

# THRESHOLDS IN IMPROVISATION: FREEDOM, THE ETERNAL PRESENT, AND THE DEATH OF JAZZ

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*they live forever who live in the present*<sup>1</sup>

There are several elements present in improvised music which seem to distinguish it from music of other kinds. The inherent process of becoming, the unrealised nature of the music, its ephemerality and air of revelation, the lack of any document outside of the instant in which it happens: all these point towards the way in which the act of improvising and the result are inextricably tangled. There is no separation of the act of performing from the music performed – there is only the process. Successful improvisation involves a continual hovering in the doorway, a pointing at a landscape, a set of possibilities, rather than the representation of the landscape that is the through-composed work. The fragility of that extended moment is the substance of such music: it is by definition poised on the threshold of realisation.

This essay will be particularly concerned with why it is that the recording process seems so inadequate a representation of an improvised performance – why so little of the experience, both from performers' and audience's point of view, seems to survive the transfer to tape or disc. Indeed, if recording is found lacking in this respect, to treat it as the necessary and sufficient documentation may be damaging to the development and survival of the music itself. This, in turn, would go some way towards explaining the intuitive sense that jazz, that most thoroughly documented of improvised musical forms, is somehow worked through, exhausted – a completed art form. My argument will be based less on what ought to happen than on what

actually happens in practice: it will offer gestures towards a phenomenology of improvisation.

## **The Temporal Threshold**

Every form of music exists only in the moment, on the threshold between past and future, balanced perfectly on the cusp. But there is a critical difference in improvised music. In playing a composition the performer walks a tightrope of sense and time: there is a single linear thread connecting past and future and going through the threshold of the present, and the player either negotiates it successfully, or falls off if the execution fails. There is a harking back even in the moment of performance, a long lingering gaze back to the composer. The best the performer can aspire to is the more or less perfect representation of someone else's thought.<sup>2</sup> When improvising, however, the musician is surrounded by a fuzzy cloud of possibility, and there is no single correct thread to choose from – an indefinite unrealised collection of potential routes extend like a cone into the future. The waveform of possibilities collapses into a linear thread as the performance progresses.

In recording, all that is registered on tape is the collapsed line – the intimation of possible states cannot survive now that the moment has passed – so the performance moves from the fluid present into the fixed past, a change of state that renders it as a two dimensional object, a slice through the original presented as though on a slide for later scrutiny. As Alain Danielou puts it, 'Of the living music in which improvisation plays an essential part, a gramophone record gives us only a frozen or fixed moment, like a photograph of a dancer.'<sup>3</sup> Composition is, after all, closure – the end of a process. Improvisation is the opening of a doorway. It is not through having executed the piece that perfect expression is achieved, but through the continual process of hovering on the brink of execution. It is that threshold experience that distinguishes, precisely, the improvised from the composed. The aim is not even to produce a piece of music – the 'piece of music' which is a composition does not exist here. It is just to find emotional affect, immediate sense, to perpetuate the flow of ideas. The musicians, the space, the audience are all inside a bubble of context, part of a musical language game in the Wittgensteinian sense; this context is what gives the music its meaning. Divorced from this environment by the recording process, the work is flattened out: it cannot make sense of the same kind. The recording is still music, but it is now a document to be pondered and analysed and re-read. Some of the context survives the transfer to disc, as a silhouette retains an object's outline, but the aspects lost are precisely those which make the improvisation what it is – in the transfer it is reduced to the status of a written piece. All its inadequacies as a composition will be

laid bare, a peculiarly fruitless exercise as it was never intended to be treated as composition in the first place. As the composer and improviser Cornelius Cardew describes this,

Documents such as tape-recordings of improvisation are essentially empty... What a recording produces is a separate phenomenon, something really much stranger than the playing itself, since what you hear on tape or disc is indeed the same playing, but divorced from its natural context. What is the importance of this natural context? The natural context provides a score which the players are unconsciously interpreting... [a score] that co-exists inseparably with the music, standing side by side with it and sustaining it.<sup>4</sup>

### **On the Brink of New Terrain**

The purest example of music in its 'natural context' is free improvisation – that is, improvising with no predetermined formal constraints. The form creates itself in performance. When free music is completely successful, it attains a continually self-renewing momentum. The music takes on its own life, seems to grow unbidden from a central position between the musicians. From the performers' perspective, the sense is not that there is instant composition going on, but quite the reverse: the collective sound seems to dictate the course of the piece, independent of and somewhere above the supporting roles of the players and the collective will of the group. A landscape appears, a whole unexpected inexplicable territory ready to be explored, and the musicians hover on its threshold – they can gaze at it from the periphery, may have the chance to explore a path or two before the piece reaches its natural conclusion, but the ephemeral nature of the music means that the landscape vanishes at the end of the performance. This experience of the unaligned centre of the music being somewhere else, and visible through a window, is available even to the solo performer: rather than playing what one hears, it is as though one's fingers are doing the hearing – a loss of self in the music.

As an instrumentalist this is a strange and magical state to find oneself in – a transcendent moment outside time, where the music flows through the fingers and instrument in an uninterrupted stream, with one's self-consciousness reduced to the role of delighted spectator: a stretching out of the cusp of the present into a timeless perfection. If the self is a fiction designed to account for the delusion that our lives have a narrative, then the timelessness of this state represents the perfect release from this delusion – plucked from the narrative and lost in the eternal present.

In practice, the intent of free music to reveal new landscapes with every performance is unworkable – it is an ideal state to aim for, rather than a

guaranteed presence. The strain of seeking new ground in preference to the immensely easier option of revisiting old territory may lead the musicians to fall back on familiar devices. Any free group begins to develop its own vocabulary, its own preferred methods, and as the music drifts towards predictable processes, old landscapes are re-explored – the threshold is breached. When the landscape is stepped into and explored, the magic dies.

## **Between Performer and Audience**

It is tempting to suggest that a further threshold is present in performance between the musicians and the audience – a doorway or opening that can be widened or shut altogether according to the mood of either of the parties. One of theatre's most persistent issues is the view that it represents a barrier: the desire to break through the fourth wall between stage and audience is implicit in most modernist drama – an idea addressed by Jean Chothia's essay in this volume.<sup>5</sup>

The audience for improvisation has a privileged position. As Derek Bailey observes, 'to improvise and not to be responsive to one's surroundings is a contradiction... the audience for improvisation, good or bad, active or passive, sympathetic or hostile, has a power that no other audience has. It can affect the creation of that which is being witnessed. And...has a degree of intimacy with the music that is not achieved in any other situation.'<sup>6</sup>

Despite the difficulty and abstraction of much free improvising, the issues discussed in Milton Babbitt's essay 'Who cares if you listen?',<sup>7</sup> where he argues that contemporary music will be incomprehensible to anyone not intimately involved in the genre, are marginally alleviated by the immediacy of the process. In a way the audience are already past the most awkward barrier to their understanding of proceedings. There is the opportunity to get inside the music in the instant of creation – and as Stanley Cavell has pointed out, this is revelatory: 'we may find ourselves *within* the experience of such compositions, following them; and then the question whether this is music and the problem of its tonal sense, will be – not answered or solved, but rather...will disappear, seem irrelevant'.<sup>8</sup>

It might be thought that this picture is artificial – do we really respond differently to improvisations? Is music not there, as sound in the room, to move us or not according to its own intrinsic qualities? For the sound in the room to be considered music at all, it must be meant – there must be an active intention involved – and while this essay lacks the scope to address issues of intention in art, it is possible to draw attention to the attitude we have to improvised music by looking at cases of deception.

Consider, for example, a situation common in improvised performance, when the musicians emerge suddenly from a long passage of increasingly

fragmented senselessness into an emphatic piece of unison playing, granting the illusion of satisfying structure to the formless noise that has preceded it, a retrospective sense imprinted on the past. For the audience, and indeed the musicians for they are part of the audience too, this spontaneous resolution can be thrilling, cathartic, a kind of magic. Here we have something that only makes sense once its process of becoming is over. It is only its echo in the memory that seems coherent. But it may be that there is a disguised map being followed by the performers here, and that the seeming revelation is a trick, preplanned. And this would make the performance a different kind of object. Similarly, if we see the same band on successive nights and discover that what appeared to be spontaneous creation is prewritten, that solos have been worked out in advance, we feel let down, slightly cheated. Why is it important to know what is improvised and what predetermined? Clearly we respond differently to each, but why? Is it the mysticism of the act of creation? Here we are, little gods, making sense from the void... thus we present ourselves. To be told the sense was in fact prewritten would be to face a significant disappointment, just as it would be similarly deflating to discover that the pyrotechnical vocal gymnastics being apparently performed in one's presence are in fact merely being mimed to a backing tape. Though it may be the same performers on the prerecorded tape, still as audience we feel cheated – there is deceit, something inauthentic here. As an audience we seek out the intimacy, the direct affect described by Derek Bailey above – and that we can respond as we do to moments we sense to be inauthentic is enough to indicate that there is a distinctive, authentic experience to be grasped.

## **Jazz 1: Continual Revolution<sup>9</sup>**

What we have, then, is a model of improvisation in practice: an unrecordable process of continuous flux, balanced on the threshold of the moment, offering potential revelation of new worlds, and having an intimate engagement with its audience. The history of jazz can be viewed as a struggle to keep these elements in play.

The formal essence of jazz is improvisation over a predetermined structure – most usually song form. In the natural development of the music – and no musical form has evolved so rapidly – there is a continual pressing against the boundaries that define the form itself, an ever-present urge to move on, evolve, transcend. Progress has been through an expansion of the vocabulary, or a development of process – a move into new territory where the threshold experience, the hovering on the brink of discovery, can be maintained. Charlie Parker did this through harmonic expansion, and the adoption of hectic tempi; Ornette Coleman through abandoning the song form as the basis for

improvisation; Charles Mingus through the spontaneous extension of form in performance; Miles Davis by a succession of moves from bebop through cool jazz, modal jazz, a hypermodern harmonic and rhythmic approach with the classic quintet with Wayne Shorter et al., and ultimately by embracing amplification and the possibilities offered by rock and funk. But in all these cases, the overarching substance of the music remains unchanging: it still sounds like jazz.

Listening now to the revolutionary music Ornette Coleman was playing in 1959 – *Change of the Century*, *The Shape of Jazz to Come* – it is hard to hear just what is so extraordinary about his approach. We can listen to John Coltrane’s *Giant Steps*<sup>10</sup> – the last step down the road of increasing harmonic complexity begun by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie in the bebop revolution fifteen years earlier – and be unable to distinguish its approach from Ornette’s entirely different tack. *Giant Steps* still follows the standard jazz blueprint, which takes the harmonic structure of the opening and closing theme and uses this as the repeating structure over which the musicians improvise. Ornette Coleman’s approach, while still bookending performances with a theme, makes a radical move beyond song form into improvisation on mood, taking the theme at the start as no more than an indicator of an emotive area to explore. For contemporary audiences, he offered exactly that threshold experience discussed earlier: his vision of a new world opening out through his playing was interpreted by his enthused supporters as a radical refreshing of the music, a whole new wonderland of freedom to explore; and by his detractors as a window on to an awful formless void, chaos, the abyss. It is curious that we can barely catch an echo of this now. Though some of what followed in the free jazz movement he inspired can still seem shocking, Ornette in this period can sound quaint, cheerful, harmless.<sup>11</sup> This must in part be due to the inadequacies of recording as a medium, a point I will return to. But there is another issue here: we have heard so much music since 1959 that our ability to hear has been corrupted by it all. Contemporary notions of dissonance and consonance are radically different from those of fifty or a hundred or three hundred years ago. And just as what has been seen cannot be unseen (an inevitable effect of the internet), so what has been heard cannot be unheard. We can no longer listen to Bach or Monteverdi or even Wagner or Britten without the filter of all the subsequent developments in music which we have been unable to avoid, all the weary noise of the twentieth century since the advent of recording and endless unavoidable regurgitation.

So, to attempt to recreate the music of, say, the Baroque period by using period instruments may have some legitimacy, but to suggest that through such a process we are revealing how the music sounded at the time is

patently nonsense. Even if we were able to slip back in time and listen to a period performance, we would still be condemned to hear that performance through the perceptual filter of all the music which has succeeded it. The neoclassical approach to jazz, treating the past forms of the music with reverence, stumbles against this inevitability. Our ears hear differently – that is the further threshold at which sense and affect must be negotiated. The ear, indeed, is as much of a threshold here as it is in the experience of listening to poetry – the process Angela Leighton explores in her essay in this volume.

## **Jazz 2: The Audience as Obstacle**

The audience for improvisation has a unique effect, both in shaping the results, determining a significant part of the environment within which the performance takes place, and on occasions providing an obstacle that must be overcome. The need for affect, something that will move, and be sufficiently entertaining to keep the majority involved in the process, can lead to trickery, the invocation of learned devices – a bit of smoke and mirrors in lieu of real engagement to achieve the desired result.

Alternatively, one can simply turn one's back.<sup>12</sup> In many performances at the more modern end of the jazz spectrum, the musicians seem to be merely entertaining themselves – their engagement with anything outside the confines of the group is so minimal that one might feel that the same performance would result whether anyone else was in the room or not. It is as though the performers have retreated behind a smooth, unbreachable wall. One might, indeed, assert after Babbitt<sup>13</sup> that in these circumstances it is only the musicians who will know when the doorway of revelation is open, where the threshold into a new world is present; but such an assertion offers a model of performance so caught up in itself, so narcissistic that it risks disappearing into solipsism.

One way to avoid this self-absorption would be to employ a singer – not that this has ever been adopted as a serious solution. Many jazz musicians are instrumentalists who abhor the idea of jazz as a vocal form, and despite or because of the example of those rare singers who have gained wholehearted acceptance within the jazz world, they resent the common view that the legacy of Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald and others sits beneath the jazz umbrella at all. Yet the difficulties such musicians have with engaging with an audience – though the refusal to make this engagement may be seen more as wilful resistance than difficulty – can be almost entirely overcome by adding a vocalist to the ensemble. The singer reaches across the divide, creates an opening in the wall, a threshold through which the audience can attain at least partial glimpses of

the sense of what the musicians on the far side are up to, a bridge across the gulf between language and music.

The need for such a bridge is increasingly apparent now that so much music is available through the proliferation of media, and so much of it is listened to in a casual and unengaged way. Jazz can have a ragged sound, uncomfortable and slightly ugly to the ear – which is irrelevant when the listener is caught up in the process, and can sit inside the music. But where music is consumed differently, as background or mood-setter, only the lush and less abrasive strands of jazz will survive; and then only for the quality of their surface. And here, it is the audience who refuse to cross the threshold and engage with the music as it was (presumably) intended – sitting resolutely, instead, with their backs to the window.

### **Jazz 3: Documentation**

There is no document in improvisation – but in jazz, documents abound. Everything we know about the history of the music relates to landmark recordings – from the Armstrong Hot Fives and Sevens through Parker's recordings for Dial and Savoy, Ornette Coleman's early forays on Atlantic, Coltrane on Atlantic, then Impulse; to the point in the early sixties when to know which record label an artist was on was enough to give one a reasonable idea of their pedigree and style – Blue Note, Riverside, Jasmine: all had their stable of players and their house style.

This points to a significant problem for musicians and for their music. Jazz and recording technology evolved simultaneously. Of course it is enormously useful to be able to listen to an established figure's work over and over again, analyse it and emerge with a better theoretical understanding – from the earliest days of the genre<sup>14</sup> every jazz musician of significance will have spent time analysing the recorded output of the players they admire. But when an improvised form perpetuates itself through recordings, and an essential part of the music can never be captured on record, what is perpetuated is in danger of being something less, or at least other than, the music in its original form. Jazz has become an over-analysed music, so that it is now widely taught in music colleges and elsewhere – and what tends to be taught is a set of rules and processes of dubious value to the improviser.

Jazz theory is a necessary part of the musician's armoury – no player can reliably expect to negotiate a set of changes to, say, a Wayne Shorter tune without a grasp of the theory underlying the harmonies. But to describe a tune like Shorter's *Wild Flower*<sup>15</sup> as an exploration of phrygian maj6 harmonies (mode II of the melodic minor), while it allows you to play something acceptably musical or at least consonant over the chords, is insufficient to an

understanding of what it is to improvise over the tune. That seizing of the moment, its expansion, or the sense of theatre caught in an eternal present, is not contained in the information offered about which notes are legitimate over a Dsus b9 or a C7 lydian dominant chord. The very idea of legitimacy and illegitimacy is challenged by the improviser's art. What is caught in the recording process is not the players' perspective as they hover on the threshold, with a glimpse of new landscape beyond, but the landscape itself.

When Miles Davis released *Kind of Blue*, modal jazz was in its infancy. Remarkable as the recording is, it lends itself far too easily to analysis. For example, the opening tune has a structure based on two dorian scales a semitone apart; the complete form for *Flamenco Sketches* consists of playing a sequence of scales in order, moving from one to the next ad lib; the Miles solo on *So What* has become so famous that not only could two out of three jazz musicians you stopped in the street sing you at least the opening eight bars, but the solo itself has been orchestrated for big band, by George Russell and others, and been quoted by numerous musicians in their own solos.<sup>16</sup> The original glimpse of a magical new landscape afforded by modal albums such as *Kind of Blue* and Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* has led, not to other equivalent threshold experiences, but to a very thorough and uninspiring exploration of the terrain, trampling it into a muddy wasteland.<sup>17</sup>

## **The Death of Jazz**

The death of jazz has been announced with wearying regularity from early in its history, usually as a result of a revolution which is said to have killed the essence of the music. But it is precisely these revolutions which have kept the music alive, maintaining its fragile position on the threshold of new territory. The neoclassical approach to jazz, with its reverence for past documentation and its emphasis on the exploration of old landscapes, condemns the music to suffocate in its own stasis. Saxophonist Steve Lacy describes a point of inertia reached in the 1950s:

[T]hat's where the music always has to be – on the edge – in between the known and the unknown and you have to keep pushing it towards the unknown otherwise it and you die... in the '50's jazz was no longer on the edge. When you reach what was called 'hard bop' there was no mystery any more... for me playing with the accepted people never worked out. Simply because they knew all the patterns and I didn't... when Bud Powell made them, fifteen years earlier, they weren't patterns. But when somebody analysed them and put them into a system it became a school and many players joined it... Jazz got so that it wasn't improvised any more.<sup>18</sup>

He goes on to illustrate the development of jazz by taking a line through successive trumpeters:

[J]azz, from the time it first began, was always concerned with degrees of freedom. The way Louis Armstrong played was ‘more free’ than earlier players. Roy Eldridge was ‘more free’ than his predecessors, Dizzy Gillespie was another stage and [Don] Cherry was another. And you have to keep it going otherwise you lose that freedom. And then the music is finished. It’s a matter of life and death. The only criterion is: – ‘Is this stuff alive or is it dead?’<sup>19</sup>

If we agree with Lacy that jazz progresses by the relentless pursuit of freedom, there is an inevitable end point. We can ask, who was more free than Don Cherry? The answer is, no one. The boundaries of the music – the formal constraints which define it as jazz – were pushed outwards to the point where the free jazz movement emerged into a space with no constraints whatsoever. Musicians in this space have two choices: they can accept the territory of free music, a wider and non-idiomatic form; or they can turn back into the idiom of jazz, and re-explore old territory. In the former case they must abandon jazz altogether; in the latter they are faced with the absence of those threshold elements that keep the music alive.

Even if we reject Lacy’s concern with freedom, it is clear that by concentrating on its recorded history at the expense of its improvisatory essence, jazz has moved in an arc from ‘the sound of surprise’ to a nostalgic recycling of its past.<sup>20</sup>

### **Coda: Improvisation in Interpretation, and the Composer as Improviser**

I have tried to indicate that improvisation is not composition in the moment: that it is a different process entirely, and with a different aim. I will conclude by looking at a couple of instances in which composition and improvisation seem to meet each other on a middle ground.

The first example is György Ligeti’s second string quartet, a transcendently beautiful and difficult piece that seems in part to work better on paper than in performance. There are any number of contemporary compositions that call for improvisation; what is remarkable about Ligeti’s work is that it is ostensibly through-composed, yet reaches out towards the immediacy of the improvised. Parts of the score are so detailed that it is impossible to grasp their substance in the moment.<sup>21</sup> The second movement starts with a kind of canon of precise technique, where a succession of exactly articulated devices, indicating on which string and with what articulation each note is to be played, is passed from player to player. Though the detail of this is manifest in the score, it is

far harder to convey, or grasp, in performance. But there is also the general comment: ‘a few extremely fast metronome markings represent the ideal tempo; the real tempo has to approach the given values as closely as possible’; repeated exhortations to play particular sections ‘as though crazy’; and at a passage of absurdly fast cadenza-like figures, the instruction, ‘the figuration is played as fast as possible, independent of the metre and the bar boundaries, and also independent of the other instruments... Depending on the difficulty of execution, change of register etc., play in a virtuoso “hazardous” manner.’<sup>22</sup> In performance this will become an ad hoc chaos of notes, a gesture in the moment, aiming at an intent – here the music opens out into something spontaneous, ephemeral and gripping.

The second example is the music of the double bassist and composer Charles Mingus. The stamp of Mingus’s personality is all over his music, even when backing a soloist in full flight, and even on albums such as *Oh Yeah*<sup>23</sup> where he leaves Doug Watkins with the unenviable task of filling the bassist’s role while he cajoles and hollers and boots the ensemble along from the piano... In the boiling chaos of his most compelling pieces, he seems to give his sidemen the freedom to do anything – provided that what they choose to do is exactly what he wants.<sup>24</sup> For much of his career he refused to let his musicians write anything down, preferring to teach his pieces by playing or singing lines to the band, often shouting a new counter-line to the horn section in mid performance – nothing too fixed, nothing tied down, a chaos of intent – giving an immediacy of affect, a striking example of creation in the moment. His band was often billed as the Charles Mingus Jazz Workshop – Mingus music was ever a work in progress. Mingus was a prodigiously talented improviser, but what makes his music exceptional is his use of the medium. Jazz musicians tend to enjoy the restrictive nature of the form of the music they play even though, as discussed above, the music is most potent when those restrictions are being stretched. What Mingus achieved was to pick up the medium in both hands and bend it to his will. He not only played bass or piano, but played the entire band – using it as an instrument on which to compose in the moment.

Both these examples represent music as risk taking, where the ‘hazardous’ nature of the enterprise is in the foreground. They point towards possible ways in which the composed and the improvised can form a synthesis: music that exists on the threshold between the two.

## Notes

- 1 ‘Wenn man unter Ewigkeit nicht unendliche Zeitdauer, sondern Unzeitlichkeit versteht, dann lebt der ewig, der in der Gegenwart lebt.’ [If we understand eternity to mean not time without end, but timelessness, then they live forever who live in the present.] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Frankfurt: Edition Suhrkamp, 1963), 6.4311.

- 2 'There is a crucial difference [between interpretation and improvisation] in terms of the way in which performers approach music. If you are playing in a symphony orchestra or if you are playing a piece of chamber music, you are trying, often against fairly heavy odds, to find out what somebody has meant when they said something. And I think that a jazz player, for example, is saying what is in him. He puts very much more of his total personality into what he does. I think he's a much happier individual in many ways.' Anthony Pay, quoted in Derek Bailey, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* (Derbyshire: Moorland Publishing, 1980), 87.
- 3 Alain Danielou, quoted in Bailey, *Improvisation*, 123.
- 4 Cornelius Cardew, 'Towards an Ethic of Improvisation' (1971), in *Cornelius Cardew: A Reader*, ed. Edwin Prévoist (Harlow, England: Copula, 2006), 125–134 (127–128).
- 5 Consider Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, themselves shut off from the play, which happens elsewhere; or Clov in *Endgame*, turning his telescope on the audience: 'I see...a multitude...in transports...of joy. That's what I call a magnifier.' Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 25.
- 6 Bailey, *Improvisation*, 61.
- 7 Milton Babbitt, 'Who cares if you listen?' *High Fidelity* 8, no. 2 (February 1958): 38–40. It is rumoured that the magazine's editor chose to replace the less contentious title ('The Composer as Anachronism') with an invention of his own – unfortunately for Babbitt, who is now remembered more as the author of this than for any of his music. His argument – that just as advancements in physics and mathematics would make lectures in those subjects incomprehensible to the uninformed public, so contemporary music had advanced to the point where the issues of concern to the composer were beyond the reach of a lay audience – has tended to get lost in the furore surrounding the piece's title.
- 8 Stanley Cavell, 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy', in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 73–96 (84). Italics in original.
- 9 There is almost no decent criticism on jazz – no body of writing to compare to Adorno, Hans Keller et al. In *But Beautiful* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), perhaps the only truly brilliant piece of writing about jazz, Geoff Dyer observes that jazz is its own best critic – the music itself in its headlong self-referential development provides its own commentary and exposition (165–172). In addition to Dyer's book, the reader interested in jazz revolutions is referred to Valerie Wilmer's book about the free jazz movement, *As Serious as your Life* (London: Allison and Busby Ltd, 1977).
- 10 Ornette Coleman, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, Atlantic LP 1317, 1959 and *Change of the Century*, Atlantic LP 1327, 1959, released 1960; John Coltrane, *Giant Steps*, Atlantic LP 1311, 1959, released 1960.
- 11 Compare the devastating noise of Albert Ayler's 'Ghosts' from *Spiritual Unity*, ESP Disk ESP1002–2, 1964 with any of Ornette Coleman's early recordings.
- 12 Miles Davis, never one to pander to his audience's desires, took exactly this step in the mid 1950s and never really turned to face them again.
- 13 Babbitt, 'Who cares if you listen?'
- 14 That is, after the New Orleans scene of the early 1900s. Buddy Bolden never recorded; the trumpet players who followed him, however – King Oliver, Louis Armstrong and others – all did.
- 15 Recorded on Wayne Shorter, *Speak No Evil*, Blue Note BLP 4194, 1965.
- 16 To give one example – the tenor solo on Branford Marsalis's 'Ballad of Chet Kincaid' from *Crazy People Music*, Columbia CK-46072, 1990 quotes extensively from it amid much studio hilarity.

- 17 Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue*, Columbia CK-64935, 1959; John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme*, Impulse! GRD155, 1965.
- 18 Quoted in Bailey, *Improvisation*, 71–2.
- 19 Quoted in Bailey, *Improvisation*, 73.
- 20 Whitney Balliett, *The Sound of Surprise – Forty-Six Pieces on Jazz* (New York: Dutton, 1959); and cf. Bailey, *Improvisation*, 65: ‘Each successive jazz revival leaves the music more firmly established as a bulwark of the nostalgia industry.’
- 21 Evan Parker has suggested that composing on paper belongs more in the realm of literature than in music: ‘[I]f the score represents some kind of ideal performance why does it ever have to be performed? Surely it would be better for the music-lover to read the score, alone or with others, conducted or unconducted as his preference dictates? If it is objected that this attitude is too unemotional, then I would reply that the score is itself too unemotional; and since it concerns itself with the description rather than the emotions themselves it would be more appropriate to consider score-making as an esoteric branch of the literary arts with its own criteria rather than as anything to do with music.’ Quoted in Bailey, *Improvisation*, 96.
- 22 György Ligeti, *String Quartet no. 2* (1968) (Mainz: Schott, 1971).
- 23 Charles Mingus, *Oh Yeah*, Atlantic LP 1377, 1961.
- 24 Cf. Dyer, *But Beautiful*, 97.