

JAZZ IMPROVISATION: A SEARCH FOR HIDDEN
HARMONIES AND A UNIQUE SELF

L'IMPROVVISAZIONE JAZZ: ALLA RICERCA DI ARMONIE
NASCOSTE E DI UN SE' DISTINTO

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1. Introduction²

In this article, we will discuss jazz musicians' perspectives on improvisation and especially on their own understanding of what improvisation represents to them. Our goal will be to show that the perspectives jazz musicians have on improvisation is produced by particular dispositions toward playing music (individually and together), which entail a particular type of social persona or Self. We use this term in the anthropological sense as first introduced by Marcel Mauss (1938) and since then elaborated and further expanded upon by a number of authors, including Geertz (1983) in his essay on the notion of "person" in three societies. As we will show, jazz musicians see the constant search for new harmonic, melodic and rhythmic solutions not only as part of a rich aesthetic tradition but also as part of an individual mission of self-realization, which has pragmatic, emotional and moral dimensions. Although emotions are often invoked in the discussion of what jazz musicians do and search for while improvising (e.g. Berliner 1994), in this article we suggest that the discourse of and about emotions is part of a more general perspective on music-making. For jazz musicians, the search for a unique type of

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sound³ indexes the search for a unique type of person, with particular moral values, including the quality of being “honest” in what one chooses to play.

Our approach to the understanding of jazz improvisation is motivated by a more general concern, which we share with a number of other scholars, with documenting the culture of jazz aesthetics as it relates to jazz as a musical tradition, of which improvisation is an integral part. This concern is shared by ethnomusicologists interested in how musicians interpret their own improvising (e.g. Nettl 1974; Berliner 1994) and, more generally, by all those scholars who consider the attention to features of jazz performance to be just as important as the analysis of the musical transcription of improvised compositions (e.g. Ake 2002; Jackson 2000, 2002).

For us, to speak of a culture of jazz aesthetics means a number of things. First, the focus on culture reminds us that people’s interactions with one-another are always interpreted, that is, they have a meaning for the participants as well as for any observers, although, as the philosopher James Bogen (1987) showed, the meanings given by two sets of people might not be the same. Second, the use of the term “culture” or “cultural” (as in “cultural practice”) has the advantage of focusing our attention on what people both say and *do* – both collectively and individually – when they play jazz. The observation and recording of jazz as a cultural practice allows us to test whether musicians’ actions are random and unpredictable or organized into patterned interactions that can be subjected to systematic interpretation and generalization. Third, we assume that socialization to a particular taste, and to a particular way of making and evaluating music, is an integral part of the view that aesthetics is “a set of norms and evaluative criteria utilized by musicians in performing and judging performance” (Jackson 2002:94). Fourth, to think about the culture of jazz aesthetics implies thinking about jazz as a tradition that is supported by a community of practitioners and enthusiasts who infuse it with memories, expectations, and a constant exchange of ideas about music and what it means to be a jazz musician. An important part of this tradition includes narratives about jazz performers and performances. These narratives expand on individual and community ideas about what qualifies as jazz improvisation and why and how one should do it. Finally, focusing on culture in the ways just outlined leads us to think

3 We are using “sound” here as a general term covering more specific qualities of music including particular combinations of timbre, volume, rhythmic patterns, as well as melodic and harmonic solutions.

in terms of the kind of person, or Self, that jazz improvisation as a practice both implies and generates.

In this article, after providing a brief overview of the study of improvisation in jazz and other musical traditions, we will discuss three theories of jazz improvisation that emerged in the conversations with and among jazz musicians that we recorded:

- (i) jazz improvisation as appropriation and transformation of previous musical texts;
- (ii) jazz improvisation as the individual and collective search for the unexplored harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic possibilities of a song; and
- (iii) jazz improvisation as an aesthetic and moral quest, which includes the search for a “unique self” that should characterize each jazz musician.

We believe that these three theories are closely interconnected and inclusive of the overall sense of person (or Self) that jazz musicians have of themselves as artists of a particular kind. These theories are generative in the sense that they allow jazz musicians to explain their own and other musicians’ aesthetic choices as well as the evaluations that such choices routinely undergo. For example, the search for a “unique Self” can be used to explain why jazz musicians take risks in trying out, for example, new melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and timbres while performing on the bandstand in front of other musicians and of a live audience.

1.1 Improvisation around the world

Improvisation – to be understood as composition in real time – is quite common around the world (Bailey 1979; Lortat-Jacob 1987; Martin 2002; Nettl 1974; Nettl & Russell 1998). As documented by ethnomusicologists, improvisation is the norm rather than the exception in any orally transmitted musical tradition. This is usually explained by the fact that performance is more likely to display a certain degree of variation when there is no written source (Giannattasio 1992:168; Nettl 1974). As first documented by Ernest Ferand ([1938]1961), improvisation is common even in the history of western music, from early Christian music⁴ to “classical” music as practiced by Bach and

4 According to Ferand, “Te Deum laudamus” still shows signs of “a certain looseness of form, as a survival from a time in which that kind of hymn-singing permitted an improvisatory modification of familiar melodic phrases and enabled

Mozart⁵. For instance, the "figured bass" notation used by Bach in his scores for harpsichord (e.g. "Sonata for Flute and Harpsichord," BWV1034) provides strong evidence in favor of the then common practice of composition in real time.⁶

1.2 The Study of jazz improvisation

The considerable literature on jazz and jazz improvisation now in existence includes a broad range of materials: articles and interviews in popular magazines such as *Down Beat*, how-to-do books (e.g. Coker 1991; Levine 1995); the 'Play-A-Long' book series by James Aebersold; countless books with transcriptions of famous musicians' solos; a number of well written and documented monographs on the life and music of specific artists or periods (e.g. Porter 1998 on John Coltrane; Carl Woideck 1996 on Charlie Parker; Thomas Owens 1995 on bebop); and numerous scholarly contributions by historians, musicologists, ethnomusicologists, and musicians (e.g. Bryant et al 1998; Cooke and Horn 2002; Gottlieb 1996; Porter 2002; Walser 1999). The most extensive study of jazz improvisation to date is Paul Berliner's (1994) *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, which focuses on the type of musical knowledge that is required to learn jazz improvisation and the different stages and strategies through which it is attained by jazz practitioners. Other studies that focus on jazz as a cultural tradition include Travis Jackson's (2000) discussion of jazz performance as a ritual, which relies on what he calls "a blues aesthetic," and Ingrid Monson's (1996) *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, which focuses on the often forgotten "rhythm section" and is partly based on spending time with musicians listening to recordings and getting their insights into what the recorded musicians were doing. These authors build on the notion of improvisation in jazz as a cultural activity with roots in African

the congregation to answer and join in." (1961:6)

⁵ There are some important differences between improvisation as practiced by jazz musicians and the type of "theme and variation" music practiced by Bach, which was based on strict (almost mathematical) rules. First, jazz improvisation is much more free in form and there is a sophisticated level of collective improvisation in jazz that was not practiced in what we know as "classical music."

⁶ "In Bach's time the right hand of the harpsichord was improvised, in other words, realized on the spot, in performance. It was part of the harpsichordist's training to enable him to read the numbers of the figured bass 'at sight.' It was considered part of the musical performer's 'art.'" (Kivy 2002:232)

American and African cultures (see also Wilson 1974, 1992; Waterman 1952). As we shall see, in this article we continue in this tradition, expanding on some key areas.

1.3 Our data for the understanding of jazz improvisation

This article relies on three major sources of data: (i) our own individual knowledge about jazz, which, in Burrell's case, is based on life-long experience as a professional jazz musician and major figure in the national and international jazz community as well as 25 years of teaching jazz at the university level; in Duranti's case, it is based on 10 years of studying jazz improvisation and using it as a teaching tool in linguistic anthropology courses at the University level; (ii) a course entitled "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics," cross-listed in Anthropology and the Jazz Studies Program at the University of California, Los Angeles, which Burrell and Duranti co-taught in the Fall of 2002 and in the Spring of 2004, and (iii) an on-going research project on jazz acquisition and socialization among college students. Out of (ii) and (iii) has emerged a rich body of audio-visual recordings, which we consider a critical source of information for understanding the dynamics of face-to-face communication among musicians and between musicians and their audiences.⁷

In our course on the culture of jazz aesthetics, we invited a number of guests, including a dozen accomplished jazz musicians,⁸ to discuss

⁷ The video recording of our course on the culture of jazz aesthetics was supported by a grant from the UCLA Office of Instructional Development (OID). Special thanks go to OID Director, Larry Loether, for believing in our project, Bill Wolfe for his input on the conceptualization of the course and his expertise on digital technology, and Steve Flood for his enthusiasm for the project and his artistic direction during the taping and editing of the video material for an educational DVD also entitled "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" (now available from the UCLA Media Lab, Powell Library, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095). We are also particularly grateful to Heather Loyd, Tiffany Lui, Amy McGuire and Paul Shirk for transcribing the verbal interaction with and among the guests in "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" class and to Steven P. Black for transcribing the interaction among students and instructors in the "Jazz Combo" classes. The portion of the jazz combo classes used for this article were recorded by A. Duranti and transcribed by Steven Black. The project on jazz acquisition at UCLA was made possible in part by research grants from the University of California at Los Angeles (A. Duranti, Principal Investigator).

⁸ For a list of the guests and the syllabus of the course, see <http://www.sscnet>.

jazz with us and play music in front of the students.

In the jazz socialization study, Duranti has been observing and video-recording jazz combo classes and the Latin Jazz Ensemble in the Jazz Studies Program at UCLA founded and directed by Burrell. The goal of this project is to document how students' playing, improvising, composing, and arranging is monitored, corrected, and encouraged by instructors as well as by other students in the class or in the program. Interviews with the students in the jazz combo classes have also provided important information on the students' musical education and their own ideas about what jazz is and what it represents in their lives.

2.1 Improvisation as appropriation and transformation

There is a long tradition in jazz of taking a song from another genre (e.g. a pop tune) and transforming it into a jazz piece, which may or not become a jazz "standard," – that is, one of the songs that professional jazz musicians are expected to be familiar with. One famous example in the bebop tradition is the so-called "Rhythm Changes" – which got its name from the fact that it can be found in George Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm." This is an harmonic progression of chords found in a number of tunes including some of those written by Charlie Parker, sometimes in collaboration with other musicians (e.g. "Anthropology," "Steppelchase," "Red Cross"). Although already used in the earlier part of the 20th century, this chord progression became so common among jazz players in the 1940s and 1950s that it is now considered to be basic and is as universally known as the 12-bar blues progression – the original source of which, like that of the blues, continues to puzzle musicians and historians. Jazz musicians who meet for the first time in a jam session might in fact start with "rhythm changes" or "blues changes," leaving the option of which melody to play in the first chorus⁹ to whoever is culturally expected to do it (often a horn player or the piano player). This tradition is continued today within college jazz programs, in which auditioning students are often given the option of improvising on

ucla.edu/anthro/faculty/duranti/courses.htm

⁹ A "chorus" is the harmonic progression (i.e. number of bars with their associated chords) of a song from the beginning to the end. When improvising, jazz musicians take the chorus to be an important unit of interaction, typically beginning and ending their solos around the beginning and ending of a chorus. The number of choruses occupied by a musician's improvisation may be decided ahead of time or, more often, left to the spur of the moment.

"rhythm changes." Another famous tune redone in a jazz version is "My Favorite Things," the song originally written by Rodgers and Hammerstein for the Broadway show *The Sound of Music* and recorded in 1961 by John Coltrane on soprano sax (with McCoy Tyner on piano, Steve Davis on bass, and Elvin Jones on drums). Coltrane's quartet's version has since become another jazz "standard" (which means that jazz musicians typically use Coltrane's chord progression or, rather, one of the progressions that he recorded, instead of the original progression as written by Rodgers and Hammerstein).

The harmonic and rhythmic differences between the two versions have been analyzed in some detail by Monson (1996), who argues that the transformations of the Broadway's version constitutes an "ironic reversal" with respect to the original tune. The "irony" detected by Monson goes beyond the notion of "variation" that some might use in talking about jazz renditions of tunes taken from other musical genres. In fact, one could further argue that jazz renditions are always a mixture of *appropriation* and *transformation* of the original tunes (see also Keil 1966:46).¹⁰ This is a point made in our course "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" by a number of musicians, including drummer/percussionist Sherman Ferguson and pianist/saxophone player Tom Ranier:

(1) (From "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" – October 22, 2002)

Ferguson: ... a lot of compositions, tunes come from the movies and- and Broadway, and jazz musicians take them and ... mess around with them, somewhat, and get them to be their own.

(2) (From "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" – April 6, 2004)

Ranier: So so jazz musicians set about to alter ... and change, what is on the printed page. Jazz musicians wanna make it their personal statement. So now they start to figure out ways to make that chord. sound ... to their ears, better. ((lower volume ->)) Hopefully to the audience ears.

Such appropriation-through-transformation has been often

⁹ Keil speaks of the "appropriation-revitalization process" in "Negro music" and sees it as a reaction to the "appropriation and commercialization of a Negro style by white America through its record industry and mass media" (1966:46). For a discussion and critique of Keil's position, see Wilson (1974).

interpreted as part of an aesthetics that is founded upon and values transformation – a social inheritance from African diasporic music (see Wilson 1974; Jackson 2002) – and also an aesthetics in which interpretive tension among different versions of the same song may index inter-cultural, social, and racial tension (Porter 2002). Jazz embodies then, among other things, what we would like to call an *aesthetics of tensions*, that is, an aesthetics in which variations on a melody or on an existing harmonic progression (i.e. a set of chord changes) is not simply a way of rethinking a tune or a particular set of chords, but, on a more general level, a way of rethinking musical composition and musical performance. Jazz renditions of popular tunes are thus a commentary and, by their very nature, can often be considered a criticism of the aesthetics implied by so-called popular music. It is in this sense that one should interpret Tom Ranier's statement that jazz musicians change certain aspects of a harmonic progression (e.g. a chord) to make the song sound "better," first, to their ears and, second (and, as he says, "hopefully"), to the ears of their audience.

2.2 Beyond variation: in search of meaning

There is no question that any performing musician is engaged in a creative act, involving a series of interpretive choices, which in turn make any performance unique. This is true of improvisers as well as of those who read a score in which all the notes to be played have been established ahead of time. No two performances are perfectly identical and a style can be identified even among those who try to stay as close as possible to the original "intentions" of the composer of the written score. On the basis of these points, it has been argued that the interpretation of a written score is a form of improvisation (Hamilton 2000); or that it is very similar (if not identical) to the work of an arranger (Kivy 2002). We find these statements problematic on a number of counts, one of which is that they do not take into consideration the musicians' experience. Jazz musicians, in particular, do not conceptualize their improvising as anything remotely related to reading or performing a score from memory. This is true also of jazz musicians who were first trained in classical music, as shown in this quote from a published interview with pianist Gerald Wiggins, (who, as we shall see later, was also a guest in our class):

... in classical music, everybody plays the same notes. There's no

variation, and so you have to get by on touch and interpretation and shading and all that. You know, everybody's got the same thing going on. There's no room for improvisation. You play what's written, and it gets pretty boring. (Wiggins 1998:312)

Similarly, saxophonist Jeff Clayton, another guest in our course, offered a view of the contrast between classical and jazz music in evaluative terms that also point to a difference between what is considered as "creating on the spot" in contrast to interpreting already written music (here defined in negative terms as "interpreting the same old music"):

(3) (From "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" – October 22, 2002)
Clayton;

[...] as I look at classical music now, and I understand what jazz music is, I'm afraid I'm weighing on the side of jazz music because on top of the fact that we have written music also, we also are creating on the spot, and classical music is merely interpreting the same old music again and again and again.

An understanding of improvisation as a cultural practice must take into consideration the interpretations that musicians themselves give about their own playing. As pointed out by Nettl (1974), not all improvisers from the many traditions around the world see their music in the same way. Some musicians highlight and focus on their creative output and innovations, whereas others see their playing as basically unchanging from one performance to the next.¹¹

Jazz musicians (performers and arrangers alike) often see themselves as drawn to transforming something that is already known into something new (Jackson 2002:94; Wilson 1992). This is a point in our course on the culture of jazz aesthetics that has been succinctly expressed by saxophonist Charles Owens regarding Miles Davis' ability (especially in the 1960s) to transform an old song into something new and exciting.

(4) (From "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" – November 26, 2002)

Owens; jazz musicians are constantly... looking for a fresh way to play old standards. ... Miles did it all the time. He could take ...

¹¹ For example, Nettl (1974:8) writes: "improvising musicians in certain cultures tend to maintain that they do essentially the same thing each time and to denigrate the idea that they vary from performance to performance."

an old, moldy ... song. That nobody else would think of playing and it would become the way to do it again.

In this context, to speak of improvisation as mere "variations" is misleading for a number of reasons, including the fact that it ignores the perspective that jazz musicians themselves have on their actions and their art. Jazz musicians have different ways of conceptualizing the process by which an arranger or an improviser introduces changes in a given harmonic structure (i.e. a sequence of chords) as written by another composer. Here is how Gerald Wilson, trumpet player, composer, bandleader, and arranger articulates his view:

(5) (From "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" – November 12, 2002)
Wilson;
The way I look at it, you know, you bring a piece to mean ...something. I see everything you have there. As I said, composers, just pop composers, they- they are limited with their knowledge of harmonic structures. And you have to- as an arranger and orchestrator you have to go in and hear what they didn't hear. They appreciate that too because you take even great arrangers like Cole Porter, I heard you all discussing a thing the last time I was here, about [Porter's] "What Is This Thing Called Love", well thanks- thanks to- Cole Porter wrote that. We know how great he is. But he couldn't hear to use the G minor 7 [chord] before he goes to the C7 (that) he's gonna hold for two bars. And then when he goes to the F minor he doesn't know enough to go to the D minor 7 flat 5 to the G then to the C then to the F minor. [...] in other words, if you've studied harmony enough, you know how to go every place.¹² [...]

Even though Wilson is here referring to his arrangements, his statement about being able to "hear what [the pop composers] didn't hear" extends to any jazz performance, as he explained during our class, where he clarified that any tune, including tunes by the jazz

¹² One of us (Burrell) felt that this statement by Gerald Wilson should not necessarily be interpreted as meaning that Cole Porter (or other composers) did not or could not hear more or different chords. Often times, composers of pop tunes might have felt obliged to choose chords that would be appropriate to a particular musical context, i.e. to a particular artist, performance, or audience.

composers, can be rethought and modified.

The concept of "hearing" what has not been written down in the original composition works for all instruments including the drums, as shown by the next excerpt of an interaction during the first rehearsal of a song written by a student piano player in Sherman Ferguson's "Jazz Combo" Course. Here Ferguson makes a number of suggestions that reveal that although the song is written in 4/4 and usually played in the typical jazz drum beat, he wants the drummer to "hear" it differently, that is, as made up of eight beat bars which can be thought of as any number of combinations, including as 3+3+2.

(6) (From "Jazz Combo" – October 29, 2002)
Ferguson;
now so you thinkin' three is one two three one two three one two being, so it's ...((writes numbers on the chalk board as he says them)) one two three. one two three. one two. it's still the eight. all that equals. eight. and it's a two bar phrase. alright?
[...]

you say well why can't we just say ((claps in time while counting the beats)) one two three four one two three four. and get to eight. it gives it more of a looser feeling the more subdivisions. that you use you can say. ((claps in time again)) one two one two one two one. or whatever. right? but the three. gives it that rolling thing like Elvin [Jones], and Roy Haines do. and Jack DeJohnette.

Ferguson is trying to make the student drummer "hear" what he (Ferguson) hears but in this case he frames his hearing in historical terms – an example of a suggestion that becomes also a mini-history-lesson and an opportunity for jazz socialization. Ferguson tells the student that he is imagining what would be done by some other (in this case more senior and established) drummer, like, for example, the legendary Elvin Jones, as he further clarifies a bit later when he says to the drummer and to the pianist who composed the tune: "this tune has got Elvin written all over it. You might have to change the name of it..."¹³ The association of a particular "sound" or rhythm to the name

¹³ What Ferguson is discussing here is one of the established ingredients of jazz drumming, namely, polyrhythm, a tradition originally imported from African drumming.

of a well known musician is a common strategy among musicians for communicating what might otherwise be difficult to explain through talk (see Feld, Fox, Porcello and Samuels 2004:324-5 for the use of this strategy for talking about timbre). In this case, however, Ferguson's use of Elvin Jones' name also works as an opportunity for socialization. The students are reminded that in order to become professional jazz musicians, they need to be familiar with the styles and rhythmic solutions previously introduced by more established and senior artists. The concept of being able to "hear" what is not written evoked by Ferguson goes hand-in-hand with a general distrust of the ability of the written score to represent the jazz idiom and what is necessary in a particular musical context. As shown below in excerpt (7), Ferguson is very explicit on this point with his students:

(7) (From "Jazz Combo" Course, October 29, 2002)
Ferguson; (now hold it)!... ((band stops playing)) every now and then. ah. drummers in particular... you're gonna run into something, where you have the music in front of you. but the music is a detriment. because while you're looking at the music. you're not using your earing holders as much. this is more of a- hearing what's going on around you as opposed to what's on the paper. 'cause what's on the paper is. pretty basic. and the same things but it's the accents. that the saxophone is playing and the guitar is playing. and the pianist is playing. [that are] more important than anything that's on that (paper). [...]

The distrust of the written score is not something limited to drummers. It has to do with a more general principle, whereby improvisers want to free themselves from the constraints of a score that is completely written down. But in fact, even in some of the most "free" performances, there are parts or "sketches" that are written out. This was a practice masterfully implemented by Duke Ellington with his orchestra. The concept of "sketching" is implicit in this excerpt from Miles Davis' autobiography, where he explains that during the recording of *Bitches Brew*, he "didn't write it all out".

What we did on *Bitches Brew* you couldn't ever write down for an orchestra to play. That's why I didn't write it all out, not because I didn't know what I wanted; I knew that what I wanted would come out of a process and not some prearranged shit.

This session was about improvisation, and that's what makes jazz so fabulous. Any time the weather changes it's going to change your whole attitude about something, and so a musician will play different, especially if everything is not put in front of him. (Davis and Troupe 1989:300)

There is another important point here, namely, Davis explains that since improvisation is context-bound, it must combine any pre-planned aspects with the attitude of the moment.

2.3 Errors and their conceptualization

The constant search for hidden possibilities of a tune while performing exposes jazz players, even those with great skills and experience, to the risk of making mistakes (Monson 1996: chapter 5). In our class, this risk was made explicit by pianist Gerald Wiggins after he played a solo version of the standard tune "Body and Soul." As shown in excerpt (8) below, it is in this context that Wiggins introduced the concept of 'clam' to the students.

(8) (The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics, UCLA, 22 October 2002)
Wiggins;

This particular tune ... I played it a million times. And it's always different. I don't care how many times you play a song, you find something else to do with it. Sometimes it's good. Sometimes it's- ... not so good. [...] ...you hope for the good times most of the time... with me I've been pretty lucky. I (don't have) too many clams. ...a "clam" is a ...mistake that you would like to cover up.

Following this point, Duranti asked Wiggins if he could give the class an example of a "mistake," which Burrell reframed as a request for a "clam" (see example 9 below). Retrospectively, this is a peculiar request considering the impossibility of separating Wiggins' execution of a voluntary "clam" from Wiggins' enormous experience and sophisticated jazz aesthetics. That is, Wiggins' "clam" in this case must somehow satisfy his own taste or has to be achieved by taking into consideration his own practical understanding of what would *not* constitute a clam. This is, in a sense, the opposite of what a "clam" is, namely, something *not*-wanted and fundamentally "unexpected." Nevertheless, as we shall see, the interaction that follows Duranti's

unusual request provides us with interesting material to reflect upon. Let us start by examining the conversation that leads up to Wiggins' demonstration of a "clam."

(9) (The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics, UCLA, 22 October 2002)

Duranti: can you give me an example of a mistake?
Wiggins: beg your pardon?
Duranti: can you give us an example of a "clam"
Burrell: a clam
Duranti: an example of a (?)?
Burrell: a clam. ((laughs)) ha ha ha
Duranti: play a clam
Ferguson: something that you didn't plan to do and it came out,
and you turn it around
Burrell: it's hard for him to make a clam.
Ferguson: he doesn't (know)
Burrell: //do it anyway!
Wiggins: alright. uhm ((Wiggins plays on the piano the beginning of "Body and Soul" inserting new altered chords which are progressively discordant or distant from the original chords))

As Wiggins reached the end of the third measure, Burrell declared the last chord "a clam." Sherman Ferguson at first seemed to agree, but, as shown in (10) below, saxophone player Jeff Clayton did not accept Burrell's and Ferguson's interpretation (and this seemed to prompt Ferguson to retract his earlier assessment). Despite the fact that in this case Wiggins "meant to make a clam," Clayton claimed that he heard it as both a musical problem and an artful solution (thus revealing what we might consider here as a different and alternative musical taste).

(10) (The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics, UCLA, 22 October 2002)

Clayton: you know what? I can't accept that.
Ferguson: you know, me //either.
Clayton: [and you know- you know why? because we musicians- we jazz musicians we stand in the corner hoping that we can minimize the clams.
Burrell: 'ha! right.
Ferguson: right.
Clayton: and we play and we play and we play and we play

ourselves ... in and out of corners all the time, and so what I just heard from what Gerald was playing, was ... I heard him paint himself into a harmonic corner, ((laughs)) haha.

Burrell: and then manage to get out.
Clayton: ((laughs)) haha.
Burrell: because there was- there was tension, and there was release.
Clayton: mhmh.
Burrell: so, I just thought it was just something else beautiful, he meant to go there.

The opportunity to witness an example of an apparent disagreement about what constitutes a "mistake" provides further support to the idea that mistakes in jazz must be understood both historically and individually (Feurzeig 1997; Walser 1993). Apparent mistakes by jazz musicians thus have an important place in the culture of jazz aesthetics not only because, as documented by Monson (1996:176), the repair of a mistake "is one of the most highly prized skills of an improviser," but also because they reinforce what we are calling an aesthetics of tension, to be understood as the tension between what is known and what is unknown, what is possible and what is impossible, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, what is expected and what is unexpected, what is right and what is wrong. All of this is succinctly summarized by the jazz musicians themselves through what has become for them a common trope, namely, the metaphor "jazz=conversation" (with the occasional variant "jazz=language").

(11) (The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics, UCLA, 22 October 2002)

Ferguson: we make that work by doing a passing tone or getting somewhere- ... somewhere into the correct ... harmonics. but ... as most of us were taught as jazz musicians, there are no mistakes. you can turn a mis- what s-...seems like a mistake ... into...a positive.
Burrell: it's just like conversation. You're talking to somebody? There's lots of ways to continue that conversation going. you might- may say a word that you don't mean, but you can- you can ... take that word and you know alter it or add to it something else. ... It may be almost a mistake but you can ... make it in ... as you call it //anticipate it.

Clayton; you can even stop mid-sentence.
Burrell; yeah.
Clayton; and continue on another conversation.

It should be pointed out that the “conversations” that Burrell and Clayton are referring to must be understood as happening among players who have reached a high degree of control over their instrument and the jazz idiom. This also applies to the correction of a “clam.” This is an important assumption reflected in the repeated effort by a number of scholars over the last decade or two to dispell the myth of improvisation as simply a spontaneous and unstructured expression of emotions by people who cannot read music (Berliner 1994; Martin 2002; Sager 2002). As documented by Berliner, players must undergo years of training, including long and solitary hours of practice to cultivate “the mental rigor to handle varied musical elements within a solo successfully” (Berliner 1994:267). Such a training is crucial for jazz players to be able to face the criticism by fellow players, especially by those who have more experience.

In educational settings such as the jazz combo classes Duranti video recorded, instructors varied in terms of how explicit they were with the students regarding how to handle a particular solo and whether the notes played by a student were “right.” In part because the students’ level of musicianship is generally fairly high, some instructors tend to concentrate on the “form” of a song (its structural organization, understood as a sequence of “sections”) and its arrangement (the planned collaborative interplay among the various instruments) without entering too much into the specifics of each player’s improvisation. However, in some cases, an instructor may step in and be quite specific in making suggestions on harmonic or rhythmic choices. Example (12) below provides an example of such an intervention by trombone player George Bohanon.

(12) (From “Jazz Combo” Class – February 10, 2003)

Bohanon; [...]. this tune- you know... is built. you can almost play a- a C scale. concert C scale (for) it. so keep that in mind ((sings tones as he says them)) C D E F G A B C ((sings the scale back down)) that’s the whole tonality of the whole tune. so. keep that in mind rather than. just. playing some foreign notes try to s- try to stay. within that or even. be aware of that because. you can play any note in the C scale and it- and it works. C major scale. you know... you know ((sings an

improvised solo on the C scale, then sings the bass line)) you know it all fits right in. so with that in mind you- you- you have more. you know that’s in common with the- the actual chords because. right now we- we’re- we’re jumpin’ all over the place. you know (and)- I’d like (you). to certainly be. ah free in playing but still I want us to be conscious of. where. the tonalities are.

What we find here is an experienced musician trying to give advice to a younger player without discouraging him from trying out new ideas. The earlier discussion of “clam” should have made it clear that the task of discussing the “right” notes or “better” notes in a given solo is a difficult one for jazz instructors precisely because they, more than anyone else, are quite aware of the fact that what is a mistake in one period may be acceptable at a later period or even in the same period by musicians who have different aesthetic preferences (e.g. Feurzeig 1997; Walser 1993).

A good example of conflicting norms and expectations within jazz is found in this statement made by Louis Armstrong in a 1948 interview published in *Down Beat*. In this case, Armstrong makes clear his disappointment, distaste and perhaps confusion for the then new style (later called “bebop”) introduced by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie:

... they play one note and nobody knows if it’s the right note or just one of them weird things where you can always make like that was just the note you were trying to hit. And that’s what they call science. Not play their horns the natural way. Not play the melody. And then they’re surprised they get thrown out and have strippers put in their place. (Armstrong [1948]1999:154-5)

Another example is provided by saxophonist Buddy Collette’s memory of his and his colleagues’ reactions to hearing Parker and Gillespie in December 1945 at Billy Berg’s Club in Hollywood.

It was scary to hear, because they were playing so fast, a lot of notes, that we didn’t understand what they were really playing. And the flat nine and the flat five. Then nobody was trying those things. They were using notes that we didn’t even dare to use before because it would be considered wrong. (Collette 1998:146)

This reliance on trying out new harmonic solutions and the associated risk to make mistakes that must be fixed on the spot leads us

to a discussion of another aspect of the culture of jazz aesthetics, namely, the morality of jazz improvisation as revealed in the search for one's true Self.

2.4. The morality of jazz improvisation

Jazz players often use metaphors and express norms or expectations (about themselves and other players) that can be easily translated into moral terms. By this we do not just mean frequent references to spirituality that one finds in jazz musicians' statements about their search for self-expression. There is morality beyond, and probably independently of, such references. As we shall see, there are general principles that help define what sounds "good" for a jazz musician on the basis of what appear to be moral principles. This aspect of jazz aesthetics is captured by philosopher William Day's characterization of the ideal jazz improviser as someone who subscribes to "moral perfectionism," a notion built on Ralph Waldo Emerson's notion of "self trust" and "self-reliance" as reinterpreted by Stanley Cavell.

Moral perfectionism is best characterized not as a set of moral axioms or principles ...but as a kind of thinking ... whose distinctive features are a commitment to speaking and acting true to oneself, combined with a thoroughgoing dissatisfaction with oneself as one now stands. ... a way of living set against a life of conformity and a lifeless consistency..." (Day 2000:99)

Day presents a complex exegesis of some of Emerson's writings on art and discusses recordings by Lenny Tristano and Charlie Parker as examples of the kind of art that Emerson saw as ideal. Day also cites an excerpt from an interview on National Public Radio with saxophonist Steve Lacy in which Lacy describes what he learned from working with pianist and composer Thelonious Monk. One lesson is to "play your own part" and the other is the corresponding "corrective" to not get so involved in one's own thinking that one forgets about the other players - Monk's rendition of this norm (in talking to Steve Lacy) was the moral-aesthetic imperative to "make the drummer sound good." Both of these concepts are expressed by a number of the musicians who participated in our "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" course. For example, according to bass player Roberto Miranda, searching for the right note to play while improvising requires two qualities: the first is the ability to "hear" the note that fits in a

particular place of a song and the second is a particular attitude toward playing music with others and in front of others, which Miranda characterizes as "humble" and "honest."

(13) (From "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" - April 20, 2004; Miranda; It might come out. Sounding. Co-rect. An- and- and people might say "WOW!" you know, but- it w- it's a lie. it's a lie! because that's not what I heard. what I heard was ((plays open G string on the double bass)). and so I have to be humble enough to play ((plays G again)) in spite of everything that I know or wanna play. that's not what I heard. so I have to be honest as an improviser and just play what I hear. and that's the best way for me to help the group.

This kind of blending of aesthetic and moral canons is not unusual in the articulation of the principles that jazz musicians see as guiding their musical choices while on the bandstand. They often characterize "good music" as coming from "good persons," that is, persons who are not pretending to be someone they are not ("honest") and who are not selfish ("humble"). As shown in excerpt (14) below, Tom Ranier, a frequent guest in our course, expressed similar views to those articulated by Miranda in (13) above.

(14) (From "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" - April 20, 2004; Ranier; I kinda feel like that when you improvise, and when you are playing jazz music, you're uh- you're really completely, open. You're kind of (uh) letting yourself be very very open to the other musicians. As well as to the audience but especially to the musicians. 'cause you're trying to create something. And so you're sort of opening up your heart, soul, ... and, with that. I think. Comes a danger. Because a person who has- ... let's say... a huge ego, ... who wants maybe to show off, ... or doesn't have the: uh what I would call. the purest of intentions, I think that affects the music tremendously and in a negative way.

In the celebration of the collective, cooperative quality of jazz improvisation, Ranier reminds the students that while improvising a musician is vulnerable in a double way. First, he or she is vulnerable to the judgment of the other musicians (who are his or her primary

audience). Second, there is what we might call “internal” or personal vulnerability. One risks being controlled by the wrong motivations, e.g. the motivation to show off or to impress others. What Ranier calls “the purest of intentions” is the same disposition that Miranda characterized as being “honest” and “humble.” But there is also another implicit disposition, namely, the disposition toward the discovery of what one really is or could be, musically speaking. To play what one hears, even when it may be something very simple like the one G note played by Miranda on the bass as a demonstration for the students in excerpt (13), means to be able to accept oneself or, in Emerson’s terms, to be “true to oneself.” This moral imperative surfaced in an explicit way in our class discussion through the maxim: “be yourself.”

On one occasion (on November 11, 2002), the horn player Bennie Maupin mentioned this maxim while recounting his experience with Miles Davis during the recording of the mythical *Bitches Brew*, a masterful example of the “fusion” of jazz and rock for which Davis became famous (see Davis 1989:298-300; Carr 1998:256-64).

Readers who are not familiar with Davis’ life and discography should know that in 1969, at the time of the recording of what became *Bitches Brew*, Davis was already considered a great “jazz star” and was an idol and model for the younger Maupin, who, speaking of Davis’ 1959 record *Kind of Blue* (the best selling jazz record of all times) said to our students: “it was part of the soundtrack of my life.” Following a recommendation by the drummer Jack DeJohnette, Davis had hired Maupin explicitly to play bass clarinet, an unusual instrument in small jazz combos then (and now) but one that, as it turned out, meshed well with the other instruments, including the electric piano played by Chick Corea, Larry Young and Joe Zawinul, and the electric bass and guitar played, respectively, by Harvey Brooks and John McLaughlin. Maupin confirmed what Davis himself had written about, namely, the paucity of planned material (see above) and Davis’ reluctance to tell others what to play during the recording. And yet, Maupin felt that Davis “was very, very determined to bring out the best” in them. But how did this happen? One hint is given in the excerpt below, where Maupin recounts how Miles invited him to play.

(15) (From “The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics” – November 11, 2002)
 Maupin; a couple of times, ... he [Miles Davis] got me real good. to really provoke me ... to just- go beyond, ... what I thought I could do. and just be in the moment, ... you know, I was so busy thinking, I guess he se- he sensed it. ... and so ... he comes over to me. we’re

standing there. ... and- we’re warming up on one of the pieces. and he- ... he suddenly looked at me and he says ... “Why don’t you- play. I can’t think of anything.” (widens his eyes and makes the face of someone who is shocked))

Students:
 Maupin:

and it was just like ((smiling))... he just-handed me this .. this gift. ... just ((shakes his head)) be yourself. that’s what he said to me. after that I felt so free, and when you hear it I mean you know, I scream and I shout. it’s-it’s-it’s joyful. ... I just felt great.

Maupin interprets Davis’ offer to step in *for* him (although it might have been more of an invitation to engage in an exchange *with* him) as a “gift” to “be yourself,” which caused him to feel “free.” To do what? Not only to play what he wanted but to realize himself in his own terms, which includes the kind of moral standard expressed by Roberto Miranda and Tom Ranier in the excerpts above. The following narrative with the projected image of a Maupin who “screams” and “shouts” with his instrument in the recording studio not only confirms his belief in the inspirational power of more mature and legendary figures like Davis on younger players (Maupin was fourteen years younger than Davis and much less known), it also provides a vivid testimony for the tension that accompanies a recording session with more experienced and influential musicians. It is in such a context that Maupin can interpret Davis’ invitation to play as an invitation to be “free,” which, in turn, translates for him into the possibility to be himself.

The second example is taken from the second week of our Fall 2002 course while Kenny Burrell was introducing his song called “Be Yourself,” which, as he told the class, was inspired by Duke Ellington. Even more explicitly than in the Maupin story cited above, in Burrell’s articulation of the meaning of his song, we find the conceptualization of an ideal type of person or Self. We have already seen some of the properties of this Self. It is a Self that, among other goals, is constantly searching for new renditions of old songs (see excerpt [4]), new sounds, new ideas (see excerpts [1], [2], [5], [7], [8]). In so doing, the Self of the authentic jazz musician must display courage, because it cannot be afraid of making mistakes (see excerpts [8], [9], [10], [11]). In fact, a jazz musician’s goal is to reach a point in his or her mastery of the music (and of one or more instruments) so that the very concept of mistake is questioned, given that any “clam” can be musically

recontextualized to be interpreted as the "right" (or the "intended") musical choice (see excerpt [11]).

But, as we show below, Burrell's comments on his own song bring out something else, or rather, make explicit something that might have been implicit in some of the passages quoted so far, namely, that any committed jazz musician is involved in a quest that is not only aesthetic, but also *existential*. It is a quest that must reach to the depths of our Egos, where, according to Burrell, we can find what makes us distinct (i.e. what distinguishes us from everyone else). Such a distinctiveness is an infinite source of creativity.

(16) (From "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" – October 8, 2002)
Burrell: the name of the piece is "Be Yourself". It's an original piece of mine. uh- ...dedicated to him [Duke Ellington] because that's- that's one of the main lessons that I got from him as a friend and as a role model. [...] ... one of the strongest things you can be, and this goes for anybody in this room whether you're going to be a musician or not is that to be yourself. Because you have something nobody else has. and [if] you can dig deep down and grab it and put it out and then be consistent with it, uh you're gonna do well. ... one of things that I learned by observing Ellington and then as a person and then his music was to be yourself.

There is no question that this lesson, which Burrell attributes to Ellington, is simultaneously aesthetic and moral. Furthermore, it has generative power, as shown by the fact that it is able to affect at least some of those who hear it. This is also demonstrated by the electronic message from one of the students in the class reproduced in (17) below, which was sent to Duranti a few weeks after Burrell spoke about the imperative "Be yourself."

(17) (e-mail message – December 3, 2002)

Dear Professor Duranti,

[...] I play the guitar, and the music I have created these past few weeks has been above and beyond anything I thought could come of myself. In fact, I can remember specifically the day and moment in class when Professor Burrell played "Be Yourself." The room was filled with such a presence that I couldn't do anything but sit there and fall into the music. And I saw it, I saw

Professor Burrell playing himself so masterfully on the guitar. I wasn't analyzing how complex the stuff was that he was playing, or comparing myself to him. I just took what I heard as being a product of the soul of the musician playing. It just made so much sense. Needless to say, I went home that day, locked myself in a bathroom with my guitar, freed my hands, freed my head and just played. And what a session it was! I finally understood myself on the guitar. I finally saw what it was that was natural to me. I could hear myself in the guitar. For the last few weeks I've come in a way to master my own instrument and find my own voice. Perhaps not because I have mastered all there is to know of technique and style, but just because I came to a certain realization... That I am and can only expect to be as good a musician as I am in the moment I'm playing. And what a simple concept!! How could I have missed that one? [...]

This is a story of self-discovery and self-realization. The student has taken Burrell's statement and demonstration as an invitation to go deeper inside himself to "understand" himself at his own instrument – the guitar (another parallel with Burrell's musical Self) – and to see what was "natural" for him. The student's highly introspective narrative displays the search for, and apparent discovery of, a way to realize the Emersonian "be true to yourself" principle, which, according to Day (2000), was implicit in Monk's directive to Lacy "don't pick up on my things." The student's detailed and eloquent message provides us with a rare and precious view of a young musician's existential search for his own "voice" (a theme that had been brought up in class but we did not elaborate upon in this article). It emphasizes the connection between musical experimentation and an on-going project of self-realization as an artist, what Emerson called the "unattained but attainable self." Finally, his narrative also demonstrates that the process of self-discovery is not something that occurs only among great musicians. It can occur at all levels of mastery.

It should also be mentioned that, contrary to the impression one might have from the student's message, not everything he says may have been inspired by Burrell's words and performance. There could have been a cumulative effect of various parts of the course. Thus, the phrase "I am and can only expect to be as good a musician as I am in the moment of playing" closely resembles a passage within a long story told the week before by Tom Ranier here partly reproduced in (18). In recounting his experience playing with his idol clarinet player

Buddy DeFranco, Ranier raised the issue of evaluating oneself and more generally the question of how to evaluate "greatness." The articulation of his solution to this problem provides a different version of the moral imperative to "be yourself."

(18) (From "The Culture of Jazz Aesthetics" – October 1, 2002)

Ranier; and- then it dawned on me [...] that it's not about trying to be better than Buddy DeFranco. and it's not about trying to make a contribution that's better than Charlie Parker because the truth is, we can't judge that anyway. we're not judges of what's going to be immortal. you know what I mean by that? and we can't even evaluate that. all we can do ... is be the best musicians we can be.

Here what appears to be advice to avoid being too hard on ourselves – one of the themes in Ranier's longer story is that it is dangerous to compare ourselves with our idols – turns out to be a general principle about how to avoid being too concerned with evaluation *per se*. When we compare Ranier's last sentence in excerpt (18) "all we can do ... is be the best musicians we can be" with the student's last sentence in (17) that "I am and can only expect to be as good a musician as I am in the moment I'm playing," we see that the student has added a temporal qualification, "in the moment I'm playing." This displays an understanding of a crucial aspect of music-making in general, and improvisation in particular, namely, that whatever we achieve is tied to a particular moment or set of conditions that make it possible in the *here-and-now*, but might not make it reproducible in the near or distant future.

Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed jazz improvisation as a cultural practice by examining how jazz musicians make sense of their own actions and the actions of other musicians with whom they engage in improvisation. After a brief introduction on the study of improvisation in music and jazz in particular, we focused on statements by and interactions among professional jazz musicians and between them and their students to identify what emerged as the view of jazz as:

- (i) a practice that often involves both appropriation and transformation of already known music;
- (ii) an individual and collective search for the unexplored melodic.

harmonic, and rhythmic possibilities of a song; and

(iii) an aesthetic quest which is partly defined through moral evaluation of a musician's aesthetic choices and inventiveness; this quest includes the search for a "unique self" that each musician should be able to express through his or her music.

The articulation of these perspectives helps us move the discussion of the "language of music" from a concern for what *music* communicates – an established and recurrent issue in the philosophy of music – to the ways in which *musicians* talk about music – as suggested by Feld (1994). What we discover is that jazz musicians – or at least the ones that we interacted with – have a highly developed discursive consciousness of what they hear, think, and do while engaged in music-making. Their collective reflections on what improvisation represents for them and how it affects and is affected by their dispositions constitute a complex model of what a musician experiences while on the bandstand. This model must, of course, be matched with other information, which we are also engaged in obtaining, on the actions (musical and otherwise) that take place during performance, practice, or instruction. But we come away from this attempt to systematize jazz musicians' conceptualizations of their art form with the conviction that what they have to say about their own experience is an important entry point into the system of meanings that music as a personal and collective activity has for them. Without falling into the trap of identifying what people *say* they do, feel, and think with what they *actually* do, feel and think, we nonetheless believe that the rich body of metaphors and narratives that circulate within the jazz community constitute an important window on jazz as a cultural tradition. They provide members and outsiders (as well as the many people who fall in-between these two categories) with powerful thinking tools to make sense of the jazz tradition and to evaluate a person's stance with respect to it. It is in this sense that the message from the student in our class must be understood. By listening to the words and the music of Kenny Burrell the musician, the student was moved to rethink and re-generate his own musical experience. He attained the language as well as the conviction necessary to explore ways of being a musician as a way of being a particular kind of human being (and vice-versa). If the student's experience can be seen as an example of what is often referred to as "inspiration," we can say that we have here a case in which at least some of the elements of this often mentioned and yet usually elusive process takes place. In this case, at least, we can reconstruct a context in which verbal articulation and musical demonstration came together to create the conditions for self-discovery. We can thus see at work elements that might very well be the sine-qua-non of any epiphany, a spatio-temporal coming together of internally and externally lived experiences, mediated through particular ways of hearing, sensing, acting, playing, and speaking.

Abstract

On the basis of video data from interviews and discussions with and among jazz musicians, this article presents three main perspectives on jazz improvisation: (i) as an appropriation and transformation of previous musical texts; (ii) as an individual and collective search for the unexplored harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic possibilities of a song; and (iii) as an aesthetic and moral quest, which includes the search for a "unique self" of each jazz musician. It is argued that these three perspectives are closely correlated and provide insights into how practitioners understand their own actions and the actions of their band mates. The strong moral component of improvisation in this model helps explain the aesthetic choices jazz musicians regularly make, including the implicit risks that they take in their continuous attempts to play the same tune in innovative ways, their interactions with other players, and their attitude toward their own perceived limitations. This model is also generative, in the sense that (a) it helps produce and is produced by particular decisions (e.g. on the bandstand) and (b) it can be transferred and adopted by others (e.g. younger or less experienced musicians) to improve their own understanding of their talent and the way they utilize it.

Riassunto

Sulla base di registrazioni video di interviste e discussioni con e tra jazzisti, questo articolo presenta tre prospettive principali sull'improvvisazione jazzistica: (i) come appropriazione e trasformazione di brani musicali già esistenti; (ii) come ricerca individuale e collettiva di precedentemente inesplorate possibilità armoniche, melodiche e ritmiche; e (iii) come una ricerca esistenziale di carattere estetico e morale, che comprende la ricerca di un "Sé unico" che dovrebbe caratterizzare qualsiasi musicista jazzista. Si sostiene che queste prospettive sono collegate tra loro e forniscono una prospettiva del modo in cui i jazzisti danno senso alle loro azioni e alle azioni dei loro colleghi con cui suonano. La forte componente morale nel modello aiuta a spiegare le scelte estetiche, compresi i rischi impliciti nel continuo tentativo di suonare lo stesso brano musicale in un modo sempre diverso, le interazioni con altri musicisti e l'atteggiamento verso i propri limiti. Questo modello è generativo nel senso che (a) aiuta a produrre e, a sua volta, è prodotto da particolari decisioni (ad es. mentre si suona in pubblico) e (b) può essere trasferito e adottato da altri (ad es. da musicisti più giovani o meno esperti) per migliorare la loro comprensione del loro talento e del modo di utilizzarlo.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

The excerpts provided in this article are taken from the transcription of videotapes of face-to-face interactions with and among a number of musicians, students, and other participants in classes taught at the University of California, Los Angeles. Following standard conventions in discourse and conversation analysis, we have *not* edited the interviews for content or form. Our goal has been to be as accurate as possible in the reproduction of the verbal part of the original interactions, with the understanding that any correction or editing of the original verbal exchanges is likely to alter our ability to assess how at the time of recording participants themselves were constructing their utterances and making sense of what was being said or done. To help readers to make sense of the transcripts, we provide here a list of the major conventions used in the excerpts.

- (5) the number on the top left corner of the excerpt refers to the sequential place of each example in this particular article;
- ("NAME") the phrase between double quotes, usually followed by a date, gives the name of the transcript of verbal interaction from which the excerpt is taken; for this article, all transcripts are from class interactions;
- Wilson; name of speaker is separated from the transcription of talk by a semicolon (;) and one or more spaces;
- they didn't underlining represents emphasis or contrastive stress.
- WOW! capital letters indicates high volume;
- last time, a comma indicates that the phrase ends with a rising intonation, e.g. the intonation found when speakers are projecting further talk or more items in a list;
- I do. a period stands for a falling intonation that suggests the possible end of a turn;
- go //next double slashes indicate the point in a party's turn where overlap by next speaker(s) starts;
- (first of all) talk between parentheses indicates an uncertain but reasonable guess as to what might have been said;
- (?) question marks between parentheses indicate that a portion of talk could not be heard accurately and no guess was possible.
- ... three dots indicate an untimed pause;
- ((laughter)) double parentheses frame contextual information about the talk;
- Elvin [Jones] material between brackets is added information that should help understand what is being implied by the speaker.
- [...] three dots between square brackets mean that a portion of the transcript was left out.