

of understanding how we live, our response – in this case, our ethical discourse – needs to be adequate to the task. We have seen the strengths of considering music as historically and culturally embedded rather than as an object remote from the material world. Unravelling the McClary–Taruskin debate further clarified our argument for the importance of agency and responsibility for doing justice to music and explanations of how it engages (with) us, also ethically. Finally, by turning to Critchley, we found an avenue that offered further clarification of the ethics that may support future ethical criticism of music as we propose it. Comparing the Taruskin–McClary debate with Critchley’s theory, we can see that Critchley’s ideas about the ways in which individuals can take charge of their own ethical experience and agency are in fact echoed by recent musicological scholarship, in which a focus on agency and responsibility has been key for ethical criticism. And it is perhaps especially noticeable in Taruskin’s comments that we can recognize the above idea of (necessary) circularity: this commitment and these ethical discourses in turn *found* who the critic is (as we saw when he warned about scholars being ‘turned into a mere means’). If music is capable of interweaving with the narrative of our moral lives in complex ways, it appears that one way to maximize our understanding of its ethical potential and pave the path forward for the ethical criticism of music is to acknowledge not only its capacity to inspire interaction and engagement, but also its resistance to totalizing discourse that would invite essentialism (for example, by strictly separating categories such as subject and object). Judging from the examples covered in this chapter, it appears that music is able to work in this capacity by encouraging strong feelings of ‘demands that demand approval’, and that most justice is done when agents take responsibility and commit themselves to explanation, rather than letting music remain a distanced, mysterious and ineffable object.

In the next chapter we turn to a different kind of ethical discourse, namely that which occurs in improvised music. We explore ideas about response and respect between musicians as they seek interaction through music, while working towards and maintaining both individual and collective responsibility.

Chapter 3 Interaction

Marcel Cobussen

The origins of music may be lost in obscurity but, from its earliest beginnings, it seems to have played an essential part in social interaction.

Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind*, p. 17.

To learn step by step to cast off the supposed individual! To expose the errors of the ego! To see egoism as error! But not to mistake altruism for its opposite! That would only be love for other supposed individuals! No! To go beyond ‘me’ and ‘you’!

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, 9, 11 [7]

Non-listening

Il faut écouter. One must listen. Such was the concluding imperative of Chapter 1, ‘Listening’, in which we first searched for specific contributions that music can make to the discourse on ethics and ethical behaviour.¹ What music can teach us is, first of all, an attentive and perhaps unbiased listening attitude and, along with that, a way of being receptive towards an otherness that always already escapes the (discursive) domain of the Self. Music invites and entices us to listen; it compels us to listen to others and to otherness – to the unfamiliarity of certain sound worlds, to the unheard sounds of our environment, to non-discursive meaning or the sonorous elements within meaningful utterances and so on – and it thereby simultaneously evokes a feeling of responsibility, of duty. What can or should I do to music? I must listen. This categorical statement is, according to Peter Szendy, imposed on us as we encounter music.²

However, all too often it is precisely music and its producers who taunt and challenge such beguiling thoughts. Musical injunctions – for example, certain developments in improvised music – at least encourage some relativism. The duty to listen, the call to pay attention, although primarily directed at the audience, is

¹ Instead of locating and indicating certain formal characteristics in and of music as ethical, we are referring here to a *medium specific sensibility* – that is, a sensibility which is formed in and by a medium, in this case music. Neither an explicit or unique feature of a subject nor an intrinsic quality of an object, sensibility only comes into existence in, with and through the medium – as a working, not as a work.

² Peter Szendy, *Listen: A History of our Ears* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 8.

certainly also meant for performing musicians. However, for a different view on this theme, consider former AMM guitarist Keith Rowe's description of his mindset during the recording of *Duos for Doris*, a CD he made with pianist John Tilbury:

Being strangely aware of John's movements, but not necessarily listening to what he is playing; not reacting to his playing but being affected by it. The act of NOT listening is very important, preferring juxtaposition to confabulation, disturbing the congruity and avoiding Pavlovian laminates.

Non Listening for me is about the intensification of the edge, or frame. This might be seen as an attempt to limit certain aspects of encroachment of the external environment, and it's almost always been part of my musical makeup. I'm very aware that it's almost heretical to praise not listening, but nevertheless I feel there is a place for it. I write these thoughts not needing or wanting to convince anyone of the correctness of these ideas, but only to explain how I approached playing these sessions.

If I attempted not to actively listen to John's piano as my hand descended towards the guitar laid out before me, what might happen? Possibly I might avoid triggering memories of the piano, memories that by definition would take me away from the immediate context and towards some looping representations of past occasions. Clearly this is not an absolute state because I imagine that some memory is needed to comprehend the present. But given that my aim is to focus my attention on the situation in that room, that room will likely contain thousands of references which will in turn trigger memories. The question for me then is how I might relate to whatever is occurring in that room, certainly not with any loquacious clarity but rather with the obmutescence of an object on a shelf.

So what I might mean by not listening is while I'm paying close attention to what I myself am doing, listening/hearing will be only a very small part of my comprehension of that complex room, or possibly listening might play no part at all. Listening will/may have become overwhelmed by the histories of painting/music/the instrument/noise/the nature of success/the nature of failure/politics/poverty/life/death/appropriation/who am I?, on and on.³

Non-listening as an alternative prerequisite for music-making; deliberately not paying attention to the performance of your fellow musician in order to arrive at an aesthetically satisfying result; consciously obstructing the possibility of letting yourself be influenced by the other's input and/or by (certain) memories: Rowe's playing seems permeated by an attitude of *de*-listening, an endeavour *not* to listen since the other might affect his actions negatively, an intentional secluding

³ Keith Rowe, liner notes for *Duos for Doris* (Erstwhile Records, 2003).

oneself from the other in order to pay more attention to certain elements in one's own playing.

How can we understand this almost provocative position from the ethical perspective we developed in Chapter 1? What remains of Levinas's call that, before anything else, we are responsible for, and should respect, the face of the Other, when Rowe deliberately tries to ignore Tilbury's piano sounds? What remains of Derrida's explicit claim that ethics should, first of all, be regarded as an act of hospitality, when Rowe seems to keep the doors and windows of his musical house closed, even for the sonic contributions of a friend and kindred spirit? What remains of Elaine Scarry's direct link between an aesthetical and an ethical attitude, an increased sensibility for injustice aroused by an attentiveness to aesthetically valuable phenomena? And what remains of Garry Hagberg's statement that 'to allow episodic perception to occlude the memory-rooted view of the long form with its antecedents and its consequents is, in the forms of attention we give to both persons and players, simultaneously a moral and an aesthetic failing' when Rowe tries to marginalize memory?⁴

Is it sufficient to come to the conclusion that the concept of non-listening is a paradigmatic example of a more general evil that surfaces every now and then in our (contemporary and Western) society, namely the indifference towards the other, the almost exclusive orientation towards one's self, the tendency to prefer the sound of one's own voice over the receptive silence which is necessary to hear the other? In short, is Rowe's approach a case in point of unethical behaviour as Levinas, Derrida, Scarry and many others have 'defined' it – that is, as ignoring and obstructing an invitation towards, and respect for, the other?

These questions will guide this chapter. As in Chapter 1, the emphasis will be on the attitude of listening to explore a possible relationship between music and ethics, or better, to suggest a useful and perhaps even unique contribution that music can make to the discourse on ethics. Again, it will not be our aim to regard ethics as an adjective that can be added to music in order to disclose or emphasize some of its formal features. Nor do we intend to divide music into an ethical and unethical part.⁵ If we speak of ethical music or musical ethics, we do not mean to say that there are some intrinsic characteristics which make (certain) music ethical, independent from a person's relation to (that) music, independent of an interpretation of and interaction with it: the ethical happens in a space between music and its listeners.

In this chapter we propose to regard the musical domain, and especially the field of improvised music, as a playground where, through (non-)listening,

⁴ Garry Hagberg, *Art and Ethical Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 267.

⁵ It might be true that morality can reveal a work of art to be objectionable. However, in our opinion it is more interesting to investigate how art (music) can contribute to reflect on the moral point of view from which people judge a particular object or event as unwanted and reprehensible or, conversely, as valuable and desirable.

interactions between musicians take place that could be investigated in terms of their ethicality. In other words, in comparison to Chapter 1, both a wider and a narrower connection between listening and music will be addressed. On the one hand, listening will be treated as just one aspect of the more general concept of interaction. On the other hand, the focus will be only on performing improvisers, either during a concert or while recording in a studio, rather than on listeners in a more general sense.

Interaction and improvisation

With a wink at Peter Kivy we could call jazz and improvised music the fine art of interaction. Of course, all music-making is imbued with interaction between the participating musicians; one could even state for sound reasons that interaction is a prerequisite for real or true music-making. Playing together means paying attention to what the other musicians are doing and somehow attempting to attune to their contributions. But nowhere does this seem to be more in evidence than during the act of improvising.⁶ Without the opportunity to fall back completely on a score or any other pre-established rules, structures or agreements, the performers of ostensibly free improvised music in particular must rely on their ability to cooperate musically as well as socially, in order to arrive at an acceptable musical result while playing.⁷ At any given moment in a performance, the improviser makes musical choices in relation to what the others are doing – choices that might radically alter the orientation of the piece. The ability to respond in an appropriate manner to changing musical events is an attainment that any improviser has to learn. She/he constantly has to make decisions regarding what to play and when to play it, thereby also inevitably eliciting responses from the co-musicians. As

⁶ Although we will restrict ourselves here to jazz and improvised music, we are very well aware that improvisation is an inextricable part of all *music-making*. To a greater or lesser degree, every performance is permeated by, and is only possible through, certain decisions made by the performers in the moment of playing. Even fully notated compositions can be regarded as solidified improvisations. However, from an ethico-political point of view, differences between primarily notated and mainly improvised music should not be neglected either. Ideal-typically, composed music starts from different power relations between the musicians involved, the composer included, than improvised music. Especially in so-called 'free' improvised music, every participating musician is, in principle, a composer, contributing to the total form and structure of the piece which is (often) not determined in advance. (The addition 'ideal-typically' is needed here to emphasize that the border between composed and improvised music is often hard to draw.)

⁷ Just what is an 'acceptable musical result' is, of course, hard to determine satisfactorily, let alone universally. It differs between musicians mutually, as well as between musicians and audience and members of the audience mutually. Expectations, desires, knowledge, mood and so on – they all play a crucial role in this. Nevertheless, we like to maintain the idea, albeit in the most general, superficial and unscholarly sense.

Paul Berliner writes in *Thinking in Jazz*, 'anyone in the group can suddenly take the music in a direction that defies expectation, requiring the others to make instant decisions as to the development of their own parts'.⁸ Musicians who miss opportunities to respond adequately to certain musical events are often said to be not listening to what is going on in the ensemble. To listen properly is essential to the process by which a specific musical idea is picked up on, developed or ignored.

The ongoing process of decision making that takes place in the ensemble perhaps explains why musicians often say that the most important thing is to listen. They mean it in a very active sense: they must listen closely because they are continually called upon to respond to and participate in an ongoing flow of musical action that can change or surprise them at any moment.⁹

Explicitly connecting the musical and the social, musicologist Ingrid Monson states in *Saying Something* that musical roles in interaction are simultaneously human personalities in interaction, determining the success or failure of a musical event.¹⁰ Thus, in the same moment, the social and the musical are fused. The point just made offers an opportunity to elaborate on the social side of improvisation, to investigate more closely the nature of that sociality.

An almost paradigmatic example of the importance and effect in jazz improvisation of interaction in general and listening in particular can be traced in an example taken from a recording by the second Miles Davis Quintet, with saxophonist Wayne Shorter, pianist Herbie Hancock, bass player Ron Carter and drummer Tony Williams. In the second version of 'Footprints' on the 1967 album *Winter in Europe* (the recording of a live concert at the Konserthuset in Stockholm), after the theme has been played on trumpet and sax, the solo by Davis almost immediately departs from the initial 6/8 time, into an ambiguous meter, until Carter picks up his 6/8 bass pattern again at a certain moment. Compared to other versions of the tune performed by the same quintet, it becomes clear that this rhythmic change, this dismantling of the groove, which occurs again in the subsequent sax solo, is not a result of predetermined and extensively rehearsed arrangements but emanates from subtle sonic and visual gestures – small yet significant bits of information which the players use to instruct and forewarn one another of impending shifts, and to comment almost immediately on musical events as they occur.

Somewhere near the end of his sax solo, Wayne Shorter – after having played three choruses in accordance with the harmonic scheme of 'Footprints' and having even quoted literally the last four bars of the theme – seems to indicate through his

⁸ Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz. The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 349.

⁹ Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), p. 43.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

soloing that he is in for an abandonment of the rhythmic and harmonic structure of the tune. At first, the rhythm section allows him space to expose and develop his musical ideas by playing less dense figures under or next to Shorter's explorations. But soon, Tony Williams, in particular, begins to react to the quick notes, scales and phrases produced by Shorter in order to retort: instead of mainly using his cymbals as he did in the previous choruses, Williams now plays short and loud paradiddles on the floor toms, thereby acting more like an active conversation partner than a mere accompanist.

What is happening here is a sort of interaction quite different from common jazz practice: rather than maintaining the harmonic and rhythmic structure of the piece, the accompanists start to follow the lead of the soloist.¹¹ By the adoption of an extremely attentive listening attitude – both directed towards Shorter and the rest of the rhythm section – each group member attains a certain freedom in the development of the music outside the pre-given structure of the tune. An elastic form is created that can be stretched or reduced to accommodate the development of the improvisation.

It is primarily Ron Carter who, by playing the bass riff which also accompanies the main theme of 'Footprints', proposes (temporary) returns to the original form and rhythm. The roles of piano and drums are less defined; rather than providing a stable harmonic and rhythmic background against which the soloist can excel, they often throw in musical ideas which alter the direction the soloist had in mind. The accompaniment is replaced by challenges and provocations thereby increasing the level of interaction. However, rather less unusual are Hancock's and Williams's dialogues with each other rather than with the soloist, especially when Carter plays his ostinato figure. In this way, a complex network of actions, reactions and interactions is woven, one that is only made possible by extraordinary aural and visual attention and efforts to recognize and react creatively to cues and calls as they pass on the fly.¹²

How can we understand these forms of interaction in which musical risk, vulnerability and trust are so prominent? How can we relate to these interactions in which insecurity is often and consciously sought out, and almost constant provocations play such an important role? How can we appreciate those musical situations in which new ideas and prevailing emotions are tested for their

¹¹ Chris Smith, 'A Sense of the Possible: Miles Davis and the Semiotics of Improvisation', in Bruno Nettl (ed.), *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 269.

The way in which the Miles Davis Quintet worked thus differs significantly from the more traditional model described by Kathleen Higgins, in which the solo instrument and the ensemble play against one another. We agree with Higgins's point that a jazz ensemble – described by her as a 'diversity in unity' – can be regarded as a model of ethical interaction, but we tend to think that the interactions taking place during a jazz performance are more complex and elaborate than she suggests.

¹² *Ibid.*

veracity, coherence and vitality? In our opinion, paying attention to the aesthetic contribution of the other players has transformed here, at least partly, into an ethics of paying respect; the musical response-ability has been converted into a shared and mutual ethical responsibility.¹³ In other words, what the members of the second Miles Davis Quintet seem to share is a responsibility for their own actions as well as a consideration of how these actions might affect the others. Each performer acknowledges and accepts an individual responsibility for the decisions he makes and the way in which he engages with the others to produce a convincing and interesting piece of music. One proof of their ability to play is the way in which these musicians have learned to fit in with the broad gamut of sounds and the personalities encountered and available. In short, their playing is (in)formed by respect for the others and for the musical context – in other words, this respect has a musical as well as a social component. Whether to lead or to support, to complement or to contrast, to play or not to play; whether to play loudly or softly, quickly or slowly, inside or outside the pre-given harmonic and/or rhythmic structure of the tune, and so on: all of these ongoing decisions involve close attention to the emerging piece in both an aesthetic and a socio-ethical way.

Musical interaction and the ethics of otherness

If we can agree on a close connection between genuine interaction and a careful attention for 'the other', it is not difficult to find philosophical arguments to support the claim that the performances of the Miles Davis Quintet carry traces of something that might be called ethical.

In a radical criticism of the Western metaphysical tradition, Emmanuel Levinas depicts ontology as the will to understand and grasp everything. It does not rest before the unknown has been identified completely and has been placed within the totality of what is and can be thought. Levinas deems this the reduction of an absolute otherness to the order of 'the Same' or 'the Self', a fundamentally unethical stance. Ethics is, for Levinas, precisely the location of a point of alterity or exteriority that cannot be reduced to 'the Same'.

His analysis focuses, however, not only and not even primarily on the object-oriented attention and appropriation of the philosophical conventions but primarily on the relation between human beings. The ethical relation is one in which I am related to 'the face of the other', 'the face' being defined as 'the way in which the other presents himself, which exceeds the idea of the other in me'.¹⁴ The face is what resists me by its opposition; it opposes my power over it, my violence – that

¹³ Garry Hagberg calls the capability to play what ought to be played and to hear that what is played is precisely what is needed in a given musical context a *moral sensitivity*. See *Art and Ethical Criticism*, pp. 275–76.

¹⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 50.

is, it resists the assimilation of the other in the self. My behaviour can be called ethical when the face of the other – even or especially the stranger to whom I am indifferent, who does not affect me and whose well-being is not to my own advantage – nevertheless matters to me. It is exactly this otherness that concerns me. In the ethical relation, the other human being remains an other. And it is this otherness, an otherness which cannot be logically justified and which exceeds the differences that can be connected to salient features, that ethically connects her or him with me.¹⁵

The ethical can thus take place in my interaction with another human being, provided that I respect the absolute alterity of the other. In a conversation with François Poirié, Levinas argues that to respect the other is to be considerate of the other. It is courtesy which gives access to the face.

To show respect is to bow down not before the law, but before a being who commands a work from me. But for this command to not involve humiliation – which would take me from the very possibility of showing respect – the command I receive must also be a command to command him who commands me. It consists in commanding a being to command me.¹⁶

What Levinas makes clear here is that this respect cannot be enforced by some ethical code or universal rule but should originate from a singular responsibility I have for the other. This thought especially is picked up by Zygmunt Bauman in his book *Postmodern Ethics*. Already in the first pages he downgrades the 'typically modern ways' of addressing ethical problems – that is, responding to ethical challenges with coercive normative regulation in political practice and the search for absolutes, universals and foundations in ethico-philosophical theories. Bauman advocates the substitution of learnable knowledge of ethical rules for an ethical self constituted by a truly personal and singular responsibility, a postmodern ethics which cannot fall back on prevailing norms and values, solidified in socio-political rules and laws which can be given universal form.¹⁷ Following Levinas, he states:

I take responsibility for the other. But I take that responsibility not in the way one signs a contract and takes upon himself the obligations that the contract stipulates ... My responsibility, which constitutes, simultaneously, the other as

¹⁵ The face cannot be the possible object of a photographer. It cannot be reduced to the domain of the visual, to some pure and simple observation. The face cannot become something that thinking would be able to encompass. It exceeds thought; it is the incomprehensible and unobservable as only that can prevent the possibility of appropriation.

¹⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. A. Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), p. 43.

¹⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 11.

the face and me as the moral self, is unconditional ... I am I in as far as I am for the other.¹⁸

Bauman's ethics is not about the duty correctly performed, but about the urge to act. An ethical person can never be entirely sure that she/he has acted in the right manner. Being more directly politically oriented than Levinas, Bauman sees the dismantling of the welfare state essentially as a process of putting ethical responsibility where it belongs – that is, among the private concerns of individuals.¹⁹ Like his source of inspiration, Levinas, he sees no good in leaving ethics to an impersonal community; being ethical – that is, being *for* the other – precedes, or should precede, being *with* the other. We will come back to the distinction Bauman makes here.

Before investigating how productive and relevant Levinas's and Bauman's thoughts are for (improvised) music, one other issue needs to be raised. The problem of calling upon Levinas and Bauman in the context of a project on music and ethics is that both of them see no role reserved for art on the path towards a more ethical society and an improved moral relationship with other human beings. In *La réalité et son ombre (Reality and its Shadow)*, Levinas judges severely what he sees as the exaggerated importance and values that are ascribed to art. 'Art, essentially disengaged, constitutes in a world of initiative and responsibility, a dimension of evasion' is his scathing assessment.²⁰ The aesthetical has a stupefying character; it contrasts with knowledge and keeps people from real problems. Therefore, one needs to exercise vigilance: 'Art is not the supreme value of civilization, and it is not forbidden to conceive a stage in which it will be reduced to a source of pleasure – having a place, but only a place, in man's happiness.'²¹

Levinas's main reproach is that the aesthetic disowns and refuses the face of the other because it confines itself to a play with forms. He notes that the receiving subject, the spectator or the listener, might be affected and carried away by artistic formalistic aspects, so that one cannot speak of consent, acceptance, initiative, or freedom. In other words, she/he recoils from the bewitchment and flush of art's intrinsic rhythms.

Decisive for Levinas is the idea that art gets its value from aesthetic pleasure instead of being able to establish truth or reality. By itself it knows no virtuousness; it is irresponsible. And the artist extricates himself from 'the real world' for the sake of that other world, the world of his art; with that, she/he is anything but available for the ethical demands of the 'real' world.

Granted, Levinas wrote this essay in 1948 in reaction, primarily, to the prevailing ideas of the art for art's sake movement. But Bauman still denies art any

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 74 and 78.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

²⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, 'Reality and its Shadow', in Seán Hand, *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), p. 141.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

ethical expressiveness at the beginning of the 1990s. Dividing social space into three interwoven yet distinct processes – those of cognitive, moral and aesthetic ‘spacings’ – Bauman writes that ‘neither the cognitively nor the aesthetically spaced worlds are hospitable to moral spacing. In both, moral urges are alien bodies and pathological growths.’²² Like Levinas, Bauman understands the aesthetic space mainly as a site for amusement and enjoyment. To be sure, otherness and the other are tolerated in aesthetic spacing – Bauman even calls the aesthetic attitude *proteophilia*, love of strangers – but their only right to exist is that they offer pleasure; the other can appear solely as an object of enjoyment. Whatever sharing there seems to be is incidental and purely superficial; proximity depends on the volume of fun and entertainment the other is capable of purveying.²³ In other words, the aesthetic space is free of ethical constraints; the attention for the other lasts as long as the desire to be entertained is still present, whereas a real ethical stance entails keeping attention in place as long as the other may need it. This brings Bauman to the conclusion that ‘amusement value is in principle an enemy of moral responsibility’.²⁴

Encountering the other from a position of individual responsibility and respect; accepting fundamental uncertainties because particular decisions regarding the contact with others cannot be grounded in established rules; not attempting to reduce the other’s input to the structures (conventions, laws) of the self: those thoughts or concrete recommendations traverse and/or determine the ethics of Levinas and Bauman. However, they also seem to be a rather adequate description of the interactions taking place during the performances of the Miles Davis Quintet. To play ‘beyond themselves’, to do something different from that which they normally do, using their imagination to be more creative and more innovative – that is what Davis demanded from his fellow musicians. Wayne Shorter recalled, in an interview, the magic and excitement of working together: ‘We all knew that we were going into some territory, some virgin territory or some points unknown.’²⁵ To anticipate the possible directions of the other musicians requires a developed and empathetic sense of listening as well as a more social and ethical sensitivity towards those others. In our opinion, Levinas’s and Bauman’s rather rigorous rejection of the arts and the aesthetic realm as domains that exclude ethical responsibility requires some reconsideration and modification. In a space where people collaborate on a joint artistic process and product, as in musical improvisation, the ethical and the aesthetical often overlap and reinforce one another.

Although hardly included in the index of books on the subject of improvisation, respect, responsibility and successful improvisations are almost always bracketed

²² Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, p. 180.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 178–79.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

²⁵ Jeremy Yudkin, *Miles Davis, Miles Smiles and the Invention of Post Bop* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 5.

together by both scholars and musicians.²⁶ In sketching the outlines of a major research programme on improvisation, community and social practice (ICASP) in Canada, Ajay Heble states that ‘improvisation demands shared responsibility for participation ... an ability to negotiate differences, and a willingness to accept challenges of risk and contingency’.²⁷ In *Sync or Swarm*, David Borgo remarks that ‘in the moment of performance and through the act of listening, our personal, social, and cultural understandings – and interpersonal and intercultural sensibilities – can also be powerfully changed in the rapture and rupture of improvisation’.²⁸ In *No Sound is Innocent*, drummer Edwin ‘Eddie’ Prévost writes:

... if intra-personal relations are uncooperative, unless there is some element of interchange, even if it’s only sparring, then the possibility of productive new music transcending individual sensibilities is slim ... Speaking and acting in response to another human being is the very essence of human existence.²⁹

And, further on in the same book, he notes that the success of a performance depends on knowing the appropriate action:

The guide for this is essentially *moral*: will it lead to beneficial effects upon me, upon fellow musicians, upon the performance, upon the audience?³⁰

The improvising musician has a musical, social and ethical responsibility to deal with all the direct and indirect stimuli that somehow determine the musical outcomes.

The ethics of musical conversation

Although not always explicitly expressed, most texts on improvisation are pervaded with ethical considerations made operational through such concepts as

²⁶ Cf. Derek Bailey, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992); Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*; Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something*; Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble, *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004); and Gary Peters, *The Philosophy of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

²⁷ Ajay Heble, ‘About ICASP’, *Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice*, at: <http://www.improvcommunity.ca/about>.

²⁸ David Borgo, *Sync or Swarm: Improvising Music in a Complex Age* (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 30.

²⁹ Edwin Prévost, *No Sound is Innocent* (Harlow: Copula, 1995), pp. 72 and 80.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 126–27, emphasis added.

respect, openness, responsibility, hospitality, attentive listening and receptivity as well as cognate terms such as vulnerability, risk, courage, hesitation, insecurity and so on; these terms become relevant because, almost by definition, improvisation leaves space for invention, discovery, experimentation, trials and various musical options.

Within a musical framework, this sincere interest in the roles of the other participants during a performance or a recording should not necessarily lead to an agreement on the formal continuation of a piece, its musical language, or the use of certain (sonic) materials.³¹ It is perhaps here, with this observation, that we can trace an explicit musical contribution to the ethical discourse, a more media-specific ethics made manifest in and through improvisation – a musical ethics which oscillates between assimilation and indifference, between the efforts to incorporate the other's input into one's own idiom and the total negation of the other's involvement in the musical process and product, between a colonizing reduction of otherness to sameness and an absolute unwillingness to relate to the other. The game piece *Cobra* by American composer, saxophonist and producer John Zorn can function as a sonic realization of this in-between-ness. *Cobra* is a conducted or controlled collective improvisation for one prompter and an unlimited number of musicians with any kinds of instrument. In front of the prompter are several colour-coded cue cards, each referring to a specific operation. A yellow 'S' stands for 'Substitute', meaning that those musicians who are playing must stop and those not playing must come in. When the blue 'MA' card is held up, the same group of players should radically change the music they are playing at that moment.³² Raising the white 'D' card (Duos), the prompter indicates that one of the players can (or should) choose someone to play with. Through these cards, more than 20 musical signs or directions can be communicated.

The last example also indicates that it is not necessarily the prompter who sets the course of the piece. Although she/he can certainly take some initiatives, she/he is mainly an intermediary, transferring cues from the musicians to the rest of the ensemble. In other words, holding up the red card with a '1' on it – write down what you are playing and reproduce it when called – is an instruction which might come from a request by one of the group members. This request can be submitted by first catching the attention of the prompter, followed by a specific gesture, in this case touching one's head and raising one finger.³³ As more than one instruction can be operative simultaneously, what arises with a performance

³¹ We are not referring here to the famous 'sax battles' that sometimes mark the end of a jazz or blues festival as these 'fights' are waged on the basis of a common musical ground, either literally, when the harmonic framework is determined, or ideologically, when all sax players share more or less the same musical background and conventions.

³² To be more precise, during the upholding of the cards, the ensemble can see and prepare; only at the downbeat does the instruction become operative.

³³ When a musician wants the yellow 'S' card, she/he has to touch her/his mouth and then raise three fingers; touching the ear and raising one finger means that the prompter

of *Cobra* is a kind of musical theatre, starring a prompter, often holding up more than one card, and several performers, playing, listening, paying attention to each other and to the prompter, waving, touching body parts and raising fingers, and all this within a matter of seconds. Although the recognition of the next call is subject to the discretion of the prompter, her/his influence on the sounding result of a particular *Cobra* performance is, of course, quite limited: she/he is unable to affect the exact choice of tones the individual performers wish to produce when, for example, playing a duo. And this equally applies to the musicians: choosing one of the other performers with whom to play a duo primarily means choosing an instrument; the manner in which that instrument will be played, the volume, the number of notes, the speed and so on all has to be left to the discretion of the chosen one. Put differently, an invitation to participate extended by one player to one or more others can simply never be grounded on the stipulation to comply with the musical ideas of the 'host' but can still be aesthetically, as well as socially (and ethically), acceptable.

The point we want to make here is that although many musicians and scholars (Monson, Berliner, Hagberg) regard improvisation as a kind of conversation there seems to be a fundamental difference between the preconditions for a verbal and a musical 'conversation'. A meaningful and exciting musical conversation does not necessarily have to be built on a consensus about its form and content. It is not only that the propriety to let someone have his say does not have to be observed in music-making; nor do the attention and respect for the other's input have to be articulated in a mutual agreement on the output. Whereas a verbal dialogue or group discussion can only be satisfying when people react to each other's contributions using more or less the same formal standards and discursive language, this is no absolute prior condition for an interesting and meaningful musical improvisation.³⁴ Rather, in the latter, otherness is accepted as a given, a sonic challenge, an opportunity perhaps to transgress one's own restrictions, to be creatively stimulated. Pieces like *Cobra* derive their aesthetical and (thereby) also their ethical attraction precisely from the tensions at work in the impossibilities of total assimilation and complete indifference, both musically and interpersonally.

However, in order to investigate a possible contribution of musical improvisation to the ethical discourse, we leave this track for another, in order to consider more fundamental objections against the emphasis in both Levinas and Bauman on individual responsibility.

should pick up the blue 'MA' card; playing a duo (the white 'D' card) becomes possible after touching the nose and putting up one finger.

³⁴ Therefore we tend to disagree with Garry Hagberg, who states that, in a dialogical conversation, the simple attitude of mutual respect is a precondition for success and precisely this is true in dialogical improvisation, too (*Art and Ethical Criticism*, p. 273). In our opinion, musical conversations open the possibility of rethinking and extending the linguistic mores of mutual respect. Musical aesthetics and ethics allow for disregard, cacophony and completely unexpected turns.

From the individual to the collective

Through music, the question might be asked to what extent we can be held fully responsible at all times. To what extent can musicians individually assume liability for their actions and the final sonic outcomes? Musical improvisation might become a means not to abandon individual responsibility for some kind of aesthetic irresponsibility as Levinas and Bauman seem to intimate, but to reconsider the strict individual character of ethical behaviour. Without intending to be exhaustive, we see three musical realities that could implicitly query the dominant conditions of an ethics as proposed by Levinas and Bauman – an ethics which requires a subject somehow being able to weigh up situations, conscious of ethical feelings and able to accept the consequences ensuing from certain actions. In other words, although ethical behaviour cannot be based on rational arguments, according to Levinas and Bauman, what nevertheless seems to be postulated is a rational and sentient being, knowable for himself, and always responsible for her/his actions and thoughts. It seems clear that improvising musicians cannot at all times fulfil these stipulations.

First station

Drawn Inward is a CD by a septet led by the British saxophonist Evan Parker, creating a mix of free improvisation, live electronics and real-time sound processing. Five of seven musicians operate a computer, two of them in addition to the more traditional instruments of percussion and violin. Only Parker himself and bass player Barry Guy do not have any electronic equipment at their disposal. The electronics are not used simply to thicken the texture; rather, they are employed to process sounds in real time and to improvise with and from them. These sounds can be taken from any or all of the other performers and may also include sounds already transformed. They can then be processed or manipulated further either singly or in combination.

The input of a particular player can thus be transformed continuously. Indeed, the performance as a whole can be sampled and used as raw material for further transformations and development, the results then being fed back into the collective pool of sounds. The electronic sound manipulations thus veil to a large extent the 'original' sounds of the more traditional instruments. Cut off from their source from the very beginning, the processed sounds wander around in an uncanny sonic territory.³⁵

The simple question we would like to pose here (and leave as yet unanswered) is how we can think responsibility in musical improvisation once the sounds are processed by electronic equipment and are (therefore) hardly recognizable and no longer controllable by the individual musicians? Put differently, how does personal responsibility relate to a kind of techno-aesthetical manipulation? If the

³⁵ For a more detailed description of *Drawn Inward* in relation to the ethics of Alain Badiou, see Marcel Cobussen, 'Noise and Ethics: On Evan Parker and Alain Badiou', *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 46/1 (April 2005), pp. 29–42.

consequences of one's playing are unable to be anticipated in any way, how can one be accountable for one's (re)actions?

Second station

Sigmund Freud has already undermined the notion that we are always in control of our ethical choices.³⁶ An individual's instinctual and unconscious desires obstruct a total domination and therefore subvert the ability to be completely responsible for one's behaviour. The (ethical) choices a human makes are not always 'his', but are somehow influenced by the instinctive psychic structures at work in the unconsciousness. If we are almost uninformed about at least some sources or causes of our behaviour, how can we ever be fully responsible for our ethical lives?

Freud's perspective is primarily psychological, not philosophical or moral. He is less interested in what we should do than what we in fact do. In his psychology the idea of an autonomous 'self' becomes a fiction. This is evident also in music-making (and perhaps especially in improvised music). The level of intensity that John Coltrane and, in his wake, Pharaoh Sanders reach at *The Olatunji Concert* takes them beyond themselves – that is, beyond the safe and familiar place where musicians still have control over what they are doing. Their states of mind may be described as ecstatic: literally 'out of place', a displacement of a self. The example of Coltrane is all the more interesting because this ecstasy is not only (or not primarily) achieved through some direct manipulation of the mind, but perhaps first of all through the activities of the body. Coltrane's body takes over, doing things not previously directed by his conscious mind. This is what the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls *praktognosia*: a (tacit) knowledge that is not only expressed in action, but, in addition, results from the acting itself, without resting on mental knowledge. The extreme corporeality of his later music does not turn Coltrane into a ruler and commander. He does not possess 'his' music; he is not mastering it, leading it with full consciousness in a desired direction. Rather, he is the obedient servant and the listener.³⁷ Can he be held fully and truly responsible for "his" improvisations? Freud's psychoanalytical insights and Coltrane's ecstatic music-making seem to question the supposition of a self in complete control of her/his musical achievements and related social and ethical actions. Another otherness, always already present within the self, can block the conscious initiative to take responsibility for the other.

Third station

What the modest analyses of socio-musical interactions of the Miles Davis Quintet, the musicians performing Cobra and Evan Parker's electro-acoustic ensemble made clear was that collective music-making, especially when improvisation is

³⁶ See also Chapter 1.

³⁷ For more on Coltrane, embodiment and the transgression of control, see Marcel Cobussen, *Thresholds: Rethinking Spirituality Through Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 89–106.

a part of it, is primarily a group process. This could lead to the conclusion that the individual responsibility of any of the participants is thereby exceeded and transcended during a performance. The third station takes us to the field of collective responsibility. Even Keith Rowe's non-listening, a deliberate attempt to be released from conventional systems of interaction, the input of real-time processing that exceeds the individual musicians' ability to control, as in Evan Parker's band, and Coltrane's ecstatic playing, a combination of conscious, subconscious and embodied actions, do not exclude any responsibility: being a group, the musicians are collectively responsible, at least to a certain extent, for the musical outcomes. And this aesthetical orientation directly implies a socio-ethical one.

To think this collective responsibility takes us from the continental philosophers to a mainly American movement that arose in the mid-1990s: communitarianism. Although a diffuse movement incorporating quite divergent theories – from Alasdair MacIntyre to Charles Taylor, and from Amitai Etzioni to Philip Selznick and even back in time to John Dewey – some general and shared principles might be traced that can provide further insight into the ethics at work in the interactive process of group improvisations.

The most basic idea that communitarians argue against is what Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor in *The Malaise of Modernity* calls 'social atomism', the inclination to seek the ideal of self-realization within the individual human being, whereby affiliations become purely instrumental, used only to achieve that ideal.³⁸ Taylor calls this 'the ethics of authenticity'. He considers this ethics, crystallized in fragmentation, narcissism and relativism, as the biggest danger of our contemporary society. It represents the inability to form common purposes and enter into joint projects and allegiances.³⁹ His arguments are not so much directed against any form of self-fulfilment but are meant to make us aware of the fact that we always need relationships to develop ourselves. If authenticity means being faithful to ourselves, this will only be possible if we recognize a stronger, more inner sense of linkages.⁴⁰

In much the same way, political philosopher Michael Sandel reacts against 'the unencumbered self', the present-day individual who seeks to determine his life in complete freedom: 'What is denied to the unencumbered self is the possibility of membership in any community bound by moral ties *antecedent to choice*; he cannot belong to any community where the self itself could be at stake.'⁴¹

American sociologist and legal scholar Philip Selznick states that 'the label communitarian can be applied to any doctrine that prizes collective goods or

³⁸ Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord: House of Anansi Press, 1991), p. 58.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴¹ Michael J. Sandel, 'The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self', *Political Theory*, 12/1 (1984), p. 87, emphasis added.

ideals and limits claims to individual independence and self-realization'.⁴² Of importance is a commitment to the group, which shows itself in communication and confidence. The latter is the cement of communities; it is the condition for attaining collaboration. Bonds of community arise from interdependence, from the virtues of cooperation and from an awareness of shared identity, although Selznick hastens to point out that communities can be made up of relatively loosely coordinated activities and persons.⁴³

In some way analogous to Zygmunt Bauman, Selznick argues in favour of an ethic of responsibility which calls for reflection and understanding instead of mechanical or bare conformity.⁴⁴ Rather than through control and command, Selznick defends an ethos of open-ended obligation. Striving after the good is always tentative, incomplete and responsive with respect to external developments; more than Bauman, however, he emphasizes that doing one's duty presumes commitment not only to an ideal, but first of all to a community. The open-ended obligation fosters trust, the indispensable binder of group life. The good is decided on by 'collective intelligence' and social learning.⁴⁵ Selznick still recognizes a certain individual autonomy since responsibility requires judgement, but besides this personal integrity he also propounds a responsibility for the practical needs of a community;⁴⁶ it is always pertinent to ask how the pursuit of individual goals affects communal values and interests. Conversely, a community 'shows collective responsibility when it provides the resources and opportunities people need for personal responsibility'.⁴⁷

Communitarian responsibility thus emerges from the experience of connectedness and the imperatives of interdependence. To a greater or lesser degree all communitarians start from the idea that members of a community gear their actions towards the realization of the common good. According to the British philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, morality only displays inner consistency when it is defined in reference to a collective goal.

This seemingly measured balance between interdependence and autonomy, between singular duties and more institutionalized obligations, between diversity

⁴² Philip Selznick, *The Communitarian Persuasion* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002), p. 4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 18. Selznick casts doubt on forms of multiculturalism that support separation instead of unity and confrontation instead of reconciliation. Diversity in itself can never be self-justifying; threshold standards of shared morality are necessary (*ibid.*, pp. 47–50).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴⁵ Communitarianism advocates open, responsive communities with a human moral which can be disputed and adjusted by its members if particular circumstances require this. Nevertheless, certain bonds of commitment and culture have to be shared in order to establish a community; to participate in a community is to be aware of, and responsive to, a complex set of communal interests and values.

⁴⁶ Selznick, *The Communitarian Persuasion*, p. 37.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

and unity, and especially the mutual influence of collective and individual responsibility, applies very well to various social interactions that take place during a group improvisation. The idea that the context determines what can be valuable, without this being fixed for ever, can be the result of a reflection on socio-political aspects of improvisations, but it is a keynote in (liberal) communitarian thought, too.⁴⁸ Trust and commitment are the hobbyhorses of communitarianism as well as important features in making successful musical improvisations possible; they provide self-regulation and a positive feeling of self-control, without deteriorating into dogmatism (solidarity should never degenerate into subordination). The idea of a collective safety net or framework within which personal responsibility (and perhaps even irresponsibility) is operative but also controlled, seems appropriate for the improvised music discussed above. The responsibilities of the individual musicians in John Zorn's *Cobra*, as well as their abilities to respond, cannot be understood in full depth through an exclusive concentration on *ethical atomism*. The musician's interrelated aesthetical and ethical behaviour depends on a complex and extensive network of interactions with cultural traditions, musical pasts, the environment, the possibilities and impossibilities of the musical instrument and, presumably first of all, with fellow musicians. The best proof for the unmistakable existence of human interdependency in *Cobra* might be the possibility offered to the musicians to become a so-called 'guerrilla'. This allows players to become a renegade, to subvert the entire proceedings and to disregard the input of the others. This seems to be a rare opportunity to exchange a primarily collective responsibility for a primarily individual (ir)responsibility.

As in Zorn's conducted improvisation games, the attention for the other and otherness in the Miles Davis Quintet appears to be coordinated and kept together by some shared principles which make risky explorations of new musical interactions possible. These principles are not made explicit or laid down in contracts; rather, these are tacit agreements emanating from concrete experiences which result in certain ideas, often less clearly describable, about making music together and about improvising.

Undeniably, commitment and interdependence were two of the driving forces behind the successful explorative expeditions in the jazz idiom by the Miles Davis Quintet. But even in the (non-)collaboration between Keith Rowe and John Tilbury, the example with which we began this chapter, only the virtues of loyalty and commitment and a shared background make it possible to come to successful musical results through the concept of non-listening, if only because Rowe is dependent here on the susceptibility of Tilbury.⁴⁹ A small community indeed, this duo, but enough to show that Rowe cannot exist as a self-determining,

⁴⁸ 'The context tells us what kinds of liberty, creativity, or discipline are appropriate.' This sentence doesn't originate from a biography of some famous jazz musician but can be found in Selznick's *The Communitarian Persuasion*, p. 75.

⁴⁹ 'In the interest of liberty people should endure some disorder, perhaps even some danger and abuse,' Selznick writes (*The Communitarian Persuasion*, p. 59).

self-sufficient individual whose desired freedom can simply ignore the other. What can(not) be done – musically, but also socially and ethically – is decided by the participating musicians, either before or during the performance.

Criticizing collective ethics through improvisation

What communitarianism shows us is that personal responsibility arises most often from collective responsibility, from a framework of rules and premises accepted in advance. Considering, for example, the state of ecstasy that certain improvisers reach during performances as well as the sonic transformations via real-time processing of laptop musicians, both of which hamper the possibility of taking full responsibility on an individual level, the musico-ethical interactions that take place during an improvisation can best be understood from a communitarian point of view.

However, somehow the shoe doesn't quite fit. We agree that communal musical life is held together by traditions and by those dispositions or virtues that groups encourage in individual members. But improvising musicians cannot hide themselves behind a collective body or institution. An improvising ensemble is irreducible to a community regarded as a fusion of beings, a unified organic whole, a transparent socio-musical organization based on the specular recognition of the self in the other. By studying musical improvisation and the social interactions taking place between improvisers, communitarianism can also be criticized. For example, communitarian theories do not make clear to what extent a community is allowed to impose rules on individuals in order to create or maintain a well-defined and closed social identity or own-ness. Ultimately, communitarianism seems to aspire to a surveyable whole in which divergences of views are solved at the risk of producing forms of oppression and disintegration; and all this under the pretext of social coherence, desired reconciliation and the necessity of accepted rules.⁵⁰ A potential disappointment for communitarianism finds its origin in the possibility that individuals will not do exactly that which the so-called whole demands from them.⁵¹ Although we have tried to argue that the ethicality of improvisers cannot be traced back completely to the responsibilities of each individual separately, the inescapable subordination of the individual to the collective in communitarian theories

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61. Perhaps Nietzsche can anachronistically be called the greatest critic of communitarian thinking. At the end of the nineteenth century he already warned against forms of friendship marked by a need for constant closeness, thereby paralysing the stranger's hostility.

⁵¹ In a certain way, communitarianism seeks after the same as Plato's political-religious treatise, Book 10 of the *Nomoi*. In it, rebellious individuals have to be convinced that it is a mistake to think that there exists a natural multitude of more or less equal individualities that have every right to look after themselves in their own way.

seems to do injustice to the musical and social dynamics taking place during an improvised performance.

All communitarians to a greater or lesser degree begin from the notion that members of a community gear their actions to the realization of the common good. As stated above, MacIntyre emphasizes the importance of moral goods defined in respect to a community and a collective goal, supported by tradition. However, in such a predilection for unity – albeit Selznick's liberal, organic unity that tries to preserve the integrity of all the parts – the individual only counts insofar as she/he contributes to the case, the project, the whole. The community is presented as an immanent entity, oriented towards the fulfilment of a pre-established destiny.⁵² However, through improvised music it can be shown that the irreducible multitude of self-willed individuals and neighbouring, analogously motivated lives and actions thus seem to be neglected. In its own way, communitarianism blocks the outlook for independent spaces of being together; it has to deny heterogeneity. Its legitimate plea for the fairness of coordinating interests of the commonwealth can rapidly change into resentment towards the obstinacy of the declared smaller units (the individuals). And this freedom for the individuals that together form a collective is of essential importance in improvised music.

One thing that interacting improvisers can oppose against the communitarian idea(l) is a more dynamic way of thinking and working: at least partially, the rules that govern the collective interplays of the Evan Parker ensemble, the Rowe–Tilbury duo, the quintets of Miles Davis and John Coltrane, and the *Cobra* musicians are only invented and established during performances. Perhaps with the exception of making (good) music together, the musical goals – if predefined at all – are almost constantly debatable and changeable. The ethical question (these) improvising musicians implicitly pose is how a community can remain a place for commonality while at the same time being an open, interrupted community that is both respectful of difference and resists closure. Through musical improvisation it becomes obvious that communitarianism obscures and obstructs dynamic and sometimes disharmonious interactions within (social) groups. Furthermore, the nature of musical collaborations and their outcomes might criticize more trenchantly the idea that identity is, first of all, an auto-constitutive whole which only at a later stage begins to relate to something or someone else. This last

⁵² MacIntyre's thoughts echo those of the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies who, in the first decades of the twentieth century, made a distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). Whereas the former stands for family, solidarity and friendship, the latter represents individualism, contractual relationships, segregation and alienation. MacIntyre's ethics and morality seem to be grounded on the idea that in the course of history a decline has taken place – that is, a transferral from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. His moral proposals, like that of many communitarians, are based on the possibility of returning to a supposed original situation, the *Gemeinschaft*. In the rest of this chapter, we emphasize and elaborate the notion that this retrograde is foreign to (most) interactions taking place during musical improvisations.

remark is not so much a final surrender to communitarian thought, but offers an alternative to Theodor Adorno's analysis and criticism of 1930s jazz in order to arrive at an ethics that rejects neither individual nor collective responsibility and, simultaneously, refutes both.⁵³

In the essay 'Über Jazz' ('On Jazz'), Adorno's rejection of (most) jazz music proceeds along four lines: the application of vibrato, the use of syncopation, the structural form of jazz pieces, and the contribution of improvisation. According to Adorno's analysis, the use of vibrato ascribes to sound subjective emotions, but without this being allowed to interrupt the fixedness of the basic sound-pattern; the vibrato cannot change the fundamental.⁵⁴ In much the same way, the syncopé always remains connected and subordinated to the founding and ongoing beat. The syncopé does not lead to new rhythmic developments but, in the end, conforms to a predetermined meter. In other words, the opposition against the compelling beat is temporary and weak.⁵⁵ Regarding the overall form of jazz pieces, Adorno notes that these are most often simple and symmetrical. The structure is usually dominated by the function instead of emanating from an autonomous formal development: in particular, the improvised parts are merely ornamental and never determine or affect the basic construction of the pieces.⁵⁶ And if improvisation can be regarded as a moment of musical freedom for a soloist, one cannot deny that in jazz this freedom is immediately and severely restricted by the pre-established and inflexible harmonic scheme to which the soloist has to conform. In that sense, jazz maintains an inexorably rigid stereotypology; its individual elements are merely illusionary.⁵⁷

All these objections can be traced back to Adorno's fundamental problem with jazz music – that is, the subordination of the individual to the collective.

The sacrificial meaning of the jazz subject is now clearly mitigated under the pressure of dream censorship. It falls out of the collective just as syncopation does from the regular beat; it does not want to be engulfed in the prescribed majority, which existed before the subject and is independent of it, whether out of protest or ineptitude or both at once, – until it finally is received into, or, better, subordinated to the collective as it was predestined to be; until the music

⁵³ Of course, it has to be kept in mind that Adorno's definition of jazz in the mid-1930s will, most probably, not correspond to prevailing definitions. For Adorno, the term 'jazz' also included the worst manifestations of (German) popular dance music. Nevertheless, the thought behind his criticism of, for example, improvisation is, within the context of this chapter, still relevant.

⁵⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, 'On Jazz', in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 471.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 477.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 472.

indicates, in a subsequently ironic manner as the measures grow rounder, that it was a part of it from the very beginning.⁵⁸

The improvising individual relates to the collective as the verse does to the refrain, as the syncopé does to the meter, and as the vibrato does to the fundamental: she/he seems to claim freedom and the right to be different, but in fact she/he is just obeying the pre-given laws. That is why Adorno defines the improvisator as the sacrifice or victim of the collective. Not only is the alleged opposition of the soloist against the collective without prospect because she/he is isolated; her or his individual efforts are still determined by the stereotypes which she/he seems to oppose. 'This subject is not a free, lyrical subject which is then elevated into the collective, but rather one which is not originally free – a victim of the collective.'⁵⁹ Adorno concludes that jazz represents nothing but pseudo-individuality and pseudo-freedom – an almost deadly sin in his philosophical ideology which is based on every individual's right to compose a meaningful existence, free from dogmatic restrictions imposed by others.

Whereas the communitarian aspiration for unity inclines towards too much amalgamation and unification, Adorno could be accused of being too wary of the collective. If ethical behaviour has something to do with being responsible for the other, the former movement introduces the possibility for an individual to hide behind a collective and thereby anonymous responsibility, whereas for the latter the attention for the other is a purely individual affair, only true and sincere if the subject is free of restraints. The question is whether through music, through musical improvisation, through an emphasis on the interactive process taking place among musicians while improvising, another position is possible: namely another outlook on ethics, somewhere between individuality and collectivity. In order to think this in-between-ness we enlist the help of the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, although it should be firmly stated from the outset that their writings have not been aimed at the construction or the analysis of ethics.

Improvisation and ethics: between individuality and collectivity

What the musical examples above have shown is that playing is always playing *with* – playing with others. This is obviously the case for ensembles, but it is equally true for solo performances: soloists, too, are constantly connected to other human beings, other musicians, other entities, either diachronically, by pursuing a certain tradition, or synchronically, by playing the same instrument, in the same style or in the same venues. John Zorn's solo saxophone concerts, for example, connect him to the illustrious reedist Anthony Braxton, who in 1968 released the first solo

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 489.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 488.

saxophone record, *For Alto*. Simultaneously, Zorn's way of experimenting with various musical parameters relates him to many more musicians from the 'free jazz' movement, from saxophonist Ornette Coleman to guitarist Derek Bailey and from keyboard player and band leader Sun Ra to trombonist George Lewis or pianist Thelonious Monk. However, his playing bears the traces of many more musics, from twentieth-century classical music to surf, film and cartoon music, and from klezmer to punk and noise. Zorn draws his inspiration from the complete history of music; nothing or nobody is excluded *a priori*. Spatial and temporal connections, musical and social relations, ethnic and cultural-political associations, technical innovations and discoveries and so on – the multitude of potential influences that forms, informs and transforms his work is inevitable. Even though Zorn appears to be alone on stage, he is continuously communicating and playing with many others. Following Peter Sloterdijk, we could call these synchronic and diachronic relations (being-together and being-together-after-one-another) *resonance communities*.⁶⁰

This rudimentary example should make it sufficiently clear that improvising musicians – and, for that matter, all (human) beings – are always situated in a certain world, always in relation to this world and to others, always being-in-common even before it is a matter of common-being. According to Jean-Luc Nancy, in *La communauté désœuvrée* (*The Inoperative Community*), being has no meaning other than being together with other beings.⁶¹ In other words, being does not precede the possibility of being-with-others: our ontological condition is fundamentally social. Existence is always already coexistence:⁶² people assemble, encounter one another, share experiences and separate again. This constitutes our being-in-common. However, with this statement, Nancy does not ally with the communitarians. He contends that community can never be the idealized fantasy of common-being or a unity of experience or perspective. A community is not a project of fusion, Nancy observes.⁶³ The reason for this is entrenched in the 'with': 'with' gestures to the possibility of connection but simultaneously exposes distance, difference and space. Similarly, the 'co' in coexistence marks deferral and difference as well as relation and bond (somewhat analogously to

⁶⁰ Peter Sloterdijk, *Sferen. Schuim*, trans. Hans Driessen (Amsterdam: Boom, 2009), p. 208.

⁶¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. P. Connor *et al.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 3. It is obvious that Nancy's thoughts take their inspiration from Martin Heidegger's reflections on *Musein*. Social fragmentation, alienation and individuality only arise as secondary issues out of the primordial togetherness of *Dasein*.

⁶² Similar thoughts can also be found in the philosophy of Hannah Arendt. She argues that the conditions of cohabitation are prior to contract, voluntary assent and decision. Arendt conducts a critique of the liberal contract theory. Her ethics starts from the idea that the ones who live here with us are the ones whose lives we are obligated to protect by the sheer fact of our coexistence.

⁶³ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 15.

the structure of Derrida's concept of *différance*). 'There is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it opens up.'⁶⁴ In most definitions, community becomes a single thing (body, mind, fatherland) and loses the paradoxical working of the 'with' or the 'together' that defines it. Instead of a fusion, Nancy suggests a double bind in which sharing and dividing occur concurrently: *partition*. 'With' is both a mark of union and a mark of division, leaving each one to its isolation and its being-with-others. It is a mark drawn out over a void, which crosses over it and underlines it at the same time, thereby constituting the drawing apart and drawing together of the void. A community thus exists in a space between integration and disintegration. Opposed to an idea(l) in which the voice of each member aligns with all others, literally being in tune with the other voices, Nancy's thoughts give space to a plurality of singularities or a multitude of voices. Partition refers to both multiplicity and communality at the same time.

This ontology of existence is in itself not only social, but also ethical. The 'I' is no Self who is unmediated present to itself. One appears to oneself insofar as one is already an other for oneself. Self-consciousness means that the self knows itself principally as other than itself. The individual is thus an intersection of singularities and always already exposed to a heteronomy, a partition, even before there is a matter of 'self', even before a deliberate choice for pluralism can be established. Following from this thought, Nancy claims that 'to exist' means to be outside-oneself, to connect to the world, to be exposed; it means to be in relation, to be open to the other or otherness, not to coincide with oneself and to exceed the self. It is our ontological condition to be exposed. To share a world means to relate to each other and to be consigned to others. Therefore, being-in-common means taking responsibility.

Such is our responsibility, which is not added to us like a task, but which makes up our being. We exist as this responsibility; that is, in Heidegger's words we *ek-sist*, we are exposed to one another and together to the world – the world which is nothing but this very exposure. Existence is responsibility for existence.⁶⁵

This existential responsibility does not give guidelines how to act; we have to justify ourselves constantly with regard to this existence, to the world, to others. And because we *are* always already an opened existence, we cannot escape from this responsibility. Respecting or disdain the other can only arise because there is, on an ontological level, already a relation between me and the other.

Implicitly, Nancy reacts to some of Levinas's and Adorno's thoughts. In Levinas's philosophy, the capitalized Other can never belong to my community.

⁶⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. R.D. Richardson and A.E. O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 5.

⁶⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Responding for Existence', *Studies in Practical Philosophy*, 1/1 (1999), p. 8.

Conversely, for Nancy each community implies by definition a fundamental otherness (lower-case) that cannot be reduced to the order of the same. Levinas's claim that the ontology has to yield to ethics is replaced by Nancy's ontological condition in which we are connected to an infinite number of others from the outset. Coexistence puts me in an irreducible openness not, as in Levinas, to an infinite Otherness, an instance transcending the world, but to an alterity or alteration of the world.⁶⁶

Contrary to Adorno, Nancy states that freedom only takes place in community; it thereby presupposes relationality. Freedom is not the free space preceding existence; it happens in-common. Freedom as independence only reveals the impossibility to relate, to connect, to bond. Each form of freedom as independence already appeals to the dependence of others to practise this independence. However, once more, Nancy's rejection of freedom as an autonomous, individual affair is not replaced by the non-subjective freedom of a communitarian collective. Freedom always presupposes relationality, and this relationality is not fixed in advance but is contingent.

Peter Sloterdijk does not take the ontological course; his bulky trilogy, *Spheres*, is a cultural analysis of how people live and act together. But, like Nancy, he recoils from embracing communitarian holism or liberal individualism. Supporting the basic idea that humans coexist before they exist – in his terms, the 'we-immunity' exceeds the 'I-immunity' – Sloterdijk attempts to present an alternative outlook on associations and the natural aim towards closeness and mutual commitment. Instead of the ontological unity of the individual organism, he proposes a poly-perspective unity of a simultaneously experienced but differently symbolized common situation by a number of intelligent beings.⁶⁷ Therefore he links up with one of the German founders of sociology, Georg Simmel, who developed a non-totalitarian analysis of social units: each element of a group is not only a part of society, but also something else. However, Sloterdijk does not understand this being-something-else-than-society as the intimate last being-for-itself of an atomic individual. Rather, he coins the concept of *co-isolated associations*: societies are multitudes of more or less autonomous spaces, in which people participate thanks to their always already present 'psychotopical differences'.⁶⁸ To put it differently, a society is an aggregate of micro-spheres that border on one another without really being accessible to one another or effectively separable from one another.⁶⁹ Sloterdijk refers to Pierre Lévy, who in his book *L'Intelligence collective (Collective Intelligence)* writes that 'in the knowledge space active exhalations work together, not to bring about some hypothetical fusion of individual

⁶⁶ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 11. See also Ignaas Devisch, *Wij. Nancy en het vraagstuk van de gemeenschap in de hedendaagse wijsbegeerte* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), p. 170.

⁶⁷ Sloterdijk, *Sferen. Schuim*, p. 202.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

beings, but to collectively inflate the same bubble, thousands of rainbow-tinged bubbles, provisional universes, shared worlds of signification'.⁷⁰ Like Nancy, Sloterdijk seems to be pursuing a space between a segregating individualism and a coordinating collectivism – a space where making an undertaking and being separated from one another can be considered as two sides of the same coin.

It is not our aim to contend that interactions in improvised music link up perfectly with Nancy's or Sloterdijk's philosophy; nor is it our intention to present musical improvisation as an exemplar of their work. Rather, their meditations put us on a track to rethink the interactions within improvised music from ethical principles. As we have demonstrated above, the responsibilities for interactions among improvising musicians cannot always be thought of as stemming from an individual or a self: certain agents (technology, ecstasy, intensive collaboration) obstruct the idea that ethical contact with others can be retraced to a personal responsibility. Nor can an ethics at work in musical improvisation merely be regarded as a set of predetermined, predefined rules, principles and duties that function as some kind of common ground on the basis of which musicians start collaborating. What Jacques Attali in 1977 formulated as an ideal, namely 'to play for the other and by the other, to exchange the noise of bodies, to hear the noise of other's in exchange for one's own, to create, in common, the code within which communication will take place',⁷¹ was at that time already one of the unstable pillars of free improvised music: perhaps the musicians worked towards a common goal, but this goal was not established, formulated or known in detail in advance.⁷² Out of many possibilities, a common route was chosen – a route that could constantly be negotiated, challenged and adapted. This is not to say that this free improvised music (movement) offered the kind of 'absolute' freedom Nancy is arguing against. Conventions and traditions, both intra- and extramusical, transect this form of musicking as they do any other. Physical (im) possibilities of musicians, instruments, technology and acoustics furthermore determine the music's upper and lower limits. And operating within a collective is not only the opening up of unforeseen possibilities; it carries with it certain inevitable restrictions as well. However, the fundamental openness, the acceptance and even the (conscious) suspension of too much security, as well as an aesthetics which allows for disruption and dissolution, are almost diametrically opposed to the communitarian consensus ideal of agreed and pre-established social and ethical rules. Musical improvisation knows no law or ultimate value but the one that makes the relation towards a law or value possible: the decision.

⁷⁰ Pierre Lévy, *Collective Intelligence. Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, trans. R. Bononno (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 1997), p. 169.

⁷¹ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 143.

⁷² Of course, the main goal of making music, of improvising, can indeed be having fun, but what we mean here is that the musical results of free improvised music are usually not predetermined or predictable.

Playing with others

Nancy's conceptualization of the 'with' and Sloterdijk's cultural analysis of isolated coexistence provide us with an opportunity to situate the interactions that take place during a performance of improvised music in a space between individual and collective responsibility – a space that can be entered neither through Levinas's and Bauman's emphasis on an ethics based on the responsibility of a human being sufficient to itself nor through Selznick's and MacIntyre's advocacy of collective responsibility preceding individual self-realization. If we can agree on the idea that, within each musical improvisation, interactions are present that at least contain traces of what can be called ethics, this music and these interactions allow us to encounter a different ethics or a different view on ethics. This ethics can be understood through a reflection on the meaning of the word 'with', based on the consideration that musicking is always a playing-with, a playing-with-others. Miles Davis plays with Herbie Hancock, Evan Parker plays with Paul Lytton, John Coltrane plays with Pharaoh Sanders, the musicians performing *Cobra* play with each other and so on. And, likewise, Keith Rowe plays with John Tilbury. Musicking is always already and unavoidably *Mitsein*, being-with, and it therefore encompasses, by definition, ethical aspects as well. At first sight, this being-with seems to oscillate indefinitely between two meanings without ever coming to a point of equilibrium: it is either the 'together' of gathering *totum intra totum*, a unified totality where the part is determined by, and dependent on, collective arrangements, or the 'together' of juxtaposition *partes extra partes*, isolated parts that aspire to complete self-fulfilment, relatively independent from the collective interests. However, the 'playing-with' of improvising musicians can be situated precisely on the point of equilibrium between the two meanings: 'together' is neither extra nor intra.⁷³ Playing-with constitutes the mark of unity and disunity, the traction and tension, the repulsion and attraction of the 'between', of the always already existing interval between performing musicians.

Returning to the Miles Davis Quintet once more, we could perhaps argue that this is a community without unity, working on and through communication without communing. Each of the musicians is permanently exposed not only to the other, the other as human being, as musician, but also to the other as intervening musical input, the other as a de- and recontextualization; it is precisely through their interplay that the musicians can experience another otherness – an otherness between themselves and their respective instruments as well as an otherness inside themselves. Davis put together a group of musicians who he could lead but from whom he could learn at the same time. This eagerness to learn – an attitude that characterized all five members – is nothing else than opening oneself to the other and to otherness. And opening oneself can be understood as making space for, admitting, inviting and deliberately calling on the other of/in oneself. During performances of this quintet, this learning process was almost guaranteed

⁷³ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 60.

because the musical material and the musical frame were not pre-established but formed in and during the interactive play in which arrangements ranked mostly as guidelines and not as compulsory instructions. This becomes especially clear at the indecisive, scrappy ending of 'Footprints' as it appears on the album *Miles Smiles*. Three times Davis signals an ending and, in all three cases, members of the rhythm section carry on regardless until bass and drums finally slow down and find a stopping place.⁷⁴ What this masterly example of (failed) interplay makes heard is that performing regarded as a playing-with always implies being exposed to an otherness that can never be reduced to the order of the same but simultaneously co-constitutes the self.

Sloterdijk would perhaps speak of the Quintet as a 'phonotopic cell' – a cell with sonically based interwoven isolations that are neither united nor really separated – or, what comes down to the same, isolations that are both connected and separated – closely entwined, yet divided, units. It is the ethical responsibility of the musicians not to obstruct the learning process, not to hamper the possibility to be open to the other, not to impede the exposure to insecurity and vulnerability. But before this ethical imperative operative within the Quintet, an ethics of being-in-common, of playing together, is already postulated. This playing together happens in a collective frame that makes space for individual freedom. In other words, the 'phonotopic cell' provides its individual members with possibilities to discover unknown sonic-ethical and socio-ethical places, the result being that the cell itself evolves, reorientates and rediscovers itself. In the case of the ending of 'Footprints' on *Miles Smiles*, the awkward result is that trumpet and sax are playing the 6/4 theme over a 4/4 accompaniment.

'One is not "with" in some general sort of way, but each time according to determined modes that are themselves multiple and simultaneous.'⁷⁵ Put simply, the playing-with of the Miles Davis Quintet differs from the playing-with of the other musicians discussed in this chapter, such as the Rowe-Tilbury duo. The initial question whether Rowe's concept of non-listening is a convincing example of unethical musical behaviour can now be recaptured. Let us recall once more Rowe's words:

Being strangely aware of John's movements, but not necessarily listening to what he is playing; not reacting to his playing but being affected by it. The act of NOT listening is very important, preferring juxtaposition to confabulation ... If I attempted not to actively listen to John's piano as my hand descended towards the guitar laid out before me, what might happen? Possibly I might avoid triggering memories of the piano, memories that by definition would take me away from the immediate context and towards some looping representations of past occasions.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Yudkin, *Miles Davis*, pp. 93–94.

⁷⁵ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 65.

⁷⁶ Rowe, liner notes for *Duos for Doris*.

Rowe's non-listening is not meant to prevent any form of interaction. It is meant to avoid relapsing into a musical performance which is built on previous explorations and discoveries; it is meant to avoid too many conventions, too many tricks that have already proven their success; it is meant to stay open to another otherness.⁷⁷ Rowe opens an ethical space of creativity and change through resistance. His attitude makes space for musical interactions that demand a response-ability that is not already prescribed, a praxis of risk for which there can be no rules, no codes, no principles and no guarantees.⁷⁸ 'Playing-with' is a formula in which the 'with' implies exposition. Rowe's attitude is the constitutive fact of an exposition to the outside. He is thus able to be affected by the other's alterity, to experience alterity in the other together with the alteration that in him sets his singularity outside him and infinitely delimits it. What is exposed is the following, and Nancy insists that we must learn to read it in all possible combinations: "'you (are/and/is) (entirely other than) I'". Or again, more simply: you shares me.⁷⁹ Non-listening as a form of playing-with, as a possibility of becoming exposed to alterities in and of the (musical) world; non-listening as a research into the possibilities of interaction on another level than the conscious, accepted, articulated, crystallized ones; non-listening as a concern not for the other improviser but a care for the work itself: perhaps that is the difference between reacting and being affected to which Rowe refers. Or, as Gary Peters summarizes, 'collective, yes, communal, no'.⁸⁰

'Community cannot arise from the domain of work because one does not produce it, one experiences or one is constituted by it,' Nancy writes in *The Inoperative Community*.⁸¹ Without purposely producing it, without consciously working on it, Rowe and Tilbury form a community. 'Community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called "unworking," referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension.'⁸² Rowe and Tilbury experience community as they are first of all exposed to each other, and exposed to the exposure of the other. It is not possible for Rowe not to play with the other. Because playing is always playing-with, Rowe cannot not take responsibility; as a being-in-common he is always already responsible.

⁷⁷ Though writing about a different musical context, Garry Hagberg also warns musicians not to become too close to the other players as that diminishes their individuality and turns an autonomous ethical gesture into bland agreement. The right thing to do is to provide a fellow musician with 'something to play against'. Hagberg thus encounters a paradox: working with becomes working against (*Art and Ethical Criticism*, pp. 277–78).

⁷⁸ Geraldine Finn, *Why Athusser Killed His Wife: Essays on Discourse and Violence* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996), p. 176.

⁷⁹ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 29.

⁸⁰ Peters, *The Philosophy of Improvisation*, p. 58.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Rowe's attitude does not seek to eradicate hospitality but rather to subject it to transvaluation.⁸³ His is an agonistic mode of hospitality. Quite analogous to Nietzsche's scattered remarks on ethics and morality, he *desires* resistances instead of evading or trying to subvert them. This requires a strong nature and, at least according to Nietzsche, will lead to personal growth, freedom and a continual self-overcoming. But the community will also benefit as such an attitude ensures that one's actions are measured and judged against one another and tested again and again. Only through contest can existing values be questioned, tested and, when necessary, reformed or created anew. This way, Nietzsche's anti-religious agonistic ethics seems to resonate and find fertile soil in the Rowe–Tilbury community. Instead of a sensitivity 'where virtually every mark interferes with or intrudes into the marked space of the other',⁸⁴ Rowe's non-listening attitude shows that resistance and the freedom to actualize this resistance aesthetically, as well as ethically, can be an integral part of improvisation.⁸⁵

From 'the good' to 'the best'

Bass player Ron Carter recalls his experiences as a member of the second Miles Davis Quintet: 'Collectively, we were a mind of one.'⁸⁶ It might be productive to interpret this reflective remark in the light of our preceding quest for a musical ethics. Following Nancy and Sloterdijk (but also many psychoanalysts), it is first expedient, and perhaps even justifiable, to add that 'a mind of one' most often encompasses many different ways of thinking and experiencing; besides rationality and combinatorial powers it knows many antinomies and inconsistencies; besides causality and linearity it often takes many side-roads and is constantly haunted by feelings of insecurity and indeterminacy. Granted, the Quintet made a good team, which is a prerequisite for their ways of experimenting. But musical as well as social analyses of their improvising practice make clear that their collectivity cannot be reduced to 'feeding in the same place, as it does when applied to cattle'.⁸⁷ The collaborations within the Quintet cannot be equated with bodily

⁸³ This paragraph is inspired by Rainer J. Hanshe's 'Agonistic Ethics: On the Hospitality of Warriors', a paper presented at the East–West Passage Conference in Pécs, Hungary, 3–6 November 2010.

⁸⁴ Peters, *The Philosophy of Improvisation*, p. 54.

⁸⁵ Similar thoughts can be found in Peters, *The Philosophy of Improvisation*, pp. 53–55. Peters states that a profound concern and care for the other might create improvisations in which attentiveness, responsiveness and support can produce works of great sensitivity and delicacy. However, too much mutual respect for the improvisatory space of the other can also be suffocating and lead to a loss of creative possibilities, thereby harming the work.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Yudkin, *Miles Davis*, p. 5.

⁸⁷ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1996), p. 249.

organs that make an altruistic contribution to the healthy eudemonia of the whole. The virtuosic interactions never lead to a complete unification, but provide a space where each individual member can explore unknown musical sites without being restricted by collective rules. Davis, Shorter, Hancock, Carter and Williams play in a space between total subordination to the interest of the group as a whole and complete individual self-realization where none of these poles is ever touched. Better yet, this supposed opposition between the collective and the individual is deconstructed in the praxis of the Quintet's improvisations.

'Collectively, we were a mind of one.' Perhaps this could be understood as a kind of *collective intelligence* as described by the French anthropologist and sociologist Pierre Lévy in his book of the same name. Lévy describes the transition of self knowledge into forms of group knowledge, collective thought and sophisticated systems of networked intelligence. The simple premise is that no one knows everything; everyone knows something. Through enhanced interaction people share their knowledge, and this transpersonal knowledge exceeds the sum of individual intelligences. What is important for music is that, throughout the book, Lévy emphasizes that his definition of collective intelligence cannot and should not be restricted to the exchange of rational knowledge only: there are body-thoughts, affect-thoughts, percept-thoughts, sign-thoughts, concept-thoughts, gestural-thoughts, machine-thoughts, world-thoughts.⁸⁸ Sharing memories and experiences thus also belongs to the 'cooperative brain' which Lévy has in mind.

Collective intelligence is the result of continuous discoveries, developments, fluctuating uses and evaluations and it will (therefore) constantly develop in many unforeseen directions; it is in a perpetual state of becoming. That is why Lévy calls it the 'utopia of the unstable and multiple'. Being volatile and open, it responds to an ethics of the best rather than a morality of the good.

Static, definitive, decontextualized, the good is imposed a priori, on top of any existing situation, whereas the best (the best possible) is situated, relative, dynamic, and provisional. The good doesn't change; the best is different wherever it is found. Good opposed to evil; it's exclusionary. The best, however, includes evil since logically equivalent to the lesser evil, it is satisfied with minimizing it ... Members of intelligent communities promote the growth of the best; they create a best that is always new and always different. The best is continuously displaced not only because objective situations evolve, but because our understanding of situations develops or becomes confused (which also constitutes a changed situation), because the criteria of choice change as a function of the transformation of the environment and the evolution of our plans.⁸⁹

It is our claim that the interactions taking place during musical improvisations such as the ones described above can be regarded as a good example of a 'displaced

⁸⁸ Lévy, *Collective Intelligence*, p. 139.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 250–51.

ethics of the best'. Since any of the members of the Miles Davis Quintet, the Evan Parker group and the John Coltrane Quintet, as well as the *Cobra* performers and the Rowe–Tilbury duo, can, in principle, shift the direction of the music, there is an ongoing process of decision-making taking place among all musicians during an improvisation. Each one has constantly to reconsider and remodel her/his own part as a result of certain decisions taken by others that change the development of the music to a lesser or greater extent.⁹⁰ Improvisation can thus be(come) a suitable medium for problem analysis, group discussion, the development of an awareness of complex processes, collective decision-making and evaluation.⁹¹ Musical improvisation can provide a site where aesthetic, social and ethical relations are enacted, negotiated and established simultaneously over and over again. Naturally, these relations can never be fixed forever or in advance; that would frustrate the basic premise of improvisation. An improvisational ethics of the best will always resist foundation, codification, formalization and universalization. It is an ethics that will always stay singular, though not merely individual.

The contribution of improvised music to the ethical discourse could consist of the understanding that ethics takes place in a space between personal and collective responsibility. However, this positive contribution cannot disguise the fact that music is frequently used in ways and for reasons which seem diametrically opposed to the ethics we have been tracing here. In the space between the personal and the collective, music often contributes to strategies of exclusion, disciplining and control, thereby obstructing a real and open quest for an ethics of the best. The initial rationale behind the next chapter, 'Affect', is to show 'the dark side of the tune' – the relation between music and amorality.

⁹⁰ 'More important for morality than a willingness to judge others is the courage to critically examine one's own actions or responses and motivations,' philosopher Craig Taylor rightfully remarks ('Art and Moralism', *Philosophy*, 84/3 (2009), p. 343).

⁹¹ Lévy, *Collective Intelligence*, p. 59.

Chapter 4

Affect

Marcel Cobussen

Every disease is a musical problem; every cure is a musical solution.

Novalis, *Schriften: Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*

The auralization of an ethnic conflict

The location is an elegant and noisy restaurant in Istanbul, at the turn of the millennium. Five people of different nationalities – a Greek, a Serb, a Macedonian, a Turk and a Bulgarian woman – sit at one of the tables. Their animated conversation is accompanied by live music, and at a certain moment the band strikes up a familiar folk tune. A rather peculiar dispute breaks out, each of the diners claiming that the tune is a well-known national song that belongs to his or her country.

This is the beginning of *Whose is this Song?*, a documentary by Adela Peeva (the Bulgarian member of the group of diners). What follows is a fascinating 'road movie' through South-east Europe, as a quest for the roots of the tune takes Peeva from Turkey to Greece, Albania, Bosnia, Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria respectively. In most of these countries, the tune is a love song with varying domestic lyrics, but in others, such as Turkey and Bosnia, it has also been used as a war song. In each country, however, the reactions to the study are the same: people display shock, anger or disbelief when Peeva suggests that the same tune is also claimed by their neighbours. 'The Serbs can never do a song like this; they have no traditions,' a young Albanian man says curtly. 'It might be that the Turks took it from us,' the conductor of a local Albanian orchestra replies to Peeva's remark that the Turks regard it as their song. In other words, for him it is beyond dispute that the song originates from Albania. For Sarajevo Sevdah singer Emina Zecaj, meanwhile, the song is 'Bosnian only'. This is confirmed by a Bosnian choir director, although he admits to Peeva that it is not (only) a sweet love song as Zecaj claims, but a religious (Muslim) song as well, used as a call to arms, brought by the Turks and forbidden during the communist rule in former Yugoslavia. Confronted with this second, belligerent Bosnian version during a festivity in Vranje, a town in southern Serbia, Peeva's hosts tell her that this is theft and a pure provocation: it is a Serbian love song. Suddenly, the festive atmosphere changes and a scuffle seems almost inevitable. Returning to her home country, Bulgaria, Peeva finds out that the song is sung there as well, particularly during an annual commemoration near southern Strandja, where the Bulgarians fought against the Ottoman Empire a century earlier. Cautiously intimating to the nationalist participants that the song might be Turkish, Peeva is met with a furious