressive authenticity of the interpretation of musical works. As I will suggest later on, thanks to this specificity, improvisation is paradigmatic for music as a performing art (and the fact that music is a performing art is a key aspect of musical authenticity: Kivy agrees with current musicological research in this regard¹²).

This specific aspect of improvisational expressive authenticity may be called *'t r u t h f u l n e s s t o t h e m o m e n t'*. In fact, the expressive musical gestures of improvisers have to deal not only with the constraints of a composition, a theme or a harmonic grid (if we are considering what we can call 'constrained' improvisation), but also with what happens during the performance. If we consider 'free' improvisation, we could then say that the expressiveness of the improvisers is configured as a search for a way to be true to the moment. By the formulation 'being true to the moment,' I mean this: since improvised music is the invention of what is played in the moment (or 'on the spot') *i n t h i s s i t u a t i o n h e r e a n d n o w*, improvisers must musically do what is appropriate here and now. This involves responding creatively to what is happening here and now, in the course and in the flow of the performance, shaping and showing in this way aspects of the artist's own artistic personality, of the artist's own voice, in interaction with the situation which is developing in the moment.

¹² See for example Taruskin 1995 and Cook 2013.

My point, then, is that “coping with challenges in the moment”¹³ is of artistic merit, if it can be understood not only in terms of solving technical problems (for example, problems of coordination between performers), but as ‘being true to the moment’, i.e. as kind of authenticity.

Hence, expressive authenticity in improvisation is *kairōlogical*, *kairós* being the time of the right moment, i.e. of the moment in which the opportune choice is made and/or the opportune action is performed. However, it is not just about doing the right thing when the opportunity arises. It is rather about finding/inventing suitable opportunities for the (musically) right thing, responding to what is emerging out of the improvised performance. Of course, in an improvisational situation improvisers cannot completely *foresee* whether what they do is right or opportune or ‘true to the moment.’ What they do can be assessed as right or wrong—i.e. true to the moment—only in retrospect, when the moment is passed, thanks to others’ reactions (musical and behavioral inputs by fellow performers and, in a live performance, the audience’s responses) and to their own reactions to what they did.

The improviser’s art consists in exhibiting a fine sensitivity for the moment, both in the sense of the precise moment in which the performance is happening, and in the sense of the concrete situation and specific condition of the performance (the kind of audience, the type of location, the members of the group, the kind of music played, the sort of artistic event, etc.) without being able to grasp the moment before it happens or to dominate from the outside the situation of which they are a part.

This view of improvisational authenticity respects the ‘existentialist’ idea that for individuals to be (ethically) authentic requires becoming responsible for themselves, reflexively (see Ferrara 1998) taking a stance toward their contingent situations, which opens up an interesting sense of *artistic authenticity*. If authenticity consists “in assuming one’s proper possibilities as a free and situated revealing of the world” and, consequently, in being “able to make one’s existence, and one’s world, one’s own” (Baugh 1988, 479), then, applying this notion of authenticity to the artistic sphere, artistic authenticity, i.e. the aesthetic authenticity of an artwork, consists in creatively dealing with its contingent situation. *Artistic authenticity* may be defined as the successful practical and potentially transformative reflection on the normative conditions of an artistic practice and on the empirical situation of the artistic production through a specific artwork or

¹³ This, I recall, is what the task of musical improvisation consists of according to Dodd 2014, 281.

performance. Musical improvisation, thus, epitomizes artistic authenticity, since its aesthetic success requires assuming responsibility toward the specific situation of the performance and making the contingency of the moment a creative artistic resource.

It could be observed, and maybe objected to, that the view I have defended so far about the expressive authenticity of improvisation as truthfulness to the moment is (exaggeratedly) individualistic and that therefore its validity is limited to those musical genres in which the soloist, the virtuoso, the artistic genius are the protagonists. So my view could work for the *improptu* cadence of a concert or for the solo improvisation of a pianist, or for the performance on a Jazz standard in which musicians in turn perform their solos. But it would miss the point of other improvisational practices, like collective Free improvisation and Free Jazz. Indeed, on closer inspection, this individualistic conception would be misleading even in respect to the previous cases, given that, as rightly defended by many scholars,¹⁴ “a musician’s voice and the music that is improvised is not just an individual achievement, but a result of collective action of musicians, in a reciprocal relation with their instruments, the constraints of a genre, and the wider social context in which they are active.”¹⁵

However, my view is far from being individualistic. I reject the idea that individual artistic expression (their style) is incompatible with the belonging of the individual to collectivities and with their being part of traditions of social, artistic, and musical practices. As Charles Taylor (2013, 91) claims, authenticity as being truthful to one’s own personality, while (inter)acting in specific contingent situations is not “the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self” (tradition, genre, work). In the field of art, those demands become elements of the artists’ personalities. In their practice, artists, including improvisers, discover and understand those demands and their artistic obligations towards traditions, genres, and works. Indeed, the normative force of traditions, genres, and works is activated by artistic negotiations, transformations, and adaptations, so that traditions, genres, and works become constitutive elements of the artists’ personalities that, in turn, develop while interacting with traditions, genres, and works. The same goes for the interaction between the individual performer and the group: the individual configures and transforms their personality through their relation-

¹⁴ Monson 1996; Benson 2003; Fishlin, Heble 2004; Borgo 2006; Hagberg 2008; Bertinetto *et al.* 2015; Hagberg 2016; Born *et al.* 2017; Peters 2017; Sbordononi *et al.* 2018.

¹⁵ I thank an anonymous reviewer for pushing me on this point and for the nice formulation I allow myself to insert in the text.

ships and the context in which they live, to the life of which they contributes in their own way. The individual musicians shape and transform their style through the group, to the style of which they contributes in their own way.¹⁶ In musical improvisation, these interactions happen especially and principally in the moment of the performance, through the way the group, and the individuals inside the group, try to be true to the moment, by means of negotiating performatively (musically and socially) their reciprocal relations, with different results and not without the possibility of conflicts.¹⁷

The notion of 'truthfulness to the moment', as I have explained it, nicely captures musical improvisation's specific kind of expressive authenticity. Moreover, it has two additional advantages. On the one hand this notion can be extended, with specific appropriate adjustments, to other forms of artistic improvisation, especially in performing arts such as dance and theater. A fine sensibility for the opportune moment articulated through a sort of 'grammar of contingency'¹⁸ seems to be a requirement for good improvisational performances in all performing arts. With this notion, at first blush maybe obscure, I mean a variety of ways and means, specific to each tradition and style of artistic improvisation and, ultimately, to each performer, and 'plastically' variable according to the performing situation, for dealing creatively with the unexpected moment, making it the opportune moment.

On the other hand, improvisational authenticity as 'truthfulness to the moment' is a key aspect of all musical performances, including performances of musical work, in that, precisely as performances, they must not only reproduce and interpret a musical work, but must do so at a specific time and in a concrete situation. First, the perspective on the musical work performers have in a certain situation influences the way they interpret it. Second, in performing a work, performers may be differently sensitive with respect to the performance conditions and to what happens during the performance itself. The ability to respond felicitously to the environmental conditions (the spatial and acoustic setting of the location, the kind of listeners and their expectations, etc.) or to performers' musical and social behavior (for exam-

¹⁶ A view of this kind is proposed by Cobussen 2012.

¹⁷ An aesthetic conflict occurred for instance between Miles Davis and John Coltrane during their last concert together in Paris on March, 21st 1960 (CD: Miles Davis & John Coltrane, *The final tour: Paris, March 21, 1960*, Columbia Records).

¹⁸ I thank Bruno Besana (personal communication) for suggesting to me this nice formulation in a personal communication. "Grammar" is to be understood in a Wittgensteinian sense as a plural network of norms capable of giving meaning to our practices from within the practices themselves. For an articulation of this notion see my Bertinetto (forthcoming).

ple, the gestures of the orchestra conductor and the personal interactions between performers) is an important ingredient not only of the expressive authenticity of the individual and of the ensemble, but of the specific way score compliance and truthfulness to the work are achieved. Instead, performers who are not truthful to the moment are 'not in the zone,' 'not in the mood,' not really there. They are not attentive and responsive and this will result in a probable cause of failure, in that it will impede bringing the musical work into that situation in that moment, thereby hindering a successful transmission of the work to the listeners' ears, hindering the achievement of the goal of this musical practice. Hence, improvisational authenticity is paradigmatic of an aspect which, to different degree, concerns all musical performances in as much they are *p e r f o r m a n c e s* and not texts (Kivy 1995, 270–277).

5. Improvisation, Truthfulness to the Moment and Artistic Normativity

By stressing the paradigmatic character of improvisational authenticity for music as a performing art, I am far from denying that performing a work-as-scored and improvising are two different practices. Still, in both cases, music, as a performing art, is played here and now. Hence, each performance requires specific attention to and responsive negotiation with the conditions of the performance.

This requirement is normative and may be made explicit with this formula: 'if you want to perform music well, you ought to be true to the moment, i.e. attentive and responsive to the specific situation of the performance.' Truthfulness to the moment is a necessary condition for the practice of musical performance.

The normative import of this kind of authenticity is, I argue, broader than the normative import of the truthfulness to the work. Indeed, as nicely argued in a recent paper by Guy Rohrbaugh (2019),¹⁹ score compliance is an end in itself as it is the 'goodness' of the practice of performing musical works in the Western classical tradition: it is not a reason for achieving some end, but is constitutive of that practice. Hence, if we do not respect score compliance, we are not 'true to the practice,' and this is how authenticity as 'being true to the work-as-scored' has been defended by philosophers such as Stephen Davies and Julian Dodd.

¹⁹ I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing me to this paper.

However, being not true to that practice does not amount to not being true to music as a performance. Of course, being true to that practice allows us to promote specific musical values, for example a kind of symbolic and algorithmic complexity (as in the structural architectures of a Brahms' symphony) that only a notation allows to build and only the accurate performance of a work-as-scored can then realize musically. But other practices promote other values. The practice of improvisation, clearly in free improvisational situations, promotes another kind of complexity: the complexity of self-organized recursive processes that have the situation and the moment of their occurring among their constitutive elements. What complexity we choose is a matter of the 'goodness' we prefer. And the preference we have depends, in turn, on (how we understand and appreciate) the practice we are in. Hence, deficiency in score compliance is not an artistic flaw per se: it is not always an artistic deficiency. It depends from the practice we are in. Following Wittgenstein, "we make up the rules as we go along" (1953): the normativity of our practices is generated within the practices. Hence, the validity of the norms of the practice depends on the force that performers assign to it within the practice itself. In relation to the issue of musical authenticity, this may be interpreted in a 'narrow' and in a 'large' way.

The 'narrow' way can be articulated in terms of David Davies' pragmatism: the "properties taken to be normative" for a correct performance cannot be "characterized independently of the ways in which performances are or would be classified" as correct or incorrect instances of the work "within a particular historically situated performative practice" (2012, 653). The criteria for correct performances are located not only in "explicit rules for following scores, but also in the practical interactions between composers, performers, and receivers in a particular musical context" (2012, 656).

The 'broad' way can be articulated in terms closer to Georg Bertram's (2018) conception of art as human practice: the 'goodness' that constitutes the practice is valid if the participants in the practice make it valid through the practice, that is, if it is, for them, in their practice, an end in itself. Which means that the validity of score compliance depends on whether performers make it valid by enforcing it as a 'goodness' in their practices. The point is that musicians may not consider score compliance as their 'goodness' and perform the work in such a way that appropriate it, creatively making it an ingredient of a different practice, not grounded on score compliance, but, for instance, on the emotional and communicative powers of music.

Therefore, score compliance, as such, is not always a necessary condition of the artistic success or the artistic authenticity of the performance. In fact, the explicit and intentional violation of what, within the context of a musical practice, is understood as the musical content of a musical work may indeed produce, through a shift of practice, highly valuable performances. Jimi Hendrix's Woodstock's performance of the American national anthem, as well as John Coltrane version of 'My Favorite Things' are valued as artistically authentic and successful in this sense, even though, while *signifying* on those musical pieces, they distort what in other practices is understood as their musical content (see Bartel 2011), i.e. even though score compliance is not their 'goodness'. There are no *a priori* reasons that can prevent performers from avoiding score compliance and appropriatively violating what is commonly understood as the musical content of the pieces they are playing. As a matter of fact, it cannot be known in advance whether this appropriative violation will succeed, or not, artistically.

The artistic success of an artwork or of a performance cannot be guaranteed by the application or the violation of rules, conventions, and criteria that constitute a practice. What makes artistic success, i.e. the artistic authenticity of the work, possible is rather the creative way in which the work or the performance interacts on the moment, in the specific situation of its production, with rules, conventions and criteria. In other words, what is at stake in artistic authenticity is the specific way the artwork or the performance deals with the normativity of a practice, that is, how it reflects practically on the normative conditions of the practice, potentially transforming them. Not score compliance as the abstract 'goodness' of a practice, but the specific way in which this or another 'goodness' is achieved in this particular situation, is what matters artistically.

Consequently, I argue that score compliance is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the artistic success of musical practices based on score compliance; but it is not a necessary condition for artistic success generally (artistic success in music does not always require score compliance). Instead, 'being true to the moment' is always a 'goodness' of a musical performance as an artistic practice, in that each performance requires a negotiation with the conditions of the performance: 'truthfulness to the moment' is a necessary condition for the artistic success of a musical performance.

In improvisation, I dare say, it is also a sufficient condition. Truthfulness to the moment is the *raison d'être* of musical improvisation. This makes improvisation paradigmatic for music, in its entirety, as a performing

art (see Bertinetto 2016a). The artistic authenticity of music ('being true to the music') is 'being true to the moment' of the performance. In an improvisation the meaning and the value of what is played is articulated through the way performers respond to what is happening in the moment. The authenticity of the music is due to the way performers creatively shape and express artistic personalities in interaction with each other as well as with the tradition of their practice, responding to the challenges and the affordances of the contingent situation. But also in the performance of a musical work, music is as it is performed in the present moment. The specific artistic authenticity of the performance is, even in this case, negotiated in the practice and, ultimately, in the performance itself: i.e. in the moment when the music is played.

In conclusion, the most relevant sense of authenticity in music is improvisational authenticity: being (artistically, aesthetically, and expressively) true to the moment; being able to respond in a creatively successful way to the demands that ensue from the artistic interaction with a situation, with other players, with the audience, as well as with a genre, a tradition, a musical work, thereby displaying the shaping of the artistic personality of the performers and creatively shaping artistic meaning.

Of course, I do not mean that improvisation, as a specific musical practice, is more artistically valuable than the performance of compositions (this would be silly, exactly like the opposite view). My point is rather that being true to the moment, i.e. improvisational authenticity, amounts to being true to the music *tout court* as a performing art. Musical improvisation is not trivially inauthentic: rather, its authenticity is paradigmatic for musical authenticity.²⁰

²⁰ This paper originated as a talk given at the University of Murcia (29.03.2017), at the Conference *Authenticity versus Improvisation in the Philosophy of Music?* (Bern, Switzerland, 19–20.05.2017), and at the European Society for Aesthetics Conference 2017 (Berlin, 25–27.05.2017). I thank all the participants and especially Maria José Alcaraz, Georg Bertram, Matilde Carrasco, Julian Dodd, Giovanni Matteucci, Roger Pouivet, Marcello Ruta, Salvador Rubio Marco, and Alberto Voltolini, for their precious comments. I also thank three anonymous referees for their invaluable work. I am very grateful to the research project "Aesthetic experience of the arts and the complexity of perception" (FFI 2015–64271–P) of the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness and to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for their generous financial support.

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Jason Moran's *Staged*: Improvisational Blurring and the Boundaries of Conceptual Art

Abstract

I examine jazz pianist Jason Moran's conceptual artwork, *Staged* (2015/18), in order to interrogate the intersection between improvisation and contemporary art. Enlisting and expanding upon George Lewis's coinage and theorization of Afrological and Eurological practices, I outline discourses that have coded improvisation as embedded in tradition, the "known," and history, and conceptual art (as a form of "contemporary art") as free from these. *Staged* brings these discourses into collision and offers new directions for contemporary art through its jazz improvisatory sensibility.

Keywords

Improvisation, Conceptual Art, Jason Moran, Jazz, Race

In 2015 Jason Moran's *Staged* opened at the Venice Biennale. The piece re-created performance stages from two important, yet now nonexistent, New York jazz venues: an elegant curve of the Savoy Ballroom bandshell—the great swing era dance hall in Harlem, and the noticeably cramped, wall-and-ceiling-padded bandstand of the Three Deuces, a small but generative club on 52nd Street during the bebop era. Both stages emanated sound intermittently through various means, including when they acted as "real" stages for live performances upon them. *Staged* has been critically acclaimed and, with the addition of a third re-creation of the 1970s era Slugs' Saloon bandstand, has been touring principle art museums in the United States, including the Whitney Museum in New York City and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. *Staged: "Slugs' Saloon"* (2018) was recently acquired for the Walker Art Center's permanent collection.

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Considering the important venues and reception for this work, one might think Moran is a seasoned visual and conceptual artist. Moran *is* a recipient of a MacArthur “genius” grant, but he gained this recognition in 2010 as a jazz pianist. Although he has been collaborating as a musician with visual and conceptual artists since 2005, this was not only his first solo art show but his first exhibition of visual art of any kind. I place Moran’s rapid success in the contemporary art scene within the context of a long history of African American artistic genre crossing that has often ignored the categories many European American critics, scholars, and artists have erected between and within such categories as music, visual art, literature, and theater. Especially regarding genre boundaries, such definitions have often stemmed explicitly from racial discourses, as George Lewis has articulated regarding improvisation and “experimental music” (Lewis 1996). Indeed, Lewis describes a racialized history that has separated the key terms put forward in this volume: “improvisation” and “contemporary art.” In light, then, of this potentially dangerous intersection, Moran’s *Staged* is a particularly rich work through which to interrogate the juncture of contemporary art and improvisation, especially as it is articulated in the United States. *Staged* calls into question definitions and lineages of contemporary art and points to new directions, including new understandings of conceptual art that would not preclude jazz improvisation from its arena.

I examine Moran’s *Staged* within Lewis’s formative theorization of Afrological and Eurological practices in music. I explicitly expand these categories into broader “extra-musical” territory to indicate larger traditions that maintain distinct conceptions of the past, history, and the individual: a Eurologic that prizes separation and boundary and an Afrologic that understands the past, history, and person as blurred and inseparable. My analysis is stark in order to highlight differences, however, these two traditions are themselves blurred together. Part of working with (that is, accepting) a necessarily blurry world, is to acknowledge the blur and to also take responsibility for knowledge within this complexity. Therefore, in initial and thus simplified terms, conceptual art’s Eurological lens would understand *Staged* as a form of installation art in the tradition of simulacra. Further, *Staged* could be understood as an example of “memory culture,” what Andreas Huyssen has described as an irrational drive for “total recall” through the persistent memorializing of the past (2003, 15). I will contend that Afrological approaches rooted in improvisation inform Moran’s work more than a conceptual lineage of simulacra, however. *Staged* highlights the reality of blur rather than boundary, including the blur of the past with the present, and

the individual with the collective.¹ It reveals a world of connection that is both comforting in its recognition of community and relationship and oppressive in the ways that negative acts and perceptions of the past persist into the present. For good and ill, this is the reality of relationship rather than the fantasy of separation.²

The Eurological and the Afrological

Histories of “contemporary art” presume and inscribe a European (and European American) lineage. While artists may be informed by the practices of other cultures, the lineage and the artists understood within the lineage are construed as normatively European. Composer/improviser/scholar George Lewis’s 1996 essay, “Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives,” details this inscription regarding “experimental music” in the mid-twentieth century United States. Certain adjectives are deployed to inscribe a racialized separation in musical practice, “coded qualifiers to the word music—such as ‘experimental,’ ‘new,’ ‘art,’ ‘concert,’ ‘serious,’ ‘avant-garde,’ and ‘contemporary’—are used [...] to delineate a racialized location [...] within the spaces of whiteness” (102). Regarding the coding of improvisation, composer/saxophonist/improviser Anthony Braxton notes, “Both aleatory and indeterminism are words which have been coined [...] to bypass the word improvisation and as such the influence of non-white sensibility” (qtd in Lewis 1996, 99). African American artists have both been ignored as influences on “experimental music” and perpetually labeled “jazz” despite sonic characteristics of their work that might more aptly align with works designated “classical,” “serious” or “experimental music,” as has been

¹ Fred Moten brings the word blur into theoretical parlance, particularly in his work *Black and Blur* (2017). Blurring the lines of poetry, criticism, and philosophy, Moten writes, “I’m interested in the b section, the exclusionarily included middle, the bridge. B is for blurr, for the seriality of an extra r, dividing movements like a fantasy...” (163). I use blur to describe the reality of interconnection, a reality unacknowledged by a Western epistemology that construes the known as that which can be only located by the separation of a viewing subject from a viewed object. Or more recently, as the West has come to understand that such separation cannot actually capture the truth of the object, to then gaze upon this fact again and again, as a type of traumatic return. I describe this in the musical reenactments of the performance art duo, Forsyth and Pollard (reenacting David Bowie) and of the band Mostly Other People Do the Killing (recreating the album, *Kind of Blue*). Both attempt to capture the past and then gaze upon the inability to do so (see McMullen 2016 and 2019).

² I say more about the reality of relationship and the fantasy of separation in the final chapter of McMullen 2019.

the case with both Lewis and Braxton. Definitions of music as “serious,” “avant-garde,” and “contemporary” serve to exnominate their association with a white racial identity, establishing these practices as universal and natural (unmarked), while jazz is definitionally marked and therefore, “other.”³

Lewis explicitly marks an otherwise invisible and “natural” European tradition through his analysis of the Eurological, comparing it to the Afrological, a logic based in African American musical practice. He makes clear that these are not essential categories but practices that stem from traditions. The terms “refer metaphorically to musical belief systems and behavior that [...] exemplify particular kinds of musical ‘logic.’ [...] [They are] historically emergent rather than ethnically essential” (93). Lewis uses these categories, in part, to demonstrate the ways white artists, authors, and historians misunderstand, mischaracterize, and devalue African American musical practice, especially improvisation, and distance it from any influence on “experimental music.”

In his description of Eurological perceptions of improvisation, Lewis scrutinizes ideas of freedom. In one conception, freedom is that of the individual to be separate and independent. As Lewis puts it, “From a Eurological standpoint, freedom is sometimes framed in terms of European music’s traditional composer-to-performer hierarchy” (115). He cites Mildred Portney Chase, who writes, “improvisation is the free zone in music, where anything is permitted and considered acceptable. You are responsible only to yourself and to the dictates of your taste.” Lewis goes on, “Similarly, preparation for improvisation is described in terms of the need to ‘free ourselves from those negative attitudes that inhibit us’” (qtd in 115). Thus, this is a “freedom from,” freedom from the dictates of a composer or freedom from one’s own internalized critic. One can see the implications of such a concept of freedom. While this freedom is desired, it also contains an implicit threat: one is basically off the grid, responsible only to oneself, where anything is permitted. One is separate and alone, which can be frightening. If this is *someone else’s* freedom, they are not responsible to anyone and thus could be a threat to *me*. This concept of freedom creates both a desire for, and a fear of, freedom.

³ Lewis deploys John Fiske’s theorization of exnomination. Fiske states, “Exnomination is the means by which whiteness avoids being named and thus keeps itself out of the field of interrogation and therefore off the agenda for change [...]. One practice of exnomination is the avoidance of self-recognition and self-definition. Defining, for whites, is a process that is always directed outward upon multiple ‘others’ but never inward upon the definer” (qtd in Lewis 1996, 100).

Because of the fear inherent in this view of freedom, it is unsurprising that a more common Eurological approach is the need to curb freedom. Lewis writes, "A much more widespread view that has evolved in Eurological music circles with regard to improvisation is the notion that, to be musically coherent, improvisation cannot be left as 'free,' but must instead be 'controlled' or 'structured' in some way" (115). John Cage serves as Lewis' primary example of a Eurological composer of "experimental music." Lewis cites Cage's methods of indeterminacy, which employed external structures via varying "chance operations," such as throwing the I Ching, in order to make decisions. Such a method provides a type of coherency in opposition to the presumably less coherent "freedom" of improvisation.

What I want to highlight, however, is how both of these ideas about freedom reveal a more fundamental issue: a Eurological apprehension vis-à-vis interiority and subjectivity. Lewis reveals the Eurological presumption that improvisation does not offer a level of structure presumed necessary for "art." This is the Eurological preference for what Amiri Baraka called the "noun" over the "verb," the belief that the score, blueprint, or some other formal structure is the locus of the art, rather than art as a process of artists interacting in time.⁴ It reveals a distrust of subjective decision making and a belief in the need for a formal law, an external structure to make decisions.⁵ Further, Cage did not see improvisation as "too free" or even free at all. Cage believed improvisation gave unrestricted rein to our preferences, thus further tethering us to our personality—the opposite of freedom from Cage's perspective. Freedom for Cage meant freedom from personal habits of taste and preference, diametrically opposed to Chase's statement that freedom lies in pursuing the dictates of one's taste. In his deployment of structure, Cage was attempting to be free from his *self*, a practice he often linked to his study of Zen Buddhism, but which I have argued elsewhere was rooted in his particular Protestant-inflected suspicion of the body and its desires (McMullen 2010). This body also represents interior, subjective decision making that does not emanate from an orienting blueprint. Jazz improvisation is a process undertaken by bodies in time that cannot be pinpointed and, as such, cannot be trusted from the perspective of a Cageian framework that yields power to an external, objective system.

⁴ See Lydia Goehr (1992) on Western music and the work concept, and Amiri Baraka (1999 [1963]) and Nathaniel Mackey (1998) on the nouning of Western music versus the verbing of African American music.

⁵ On subjectivity and formalism in Western music and thought, see Taruskin 1984 and Manderson 2010.

From the Eurological standpoint of “experimental music” then, improvisation is either too free (without rules and structure) or too embedded in subjective preferences (and hence, not free). In the Eurological preference for abstraction and external structure exemplified in Cage, there should be no personality, thus, no context. As Lewis puts it, the improvisation/indefinite/new should be “unsullied by reference to the past or foreshadowing of the future” (108). It should be free from “known” styles, which is a way of saying that it “excludes history or memory” (107). What comes before contaminates the purity of the perfectly new and therefore perfectly spontaneous. The interiority of the performer—their preferences and previous history—will sully the spontaneous moment. An external structure such as Cage’s chance operations offers “an important method of avoiding ‘known’ models of improvisation” like jazz (108), which is based on idioms and tradition—preferences, in Cage’s parlance. It takes the person out and replaces it with an objective system. This is freedom, because real freedom in this model can only be completely separate and unsullied by any complication of past, history, or person.

The idea that we can be free of the past or of personality can only come from a view that imagines the separation of past from present and past from person. As I have argued elsewhere, this view is what supports the rise of “memory culture” in the West.⁶ In the Western conception, because we imagine the past as separate, we long for it and attempt to capture it through ever-expanding memorialization. Yet our efforts to capture it only yield more of a sense of separation in that it is our very construction of the past as over and lost that creates this sense. The irony is that while a sense of loss is generated in regard to the past, the past, in fact, is very much with us. Imagining the past is over and then controlling how it is remembered serves to elide the ways that the past remains with us in the form of habits of society: white and male privilege, for example. Thus, the concern of losing the past found in a Eurological memory culture is rebutted by the argument that the past is not in the past at all, but still here and often being rewritten as “history and memory in the image of whiteness” (109).

Expanding his term beyond music, the tradition Lewis describes as Afrological can be understood as a counterview to the dominant Western ontology and epistemology, one in which the past is not understood as separate, but in blurry relationship to the present. As such, improvisational “freedom” is understood as occurring within history, in a type of interactive verbing that is an ongoing process. It is a freedom that might have more to

⁶ McMullen 2019. On memory culture, see Gillis, Huyssen, and Boym.

do with acceptance and awareness, with recognizing the past and our connection to it as well as our responsibility *to* others, not a freedom *qua* separation *from* others (“responsible only to yourself”). Rather than separating and then imagining an interior as untrustworthy because it is too inhabited by others—history or personality (personal history),⁷ freedom is embedded in personal narrative, in community, and in process. As opposed to the elimination of personality, preferences, and subjectivity under an abstract, objective system, the Afrological recognizes the embeddedness and interrelationship of phenomena. Thus, Lewis points out what should be obvious: “As with any music, close listening and analysis of improvised music requires attention to information at different laminar depths [...]. The Eurological notion of pure spontaneity [freedom from history and context] in improvisation fails to account for this temporally multilaminar aspect of an improvisation” (108). Improvisation has layers that are further understood and recognized over the course of time, without end. Within improvisation there is a call and a response from listener, performer, actor, giver, receiver, and these can become increasingly blurred the closer and longer one looks and listens.

Jason Moran's *Staged*

An African American jazz artist who appears suddenly in sanctioned contemporary art venues as a conceptual artist could be viewed as an interloper into territory outside their ken. One critic wrote that *Staged* “resists classification under the heading of contemporary art” with no explanation of why that was so, leaving this reader to presume it was because the piece was a site for live jazz performance (a *performing* art and “known” style and therefore not “contemporary”) and was created by a jazz artist (Corrigan 2016). But *Staged* points to a long lineage of cross-category practice found in African American artists and it calls into question the racialized construction of artistic categories and separations, especially between jazz and contemporary art. Moran is part of an African American lineage of creativity that contests categories of jazz, experimental, classical, and even the separation of music from poetry from art from theater. Brent Hayes Edwards has written that, “black musicians so often insist on working in multiple media, not as autonomous areas of activity but in conjunction, insistently crossing circuits, rethinking and expanding the potential of each medium in the way it is like and unlike the other” (Edwards 2017, 19). Further, there has been little

⁷ In the Western ideology, the interior is the site of the emotional, the feminine, the blurred, the private, and the exterior is the abstract, located, rational and public.

incentive for African Americans to accept and abide by categories created by white critics, historians, and curators given the historically limited access black artists have had to American art institutions.

While his family was interested in a variety of arts and Moran has long had an interest in visual art, he grew up in Houston, Texas, focused on learning jazz. He began his professional career as a jazz pianist in 1997, touring with the saxophonist, Greg Osby. He was soon signed by the celebrated jazz label, Blue Note, and issued his first recording as a leader in 1998, *Sound-track to Human Motion*. Moran embarked upon the career of a virtuosic jazz pianist, issuing critically acclaimed solo, trio, and quartet albums for the next several years.⁸ As an improviser, composer, and arranger, he has been lauded for his deep knowledge and extension of the jazz tradition. In 2006, he made his cross into the area of “contemporary art” with his album, *Artist in Residence*, a compilation of pieces he wrote as commissions for art museums that responded to the work of conceptual performance artists Adrian Piper, Joan Jonas, and others. He followed in 2007 with his multi-media collaboration *In My Mind: Monk at Town Hall, 1959* (with visual artist, Glenn Ligon, video artist David Dempewolf and his large ensemble, Big Bandwagon), a reimagining of Monk’s famous 1959 New York City concert. Over the next 10 years, Moran continued and expanded collaborations with visual and performance artists, including *The Death of Tom* (2008) with Glenn Ligon, *Bleed* (2012) with Alicia Hall Moran, *Reanimation* (2012) with Joan Jonas, and *Looks of a Lot* (2014) with Theaster Gates. In 2015 he created *Staged* for the Venice Biennale and in 2018, with “Slugs’ Saloon” added to form a triptych, brought *Staged* to The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio, and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.

Moran is not the only jazz musician currently extending his art beyond the sonic. Pianists Vijay Iyer and Robert Glasper, and saxophonist Kamasi Washington have all had recent art museum residencies or worked with visual and theatrical artists (Chinen 2016). Moran is well aware of the long tradition of boundary blurring in African American artistic practice. When asked in an interview about the history of jazz and visual art crossover, Moran lists the communities and associations that occurred around visual artist David Hammons, composers Butch Morris and Henry Threadgill, and the collaborations of composer George Lewis with video installation artist Stan Douglas more than twenty years ago (Simonini 2018). Moran goes on to describe perhaps the most famous example, the Association for the Ad-

⁸ See for example, Hreha 2003; Loewy N.D.; Turner 2003.

vancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), which was formed in Chicago over 50 years ago by one of Moran's teachers, Muhal Richard Abrams. Starting from the early years of the association in the 1960s, "they would do performances all the time—this performance-art-hybrid-theater-compositional kind of thing. And so, you know, I'm from that" (qtd in Simonini 2018). Going back even further, Moran reflects on the Harlem Renaissance with artists like Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington and Mary Lou Williams in "conversations that informed [their] own work and made it more potent, because it had the layers that would sustain through history" (qtd in Simonini 2018). They were creating, and adding to previous, multi-laminar depths that echoed forward and were eventually heard by Moran.

I visited *Staged* at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston in January 2019. It was the main part of a collection of Moran's work that also included his collaboration with Glenn Ligon, *The Death of Tom*, Stan Douglas's video recreation, *Luanda-Kinshasa* (2013) for which Moran was the bandleader, video compilations of several of Moran's collaborations with performance artists, and Moran's works on paper (*Run 4* (2016), *Run 4, Right Hand* (2016), *Basin Street Runs 1 and 2* (2016)). The three installations of *Staged* were spread throughout a medium-sized room in close enough proximity that the sound from the "Savoy Ballroom 1" and the "Three Deuces" would bleed together when they overlapped. This is also true of the two video screening rooms in which *The Death of Tom* and *Luanda-Kinshasa* each played on a loop. The overlap of the sound felt central to Moran's presentation. In *The Death of Tom*—Ligon's abstract black and white video of smudged and blurred footage from the 1903 silent film, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,⁹ with Moran's improvisatory treatment of Bert Williams' song, "Nobody"—the pianist left generous space in his performance. In these gaps, which gave the video a lonely, haunting quality, I heard the muffled echo of forced labor songs from "Savoy Ballroom 1" bleeding through from the room outside. The effect was to highlight the interplay and overlap, the complexity and laminar depths of past and the present, forced labor with jazz labor, joy and despair, indeed, even the layers of call and response itself, where there is blur between what is call and what is response. Overall, Moran's work, and *Staged* in particular, presents a type of embedded connectedness that is in stark contrast to an external autonomous structure. This embedded connectedness is seen in his concern with personal narrative, place, and time/history.

⁹ The final scene, Edwin S. Porter, director. Based on the novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Moran makes clear that jazz is not an “autonomous” art form, but embedded in social context. That “Black music as an artform” is embedded in a social context was argued by Olly Wilson in 1983 in part to address the problem of jazz music being measured by a Eurological yardstick that deemed “serious music” music of the concert hall, presumably separate from everyday life. Moran states, “in jazz music, politics is already embedded in the fabric of the music because the music comes out of a need for oppressed people to actually play a solo, which means tell your story and say it out loud and that was not a right afforded many people at that time, because you were afraid that you’d be murdered” (Phonica Records 2015). This relates to a characteristic of Afrological musical practice adumbrated by Lewis, “the importance of personal narrative, of ‘telling your own story’” (117). Moran makes a link between this personal expression in music and conceptual art through the work of performance artist Adrian Piper. “There’s something about Adrian’s work about how to unveil your personal history which I thought was so indicative of her power as an artist to share her identity and also to share her parents’ identity. It’s very personal” (qtd in Edwards 2018). Moran literally brings Piper’s voice into his work by transcribing her speech for the piano in his composition, “Artists Ought to Be Writing.”¹⁰

In addition to personal narrative, Moran is concerned with place, specifically the places and stages where jazz has occurred. The physical aspects of venues have an acoustic effect which Moran connects to the development of jazz. “A lot of what a musician does is we listen to the sounds that happen in rooms. Whether it’s a recording studio or it’s live at a club or whatever. You go to church, you hear them sing from the balcony. You listen to them sing in a room. We listen to that as content” (qtd in Edwards 2018). In regard to *Staged*, Moran says, “I start thinking about the way they work in these rooms, that they’re also working in response to the room. Not only to each other and not only to the kind of stipulations that the unions forced musicians to work under in the 1940s and ’50s, but how do they work in a room that’s set up this way, where the ceiling is only like eight feet tall. That changes how you play, tremendously” (qtd in Edwards 2018). The room changes—the Three Deuces is not the Savoy Ballroom, it is not for dancing but for listening. The audience is up close. What were ornaments in Swing become the centerpiece, the winged phrases of bebop. The place, that is, the larger context, has an effect and this effect cannot, in fact, be separated from “jazz,” the music. Further, this effect is not only acoustic. The Savoy, the Three Deuces, and Slugs’ Saloon were cultural gathering spaces. Moran

¹⁰ Released on his 2006 album for Blue Note, *Artist in Residence*.

states, “these are cultural institutions [...]. it’s all the conversations that happen in there and it’s all the conversations that they lead to outside of those spaces” (qtd in Phonica Records 2015).¹¹ Finally, Moran maintains that place has an effect in even more subtle and less tangible ways. Describing his recent performance at the Park Avenue Armory, Moran recalled that the concert “was also as much about seeing as it was about performing. Every wood crevice, every audience member, every softly glowing light fixture, every tile in the fireplace, and every note that responds to it” are part of the experience (quoted in Blumenfeld 2016b).

Embedded in Moran’s presentation of place are questions of time and history. Most obviously, none of these venues exist anymore. Moran expresses concern that, “in America, we tear down everything” (qtd in Edwards 2018). This aspect of the piece is part of what I would align with the preoccupations of memory culture—the fear that “everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion.”¹² This is a reading, and potentially an aspect of the piece, that I find narrow and foreclosing of the complexity of time and history acknowledged in other readings or aspects of the work. When Moran asks, how do you “pinpoint emotion, pinpoint narrative, pinpoint history, and look at the question: how do you share that within the framework of a jazz concert?” I am concerned with the conception of knowing as a way to pinpoint, to find that Euclidean point.¹³ Attempting to find that point leads into a dizzying house of mirrors, at least in attempts to capture and recreate the past. In such pinpointing we find the precession of simulacra.

Contemporary Art and Improvisation

In the normative history of conceptual art, Moran’s *Staged* is in a lineage of installation art and, by virtue of its restaging of past venues, a type of simulacra. Modern ideas of the simulacrum are rooted in the notion that images exist as representations without an original meaning that grounds that representation. Baudrillard’s influential treatise on the subject, *The Precession of*

¹¹ Jazz historian, Michael Heller articulates and elaborates how jazz spaces functioned as community nexuses for empowerment, nurturing, and political organizing, including Slugs’ Saloon (Heller 2016, 45).

¹² Sebald 2011 [2001], 24. Andreas Huyssen argues that our postmodern “memory culture” is driven by this “panic of oblivion” and seems to seek “total recall” (Huyssen 2003).

¹³ Moran quoted in Edwards 2018. Lewis refers to a Eurological desire to find perfect freedom in a “now” separated from the past and future as if it were “an infinitely small “now,” a Euclidean point” (108).

Simulacra, indicates this in its title: what precedes the simulacrum is another simulacrum. There is never an original meaning to be found, only another image, another representation. I link this sense of “no meaning” to the Eurological desire to be free from history and personality. Susan Sontag’s influential essay on contemporary art, *Against Interpretation*, can be read as exemplifying this viewpoint. Sontag argues that critics should place their attention on the surface of the work, creating “criticism which would supply a really accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of a work of art. [...] reveal the sensuous surface of art without mucking about in it” (2001, 13). If critics continue in their project to find meaning in works, artists should find ways to sidestep this tendency: “Ideally, it is possible to elude the interpreters [...] by making works of art whose surface is so unified and clean, whose momentum is so rapid, whose address is so direct that the work can be [...] just what it is” (Sontag 11). This view has influenced the work of recent conceptual artists reenacting music (see McMullen 2019, 64–95) and can be linked to what Lewis above recognized as Eurological: that a work—or spontaneity, or freedom—could be “just as it is,” separate from context, history, tradition, that is, from meaning. Scholars of African American music in the 1980s like Olly Wilson and Billy Taylor recognized this dominant ideology and had to directly and explicitly counter this idea about what constitutes “Great Art.” They articulated that meaning and purpose are essential to African American music as an art.¹⁴ The Afrological does not imagine music or art “just what it is,” but on the contrary as inseparable from context and greatly concerned with meaning.

What arises from understanding the world as simulacra and apart from context and meaning are intellectual paradoxes. Performance and conceptual artists involved in simulacra that strive to reperform the past “exactly,” whether of musical recordings, past concerts or historic events, have all expressed fascination with the “impossibility of recreating the event,” the “paradoxes [...] contradictions [...] impossibility of it,” how “the copy never reproduces the original completely” (qtd in Reynolds 2011, 52).¹⁵ Simon

¹⁴ Taylor writes, “The Afro-American value system was the determining factor of what elements remained in the music or were discarded. Did the music make you want to dance, party, get drunk, make love? Did it express frustration, anger, joy, sadness? Afro-American music had to have a purpose, had to say something to the person; or it was altered or discarded” (1982, 86).

¹⁵ See McMullen 2016 on the band Mostly Other People Do the Killing’s note-for-note reenactment of the Miles Davis Sextet’s album, *Kind of Blue*. See Reynolds 2011 for his interviews with performance artists Jo Mitchell, Rod Dickinson, and the performance art duo, Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard.

Reynolds writes that the performance artists with whom he spoke were “forthcoming and engaged” when discussing the intricate, meticulous, and arduous effort that went into re-creating the material detail of their chosen pasts as precisely as possible. They had no problem discussing with great animation the “how” of their work. “But,” he states, “somehow the ‘why’ kept eluding us in our conversations” (52). I wrote a book on why we keep trying to capture something we know we cannot, involving ourselves deeply in what Theodor Adorno drolly termed “pseudo-activity” (McMullen 2019; Adorno 2006 [1991], 26). The point in the context of this article is that in a world that has separated itself from meaning, we are left with fascinating ourselves with the incommensurability of the signifier and the signified—the ways that our representations cannot capture the Real. Thus, we fetishize the intricate, meticulous, arduous work of attempting to capture the past in a recreation. Artists burying themselves in the materiality, that is, the “unified and clean” surface of their work and unable to grasp much regarding why they are making such art is the inevitable outcome of a worldview that repudiates interpretation and meaning.

Moran involved himself in some archeology of the past that is redolent of the processes of the artists interviewed by Reynolds. Of recreating the stages, Moran shares, “I tried to source as many photos as I could from archive collections and then also try to start to talk to musicians” (Phonica Records 2015). Moran would ask people who had been in these venues about the colors of the walls and other details. “It was something about this missing part of our history which I wanted to pull up, so that maybe then I could jump on that stage. Maybe it’s part of my own need to feel these places, because no one cared anymore” (qtd in Edwards 2018). The interviewer then asked him, “Do you think of them as memorials?” “Sadly,” Moran responds, “I think I do” (qtd in Edwards 2018).

For a variety of reasons, however, I do not think Moran fetishizes the past like the re-creators above. He does not concern himself with recreating these spaces “exactly.” He describes a moment when he understood “it was impossible to actually recreate the photograph. Like the fabric that’s on the Savoy Ballroom, that is not actually the fabric that they had” (Phonica Records 2015). The practices of the artists above would involve arduously recreating that fabric as precisely as possible. Moran is unconcerned with that. I am apprehensive, however, about the influence and yes, context, of conceptual art that prefers abstraction, separation, and surface to meaning, tradition, and blur on Moran’s work. *Staged* invites us to consider which spaces are deemed cultural institutions and which are not; which are saved and which are destroyed. This is important, yet, I worry that grasping for what is lost

can lean into unhelpful Eurological tendencies. Moran states, rightly, that there is a “disease we have right now to document everything.” He goes on, however, to concede: “but I have it in my bones” (qtd in RoundO Films 2014). In his works *In My Mind: Monk at Town Hall, 1959* and *Staged*, Moran honors and recognizes the past and in the case of *Staged*, loss, without pasting over that loss with a fetish. While I think there is a danger of fetishizing and getting lost in the precession of simulacra, I think it is the improvisatory elements based in the Afrological that point toward a more realistic understanding of blur over a fascinating but ultimately futile intellectual antinomy. Unlike efforts to “bring back the past” in order to somehow have that past with us because “everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion,” Moran’s works suggest that the past is in fact still with us but in very complex ways that demand our awareness and decoding (interpretation).

Moran’s use of sound especially articulates the layers of the past that resonate with us even as specific venues may be gone. *Staged* sets up a periodic conversation between forced labor songs recorded at the Angola State Penitentiary in the 1930s emitting from “Savoy Ballroom 1” and the twelve-minute song cycle composed and performed by Moran emanating from the “Three Deuces” via a Steinway Spirio piano that plays back Moran’s performance without the pianist there. Moran says of the confluence: “It’s a different kind of ghost [...] [the Spirio] plays the song ‘He Cares’ and it’s in sync with the Savoy Ballroom with the man singing ‘He Cares’ as well as all the hammers and chains from the recording of the Angola prison workers. So there’s an ambient sound coming from the Savoy Ballroom stage but the answer comes from the music that happens on the Three Deuces. So they do have a conversation” (Phonica Records 2015). Moran sets up a conversation between these forced labor songs in the past and his more recently performed music. “It’s not only a conversation about where the music was but it’s also a conversation about the history that preceded those spaces that still ties them together” (Phonica Records 2015). Moran questions the purpose of African American musical labor, stating that “work songs,” or forced labor songs, were deployed by slave masters, prison guards, and employers to make enslaved, imprisoned, and indentured people work harder and longer. “The music was used against us...So how was jazz used against us?” (qtd in Krasinski 2016). *Staged* makes us think about how the music resonates from and through the past and the present and the future. The good and the bad, the beauty and the ugliness, the freely given and the forced. Indeed, he seems to ask what *is* freely given and what is forced in the context of an American tradition of racialized hierarchy. The sounds foreground the continuity of the past with the present: connected, blurred, haunting.

Improvisation can be a way of understanding the world that directly engages meaning and context, so much so that it can (at least strive to) bring everything *in* rather than attempt to separate everything *out*. Thus, the practice of improvisation can be a direct repudiation of an epistemology of boundaries, offering instead an acknowledgement of blur. I contend that Moran views conceptual art, so influenced by the intellectual tradition represented in Baudrillard and Sontag, through a jazz lens.¹⁶ Setting up stages from the past to interact is redolent of musicians on the bandstand listening and responding. Moran highlights how this hallmark of black music—improvisatory call and response—has always included the audience (the listener), the place (“every wood crevice”), the past, and the present, blurring who is calling and who is responding. The temporal laminar depths are what the listener brings to it, all the musicians that have preceded and are a part of the music of the current present, and indeed, all of the past that is a part of the present now. This is a Black music-derived improvisatory process unfolding in the realm of contemporary art—self, music, history, other, time as a blurry, messy, unlocatable relationship that is always with us and that will never be adequately pinpointed but demands our responsible acknowledgement and action based on awareness. Moran states that place and music, music and the past, are “the relationships I want people to question” (Phonica Records 2015). I would argue that Moran’s focus on relationship extends into every aspect of his work thus far, musical and beyond. Thus, *Staged* does not “[resist] classification under the heading of contemporary art” but broadens our understanding of what contemporary art is and can be.

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¹⁶ I am not making claims about all conceptual art, but want to highlight a reading of Sontag and Baudrillard that indicates a Eurological fascination with the signifier that will never meet the signified. It is my contention that the Eurological perspective understands this as a site of trauma and thus will continually (re)enact (that is, gaze upon) this moment of incommensurability.

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Abolfazl Mohammadi*

Autopoietic Free Improvisation vs. Technototalitarian Regulation of Consciousness

Abstract

The elusive nature and the function of art occupy a highly contested territory within aesthetic philosophy since its inception. The present article also engages with the question of the nature and the function of art, though in a more narrowed and specific domain. The claim that is going to be tackled here is whether improvisation in art, in general, makes a statement against empirical science? To corroborate this claim I will look at specific artworks that offer a way of considering the function of art as something that can stand in opposition to empirical science and as something that therefore can offer an alternative understanding of consciousness. The main question is, “where does improvisation stand against the radical evolutionary positivist objectivization of consciousness?” To answer, we look at the emancipatory role of art that challenges the empiricism of modern science via investigating several artworks as signposts. We examine different types of improvisation by analyzing Joe Wight’s *Darkest Hour* (2017) and by drawing on the concept of autopoiesis, we define autopoietic improvisation as free improvisation. Then we draw on Charlie Brooker’s *Black Mirror* show (2011–present) to indicate that the idea of how indelible techno-totalitarianism, which envisages a dystopian future for mankind via the refinement and regulation of consciousness, offers a limited view of consciousness. Techno-totalitarianism stands as a key term to be defined and analyzed here as it is precisely the mechanism against and through which I will shape a new discourse of improvisation. Techno-totalitarianism is the state of digital rationalization and instrumentation of neuroscience in the regulation of human desire, choice, and behavior such as regulation and self-regulation are no longer distinguishable. We also discuss how finding a theory of everything and complete formula for consciousness means cutting new alleyways to utter annihilation of human will, improvisation or freedom in general.

Keywords

Anti-representational Art, Neuroscience, Improvisation, Self-objectivization, Consciousness, Technototalitarianism, Autopoiesis

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Introduction

What is the purpose of improvisation? If it is to produce the new, we should ask what this new could be in the closed loop of causality and in a new world where every act is reduced by neuroscientists to its positive causes? In this paper, we will take a brief glance at the emancipatory role and stance of art that challenge the empiricism of neuroscience that serve the infrastructure of digital manipulation, that categorize, that produce by prediction, and endeavor to reduce the full phenomenal consciousness to some set formula like the claims of neuroscientists like Hanna Critchlow and Ray Kurzweil. The anti-representational merits of the chosen Science Fiction cinematic works alongside paintings by Francis Bacon and Salvador Dali, Jackson Pollock and René Magritte, are used as signposts for directing the reader to the main argument, that is the assertion of improvisation as antithetical to a rationalized consciousness system. Ideas such as the definition of ‘art’ by Martin Heidegger, the ‘unforeseeable nothing’ by Henri Bergson, the concept of ‘event’ by Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze, Heidegger and Slavoj Žižek will be discussed as they are emblematic of the aforementioned obsessions and are very similar to the pre-symbolic void. Central to my argument are *Parallax View* (2009) by Žižek, *Event and Being* (2001) and *Cinema* (2002) by Badiou as they provide the theoretical ground to discuss how obsessions with a locus prior to being are entrenched in the minds of those who thirst for free improvisation, a real freedom to produce new beginnings unfettered by the givens.

By exploring Joe Wight’s *Darkest Hour* (2017) in the second section we probe the meaning of improvisation and discuss the positive and negative freedom as examined by Gary Peters in his *Philosophy of Improvisation* (2009). A significant question raised in this section is “from where might an artist or a performer, whether an artist, or a politician like Winston Churchill, draw the originary force for free improvisation?” To answer this question, we draw on the Edgar Landgraf’s idea of the autopoietic creation of art to show how true improvisation is done in the continuous process of creation.

In the third section, we examine the antihumanist attitude of modern subjectivity in the second episode of Charlie Brooker’s science fiction television show *Black Mirror* (2011–present) called “Fifteen Million Merits.” In this section we delve into the way the portrayal of technototalitarianism uses ‘tech-noir’ (also known as ‘future-noir’) in *Black Mirror* in order to envision a world where consciousness is being refined, and thought as radically

objectivized. We will show how this episode can be illustrative of the hyper-capitalist long-lasting aspiration to find a theory of everything and to translate the entirety of human thought into set formulas. The conclusion we aim to reach is that such accomplishment means being capable of modulating human motivation and will, thus destroying any hopes for any true improvisational act. However, we will argue for the impossibility of such a grand and dark project, and by drawing partly on Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), we try to suggest some redemptive signs of freedom originating from machines themselves.

Emancipated Dystopias

The overarching framework of pessimism in some recent TV shows, such as *Twilight Zone* (1959–1964), *Black Mirror* (2011–present), *Westworld* (2016–present), present bleak images of highly regulated societies, which radically suppress spontaneity and improvisation. In the universe of these shows, acts which are imbued with improvisational substance are regarded as subversive threats that should be immediately neutralized. In the science-fictional dystopia of “Fifteen Million Merits,” the second episode of the first season of *Black Mirror*, the improvisational attempt by Bing (protagonist) to rebel against the system is not only contained by the system, but also transformed into the anathema of the subversive force that breeds such improvisation.¹ The episode portrays a society where almost everyone must cycle on exercise bikes in order to power their habitat and earn a form of currency called “Merits.” In the caste system of this fictional universe bike-riders are positioned at the lowest level, so that when Abi is faced with the dilemma of going back to biking or becoming a porn star, she prefers the latter option. The hidden mechanisms of predetermination ensure that people are either labor workers or sex workers in this universe and their only chance of

¹ The narrative centers around the story of Bing, who meets Abi and convinces her to participate in a talent game, which blatantly parallels reality shows such as *The X Factor*, to escape the oppressive slavery that subjugates them. Though impressed by Abi's singing, the judges claim there is no more room left for singers but they propose a position on a pornography show called *Wraith Babes* to her which she accepts. Angered and disappointed Bing plans to rebel against the show by taking part in it. He starts his performance with some dancing, but suddenly half way through it he pulls out a shard of glass and threatens to slice his own neck. Bing rants about the oppressive system, the bike life, and exploitation they are suffering. The judges reaction comes as a surprise as they offer him his own regular show. The last scene displays Bing recording his show: holding the glass shard against his neck and ranting anti system babble.

redemption lies in the hands of godlike figures (*Hotshot* judges) who, as the case of Bing suggests, not only stifle and suppress improvisation but also endeavor to assimilate it into the regulatory mechanisms of the system. The final outcome is a bleak new world empowered by technology and modern science which, according to Merleau-Ponty, “manipulates things and gives up dwelling in them” (Ponty, Johnson 1996, 351), with no hope of emancipation.

Such a dark reality illustrates how every single act of the human being is engineered and programmed, which leaves no old image of the autonomous human unscathed; however, in classical science as opposed to the empiricism of positive science in the art and paintings of the likes of Bacon and Dali, we hear the echo of ‘the feeling of opaqueness’ that characterizes the world. As Ponty notes, “classical science held unto the feeling of opaqueness of the world, and through its constructions it intended to join back up with the world” (1996, 351). For instance, in Jackson Pollock’s “all-over” paintings, space is not deemed as chaotic but as chaosmosis or machinic heterogeneity. Pollock’s paintings are neither confined externally by frame nor internally by reference points. “All-over” canvases like *Summertime* (Number 9) (1948), *Lavender Mist* (Number 1) (1950), and *Blue Poles* (Number 11) (1952) defy contour, express matter and, by executing an optical catastrophe, give birth to a pure appearance, a form of expression without image—Event (Judy 2000, 135). Thus, the emergence of the event means the emergence of non-being prior to the being, which causes the pseudo-wholeness of being (e.g. appearance of normality in a society) to break apart and its inconsistency be revealed. The Bing’s improvisational act in “Fifteen Million Merits” (pulling out a shard of glass and threatening to slice his own neck while ranting about the oppressive system) constitutes a perfect example of an Event as it destabilizes the appearance of normality in the fictional universe of the episode.

Badiou argues that being as the order of situation is a pure multiplicity that finds its consistency through an operation he calls “count-as-one” (e.g. the dominant ideology). Thus, being does not precede its presentation and, in fact, it is the presentation (*appearance* in itself) that provides it with consistency. However, the excluded or unrepresented nature (event or void) haunts the situation with the danger of exploding the axioms that are the conditions of appearance (Badiou, Feltham 2006, 89–95).

Through Žižek we come to understand the three perspectives toward the concept of the Event by Heidegger, Deleuze, and Badiou:

In Heidegger, it is the Event as the epochal disclosure of a configuration of Being; in Deleuze, it is the Event as the desubstantialized pure becoming of Sense; in Badiou, it is the Event reference to which grounds a Truth-process. For all three, Event is irreducible to the order of being (in the sense of positive reality), to the set of its material (pre)conditions (Žižek 2009, 165).

Badiou offers us an explanation of how cinema acts as a truth procedure as well as a 'poetics of politics' against Capital's saturation of everything, disrupting the politics' meta-domain, whose measuring devices originate from themselves. Thus, the role of cinema is to open a path for an Event to emerge by stripping itself from the representational grammar of the dominant class so as to bring forth a new truth, 'a new image of collective' (2009, 336).

With Francis Bacon's portraits of his friends—George Dyer, David Sylvester, Michel Leiris, Isabel Rawsthorne—we witness how the wholeness of the representational being is festered and distorted into naked multiplicity. In his analysis of Francis Bacon's paintings, Deleuze's distinction between face and head corresponds with Badiou's "count-as-one" and "void." Deleuze defines a face as having some distinguishing features such as ears, eyes, nose, old, young, woman, student, etc. that are the productions of society while he finds in Bacon's fleshy and meaty heads or head a state of non-signifying, a horror story as catastrophic as Pollock's "all-over" paintings.

A good example of a non-signifying face would be Rene Magritte's *Rape* (1945) which is the best example of a painting that vigorously features a non-signifying face composed of the torso and the pelvis of a woman. Susan Gubar mentions that this surrealist painting illustrates how the image of the woman is humiliated, 2 structures for male sexual pleasure (1987, 215). In the same anti-representational vein illustrating an ideologically-wrought woman is Dali's *My Wife Nude Contemplating Her Own Flesh Becoming Stairs, Three Vertebra of a Column, Sky and Architecture*. This painting illustrates a picture of a woman sitting in a desert watching the structured reflection of herself—a mirage of who she is forged by masculine whims, imaginations, and misperceptions. This is what Dali names concrete irrationality: 'images which provisionally are neither explicable nor reducible by the systems of logical intuition or by the rational mechanisms' (McMahon, Dali 1936, 12).

In her *The Face is a Horror Story: The Affective Face of Horror*, Anne Powell examines Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* (1987), Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1931), and Georges Franju's *Les Yeux Sans Visage* (Eyes without a Face)

(1959) by discussing how all these horror movies illustrate “the face—subject to defacialization—as an affective locus of horror, or even as rendering the Deleuzo-Guattarian ‘body without organs’” (Sinnerbrink 2008, 86).

For Bacon, the purpose of distorting appearance is to bring distortion back to the recording of appearance (Sinnerbrink 2008, 243). To put it in Badiou’s term, in Bacon’s paintings, what is not-counted-as-one is to haunt the face, the expressed one. Therefore, the dismantling face, shocking portraits, and bringing distortion to a recording of appearance is a “foregrounding of the ‘abjection of the flesh and disintegration of subjective wholeness’ by the violation and destruction of the body” (2008, 243) and this is what Žižek names as “Alien,” which will be discussed in the second part of this paper.

In the following section we leave painting behind to focus on the main body of our argument that concerns cinematic works. What is central to our discussion on the aforementioned cinematic works is their refutation of cognitive-state-corporate regulation. As early as May 2002, it was reported that scientists had succeeded in attaching a microchip to a rat’s brain which is able to receive signals directly, so that similar to a remote-controlled toy car the rat could be controlled, its “spontaneous” decisions for movements taken over by an external machine (Harder, Ben). If we assume that the rat experiences its condition as spontaneous (that it remains oblivious to the fact that it is being controlled by an unfathomable force) its condition precisely parallels the condition of human beings according to neuroscience. For neuroscientists, all our choices are determined by neuronal processes which effectively reduces all our lived experiences to illusory experiences in which ‘the biological process that really runs the show’ remains unrecognized (Žižek 2009, 177).

This approach basically reduces the human subject to a mere puppet which is steered by neuro-biological strings. In her book *Conscience: The Origins of Moral Intuition* (2019) the neurophilosopher Patricia Churchland ventures to even reduce ‘morality’ to the development of our brain over the course of our evolution. For Churchland morality is a set of norms that evolved because of their usefulness in keeping a social group together and even today our brain releases dopamine when our actions receive social approval. Thus even the most sublime human values are nothing more than a brain-construct that has formed through the course of our evolution. Churchland goes further to claim that even our political attitudes are also determined by our neurons and are open to engineering. The state-corporate-capitalist machinery also seems to regard the human subject in similar

terms, i.e. as a set formula open to manipulation. Today, in the aftermath of the Cambridge Analytica-Facebook scandal, it is flagrant that the corporate-political power attempts to engineer and steer the desire of human subjects to achieve political and commercial goals. The outcome of the American 2016 election notoriously confirmed not only the validity of their stance regarding the nature of the human subject but also the efficiency of their methods in manipulating subjects. It appears that we are like rats trapped in the hands of neuro-biological and corporate-political forces, steered by their signals with no hope for freedom. As the director of engineering at Google, Ray Kurzweil is of the belief that the whole content of our brain will be uploaded on a computer:

A more controversial application than the scanning-the-brain-to-understand-it scenario is *scanning the brain to upload it*. Uploading a human brain means scanning all of its salient details and then reinstantiating those details into a suitably powerful computational substrate. This process would capture a person's entire personality, memory, skills, and history (Kurzweil 2006, 138).

In the following section via examining three cinematic works it is explained how improvisation can act as an effective tool against such regulation and predetermination.

The Pre-Symbolic Site and the Free Improvisational

If improvisation had a name in the political history of the 20th century, it would be Winston Churchill, who had to face the darkest forces and decide on doing the unexpected. In Joe Wright's film *Darkest Hour* (2017), we are briefly introduced to the most important moments of Churchill's life. What we try to suggest here is that this movie portrays Churchill's emergence from the aforementioned unvarnished darkness or pre-symbolic depth, like the womb, from which the artist emerges to demonstrate what is unthought, to improvise and make novel decisions when everyone has abandoned all hope.

The biographical aspects of this movie are not of much significance in this paper as the heap of presupposed images with artistry dull the notion of newness offering us something no more than an expression of underlying historical processes. Yet, what is important in a work of art is to 'produce new *beginnings*' and that is through free-improvisation, as Gary Peters says in *The Philosophy of Improvisation*:

Clearly, all spaces are in reality marked by the presence of other works, not least the artist's own, which implies that the ingenuity of origination must find ways to erase or forget the presence of the given in order to both avoid imitation (including self-imitation, perhaps the most common form) and open up the path to be followed, the "Open" that Heidegger believes is created and preserved by art. As an ideal-type in this regard free-improvisation is able to achieve, or at least strive to achieve, a prior degree of aesthetic erasure beyond the reach of other art forms precisely because its primary aim is not to produce works. Its primary aim is to produce beginnings (2012, 37).

In this movie, the historical version of Churchill has turned into an artist creating a new beginning, a new portrayal of himself. The emergence of Churchill from the dark womb, like an artist, can be seen in four different scenes: first, when he is sparked for the first time out of darkness into the light of our vision by the match he strikes to light his cigar; the second time when he faces the 'gravest odds' and is in doubt whether to negotiate with Germans or not and in this moment of great self-doubt, we see a ponderous darkness engulfing the scene, pushing and creeping on him. The third moment is when he is alone at home, sunk in his thought in utter darkness, and is illuminated when his wife turns the light on. The fourth moment occurs when, at the end of the movie, in Parliament after he has made his last decision for not negotiating peace terms with Hitler, he walks right into us, into a dark scene and the movie finishes. These scenes show that each time Churchill heaves from the pre-symbolic darkness into light or from what Hegel calls 'Night of the World'² he strips himself of all the pang of the ultimate horizon of presupposed meanings weighing so much on his mind. It is like pushing itself agonizingly out of a womb which is untouched by the presupposition, it is like coming out of absolute nothingness.

When Churchill is born out of darkness or the pre-symbolic abyss, he makes the most important decision of his life, which is to save thousands of soldiers trapped in Dunkirk. The grave decisions he comes forth with in the face of every disaster defy predictions and presuppositions, making him a true improviser. The anti-representational artistry thus reverberates

² Hegel describes 'Night of the World' as such: The human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity—an unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none belongs to him—or which are not present. This night, the interior of nature, that exists here—pure self—in phantasmagorical representations, is night all around it, in which here shoots a bloody head—there another white ghastly apparition, suddenly here before it, and just so disappears. One catches sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye—into a night that becomes awful. (Donald 1986, 7–8).

in this movie as the pang of the ultimate horizon of meaning weighs on Churchill's mind every time he emerges from darkness to give meaning and hope to the lives of people who are a step from total annihilation. It can be said that the title of this movie, *Darkest Hour* symbolizes the moment of the unforeseeable nothing, the moment when he retreats back into the night of the world before he emerges as a new person, as an alien to face "an ordeal of the most grievous kind" (Wright 2017). Therefore, the Churchill we witness in this movie is near in definition to what Žižek defines as the Alien:

The first association that this tension between presymbolic depth and the surface of events gives rise to in the domain of popular culture is, of course, the 'Alien' from the film of the same name. Our first response is to conceive of it as a creature of the chaotic depth of the maternal body, as the primordial Thing. However, the 'Alien's' incessant changing of its form, the utter 'plasticity' of its being, does it not point also in the very opposite direction: are we not dealing with a being whose entire consistency resides in the fantasmatic surface, with a series of pure events-effects devoid of any substantial support? (2013a, 157)

So, it is not strange to say that the character Joe Wright stages as Winston Churchill in *Darkest Hour* is but to show the power of the fantasmatic surface devoid of any substantial support in the life of this great politician. We see it time and again when Churchill pretends that the English are victorious against Germany, though the victory of the Germans is imminent and such pretension from Churchill's side is deemed to give spirit to the English soldiers, so they could stand with all their hearts against the enemy. This pretension, just like Alien's fantasmatic surface confers consistency on what is not truly consistent.

This is also what the art of cinema does, which is to make us think of appearance as appearance and, as Badiou points out in his essay *Dilaectics of the Fable: The Matrix A Philosophical Machine*, the power of cinema is "to render the certainty of the visible visibly uncertain" (Badiou, de Baecque 2013, 190). Thus, we can say that the sense of terrifying uncertainty is the life-blood of free improvisation in order to 'produce new beginnings' and to step away from mere representation. The cruelty of such uncertainty can be understood in the appearance-based reality of Television and Cinema which has framed the reality out there telling us how it is but an appearance from which various interpretations of reality can be grasped. Thus, it can be said that the screen is the best way for reality to be improvised. At the end of the aforementioned essay by Badiou, the author mentions the significance of appearance as appearance in cinema:

The principle of the art of cinema lies precisely in subtly showing that it is only cinema, that its images only testify to the real to the extent that they are *manifestly* images. It is not by turning away from appearance, or by lauding the virtual, that you will have the chance of attaining the idea. Rather, it is by thinking appearance as appearance, and thus as that aspect of being which, by coming to appear, gives itself to thought as a disappointment of seeing (2013, 201).

Churchill's solitary bestows him a remedy, so he could not be bound by the articulations of time and place. Just like the art of cinema, at those crucial moments that he is born out of the depth of darkness, he appears to us in a new way and makes us see him in a new light, thereby helping the viewers learn how to retreat into a dark-engulfed alcove untouched by regulation and not bound by representations. Still, in this movie, the pang and the uncertainty of Churchill's solitary-produced originality undergoes an initiatory odyssey which gives birth to the significance of public gaze. Thus, when he sneaks off to London subway with no pre-plan and interacts with people, Churchill makes his last decision through a collective improvisation and this action opens up a counterargument to singular improvisation.

In *Cinema 1*, Deleuze refers to Akira Kurosawa's fascination with Russian literature and the way he establishes a link between Japan and Russia. What Deleuze highlights is the entanglement of a hero with a pressing situation and the significance of tearing 'from a situation a question which it contains'. So, in both Kurosawa and Fyodor Dostoevsky, it is not the urgency of the situation that entails encountering but the urgency of the question. As Deleuze says: "Instead of absorbing a situation in order to produce a response which is merely an explosive action, it is necessary to absorb a question in order to produce an action which would truly be a considered response" (1986, 90).

According to Deleuze, in *The Seven Samurai*, the highest question is not if the village can be defended, but it is "what is a samurai today, at this particular moment of history?" The answer is that the samurai are but shadows and the real victors have been peasants in this movie (1986, 191).

In *Darkest Hour* (2017), there is no hope in all the givens of the situation, every step toward defending the country can be a grievous misstep and the highest question is not if England will be victorious against Nazis, the question is: on what basis can the old values, rules and strategies be relied upon when all the old bases are being annihilated? The answer is: this is where the new must emerge and forge its own bases. And, this newness is improvised by Churchill meeting Londoners in the subway to decide the biggest decision alongside them. This act is an act of collective improvisation in this context

which is the harbinger of Churchill's ultimate success. Collective improvisation means giving into intersubjective experiences, submitting one's voice and thoughts to no more than audience's thoughts. Thus, the inevitable notion of non-singular improvisation opens up a counterargument to the singularity of improvisation.

So far, we expatiated on the significance of improvisation in producing new, avoiding being reduced to raw materiality and preserving the originality of the beginnings. Yet, the moral to this movie that could be fathomed within the boundary of our discussion, is the importance of collective improvisation by undergoing initiatory journey of destroying one's originality obtained through singular improvisation. To avoid falling into the ironic discourses of emancipation and elucidate different types of improvisation, first we should point out to freedom's duality: positive and negative freedom. By drawing on Isaiah Berlin, Gary Peters defines positive and negative freedom as follows:

As Berlin demonstrates, in essence negative freedom is a collective ideal. It protects the collective by establishing a regime of noninterference that, in breaking with "men's constant tendency to conformity," allows the individual the scope and the space for "spontaneity, originality, genius [and] mental energy," all of which figure large in the world of improvisation. Positive freedom, on the other hand, is an ideal of singularity, and it has a rather more worrying vocabulary, one inescapably intertwined with a notion of mastery that has not worn well during the modern period (2012, 23).

Peters further links the duality of freedom to the duality of free improvisation: positive and negative improvisation. Being "unconcerned with respecting the sanctity of other's space," not being settled in the given, and preserving a singular autonomy is the positive side of singular improvisation. However, the negative side of singular improvisation or the negative side of positive freedom in general that Peters mentions is:

"Negative liberty" [...] seems to me a truer and more humane ideal than the goals of those who seek in the great, disciplined, authoritarian structures the ideal of "positive" self-mastery. [...] It is true, because it recognizes the fact that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and in perpetual rivalry with one another (2012, 22).

We already mentioned the negative sides of collective improvisation, which is sacrificing the "I" for the "we." While Churchill's final decision with the subway people embodies the 'negative liberty' the self-mastery and the singularity of Hitler's actions embodies 'positive liberty.' The 'positive liberty' on the Hitler's part, driven by the wish 'to be his own master,' is em-

blematic of how self-mastery “threatens the diversity, spontaneity, and originality seen by the vast majority as essential to improvisation” (Peters 2012, 23–26). Notwithstanding the explanatory and enlightening power of these paradoxes surrounding the concept of improvisation, drawing upon Edgar Landgraf’s reading of neocybernetic discourse completes our argument about free improvisation and “allows us to understand the ‘experience’ created by a person’s cognitive engagement with art without having to assume a representational or an interpretive stance toward the work of art or performance” (Landgraf 2014, 150).

Landgraf’s emphasizes improvisation as an autopoietic process rather than aesthetics of autonomy in that “the artwork [must] emerge with and according to a plan that it develops for itself only in the process of creation” (2014, 79). Rather than specifying the inspiration to the artists, Landgraf views it from the perspective of an “attentiveness that the artist lends to the emerging artwork” (2014, 82).

Therefore, it can be said that Landgraf’s improvisation as autopoietic process and Peters’s collaborative improvisation give improvisation the power of being a self-supporting activity, as Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, who have coined the term autopoiesis, point out:

An autopoietic machine continuously generates and specifies its own organization through its own operation as a system of production of its own components, and does this in an endless turnover of components under conditions of continuous perturbations and compensation of perturbations (1980, 89).

Returning to *The Darkest Hour*, following the fall of France, the War Cabinet sticks with the idea of negotiating peace terms with Germany. Churchill receives an unexpected visit from George VI who asks him to continue the war. The biggest moment of uncertainty comes to Churchill when with no preplan, he decides to ride the London subway and ask the passengers’ opinion about continuing the war and resisting the Nazi invasion. The civilians want the war to be continued and they don’t want Britain to capitulate to Hitler. Even though this fictional scene is propped by pure melodrama like Wright’s *Anna Karenina* (2012), it still creates an impact in portraying the significance of what Peters names as collaborative act of improvisation (2012, 17).

To conclude, Churchill’s resilience comes to fruition in two ways: through an autopoietic act of active self-limitation or self-inclusion, and collaborative improvisation. First, his being like an autopoietic machine allows him to bootstrap himself into his darkness just like a cell that sets a boundary for

itself, and from this loop emerges a self-distinguishing entity. To clarify, it would be better to say that Churchill sets the self-reflexive causes that will define him regardless of the external causes. Secondly, his improvisational decision to meet people might be derailed off into annihilation when he decides to meet people for their opinion, but it turns into a collaborative one when people weave their urge-to-resist with that of Churchill's. Thus, this is where his eventual attempt lies.

Indelible Techno-oppressions in *Black Mirror* and Signs of Redemption in *Blade Runner 2049* (2017)

Despite the disparity between *Darkest Hour* (2017) and *Black Mirror* (2011–present), we can locate the British people's freedom or freedom in general as a common theme. In *Black Mirror's* premier, "The National Anthem" (Dec 4th, 2011), Michael Callow, the British Prime Minister is forced to have sex with a pig on live national television on account of the demands of a madman who has abducted Susanna, the princess. The premier was a big hit in showing how techno-totalitarianism has shut all the avenues for formulating a policy. When an attempt to fake footage of the sex act fails, the kidnapper finds out and sends a severed finger of the princess. In short, this set of actions indicate the indelible technological oppression by various means such as mass scale surveillance which has overtaken personal privacy and the space that was the source of free improvisation for Churchill. Whereas in *Darkest Hour* we witness people's fervor in refusing to capitulate to the enemy and asking Churchill to continue the war, in "The National Anthem," people expect Callow to undergo the scandal, so in a word offering no possibility for freedom. To extend this analysis, we examine the second episode of the first season—"Fifteen Million Merits" (Dec. 11th, 2011).

In "Fifteen Million Merits," we witness the bleak life of the young protagonist (Daniel Kaluuya) in an enclosed subterranean cell, which is no more than a rebarbative prison and a digital hell whose walls are covered with video screens. Bing and so many other young people in these cells are forced to watch commercials. To mute or get rid of them, they have to pay credits that are earned by riding cycles in a space which is devoid of sun light, animal life and vegetation. Riding the stationary bikes provides them with merits which in turn are used to buy food and virtual items used for their entertainment.

Bing falls in love with Abi Khan (Jessica Brown Findlay) and when he hears her singing in the restroom, he encourages her to participate in *Hot Shot*, a contest whose winners would no longer need cycling to sustain

themselves. The entrance fee is 15 million merits, so Bing gives his 15-million inheritance to Abi so she could enter the contest. When Abi goes on stage and sings, judges become very impressed with her singing, but they tell her that they don't have any room for another singer and Wraith, one of the judges, tells her that she is better suited for the pornography show *Wraithbabes*. Abi has no choice but to accept.

One day when Bing watches Abi's porn, he tries to skip it, but he does not have enough credit to do so. This makes him so furious that he breaks one of the screens. A large shard of glass catches his attention and he comes up with the idea of working hard, being frugal and earning 15 million merits to take part in the talent contest. After 15 months, he takes part in the contest with the shard of glass hidden in his trousers. After impressing everyone with his dance, he suddenly takes out the glass shard and threatens to cut his neck. He goes on raving against the cold, heartless and dehumanized system and life they are leading. After some discussions among themselves, one of the judges comes forth with the idea of Bing's regular show on one of the channels. So Bing goes on recording his show of anger by holding the shard of glass to his neck and the prize he receives is a larger cell.

Notwithstanding the somewhat unrealistic aura of this episode, signs of the present can be traced that are cloaked in the future. These days the concerns regarding the fusion of human and machine are being felt more than ever and the theme of human mechanization has found its way in the movies such as *THX 1138* (1971), *Brave New World* (1980), *1984* (1984), *The Island* (2005) and more recently, *The Hunger Games* franchise (2012–2015). In the previous sections, we discussed the redemptive void which is untainted by language and the possibility of free improvisation rooted in the pre-symbolic void.

What is at stake more than ever is human spontaneity and free will caused by the total objectivization of the human mind by translating human thought into neuronal counterparts and the instrumentalization of that research into techno-totalitarianism. The prospective success of the scientific explanation of consciousness, envisaged by neuroscientists, helps the scientist to regulate the biological processes that generate pathological psychic phenomena. Therefore, it can be said that when the total formula of mind is accomplished, the consciousness of those who live an unwholesome life can be regulated and refined to the extent that they become nonchalant about their unsavory surroundings. Such scientific totalitarianism can be metaphorically seen in "Fifteen Millions Merits" to the extent that laborers are nonchalant to their own bondage.

The glass through which Bing catches the judges off guard symbolizes consciousness itself, whose emergence at first cannot be schematized by any dominant principles (here, judges' expectations). However, the sharp glass is objectified by turning into a commodity when Bing uses it in his recordings. To put it another way, the glass, into which all the heroic values of Bing is concentrated, becomes totally stripped of any improvisational value that first stood for Bing's subjective experience of free will. The unsettling radicalism we are made to confront is that of unconditional acceptance of the fact that free will is but another fact to be transmitted under the dominance of science. Even though young people are not androids (or are they?), all their motivational inclinations seem to be regulated by all the scientific devices employed in the service of state/corporate control.

The bleakest moment is when we see how Bing's rage on the stage turns into a fictional suspense and when we witness his improvisational failing as he says:

[...] I haven't got a speech. I didn't plan words. I didn't even try to. I just knew I had to get here, to stand here, and I wanted you to listen (Brooker, 2011).

Yet, the bleakest of all is to see how Bing capitulates to the judges' decision on stage and his heroic rage turns into a TV program. Even Bing's suicide after this misery could mean potential suicides of all those prisoners, and thus, the annihilation of the entirety of the system, but nothing happens.

Whereas all the shows and movies around the theme of androids versus human beings end either with human reality as a mere illusion or the inevitable dominion of machine over humans, *Blade Runner 2047* (2017) is a recent movie in this genre that ends with a hope rooted in a machinic miracle. Yes, it is contradictory and somewhat ridiculous to imagine how a miracle can emerge out of a machine, the entirety of whose existence does not surpass the closed loop of zero and one. This movie is the story of an android with the name of officer K, who as a Blade Runner, is in charge of hunting down rogue replicants. On one of his missions, after killing Sapper Morton, a replicant, one of his victim's claim that "you have never seen a miracle" (Villeneuve 2017) haunts officer K until the end. After killing Morton, K finds a box under a tree inside which there are the remains of a dead female replicant proving that replicants can become pregnant. Before grappling with Morton and killing him, Morton hints at the possibility of a miracle and it is actually the possibility of such a miracle that empowers the human race to step out of the shadow, on the verge of extinction to rise against Androids

and retrieve what is real. The actuality of this miracle subverts the reigning Techno-capitalist discourse that Wallace Corporation embodies and thus retains the subversive force of an authentic improvisatory act. A child born by an Android negates the very regulatory system upon which the universe of the movie is based and that is precisely why K is missioned to eliminate this child. Its existence stands as an existential threat to the predetermined, highly regulated, caste constellation of the system and hence must be terminated.

Even though some philosophers like Chalmers resist the reductive approach toward consciousness, they take another avenue to reach total radical objectivization of mind by finding an answer to the inexplicable problem of consciousness by creating a link between physical processes and conscious experience:

Once we have a fundamental theory of consciousness to accompany a fundamental theory in physics, we may truly have a theory of everything. Given the basic physical and psychophysical laws, and given the distribution of the fundamental properties, we can expect that all the facts about the world will follow (Chalmers 2007, 127).

If neuroscientists could find a theory to explicate the emergence of consciousness, they could regulate or even eliminate suicidal or any other pathological motivations. That would mean eliminating the facts that result in a conscious decision for suicide; thus, consciousness would lose its meaning. Some neuroscientists like Hanna Critchlow believe that “we can now artificially create consciousness (or at least produce machines that simulate certain characteristics of it)” (2018, 46).

The following questions by Žižek sheds a concluding light to this paper:

[...] after we have constructed an artificial intelligence machine which can solve even very complex problems, the questions crop up: “But if it can do it precisely as a machine, as a blind operating entity, why does it need (self-)awareness to do it? (2009, 177).

Conclusion

The main claim of this paper centers around the problem of representation *qua* representation and its ability via spectacle and scientific manipulation to eradicate the very terms of improvisation, and improvisation as a form of both emergence and resistance. We analyzed the possibility of free improvisation whose aim is to produce new beginnings by examining various types

of improvisations—singular, collective, and collaborative. By considering Churchill's improvisatory acts in *Darkest hour*, we concluded that to be free from a representational stance and to produce new beginnings, improvisation should be autopoietic—a process through which the organization of an artwork is created through continuous operation under the continuous perturbations and compensation of perturbations. In the end, we illustrated an example of an autopoietic improvisation in Churchill's ultimate decision to continue war against Nazis.

As discussed, the unfolding of the new or the unforeseeable nothing is called an Event by some philosophers. It has been the eventual attempts of modern sciences to throw light on what has been left unrepresented in human consciousness. Such attempts might result in the final answer for the hard problem of consciousness. We drew upon Žižek to show that by translating the entirety of human consciousness into a positive formula by brain scientists and neuroscientists, there will be nothing concealed about the human mind and the source for an improvisational act will be foreclosed. We tried to show that having full access to every mental function and finding a theory of everything equals to the full objectivization of mind, thus regulating and refining one's motivations and will; however, we discussed the impossibility of such an entire objectivization. Even though art has clothed itself in namelessness, it gives birth to new names of hope for the bright future of mankind, in contrast with the hopelessly-illustrated darkness of mechanization and objectification in many sci-fi movies and shows.

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Steve Odin*

Nichiren Buddhism in the Contemporary Jazz Improvisation of Herbie Hancock & Wayne Shorter

Abstract

This essay explains how Nichiren Buddhist philosophy and practice of Soka Gakkai International (SGI) in Japan inspired the contemporary jazz improvisation of musical legends Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter. The essay concludes with the jazz aesthetics of spontaneous musical improvisation formulated by Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter based on the Nichiren Buddhist theory and practice of “value creation” by tapping our Buddha nature as the source of infinite creative possibilities.

Keywords

Jazz, Improvisation, Aesthetics, Nihilism, Value Creation, Aesthetic Value, Beauty, Novelty, Variations, Spontaneity, Extemporaneity, Japanese Philosophy, Buddha Nature, Unlimited Possibilities, Multiple New Perspectives, Nichiren Buddhism, Lotus Sutra, Tendai Buddhism, Soka Gakkai International

Introduction

This essay analyzes contemporary jazz improvisation in the music of jazz legends Herbie Hancock (b. 1940) and Wayne Shorter (b. 1933), who have both been longtime members of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a lay branch of Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism in Japan.¹ It is shown how Hancock

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¹ This paper is based on my presentation at the first Jazz and Philosophy Intermodal Conference (JPIC 2017) held May 5–7, 2017 in Winslow, Arizona on old Route 66 (made famous by the Eagles' song “Take It Easy”) at the historic La Posada Hotel. The conference

and Shorter developed an innovative jazz aesthetics of musical improvisation based on the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism, which itself has its roots in Tendai Buddhist philosophy and the Lotus Sutra. Hancock and Shorter describe how the Nichiren Buddhist theory and practice of chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra functions to activate indwelling Buddha-nature as the inexhaustible source of unlimited creative possibilities, thereby providing the basis for ongoing “value creation” through musical improvisation. According to Hancock and Shorter, the practice of Nichiren Buddhism enables one to realize Buddha-nature as the reservoir of latent potentialities, thus to facilitate the aesthetic creative process of spontaneous improvisation by opening up to the multiplicity of possible variations, new perspectives, and novel inventions at each moment, both in jazz and in everyday life.

The Conversion to SGI Nichiren Buddhism of Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter

Herbie Hancock’s autobiography is titled *Possibilities* (Hancock, Dickey 2014), which is named after his jazz album *Possibilities* (2005), as well his documentary film called *Possibilities* (2006), which highlights his musical collaboration with Wayne Shorter in their tours throughout Japan and other countries, aimed toward the goal of creating the value of world peace. In his autobiography Hancock describes his religious conversion to SGI Nichiren Buddhism and explains how it radically transformed his capacity for musical composition and extemporaneous jazz improvisation. Similar accounts of religious conversion to SGI Nichiren Buddhism and its impact on their musical performance can be seen in the lives of his two closest musician friends, these being Wayne Shorter as recorded by Michelle Mercer in *Footprints: The Life and Work of Wayne Shorter* (Mercer 2007), and Tina Turner as recorded in her autobiography *I, Tina: My Life Story* (Turner, Loder 1986/2010), which inspired the 1993 Hollywood film *What’s Love Got To Do With It?*

As explained in his autobiography, Hancock first became interested in SGI Nichiren Buddhism in 1972 during a jazz concert in Seattle upon hearing an extraordinary solo by Buster Williams, the bass player in his band Mwan-

was jointly sponsored by the Northern Arizona University (NAU) Philosophy Department, and the NAU School of Music, along with several other partners. The context of this paper was that Herbie Hancock was originally invited to participate in the conference, and so due to my background in Japanese philosophy, religion, and aesthetics, I was invited by the conference organizers to respond to Herbie Hancock by explaining the role of the Lotus Sutra, Tendai Buddhist philosophy, and SGI Nichiren Buddhism in his style of contemporary improvisational jazz music.

dishi, who was also a member of SGI Nichiren Buddhism: “Buster started playing, and what came out of him was amazing. Astounding! [...] Then, when the rest of the band joined in, the place exploded [...] All of us in that room had just shared a spiritual experience and Buster was the spark that made it happen.” He continues: “When we got back to the dressing room, I grabbed Buster and said, ‘Where did that come from? Whatever made you play bass like that, I want some of it!’” Buster Williams then explained that his electrifying bass solo was inspired by his practice of Nichiren Buddhism. Hancock reports: “Buster had been awake in his room, chanting the words *Nam Myoho Renge Kyo* over and over. He hadn’t slept at all, but when it came for the gig, he had more energy than all the rest of us put together” (Hancock, Dickey, 2014, 152–153). It was shortly thereafter that Herbie Hancock became a member of Soka Gakkai International and took up the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Like his friend Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter underwent a dramatic religious conversion to SGI Nichiren Buddhism. Shorter has played saxophone for Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers (1959–1964), Miles Davis (1964–1969), Weather Report (1970–1985), and then with his own jazz bands. Along with Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Lester Young, Sonny Rollins, Stan Getz, and others, Wayne Shorter has been recognized as among the greatest saxophone players in the history of jazz. Hancock and Shorter played together in Miles Davis’ second quintet, and have since composed and performed as collaborators throughout their careers. Shorter was first introduced to the SGI Nichiren Buddhist practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo by his wife Ana Maria, who in turn was introduced by Herbie Hancock. But as recorded in Mercer’s biographical account, Shorter converted to SGI Nichiren Buddhism in the summer of 1973, when his band Weather Report opened for Santana on a tour of Japan, at which time he attended a ceremony with SGI president Daisaku Ikeda and became a member of Soka Gakkai International (Mercer 2002, 153–154). The application of SGI Nichiren Buddhist theory and practice to jazz improvisation has been taken up in a dialogue between Hancock, Shorter and Ikeda, as recorded in *Reaching Beyond: Improvisations on Jazz, Buddhism, and a Joyful Life* (Hancock et al. 2017). Thus in the present essay I have endeavored to clarify the contemporary jazz aesthetics of value creation through extemporaneous musical improvisation based on the philosophical teachings of SGI Nichiren Buddhism, as articulated by Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, as well as their spiritual mentor, SGI president Daisaku Ikeda.

As documented by Jason C. Bivins in *Spirits Rejoice: Jazz and American Religion* (2015), American jazz musicians have been influenced by many religious traditions, including early gospel music in the “black church” of Christianity, Judaism (Benny Goodman, Dave Brubeck), Islam (Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers), Baha’i (Dizzy Gillespie), Hinduism and Yoga (John and Alice Coltrane, “Mahavishnu” John McLaughlin), Scientology (Chick Corea), Zen (Gary Peacock), and various other paths. Ian Carr (1992) documents how the improvisational jazz pianist Keith Jarrett studied the esoteric philosophy and practice of the Russian mystic G. I. Gurdjieff, and then went on to record, for the first time, Gurdjieff’s music for contemplative dance movements in his 1980 album *G.I. Gurdjieff: Sacred Hymns*. However, after exploring different spiritual traditions, both Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter both dedicated themselves to the practice of Nichiren Buddhism. Thus while Nichiren Buddhism does not have an exclusive or necessary connection to jazz, it is the path that Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, their close friend rock diva Tina Turner, and many other jazz musicians have adopted. It should further be noted that while different jazz artists have sought inspiration from various spiritual traditions, what distinguishes the approach of Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, is that they explicitly and systematically use the philosophical teachings of SGI Nichiren Buddhism to formulate a jazz aesthetics that explains their own creative process of extemporaneous jazz improvisation. As a prelude to our analysis of improvisation in the contemporary jazz music of Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, it is therefore necessary to first briefly explain some of the key philosophical doctrines as well as the central practice underlying SGI Nichiren Buddhism.

The Philosophy and Practice of SGI Nichiren Buddhism

Herbie Hancock undertook a spiritual journey that finally led to the practice of Nichiren Buddhism based on the Lotus Sutra and Tendai Buddhist philosophy. The thirteenth-century Tendai Buddhist monk Nichiren Daishonin (1222–1282) held that enlightenment was not attained by rebirth into a heavenly paradise as for Pure Land Buddhism, nor is it achieved by detached contemplation of emptiness or nothingness as taught by Zen Buddhism, nor through the secret rituals of Shingon Buddhism. According to Nichiren Buddhism, enlightenment can most easily and quickly be achieved by chanting the sacred title of the Lotus Sutra: [*Namu*] *Myōhō Renge Kyō* (南無妙法蓮華經), “Devotion to the Lotus Sutra.”

The Nichiren Buddhist practitioner recites the mystic title of the Lotus Sutra while focusing attention upon the Gohonzon (object of devotion), a mandala scroll wherein the characters for “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” are inscribed down the center in Nichiren’s own bold calligraphy. According to Nichiren, the main teachings of Tendai philosophy are all encoded in the Gohonzon. As explained by Hochswender (2006, 65–66), in Nichiren Buddhism the title of the Lotus Sutra inscribed on the Gohonzon reveals the “three truths” of Tendai Buddhist philosophy.

1. *myōhō* (妙法) or the “mysterious law [of emptiness],” corresponds to *kūtai* (空諦) or the spiritual truth of emptiness;
2. *renge* (蓮華) or “lotus” symbolizes ordinary phenomena, correspond to *ketai* (仮諦) or the material truth of conventional existence;
3. *Kyō* (經) or “teaching,” corresponds to *chūtai* (中諦) or the truth of the middle way.

Thus at the philosophical level, chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo affirms the middle way between the material world of phenomena and the spiritual world of emptiness. It is claimed that by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with resolve one can manifest any goal, including ordinary material desires of conventional existence such as wealth, success, and romantic love, as well as the highest spiritual aspirations such as attaining Buddhahood. As stated by Hochswender: “You can chant for anything. Nothing is too small or too big. You can chant for a parking space, and you can chant to become enlightened” (2006, 106). Likewise, the jazz musician can chant to actualize the latent potentiality of Buddha-nature toward the aim of increased value creation through spontaneous improvisation.

Today the bestselling work on SGI Nichiren Buddhism is *The Buddha in Your Mirror* by Woody Hochswender, Greg Martin and Ted Morino, with a Foreword by the jazz musician Herbie Hancock (Hochswender *et al.* 2001).² In this work it is explained:

Ultimately, we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to reveal our Buddhahood [...] As Daisaku Ikeda has written: “When you invoke Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, you call forth your Buddha nature, or Nam-myoho-renge-kyo within you. Then you yourself are Buddha” (Hochswender *et al.* 2001, 56–57).

² In 1991 the lay movement of Sōka Gakkai International (SGI) or the “Value Creating Society,” founded by its three presidents Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda, and Daisaku Ikeda, broke off from the orthodox priesthood of Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism over a series of disputes.

As stated here, chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, functions to activate one's indwelling Buddha-nature. The "original enlightenment" (*hongaku*, 本覺) of Buddha-nature is characterized by the key Tendai (Chinese: T'ien-t'ai) Buddhist philosophical principle of *ichinen sanzen* (一念三千), "three thousand realms in a single moment of life:"

T'ien-t'ai formulated this truth as the principle of "three thousand realms in a single moment of life" [...] The theory holds that all the innumerable phenomena of the universe are encompassed in a single moment of a common mortal's life. The macrocosm is contained within the microcosm (Hochswender *et al.* 2001, 20).

The doctrine of Buddha-nature as possessing "three thousand realms in a single moment of life" signifies that each moment is a micro-cosmos of the macro-cosmos, such that everything is interconnected with everything else in the cosmic net of relationships. It is this doctrine of Buddha-nature as possessing "three thousand realms in a single moment of life" that underlies the core SGI Nichiren Buddhist teaching that each moment of life has unlimited creative possibilities.

Another aspect of the doctrine of "three thousand realms in a single moment of life," is the Tendai philosophical principle of "mutual containment of ten worlds" (*jukkai gogu*, 十界互具).

A core Buddhist principle called the Ten Worlds [...] teaches that we are continually experiencing varying states of being that operate at a level far below the conscious mind. The states, from lowest to highest, are (1) Hell, (2) Hunger, (3) Animality, (4) Anger, (5) Humanity, (6), Heaven, (7), learning, (8), Realization, (9) Bodhisattva, (10) Buddhahood (also called enlightenment or absolute happiness) (Hochswender *et al.* 2001, 101).

These "ten worlds" constituting the full mental spectrum ranging from hell to Buddhahood are depicted on the Gohonzon mandala diagram inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin. One can be in the life condition of anger, yet due to the "mutual containment of ten worlds" within the *ālaya* or "storehouse" of one's deeper subconscious mind, by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo before the Gohonzon one can instantly shift to the life condition of a compassionate Bodhisattva, or to the fully illuminated state of a peaceful Buddha, thereby to achieve sudden enlightenment. Thus like the Tendai Buddhist philosophical doctrine of "three thousand realms in each moment of life," the principle of "mutual containment of ten worlds" underlies the core SGI Nichiren Buddhist teaching that each moment of life is a microcosm of the macrocosm that has unlimited creative possibilities.

The Philosophy of 'Value Creation' in SGI Nichiren Buddhism

The lay movement of Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism founded by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi in 1930 was called *Sōka Gakkai* (創価学会) or "Value Creating Society." Makiguchi coined the neologism *sōka* (創価) or "value creation" based on the Japanese terms for "creation" (*sōzō*, 創造) and "value" (*kachi*, 価値). Tsunesaburo Makiguchi developed the educational philosophy of "value creation" distinctive to Soka Gakkai teachings. One of the original contributions of Makiguchi was to introduce the idea that the aim of Nichiren Buddhist practice is *creation of values*, including aesthetic, moral, and religious, as well as practical this-worldly values. His disciple Josei Toda greatly expanded the movement in Japan during the post-World War II period, adding a new vitalistic philosophy, where the Buddha is understood as "life-force" (*seimei*, 生命), so that by the practice of chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra, one becomes fused with the inexhaustible life-force or cosmic power of Buddha-nature. Daisaku Ikeda, the disciple of Josei Toda, went on to internationalize Soka Gakkai into a global movement in over 190 countries, so that it is now Soka Gakkai International (SGI).

SGI synthesizes the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism based on the Lotus Sutra and its interpretation by Tendai Buddhist philosophy, with the modern humanist educational philosophy of value creation established by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. Ikeda explains:

Central to Makiguchi's Pedagogy was his theory of value. In his schema, he modified the neo-Kantian value system of truth, goodness and beauty dominant in Japan at the time and reordered as beauty, benefit (also translated as gain or utility) and goodness. He defined beauty as that which brings fulfillment to the aesthetic sensibility of the individual; benefit as that which advances the life of the individual in a holistic manner; goodness as that which contributes to the well-being of the larger human society (Ikeda 2010, 15).

According to the value creating philosophy of Makiguchi, the purpose of education is to teach how to overcome suffering and realize happiness through creation of values, including beauty, goodness and practical benefit. In his book *Soka Education*, Daisaku Ikeda points out that Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's pedagogy of value creation was strongly influenced by Dewey's theory of education in American pragmatism, where ideas and actions have the instrumental value of usefulness, to be tested by experiments for their

practical benefits in everyday life (Ikeda 2010). Following Dewey's pragmatism, Makiguchi reformulates the trinity of cardinal values as beauty, goodness and truth, in terms of beauty, goodness, and practical benefit or gain, thereby replacing "truth" with the pragmatic value of *usefulness* in everyday life. SGI Nichiren Buddhism thus emphasizes not only the goal of spiritual enlightenment, but the pragmatic aim of attaining "this-worldly benefits" (*genze riyaku*, 現世利益).

A major theme in the Kyoto School of modern Japanese philosophy as formulated by Keiji Nishitani is the existential task of countering "nihilism" at the level of negative nothingness by breaking through to the level of positive nothingness that affirms life just as it is in its suchness (Nishitani 1961/1982). Likewise, the theme of overcoming nihilism as meaninglessness or absence of value has also become central to SGI Nichiren Buddhism. As the counter to the negative life-denying attitude of nihilism, SGI Nichiren Buddhism emphasizes the positive life-affirming act of "value creation." Hochswender asserts: "Nichiren Buddhism [...] looks at a world that has been stripped of its meaning and says 'create value'" (2006, 52). In *The Buddha in Your Mirror* it explains how for SGI Nichiren Buddhism, chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra in front of the Gohonzon as a mirror of our Buddha-nature is itself the antidote to the existential problem of nihilism or pessimism (Hochswender *et al.* 2001, 26). He adds:

Chanting "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" is the wellspring of this optimism and growth, what [SGI Nichiren] Buddhism calls "value creation." This wellspring enables practitioners to turn everything in their lives, joys and sufferings alike, into causes for absolute happiness (2001, 115).

SGI president Daisaku Ikeda describes the pervasive existential attitude of nihilism in Japan and throughout the world as the materialistic life condition arising from an "absence of values" or "loss of values" (Ikeda 2010, 59, 80). Ikeda asserts: "Japanese society is rife with materialism and scandalous corruption [...] that demonstrate our loss of values and sense of purpose" (2010, 80). According to Ikeda, the existential problem of nihilism as the absence of values, like the Buddhist problem of universal suffering, is countered by the Nichiren Buddhist practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, which results in the achievement of happiness by actualizing the latent possibilities of Buddha-nature for creation of values, including the values of beauty, goodness and practical benefit.

Daisaku Ikeda internationalized Soka Gakkai into a global movement based on his notions of education, culture and peace. By culture he means creation of new and higher values, including new aesthetic values created by the multivariate arts, such as music, painting, poetry, literature, theater, and other artforms. According to SGI president Ikeda, musicians and artists have a special gift for value creation. In Ikeda's words:

The spirit of art and the spirit of peace are naturally bound together. Artists are the standard bearers for the creation of peace. I am convinced that art, as an expression of life itself, constitutes the highest form of value creation (Mercer 2007, 268).³

For Ikeda, just as existentialists attempt to create meaning in an otherwise meaningless existence, musicians have the power to counter nihilism through value creation, including the aesthetic value of beauty realized through music and other arts, moral values of compassion and kindness, pragmatic values of this-worldly benefits, modern humanistic values of individualism, freedom, rights, justice, tolerance, democracy, and equality, and the spiritual value of peace, including outer peace as social harmony and eradication of war, as well as the inner peace of nirvana. But as emphasized by Ikeda in the above citation, "art, as an expression of life itself, constitutes the highest form of value creation" (Mercer 2007, 268). Ikeda thus holds that while there are many ways to extemporaneously create new values at each and every moment of life, the highest form of value creation is production of the aesthetic value of beauty through the multivariate arts such as music, painting, and poetry, including the great American artform of jazz.

In the bestselling SGI Nichiren Buddhist work titled *The Buddha in Your Mirror* with a Foreword by Herbie Hancock, it is asserted that the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the way to activating the creative potentialities of Buddha-nature in each pulsating moment of life:

Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo enables us to open every potential hidden in the depths of our lives. This has been Buddhism's greatest discovery. It opens the treasure reservoir within, giving us access to unlimited potential (Hochswender *et al.* 2001, 175).

In the jazz aesthetics of Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, the Nichiren Buddhist practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is thus the key to unlocking the hidden potentials of Buddha-nature toward the end of producing maximum value creation through spontaneous improvisation, both in music and in everyday life.

³ Ikeda cited by Mercer.

The Contemporary Jazz Improvisation of Herbie Hancock

Herbie Hancock is a contemporary virtuoso improvisational jazz pianist and composer whose musical genres include both acoustic and electric jazz, rhythm and blues, funk, and hip-hop. He is known for the brilliant improvisational piano solos in his early Blue Note recordings, his extemporaneous musical performances with Wayne Shorter in Miles Davis' second quintet, and as the leader of his own bands, including his breakthrough electric jazz/funk fusion records. At this point he has won fourteen Grammy Awards as well as an Academy Award for Best Original Score in the jazz film *Round Midnight*.

Hancock describes how his improvisational jazz style has been influenced by such notions as "controlled freedom" (Hancock, Dickey 2014, 60, 126), "being in the moment" (2014, 23), "opening up to possibilities" (2014, 65), "minimalism" (2014, 65–66), "suggestion" (2014, 78), "power of letting go" (2014, 151), "openness to new directions" (2014, 151), and other principles of SGI Nichiren Buddhism based on the Lotus Sutra and Tendai Buddhist philosophy. Hancock clarifies how according to Nichiren Buddhism, by awakening to Buddha-nature as the reservoir of unlimited potentials, one opens to the new possibilities, multiple perspectives, and novel variations available at each moment of life, which in turn enables the process of value creation through spontaneous jazz improvisation (2014, 287).

Herbie Hancock asserts that the two most influential mentors in his life have been Miles Davis, one of the greatest trumpet player and band leaders in the history of jazz, and Daisaku Ikeda, the president of SGI Nichiren Buddhism. In his Foreword to *The Buddha in Your Mirror* (Hochswender *et al.* 2001), Hancock says Miles Davis once advised him to take a minimalist approach that eliminates all excess notes to achieve maximum simplicity, and "this opened up the sound so that whomever I would be improvising with could make much more of a contribution to exploring the possibilities of a melody" (2001, xi–xii). For Hancock this meant playing sparsely, thus opening up an empty space for his fellow jazz musicians by "inspiring them to tap their possibilities," thus to heighten the spontaneous improvisational skills of everyone in his band (2001, xiv). He adds: "I saw it only after I started my practice of Nichiren Buddhism" (2001, xii).

Hancock recalls one of the fundamental teachings that he received from his mentor Daisaku Ikeda, the president of the SGI Nichiren Buddhism:

Daisaku Ikeda is a man who encourages the creative expression of the individual [...] I learned from him that any given moment can be looked at from an infinite number of perspectives [...] This impacts everything from how I might put together certain music on a record I'm making—how I improvise—to how I look at the people I encounter in the various realms of my life (2001, xii–xiii).

As stated here, the Buddhist teaching that Herbie Hancock learned from Daisaku Ikeda was that *any given moment can be looked at from an infinite number of perspectives*, and it is this teaching that directly influenced his creative ability to *improvise* as the musical skill whereby one explores the possibilities of a melody. Again, Hancock underscores his central theme, that by unlocking the full potentiality of indwelling Buddha-nature through the chanting practice of SGI Nichiren Buddhism, each moment of life is seen as a microcosm of the macrocosm that has unlimited creative possibilities, such that new aesthetic values can be created in each moment through unexpected novel variations by the musical process of spontaneous improvisation. For Hancock it is this ability to actualize the creative potentials of Buddha-nature that enables one to see each moment from multiple new perspectives, which in turn opens the capacity for spontaneous improvisation both in jazz music and in life.

Influenced by Miles Davis's innovative electro-jazz experiments, Hancock further explored the possibilities of electric jazz using newer technology, especially his 1973 electronic synthesizer jazz/funk album titled *Head Hunters*. He writes: "My arsenal of electronic instruments just kept growing, and with computers now in the mix, the possibilities of how to make music seemed limitless" (Hancock, Dickey 2014, 220). From the SGI Nichiren Buddhist teachings of Buddha-nature as the source of unlimited possibilities, Hancock came to see that he was not bound to the tradition of classical jazz music as played on the acoustic piano, but could expand his technique of spontaneous improvisational jazz performance into electric jazz, as well as crossovers into funk, hip hop, jazz-rock fusion, and other genres. In this context he describes how *Head Hunters* became the top selling jazz album of all time for awhile:

Within six months *Head Hunters* went gold. And it just kept on going, eventually passing Dave Brubeck's classic *Take Five* to become the biggest-selling jazz album of all time. Today that top spot is held by Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*, which was released back in 1959 and still keeps selling. But for a while, at least, *Head Hunters* was at the top (2014, 183).

Further explaining the unprecedented commercial success of *Headhunters*, he adds: “And because most of the guys in the band were also SGI members, we did a lot of chanting together” (2014, 182).

One of the highlights in the musical career of Herbie Hancock occurred in 2007 with the release of his jazz album *River*, which earned the Grammy Award for Best Album of the Year. Hancock had already won ten Grammys, but this was the only jazz record that had ever won Album of the Year since Stan Getz and Joao Gilberto’s *Getz/Gilberto*, which introduced the *bossa nova* style of Brazilian jazz to the American audience back in the 1965 awards over fifty years earlier (2014, 318). Each track of *Rivers* includes Herbie Hancock on keyboards and Wayne Shorter on saxophone. The second track “Edith and the Kingpin” also features the vocals Tina Turner, another member of SGI Nichiren Buddhism.

For Herbie Hancock, the Nichiren Buddhist practice of chanting *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo* in front of the *Gohonzon* is what the Lotus Sutra calls *upāya* (J. *hōben*, 方便), a pragmatic tool or expedient device to attain Buddhahood and actualize the latent creative potentials of Buddha-nature. Inspired by his study of the philosophy and practice of SGI Nichiren Buddhism, Herbie Hancock formulates a jazz aesthetics based on tapping Buddha-nature as the locus of unlimited possibilities by opening up to multiple new perspectives, that itself underlies the actualization of novel variations in the creative process of spontaneous improvisation, both in jazz and in life. This actualization of creative potentials in Buddha-nature itself results in maximum creation of new and higher values, including beauty, goodness, and practical benefit.

A Nichiren Buddhist Jazz Aesthetics of Value Creation

In a recent issue of the magazine titled *Lion’s Roar* devoted to Buddhist practice and teachings, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter co-authored an article setting forth an aesthetic manifesto for young jazz musicians: “To the Next Generation of Artists” (Hancock, Shorter 2016, 14). For Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, it is “openness to the unknown” in each new moment of life that enables realization of Buddha-nature as the source of new possibilities for aesthetic value creation, which itself facilitates discovery of novel variations and musical permutations in the process of spontaneous jazz improvisation.

The aesthetics of contemporary jazz improvisation inspired by SGI Nichiren Buddhism is further elaborated in *Reaching Beyond: Improvisations on Jazz, Buddhism, and a Joyful Life* (Hancock et al. 2017),⁴ coauthored by Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, and Daisaku Ikeda. In this book Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter enter into an impromptu dialogue with their mentor Daisaku Ikeda, the president of SGI, about how the chanting practice of Nichiren Buddhism can unlock Buddha-nature as the universal reservoir of infinite possibilities, thereby to maximize value creation through jazz improvisation by opening up new perspectives, novel variations and musical permutations at each and every moment. Wayne Shorter here emphasizes that the requirement for the creative process of spontaneous jazz improvisation is “to ‘be in the moment’ while creating value extemporaneously” (Hancock et al. 2017, 83). The jazz musicians and other artists inspired by the Nichiren Buddhist practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo aim to overcome nihilism by creating new life-affirming values, including the aesthetic value of beauty, the moral value of compassion, and the spiritual value of peace, which embraces both world peace and the inner peace of nirvana.⁵ In his east-west intercultural dialogue on the process of extemporaneous improvisation in contemporary jazz music with Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, SGI president Daisaku Ikeda writes:

Whether an artist or not, each of us can create infinite, unhindered beauty. People who, while enduring and overcoming hardship, dedicate themselves to others, create a noble hymn to humanity, a beautiful painting of an indestructible life that they can leave behind (2017, 200).

Thus according to Ikeda, as well as Hancock and Shorter, the value creation process of producing beauty, art and aesthetic experience through spontaneous improvisation is not limited to musical performance, but is fundamental to both jazz and everyday life, hence resulting in the transformation of life into art.

⁴ Originally published in Japanese as *Jyazu to bukkyō, soshite jinsei o kataru*, ジャズと仏法、そして人生を語る, 2003.

⁵ See my essay, “Peace & Compassion in Whitehead and the Lotus Sutra” (2001). This essay received the 2001 Niwano Peace Prize in Japan.

Conclusion

In this paper I have endeavored to clarify how jazz musicians Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter applied SGI Nichiren Buddhist theory and practice to articulate a contemporary jazz aesthetics of value creation through spontaneous improvisation. For Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, the SGI Nichiren Buddhist practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon is the key that unlocks the treasury of Buddha-nature as the inexhaustible source of creative possibilities. Thus according to the contemporary jazz aesthetics propounded by Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, and other jazz musicians inspired by SGI Nichiren Buddhism, it is the activation of Buddha-nature as the matrix of unlimited potentiality that induces the artistic process of value creation through spontaneous improvisation as an openness to the multiplicity of alternate perspectives, new possibilities and novel variations at each moment, both in jazz music and in everyday life.

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