

## 6 Jazz as cultural practice

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Since jazz emerged from its geographical origins it has travelled back and forth across the disputed terrain between high and low culture, variously located as folk, popular, art music and permutations. Its shifting position makes it a particularly instructive vehicle through which to study the matrix of cultural politics, the balances of power that determine which cultural forms carry authority. The migrations of jazz within musical politics and aesthetics depend upon negotiations between text (the particular jazz performance) and context (the physical and cultural space within which it is situated). The Eurocentric arbitration of musical value by the end of the nineteenth century was predicated on the stability of the musical text and of its relationship with context. Jazz appeared to demolish this model. As aurally based improvisation, in performance the 'text' evaded fixity, and the sites and conditions of performance blurred the distinction between art and social practice, music and noise. Even preserved on a sound recording, its formal components were scarcely intelligible in established musical terms such as background–foreground, melody–harmony and structural coherence. Jazz was a site of unruliness.

### Jazz categorisations

The rapid international diaspora of jazz (see Chapter 2) meant that it could not be ignored; jazz was arguably the most pervasively influential development in twentieth-century music. Apart from the particular musical forms and practices in which it has been seminal, it was the most widespread musical vehicle of the progressive thrust into the experience of modernity in the early twentieth century, in such matters as gender, mass mediations and technological innovation. Jazz had to be spoken of. Yet there was no consensus as to how it should be categorised, or which of its formal and affective features should influence its categorisation. At one extreme it was deemed to possess no musical properties at all, being simply 'general noisy effects' (1922), a 'general din' (1918).<sup>1</sup> Society bandleader Vincent Lopez declared in 1924 that originally the word jazz meant 'contrary to music' (Walser 1999, 8). The acoustic disorder proclaimed itself in an apparent absence of melody; in timbral peculiarities arising from the unorthodox use

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of conventional instruments; the incorporation of ‘noisemakers’; and most generally in rhythmic displacements.<sup>2</sup> The more disordered the sound, the more morally and aesthetically abominable. A definition of jazz in 1921 in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, as something in which ‘the three simple elements of music – rhythm, melody and harmony – have been put out of tune with each other’, was also framed by terms expressing the most extreme moral panic: ‘evil influence’, ‘savage instincts’, ‘barbaric . . . brutality’ (Walser 1999, 33, 34).

At the other extreme it was recognised that formal protocols were operating, particularly of course by its own pioneers. Jelly Roll Morton articulated the importance of melody, dynamics, structure, scored sections and European elements, all of which were elegantly embodied in his own work (*ibid.*, 19–21). Some attentive and well-informed European ears also recognised and respected a jazz aesthetic. Ernest Ansermet in a 1919 review paid the highest respect to the ‘artists’ of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra (which included Sidney Bechet); its ‘astonishing perfection’ and ‘superb taste’ were reflected in music which represented a ‘veritable religious art’ (R. Gottlieb 1996, 742–3).

Between these two extremes a spectrum of opinions refracted various aspects and permutations of jazz practices and its performance conditions. The African components paradoxically enabled the music to be declared barbarically primitive yet possessing the ‘rhythmic aggressiveness’ of ‘the moderns’ (Walser 1999, 6–7). Alternatively, these components marked jazz as a significant folk music through which African-American identity might be articulated with ‘artistic finish’ and having emancipative political potential (*ibid.*, 15, 55–7). For a writer in West Africa, however, the distinctive point about jazz was precisely its *non*-African elements (*ibid.*, 37–8). These categorisations of course were also determined by the particular performers and the performance sites and conditions associated with the label ‘jazz’. Ansermet was writing of a concert format, while for the *Ladies’ Home Journal* writer it was a dance music with disturbingly unruly affective manifestations. For others, as a cabaret music during prohibition, its links with bootleggers emphasised (glamorously or repellantly) the low-life licentiousness that already tainted its mythologised origins (Gabbard 1995a, 108).

Early responses to jazz thus ranged through bewilderment, outrage, fascination and respect, and depended on which version of the music was heard, in what conditions, and of course on the predispositions of the listener. These responses foreshadowed all the positions over subsequent decades, positions that both reflected and affected the range of jazz practices and venues. For its part, jazz obligingly provided exemplifications of whatever its partisans or opponents required of it, since its rapid diaspora was accompanied by a bewildering formal and functional pluralisation unique among musics.

Moral panic and aesthetic scorn have never entirely dissipated, partly because jazz has always lent its name to transgressive gestures of one kind or another. The anarchy and moral heedlessness of the 'Jazz Age' resurfaced in the extroverted ecstasies of the 'Swing Era' (Gendron 1995, 44–5). The drug-tainted *demi-monde* of bop and its argot strengthened an image that continued to pervade the jazz persona through subsequent developments such as psychedelic and later fusions. Such liaisons with dubious newcomers simply confirm its incorrigible nostalgia for the low-life.

By the mid-1930s, a growing body of articulate defenders of jazz were forced to agree that, in the theatrical excesses of swing, African-American music had surrendered to all that was crassly commercial in mass modernity. Rather than consign jazz in general to the artistic dustbin, however, they introduced a line of demarcation across the music itself. On one side it was an authentic folk art, and on the other its vulgarised commercial appropriations. In 1936, Alain Locke wrote: 'there is a vast difference between its first healthy and earthy expression in the original peasant paganism out of which it arose and its hectic, artificial and sometimes morally vicious counterpart which was the outcome of the vogue of artificial and commercialized jazz entertainment' (Walser 1999, 77–8).

This distinction would provide the most durable and versatile model for jazz discourse and the categorisation of jazz practices. It has been re-articulated in terms of race and colour, politics, musical form and gender. In the reaction against 'commercial' swing there emerged from the late 1930s a group that became known internationally as 'Mouldy Figs', invoking an authentic jazz which was a noble folk art in contradistinction to an early version of pop(ular) music which was a despised manifestation of mass culture (see Gendron).<sup>3</sup> The Figs' position frequently overlapped with the political left who found in pre-swing jazz an integrity that could be opposed to decadent bourgeois popular musics. The meretricious commercialism was held to be evident in a number of practices associated with swing, including ostentatious entertainment rhetoric and repertoire. The reductionist appeals to authenticity overlooked the fact that the idealised, rough-hewn, New Orleans folk musician eschewing commercial showmanship, and invariably black, was a denial of history and a form of 'postcardism' that ironically disempowered black musicians by discursive exclusion from the mainstream music industry.

At the same time, the debate created an aesthetic discourse for a music that in the 1920s had generally been dismissed as culturally negligible or reprehensible. In their condemnation of swing, the Figs echoed earlier attacks on contemporary African-American popular music, but in valorising a folk form, they were developing a version of the defence of jazz that some earlier avant-garde and art-music composers had foreshadowed: jazz as a

significant new art form. Australian composer and concert pianist Percy Grainger had declared in 1932 that the ‘three greatest composers who ever lived are Bach, Delius and Duke Ellington’ (J. Bird 1998, 239–40). Two years later, Roger Pryor Dodge saw jazz musicians as heirs to a tradition of improvisation once practised by Frescobaldi, Handel, J. S. Bach, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Now moribund in art music, ‘improvisation is absolutely imperative to the development of an art form such as music or dancing’ (R. Gottlieb 1996, 749). The ambiguous layerings of discourse and practice are evident even when the objective of securing art status for jazz was shared. Paul Whiteman was a celebrated exponent of the durable belief that what was required to lift jazz to an art form was increased symphonic discipline and scoring (Walser 1999, 39–40).

A significant moment in the apparent resolution of the tensions between African-American identity and high art was the bop revolution of the mid-1940s, which provided new impetus in the transition of jazz from entertainment to art (see Gendron 1995; and Elworth 1995). Regarded largely as a black phenomenon, it also evinced a mystifying cerebral complexity, to the point of being apparently undanceable – a significant contrast with commercial swing. It defied the vulgar commercial imperative and alienated itself from a bourgeois mainstream, boasting among its practitioners a number of spectacularly socially dysfunctional musicians available for artistic romanticisation. It centralised the *agon* of the individual virtuoso and was produced in the jazz equivalent of a Parisian garret. The relationship of all this to the boppers’ day-to-day lives was uneven and immaterial; there was enough anecdotal available to patch together the identikit jazzman as a driven outsider/genius, and the appropriate artistic discourse. Barry Ulanov defined the position of the jazz musician in the late 1940s thus: ‘behind him is a history and a tradition. Before him is an art’ (Elworth 1995, 67).

From the 1950s, particular kinds of jazz practice, particularly those associated with ‘progressive’ schools, became increasingly intellectualised (see Chapter 10), especially through the music’s association with undergraduate audiences distancing themselves from emerging rock-and-roll. In doing so, jazz found a place as an approved satellite of Eurocentric high culture and increasingly situated itself in ‘art’ spaces. The Newport Jazz Festival was established in 1954 to sponsor America’s ‘only original art form’ (R. Gottlieb 1996, 686).

The simple fact of being so taxonomically evasive is sufficient to cause nervousness among custodians of culture in a positivistic milieu. Additionally, however, several of the categories straddled by jazz exhibit characteristics that are at odds with the dominant discourses of aesthetic value in the modern era. This aesthetic is layered. Its surface displays explicit criteria as to what kinds of music should be accorded greatest value. But these

are moulded over ideological templates with, at the deepest substrate, an Enlightenment episteme which is not hospitable to protocols historically associated with jazz. Our epoch privileges ways of knowing and experiencing that are not conformable with ways of knowing and experiencing manifested in jazz.

### Epistemological frame

Because of its distinctive practices and taxonomic ambiguity, jazz (like other related musics) has not enjoyed artistic recognition commensurate with its character and influence. It must either eat in the scullery – ‘down in the basement, a kind of servant’s hall of rhythm’, in the words of New Orleans’s *The Times Picayune* on 20 June 1918 (Walser 1999, 8) – or gain admission to the dining room of funding, recognition and support only by donning a (sometimes implausible) disguise. The gatekeepers – traditional musicology, the forms and practices that it has canonised as the aesthetic and moral apogee of music, and the policies and attitudes arising from these – are in turn the musical agents of an Enlightenment epistemology. Although under increasing interrogation during the twentieth century, this epistemology remains dominant in the public discourse of western cultures and their satellites, the conditioned reflex that governs ways of thinking and practising culture. A defining contour is the connection between ocularcentrism and the intellect in maintaining a regime of knowledge-as-control, precipitating as, among many other things, a fixation on product rather than process. The more comfortably any cultural practice can be incorporated into such a model, the more privilege it will enjoy. It will be the argument of this chapter that in the general category of ‘music,’ jazz is less conformable than conventional art music to the dominant episteme, and that some practices associated with particular styles are even less so than others.

The episteme I am describing is particularly clear in the traditions of intellectual enquiry informed by the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, in which virtue was eclipsed by power as the objective of knowledge. The desire to discover what is so has become instrumental to the desire to control what is so. The ‘knower’, the searcher for knowledge, is placed outside and above the field in which knowledge is to be found, manipulating and controlling through science’s child, technology. It is a view of knowledge that seeks to open up the distance between Self and Other, empowering the former at the expense of the latter, ‘that the mind may exercise over the nature of things the authority which properly belongs to it’ (Bacon 1620, 7).

This is implicated also in the Cartesian mind–body dualism, with the mind as the central organising principle, exerting control over its objects, including the body – part of the mind’s ‘Other’. Clearly, however, in the materialist scientific regime the body must mediate the materiality from which knowledge is constructed. The classic experimental method, enunciated by Francis Bacon and later institutionalised in the Royal Society, harnesses the senses to reason. This hierarchy of mind over body in turn produced a hierarchy of the senses, in which the visual enjoys epistemological dominance:

I . . . dwelling purely and constantly among the facts of nature, withdraw my intellect from them no further than may suffice to let the images and rays of natural objects meet in a point, as they do in the sense of vision.

[*Ibid.*, 13–14]

Already, in this pioneering articulation of the project to link knowledge and power, Bacon instinctively enlisted its sensory trope. There is a range of reasons for this, and they bear on the arguments that follow. Different aspects of subjectivity are activated by each sense and, in some cases, the corporeal rather than the cerebral component of subjectivity is brought more powerfully into play. Smell, for example, ‘is unique among the senses in not having connections through the thalamus to the . . . neocortex’, while the visual system, however, directly accesses the cerebral cortex and has over 500 times the information-analysis capacity of the aural system (Gregory 1987, 720, 795). This facility makes vision highly appropriate to the dominant epistemology of the modern epoch. Vision is, more than any other sense, the faculty of distancing, control, intellectual analysis and analytical focus. Scopic cultural mapping and modelling distance us from the object in ways that other physical mediators do not. All the other senses are strengthened by physical proximity. The Self is vulnerably submerged in the wash of sound, intruded upon by touch, invaded by smell and taste. Sight is both the sense and the trope of objectivity and distance. As Foucault’s work reminds us, as an instrument of knowledge devoted to control, vision is hegemonic in the modern epoch.<sup>4</sup>

That we are a scopocentric society has been the subject of note and critique. What is less often recognised is how deeply this traps us in a particular regime of knowledge itself. The visual is so deeply inscribed in cultural analysis, its ‘perspectives’, ‘horizons’, ‘insights’, that the language itself contests the exploration through alternative sensory fields, such as the acoustic.<sup>5</sup> In a paradigm that links knowledge with control, the enabling model is scopic. The post-Renaissance era organises knowledge through visual models: it is not merely a rhetorical ornament that the era is called the *Enlightenment*.

## Aesthetic frame

Art music, its aesthetics, its most powerfully authorised production, performance and consumption protocols, and its public discourses are the musical realisation of these overlapping ideologies of the scopic, intellectual control and product fetishism. The privileged event of art music, the concert performance, is the social ritualisation of the convergence. To speak of a concert performance as ‘spectacle’ is clearly not to distinguish it from other forms of music performance. Stadium rock, for example, is one of the most visually theatricalised of all musical events. It is, however, a question of the relative emphases, of the balance with other criteria, and the content of the spectacle. Both the art music and the stadium rock concert are highly attentive to the appearance of the musical event, but they constitute a window on two very different kinds of visual statement. The rock concert relinquishes its purchase on the highest peaks of artistic seriousness by presenting a staged spectacle of unruliness and abandoned physicality, stylised anarchy that blurs the distinctions between performers and audiences (from aisle-jiving to mosh-pit). The rock spectacle is a ritualised refusal of other traditional components of the paradigm that defines ‘serious’ artistic achievement.

The traditional art-music concert is equally ritualised, but in celebration of a different (‘higher’) order of experience and value. The visual is equally respected in the art-music concert, but it is a spectacle of conformity to the other components of the aesthetic hegemony. It discloses regimentation, physical control in the interests of cerebral focus, the art work as a finished product, quarantined from social materiality in a bourgeois ritual of expiatory transcendence, yet also imperialistically universalised, a ‘celebration of the “sacred history” of the western middle classes’ (Small 1987b, 19). The performance constructs an uncrossable divide between everyday world and artist, the masses and the genius, underlined by conventions of architecture, acoustics, lighting, dress, and temporal (order of appearance) and spatial hierarchies. The particular form of regimentation centralises the inviolable and completed score, the object of visual–mental focus for every musician either directly or as conducted from a central ‘altar’. The programme centres on the ‘opus’: it is a spectacle of scopic hegemony, the eye engaging with a ‘product’. All the musical skills on display are those of a body disciplined to a cognitive design inscribed in the score.

There is thus a template for high-status musical form and practice which celebrates the Enlightenment. Musics that evolved according to other templates must either endure trivialisation or disdain, or attempt to fit themselves into a Procrustean bed of values, which they can never occupy as convincingly as the music for which it was historically tailored.

## **Art-music discourses and jazz practices: performance**

Jazz is an example of such other practices.<sup>6</sup> In whichever of the categories jazz has been situated, it has retained pre-eminently the practice of improvisation. Improvisation is so integral with jazz performance that jazz has in significant respects more in common with, and is therefore better understood in relation to, non-musical improvisational practices than with non-improvisational musical practices. Yet it is most frequently evaluated exclusively as a musical form. As such, in spite of its massive influence in the twentieth century, it has been accorded minor aesthetic significance in direct relation to the art-music tradition: an influence on it, but not an example of it (Johnson 2000, 47–52). We find the reasons for this in practices and competencies that distinguish jazz (and other similarly marginalised musics) from art music as it evolved throughout the nineteenth century. These practices are not inherently rebarbative, nor do they signal in any absolute sense a deficiency of creative imagination or a limit on performative competence. They are simply in tension with a dominant epistemology.

Central to the reasons for the trivialisation of jazz is that it is to a crucial extent an improvised music which comes into being in a moment of relatively unscripted performance and in response to social praxis. Paul Berliner's massive study documents the continuing centrality of improvisation as one of the distinctive elements of jazz in relation to western art music. This is not to posit an impermeable membrane between jazz and score-based music but, in practice and in print, jazz musicians almost universally hold improvisation to be a constitutive practice. This contends with the aesthetics and politics of a score-based tradition growing out of the episteme I have summarised above.

The marginalisation of improvisation is an outgrowth of the dialectics of modernism, reflecting the tensions between the elitist centralisation of cultural power and a form of mass enfranchisement achieved through the (re)production of music through aural and technological channels. This bypasses the (scopic) score-based aesthetics that serve 'First World' modernism. Key notions in the dominant cultural discourse have served to privilege particular artistic myths – the shaping genius (the composer) handing down the sacrosanct and autonomous work of art, a model of transcendence and permanence. One outcome of this ideology is the sacralisation of the scored composition – the *Opus* – as the centre of music production–consumption, against which all alternatives are to be seen as more or less imperfect deviations. Eminent Sorbonne musicologist André Pirro informed his pupil and successor Jacques Chailley: 'I never go to concerts any more. Why listen to music? To read it is enough' (quoted in Chailley 1964, 104).



Other interests converge with the aesthetic to favour musical practices that can be embodied as scored composition. One advantage of the 'Composition' is that its circulation can be controlled in a commodity economy, while the democratic enfranchising practices of improvisation are suspect because they represent a devolution of the control of cultural production. The moments and processes of production and consumption merge. There is relatively little intervening space for a mediating economic or critical network, as in a concert hall where interaction is controlled, or in a recording, which is only a static memory of the improvisational moment. A significant proportion of jazz performance is thus resistant to the usual dynamics of commodification. The organic process of interactive improvisation cannot be 'owned', but if that music can be frozen as a 'product' (a composition), it can be severed from the life that produced it, the conditions of production, and circulated as a commodity (see Johnson 1993). Jazz, of course, has its own commodified forms, and these are examined below.

A vernacular music like jazz has difficulty finding a place in this discourse. The aesthetics that frame the composer of 'serious' music, for example, are an inappropriate model for the relationship in jazz between composer, performer, audience, music-text and venue. When it seeks to situate itself within the domain of autonomous art, jazz finds it more difficult to mask its social specificity, especially those styles and performance practices in which the improvisational textures are most thickly entwined with the performance environment. The more overt the level of collective improvisation, and the more interactivity with audiences and supposedly extrinsic conditions, the less leverage jazz will have in a musicology that privileges the autonomous text.

The theoretical and instrumental competencies are very different for the jazz musician. Orchestral training does not normally develop the ability to improvise over sequences that change key, sometimes passing through different keys as often as every beat in a bar. Jazz instrumental skills also develop different dimensions of expressiveness, including spontaneously generated rhythmic and timbral ambiguities. That improvisation involves a differing repertoire of practices from those of score-based musics would not in itself disadvantage jazz were it not also the case that it is also a repertoire less oriented to the visual as a privileged channel and model of knowledge and experience.

Jazz is distinguished from art-music models in the priority of the ear in collective improvisational performance. Jazz is an earsite in an epistemology dominated by eyesight. It evades the authority of the score in both production and consumption. It is possible to become a successful jazz musician without ever having learned to read the conventional notation through which the art-music repertoire is definitively stored. It can thus be

performed by musicians who have not subscribed to an approved symbolic order, access to which is restricted by class, race, economics and gender. Jazz performance also destabilised the rigid distinction between text and context by which musical experience was regulated in the prevailing aesthetic and political economy. The jazz ear constantly synthesises unexpected sounds into performance. Apart from the unpredictable contributions of other musicians in the band space, most jazz performances occur in the relatively unregulated soundscapes of pubs, dances, restaurants, malls, picnics or promotions, where they have to negotiate with audience interactivity, conversation and sounds such as dancers, dinnerware, glasses, poker machines and the intrusion of street noise.<sup>7</sup> Thus the myth of the artistic genius in full cognitive control of the act and conditions of creation has relatively little to do with improvisational performance, rooted not in a closed text, but in the unregimented acoustics of a vanishing moment.

Jazz musicians are working with contingencies over which they have little or no control, forming designs only to discover that they must be modified or abandoned, at one moment leading a line of development, at another, yielding to some other unexpected acoustic pattern. Unlike score-based art-music performances, jazz performance thus entails extraordinarily dense, unexpected and complex individual and collective decision-making processes in an acoustic field that is unscripted. Because the performance moment is everything, the soundscape is actually part of the 'text', part of the total sound being produced and consumed. Relative to art music, jazz is unprotected by the distinction between quotidian noise and music, a distinction preserved in the art-music score and central to the aesthetics of autonomy.

What these improvisational practices have in common, which sets them at odds with authorised musical aesthetics, is a tendency away from accepted forms of regulation, control and containment. To a greater extent than score-regimented art music, jazz is a music in which a degree of performance unruliness is a means to expressiveness. In terms of rhythm, pitch and timbre, jazz has broadly exhibited a resistance to the precise calibrations of western musicology and the score. Charles Keil's theory of participatory discrepancies is a recognition of the importance of this as a key to the expressive power of vernacular musics, including jazz.<sup>8</sup> This enabled its origins in 'primitive' (African) and contemporary mass (American) culture to be deployed as converging confirmations of its aesthetic deficiencies. Whatever apparent tensions might exist between the primitive and the modern, they were equally reprehensible in terms of Eurocentric Enlightenment criteria of civilised artistic practice. Thus, central to the expressive power of a jazz performance is a set of practices that are described by art-music discourse as musical incompetence or transgressiveness.

The centrality of performance rather than prior composition also destabilises the mind/body hierarchy that underpins high-art aesthetics. As performance music it is registered by and through the body in a way that is exuberant compared with 'classical' music. Jazz musicians and audiences are more physically animated, even in concert conditions, and this animation itself (as in shouted acclaim) in turn affects the character of performance. But the body is complicit, in a more profound and pervasive way, through the phenomenon of kinaesthetics (see, for example, Pressing 1987). The patterning motifs in a jazz musician's work represent a meshing of kinaesthetic and cognitive representation. Certain patterns are attributable not simply to cognitive design, but to the physical engagement with space, such as a habitual sequence of movements of the hand on the keyboard or fingers on keys and valves. The aesthetic implications are significant in violating formalist aesthetics based on the triumph of the heroic consciousness, the outcome of cognitive control. This means, for example, that among the determinants of 'artistic form' are physical contingencies associated with, for example, key signature. A musician's improvisational motifs will depend, among many other things, upon fingering sequences that have been habitualised in a particular key. On this basis, reed player Bob Wilber was able to restore the correct speed of an early Bechet recording (Kappler *et al.* 1980, 34). The relationship between cognitive and physical control in jazz performance is far too complex to be able to mythologise romantically the priority of the cognitive.

The internal politics of jazz reflect the same differentiated orientations to dominant discourses of value. In the attempt to increase its cultural capital, jazz is disadvantaged against art music; for the same reasons, certain jazz styles are disadvantaged against others, in particular to the detriment of sustained polyphony between three or four horns, supported by a rhythm section. This is virtually the distinguishing practice of all forms of so-called traditional jazz from New Orleans to Dixieland, re-emerging again in the 'free' jazz movement of the 1960s, with the difference (among others) that conventional concepts of tonality were now abandoned. Even so, its exponents frequently invoked the New Orleans tradition of collective improvisation as a model in terms of both form and social mission (see, for example, Wilmer 1977, 41).

Both traditional and free jazz are represented most sparsely in institutionalised support systems such as education, funding and media coverage. Continuous collective improvisation is both a formal musical skill involving the cultivation of a distinctive aural alertness, and a vehicle for a form of musical socialisation, that is peripheral to the tradition of the artist-as-individual, as 'soloist'. Collectivity does not construct the heroic individualism central to the aesthetics that equate artistic worth with formal virtuosity.

Improvisation, especially polyphonic, also destabilises a major structural principle by which romantic and modernist art works anchor themselves in, and confirm, their milieu: the figure–ground model. ‘Where’s the Melody?’ asked the title of Martin Williams’s introduction to jazz (1966), reflecting the nervous disorientation of many suspicious newcomers to the music. It is also singularly difficult to accommodate collective improvisation in a text-centred ethos, simply because it is so resistant to notation. As ‘improvisation’ (and this, of course, is as true of a bop solo as of traditionalist polyphony), it cannot be written down beforehand; but as ‘collective’ it is virtually impossible to transcribe later from a recording (see Munn 1960, 101). The intractability of collective improvisation to the form of a scored ‘opus’, as well as the effacement of individual virtuosic ‘genius’, the democratic dispersal of power in a collectivity, constitute radical disadvantages in any attempts it may make to secure legitimacy as high art.

### **Art-music discourse and jazz practices: dissemination**

By the 1920s, jazz was linked with the sound recording so closely that an advertisement in the Australian journal, *Graphic*, on 20 January 1921 described the Melola record-player as being ‘as effective as a full jazz band’. In this partnership, which represented the displacement of traditional musical practices by twentieth-century mass culture, jazz was already in tension with artistic values inherited from the nineteenth century. In many ways the sound recording became the jazz equivalent of art music’s score. None the less, there are differences which also help to account for the lower status of jazz.

Of course, art music also enjoyed the benefits of the sound recording, but the recording determined the meaning of jazz to a far greater extent than it did in classical music, which had already situated itself aesthetically and politically through the more respectable authority of the score. For most of the world, however, jazz was first encountered and therefore inextricably linked with sound recording, and had no pre-existing purchase within the score-based nineteenth-century musical aesthetics that continue to dominate artistic standards. As in the case of live performance, the global generation of jazz was primarily by acoustic rather than visual means.

The fact that it was thus indiscriminately accessible on a global scale to the musically illiterate helped to lodge it in the category of ‘mass culture’. This was seen by its opponents as evidence of its pernicious homogenising influence. The truth is by no means so simple. The art-music score, with its aura of sacral inviolability, constrains democratic interventions and reinterpretations. And the way in which the score is realised in the traditional

concert setting reproduces that regimentation in social practice. Focused cognitive attentiveness is equally the approved protocol for domestic listening to classical recordings. All this is in the interests of a higher aesthetic (as well, however, as serving a political economy). By contrast, jazz is an example of musics that are performed and listened to (publicly and privately) in conditions that encourage interaction and reinterpretation. The recording also shifted attention away from composer and fixed or closed score, to performer and variable, open-ended performance. Mass mediations (historically the most symbiotic medium for jazz beyond earshot) place musical meanings up for grabs. The sound itself can be rearranged at the whim of the listener: by singing along, playing tracks in different orders, transferred, spliced, sampled. It can be listened to under a wide range of social conditions with personalised codings. The person sitting in a living room or car has greater freedom to mediate her/his individuality through a recording than the audience in a classical music concert. Indeed, it is precisely this – not homogenisation – that is antipathetic to the dominant aesthetic. While all musics, from ‘art’ to ‘pop’, are technologically accessible to such interventions, such unauthorised reconstructions of form and meaning are inherently offensive to an aesthetic tradition of privileged genius, transcendence and permanence.

The moral and aesthetic odium attached to mass culture, and to jazz by association, is less a manifestation of concern for ‘the masses’ becoming opiated or deprived, than a fear of the threat to centralised cultural control and its associated aesthetics. This control was once exercised by considerations such as class, race, gender and place. While these remain powerful instruments of inequity and exclusion, mass mediations such as the sound recording have not only given access to music without reference to score-reading skills or controlled-access concert settings, they have also made the (re)production of culture more democratic. This does not mean that unregulated cultural production must also be chaotic: spectators in a sports stadium are able spontaneously to sing together and in tune. Cultural democracy has proven no more likely to produce chaos and barbarity than any form of centralised control. The problem with cultural democracy is that representation and meaning can no longer be controlled by the established custodial classes. Thus, as a music stored for distribution in recording, jazz again cuts against the grain of the ideologies that determine artistic value.

The two generic categories, folk and mass culture, have most frequently hosted jazz. Jazz aspirants to a level of artistic respectability beyond the reach of such categories have therefore found it necessary to try to resituate the music as ‘art’. Sometimes this is attempted by simply putting the music somewhere else. The effectiveness of this tactic is reflected in the increased respect and acclaim enjoyed by a jazz group when it performs in a concert

hall exactly the same programme it presents in a pub. A more radical tactic is to try to develop a jazz form that attempts to conform to art-music criteria in terms of compositional practices, instrumentation and arrangement. In both cases this has amounted to resituating jazz into different performance and audience protocols, rhetoric, musical forms and taxonomies (from Paul Whiteman's 'symphonic jazz' to the increasingly ubiquitous 'Jazz Suite'). While this is no more or less 'valid' than any other of the numerous re-inventions of the music, it has most often produced curiosities isolated from what at this time appears to be the mainstream.

### **Popular-music studies and jazz**

Certainly it has produced a hybrid, decentred discourse. While representatives of jazz were seeking a position within the art-music firmament, that aesthetic itself was under increasing critique with the emergence of popular-music studies. The latter specifically provided a counter-discourse to traditional musicology, drawing upon such fields as cultural studies and ethnomusicology. It might be expected that jazz would inevitably find a significant place in such scholarship and the public discourses it has helped to authorise, yet this has scarcely been the case. Simon Frith's incomparably well-informed perspective on the British scene is representative of a general pattern: 'In Britain the world of jazz scholarship remains far apart from the world of popular music studies. I can't recall a single article on British jazz being submitted to *Popular Music*' (Johnson 2000, vi).

Given jazz's history of general marginalisation and condemnation by the art-music establishment, this begs the question: why not? To some extent answers have already been provided. While cultural and popular-music studies have certainly evolved to a large extent as a reaction against established arts scholarship, they are nonetheless institutionalised in the same framework of Enlightenment intellectual traditions modelled on the knowledge/power/ocularcentrism axes. Although critiques of such traditions, they predominantly remain prisoners of its mental tropes of 'perspectives', 'horizons', 'viewpoints' and 'envisionings'. The resilience of the 'power' agenda in scholarly discourse will also impose the same limits on radicalism, producing the same blindspots as are found in its contestants.

Apart from such fundamental patterns, there are more particular reasons for the relative silence of jazz in popular-music scholarship. The tension between the two converges on the word 'popular' in a particular historical moment. The meaning of 'popular' in relation to culture in general and music in particular has itself been a major debate in the literature. There seems to be no satisfactory way of defining the term that corresponds to the

powerful but inchoate understanding that drives its study; clearly there is such an understanding, or its various definitions would not be so vigorously debated. ‘Popular’ as ‘liked by many’ does not work. It is equally clear that it cannot be identified simply in the formal properties of a product. It possesses the characteristics of a process, of signifying practices, of negotiating spaces, of means of dissemination and consumption (see Storey 1993, Strinati 1995, and Middleton 1990). The point here is that by any definition, and by the logic of popular-music theory, the history and practices of jazz are substantially (if not wholly) case-studies in ‘popular music’.

In practice, however, the territory thus designated has been colonised almost entirely by rock, post-rock and its derivatives. This is analogous to traditional musicology’s tacit assumption that ‘music’ equals ‘art music’. Tacitly, ‘popular music’ has coalesced with ‘pop music’. The reasons are to some extent based in jazz practices, which manifested a level of improvisation that, its supporters in particular insisted, distinguished it significantly from rock. It became more difficult to sustain this distinction in relation to later developments in pop, however, particularly when jazz musicians themselves entered into crossover projects. Such developments unmasked the political and historical factors that opened the gap between jazz and post-rock. First, they disclosed the fact that the gap was more between the discourses than the practices. In practice, there has been a dynamic interaction between jazz, rock and pop, including sharing of blues forms by jazz and proto-rock styles such as jump, jive, rockabilly and rhythm-and-blues. Jazz musicians have always been found on what are regarded as rock sessions as well as later more self-conscious exercises in fusion.<sup>9</sup> Many bands and musicians securely located in the pop canon, such as Frank Zappa and Jack Bruce, have enjoyed the highest respect among jazz musicians, and pop figures such as Lou Reed have had a strong attachment to jazz.

The silence of jazz in popular-music studies thus reflects a great deal more about musical discourse than musical practices, though of course some of that discourse itself has been conducted by musicians. New Orleans revivalists in the late 1950s, for example, were determined to distance themselves from rock, while John Lennon helped kill the ‘trad’ boom when he reportedly declared a loathing for traditional jazz. Indeed, these two cases draw our attention to the historical moment at which the space between jazz and popular-music discourse began to open up. Anglophone cultural studies emerged largely as an interrogation of existing cultural hierarchies and assumptions, with Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) paving the way for the seminal work of Raymond Williams, as in *The Long Revolution* (1961). While Hoggart dismissed ‘juke box’ culture, the redirecting of attention to popular culture under the sponsorship of a radical critique of value set the scene for the emergence of a serious and sympathetic popular-music

discourse (Hoggart 1957, 247–8). This was largely initiated by a generation whose enthusiasms were shaped by the popular music of the late 1950s and 1960s. That is, the development of popular-music studies broadly coincided with the development of pop music itself: both new, both presenting themselves as oppositional.

At the apex of the high–low model under critique was art music (‘Roll Over Beethoven’) and its central legitimating discourse, musicology. However, other forms of arguably popular music were already positioned in the field that, in general, popular-music scholarship was writing against. Although the position of jazz within that field was subordinate, its own proponents, insofar as they participated at all in the high–low debate, were scrambling for the high ground. Whatever else might have divided the often fractious community of jazz writers, they largely closed ranks in scornful opposition to rock and its immediate successors. From the late 1950s a large section of the jazz community formed a united front with other cultural practices that were seeking or endowed with artistic *gravitas*. Alliances with the folk–gospel movement, with the university-campus population and the coffee-lounge set, with the Beats, through poetry and jazz ventures and collaborations with bohemian painters – all helped to stabilise jazz in an orbit, if at some distance, of ‘art’. In earlier decades many would have agreed with American composer John Alden Carpenter, who insisted in 1924 that jazz was ‘our contemporary popular music’ (Walser 1999, 43). As rock invaded that category, jazz fled it, intensifying its efforts to gain admission to the sanctuary of art-music discourse, claiming allegiance to its ideologies, its conceptual models, and often its Schenkerian modes of ‘textual’ analysis (see DeVeaux 1991 and Gabbard 1995b). The apotheosis of this strategy was reached in the 1960s in the writing of what Elworth suggests were the Leavisites of jazz, Gunther Schuller and Martin Williams (1995, 71).

Rock–pop and its discourses were happy to live with the divide, to distance themselves from a music that, in a new culture of youth, carried the odour of the past, and that was publicly disdainful. While jazz was attempting to consolidate its position as art music (albeit incorrigibly second class), cultural and popular-music studies were seeking to articulate aesthetics appropriate to popular music (see, for example, Chester 1970). In the process they were privileging and glamorising contemporary subcultural sites that were deemed to be emancipatively and democratically oppositional. The immense range of cultural and specifically musical practices which appeared to be too prosaic, conservative or simply unfashionable were largely overlooked no matter how quantitatively popular, from philately to Julie Andrews, and included jazz. While it may seem to musicology that jazz is too demotically unruly to take equal place with high-art music, it is widely regarded as too elitist to warrant the attentions of popular-music scholars.



The coalface experience of David Horn, Director of Liverpool University's Institute for Popular Music, prompted him to comment that students at the Institute continue to feel that jazz improvisation 'seems to them to have its own brand of elitism'.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, this is all a matter of relativities, and relativities that are shifting. Gabbard's 1995 collections of essays represent themselves as an attempt to draw jazz into the new critical discourses.<sup>11</sup> Apart from registering a shift, their own bibliographies help to identify its prefigurations. The hitherto uncoordinated character of 'cultural studies' approaches to jazz, however, has thrown them into the shadow of the much larger body of literature in the tradition of high-art musicology which has most decisively framed the music. Jazz has left it very late to attempt to find a place in the discourses of popular culture. Trailing deferentially in the wake of traditional musicology and the Romantic and modernist ideologies that underpin it, jazz criticism has tethered itself to one of the most conservative of all critical discourses, gradually internalising and adopting its models even as they were being profoundly problematised.<sup>12</sup> It is strange that, for most of the century or so of its existence, a music that has been so pervasively influential, and that is such a potentially incandescent case study in modernity and cultural theory, has been treated so derivatively and unimaginatively by its major scholars, and almost completely overlooked by recent discourses that seem tailored to its history and practices. The resolute silence of jazz in those discourses has retrospectively occluded its historical status as the first music of urban modernity, to the extent that the pre-rock era is frequently regarded as being entirely bereft of oppositional youth music (Johnson 2000, 153). At the same time, with its fixation on formal high-art modernism, musicology has demonstrated the same insensitivity to the importance of jazz as the music of modernity (*ibid.*, 45–52).

Jazz aspirants to aesthetic legitimacy and its benefits are able to draw upon a critical commentary based on art music as well as bring into being projects that reconstruct jazz in ways that might allow it access to the category of 'art'. The attempt to accord jazz practices the status of art music can achieve important tactical gains, giving weight, for example, to arguments for its consideration in educational and funding policies. In broader strategic terms, however, the attempt will always bring jazz into unequal competition with the art music itself for which the 'rules' and criteria were created. As Walser comments, 'Virtually the whole tradition of musicological analysis of jazz . . . has been caught between the admission that jazz is different from classical music (and probably inferior), and the desire to legitimate jazz according to the criteria commonly used to analyze classical music' (Walser 1993, 171). At the same time, jazz distanced itself all the more from other musics that have enjoyed the attentions of popular-music

scholarship and the policy recognition that has emerged in conjunction with the rise of cultural studies. Jazz has thus fallen between the two stools of traditional musicology and popular-music studies. The dialectical relationship between the music and its discourses, between the text and its contexts, is infinitely complex. The broad-ranging and durable debates it has generated are far more than just squabbles about naming and categorising. They reflect profoundly on how jazz has registered the distinctive twentieth-century convergence of musical practices, discourses and technologies.