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Jazz Improvisation as a Social Arrangement

MY STARTING POINT is an essay by the philosopher Lee B. Brown entitled “Phonography, Repetition and Spontaneity” in which he argues that the repetition of musical performances made possible by recording is “the enemy of improvised music,” for which jazz is his point of reference.¹ He argues (as others also have) that recording turns improvised jazz performances into fixed compositions by “transform[ing] an improvisatory process into a depersonalized, structured musical tissue.”² He further claims that those who listen seriously to jazz are interested not only in the music’s sound and structure but also in “a performer’s on-the-spot decisions and actions that generate the sonic trail. . . . But this interest is at odds with one of phonography’s chief ‘virtues,’ namely its capacity for repetition.”³ Subjected to repeated listening, recordings of jazz improvisation become wholly predictable, rather than spontaneous, and, ultimately, boring.

Although I sympathize with Brown’s desire to assert and preserve jazz improvisation’s identity as performance rather than composition, I do not agree with his argument that one can experience jazz as improvisational performance exclusively in live settings because recordings reify improvisation in a way that eventually robs it of interest. Brown’s general arguments are vulnerable on several grounds. For one thing, they take for granted a clear distinction between improvisation, on the one hand, and composition and playing from score, on the other, a distinction that is in fact highly problematic. Carol S. Gould and Kenneth Keaton argue, for example, that inasmuch as even the performers of scored music have to make choices not specified by the score, all performed music is improvised to some extent, and, therefore, “jazz and classical performances differ more in degree than in kind.”⁴ Whereas Philip Alperson argues, like Brown, that improvisation

is different from scored playing because it draws our aesthetic attention primarily to actions rather than works, other writers (e.g., Ed Sarath) agree with Brown for different reasons, seeing improvisation and composition as two distinct, perhaps even opposed practices.⁵ Still others, by contrast, see jazz improvisations as appropriate subjects of formal analysis and, therefore, as comparable to compositions (e.g., Frank Tirro, Lewis Porter).⁶ One can only agree with the ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl when he writes, “Obviously the relationship of improvisation to composition and notation is a complex one, on which there is no general agreement.”⁷

Another difficulty with Brown’s argument is that the kind of listening he attributes to consumers of recorded music bears a strong resemblance to “structural listening,” a concept derived from the work of Theodor Adorno and Arnold Schoenberg “intended to describe a process wherein the listener follows and comprehends the unfolding realization, with all of its detailed inner relationships, of a generating musical conception.”⁸ The idea that structural listening is the ideal mode of listening has been roundly criticized within musicology, particularly by Rose Subotnik, and seems out of touch with a world in which “ubiquitous listening,” a mode of listening that “blends into the environment, taking place without calling conscious attention to itself as an activity in itself,” seems closer to the norm.⁹

Yet another problem with Brown’s account of the baleful effects of phonography is his assumption that the listener experiences the same recording so many times, and remembers it so well, that at some point it becomes predictable and dull. While this may be true in principle, Jacques Attali notes that the stockpiling of potential musical experiences made possible by recording means that most listeners own far more recordings than they have time to listen to, let alone grow overly familiar with!¹⁰ For the sake of argument, however, I will accept Brown’s premises—including the clear distinction between improvised and non-improvised music, and the implicit characterization of the analytical listener who has the time and strength of memory to listen to the same recording until it becomes overly familiar—and offer a counter-argument that addresses a differently problematic dimension of Brown’s position.

In another essay, Brown describes the jazz musician’s activity and the listener’s experience in the following terms.

In typical jazz improvisations, players can be heard probing and testing possibilities latent in the music they are making. . . . Correlatively, we take a special kind of interest in this activity—in how a performer is faring, so to say. If things are going well, I wonder if the

player can sustain the level. If he seems to be getting into trouble, I wonder about how he will address the problem. When he pulls the fat out of the fire, I applaud—as when Louis Armstrong rushes too quickly, if thrillingly, into the first notes of the introduction in his famous Okeh recording of *West End Blues*.¹¹

This account of listening to jazz exemplifies the central problem inherent in Brown's analysis. I agree with Brown's characterization of jazz improvisation as entailing musical exploration and problem solving, and I am not saying Brown has misunderstood the way listeners think about the performance of jazz. The problem, rather, is that Brown assumes that listeners respond the way they do *because they can hear that the music is improvised* (clearly one would not have the same concerns when listening to music heard as composed because one would assume that the composer took the time to solve any problems created by particular compositional choices rather than forcing the musician to solve them in performance). In reality, however, the audience cannot possibly hear improvisation: the fact that music is improvised is not accessible or verifiable through the act of listening. Sitting in a jazz club listening to a brilliant solo, there is no way for me to know whether the musician is actually improvising it on the spot or playing something from memory that was originally improvised on another occasion or composed in the hotel room the night before.

There are, of course, circumstances that arise in jazz performance in which the fact of improvisation seems self-evident and irrefutable. Every jazz fan will have a favorite example; here, I will mention Ella Fitzgerald's performance of "The Cricket Song" at the 1964 Festival Mondial du Jazz Antibes in Juan-Les-Pins, France, in response to the ubiquity of the titular insect's audible chirping during her two-night stand there. Near the end of her set on the second night, expressing something like affectionate exasperation, Fitzgerald, after calling on the band to provide her with a vamp, improvised a song about the crickets whose lyrics allude not only to their presence as uninvited musical partners but also to the fact that she was inventing the song's melody and lyrics on the spot.

I will make two points in reference to examples of this kind. First: despite all evidence to the contrary, it was not possible for Fitzgerald's audience to verify that she was improvising. Keep in mind that she performed "The Cricket Song" on the second night of the gig. Perhaps she had become aware of the crickets' presence on the first night and had cooked up an informal response with her band to be presented as a spontaneous improvisation on the second night. I am not saying this is what happened—it

is no part of my purpose here to debunk the idea that jazz musicians improvise or to question Fitzgerald's integrity. All I am saying is that, in principle, there would have been no way for the audience to know the difference between the prearranged "Cricket Song" I have hypothesized and the spontaneous improvisation it undoubtedly was. Second, and more important: Incidents of this kind, while anecdotally entertaining, cannot be treated as normative cases of jazz performance. If jazz audiences had to depend on this kind of evidence to behave as if improvisation is taking place before them, there would be very few instances of improvisation in jazz!

In his discussion of the performance of classical music, Stan Godlovitch makes a useful, if ultimately troubling, distinction between agent performance (what the performer does) and phenomenal performance (what the audience hears). Improvisation is an aspect of agent performance—indeed, a very important aspect, considering how long and hard jazz musicians work both to master the vocabulary of their idiom and to develop an original voice. Improvisation is thus a defining ontological characteristic of jazz. However, Godlovitch's claim that "normally, phenomenal and agent performances are directly and uniformly linked [and, in] such a case, judgments about the phenomenal performance are acceptably transferred to claims about agent performance" does not apply to improvised music because only the musician can know for sure whether or not he is improvising.¹² Since listeners cannot deduce with certainty from the phenomenal performance that the agent is improvising, they are never in a position to forge that link.

I find Godlovitch's distinction between agent performance and phenomenal performance troubling as well as useful because he seems to suggest that performers are the only active parties in the musical process: they are the agents who make music, while the audience's job is to experience what the performer does. Erving Goffman, writing on theatre in *Frame Analysis*, offers a more balanced perception of the performer-audience relationship. Goffman's account is symmetrical: what is true for performers is also true for the audience. For example, Goffman points out that actors on stage have a dual existence: they are there as both actors (that is, real people functioning in a professional capacity) and characters (that is, fictional entities that exist in the world of the play's narrative).¹³ This is a fairly unremarkable observation, of course, but things get more interesting when Goffman suggests that spectators, too, are present in a similar dual capacity: as theatregoers (that is, the people who paid for the tickets, are sitting in the seats, etc.) and onlookers (that is, people absorbed into the fictional world of the play as observers).¹⁴ Actors and theatregoers oc-

copy the same plane of reality, while characters and onlookers interact on a different common plane. A straightforward example, from Goffman, illustrates this distinction: if we, as audience, laugh “with” a character who has said something funny, we do so in the status of onlooker, and our laughter is contained within the world of the play. If, on the other hand, an actor makes an embarrassing error and we laugh “at” her, we do so in the status of theatregoer, and the laughter is contained within the “real” world.¹⁵

This schema is readily adaptable to musical performance. Although I would not argue that the modes of performance involved in playing music are precisely equivalent to acting, it is nevertheless true that musicians appear before us in a dual identity: as real people functioning (like actors) in a professional capacity, and in their personae as musicians, whether the persona requires the flamboyant theatricality of a glam rocker or the decorum of a symphony player.¹⁶ (I shall call the first entity the *musician*, the second the *player*.) The listener, too, takes on a dual identity: first, as *concertgoer* or *clubgoer*; let us say, an entity congruent to Goffman’s theatregoer. I shall use the term *listener* to denote the audience role that parallels Goffman’s theatrical onlooker. The listener is the version of the audience member that is absorbed into the world of the music and its performance. Even if that world is not fictional (though it can be if we include opera, program music, and highly theatricalized rock performance) it is structured around narratives and, therefore, implicitly dramatic. Brown’s description of the jazz listener points in this direction: the listener is absorbed into the player’s dramatic struggle with her materials and her ability to improvise successfully. The listener worries about the player’s success, cheers her on, evaluates her effort, and expresses appreciation of it. This unfolding drama, and the roles of player and listener within it, take place within a reality that is distinct from that of the professional musician who almost didn’t make it to the club because of traffic, and the clubgoer who is still feeling stung by the high cover and two-drink minimum.

Goffman pushes his analysis further to suggest that, in the theatre, playing the role of either character or onlooker equally requires the active and intentional assumption of a specific information state. The character, for example, has to act as if she does not know how the play ends, even though the actor playing her does know.¹⁷ Similarly, “being part of the audience in a theatre obliges us to act as if our own knowledge, as well as that of some of the characters, is partial. As onlookers we are good sports and act as if we are ignorant of outcomes—which we may be. But this is not ordinary ignorance, since we do not make an ordinary effort to dispel it.” In fact, “we actively collaborate in sustaining this playful unknowingness.”¹⁸

Even though these particular differential information states are specific to theatre, Goffman's basic concepts provide a workable matrix for thinking about other kinds of performance. Every kind of performance involves an act of collaboration between performers and audience the terms of which are known to all even when they are not expressed overtly. In other words, there is tacit agreement among performers and audiences, and between them, on the "as ifs" that govern behavior on each side and enable performers and audience to collaborate on maintaining the performance. One important "as if" central to jazz performance is that both players and listeners will act as if every solo was a successful improvisation even when they have reason to think otherwise. It is almost unimaginable, for example, that after completing a solo a player might address the audience to say, "Sorry, that really didn't work. Stay for the next set, on me, and I promise to do better." Similarly, it is extremely rare that jazz listeners fail to applaud at the end of a solo, and even rarer that they boo, though there surely are cases in which their opinion of a particular solo does not warrant applause. In other words, part of the social contract between jazz musicians and their audiences is that everyone will behave as if virtually every solo is a worthy achievement, thus exemplifying what Howard Becker calls the "etiquette of improvisation": "The rule in conventional [jazz] improvisation is to treat everyone's contribution as 'equally good.'"¹⁹

But the most important "as if" of jazz performance is the status of improvisation itself. I am suggesting that the audience experiences jazz improvisation first and foremost as a social characteristic of jazz performance rather than an ontological characteristic of the music. Since the listeners cannot ascertain that the musician is actually improvising they must act "as if" that is the case when witnessing the performance. In this respect, jazz performance is no different from any other social interaction. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman quotes William L. Thomas to the effect that "we live by inference"—we are continually in the position of having to base our understanding of, and actions toward, others on incomplete information and are therefore inclined to take things at face value unless there is a compelling reason not to do so.²⁰

The framing of a jazz performance encourages the audience to act as if improvisation is taking place: the word "jazz," associated with both the venue and the performer, suggests that conventionally designated portions of the performance are to be understood as improvisational (e.g., choruses in the case of conventionally structured jazz and almost the whole thing in free jazz). In the spirit of Goffmanian symmetry, I further suggest that the musicians, too, must act "as if" they are improvising. What I mean is that

they must engage in the conventional behaviors through which players frame portions of their performances as improvisations to which listeners are to attend in a different way from those moments at which they are playing the composed portions of the music. These may include moving away from other players or a music stand, stepping up to a microphone, displaying effort and concentration through physical posture and facial expression, marking the end of the solo and acknowledging audience response, and so forth. (Improvising jazz soloists are generally aided in this framing by their fellow players, who may act differently toward their peer when she is soloing than when they are playing ensemble passages. They may act, in fact, as if they are caught up in the same dramatic perspective on the soloist that Brown attributes to the listener.)

In order to provide specific examples of the way jazz musicians frame their activity as improvisation, I will briefly analyze a portion of a specific performance of “So What” by Miles Davis, with John Coltrane in his group, joined by members of the Gil Evans Orchestra, from a CBS television program entitled *The Sound of Miles Davis* that aired in April 1959.²¹ The musicians in this clip mark moments meant to be perceived as improvisational and distinguish them from moments when they are playing composed music in several ways. For example, Miles Davis underlines the transition from playing the theme to improvising a solo by lowering his trumpet, then bringing it back up to his lips, moistening them, and checking his mouthpiece. Apart from this one instance, he never moves the instrument away from his lips, even between phrases when he might have time to do so. Moving the trumpet down, then back up, clearly reads as a way of segmenting the performance, of emphasizing the transition from playing composed music to improvising.

When playing the theme, Davis looks off to his right, as if he doesn’t need to give this task his full attention. When he solos, however, he gazes ahead and somewhat downward, his eyes either closed or fixed in a stare that is not focused on anything, suggesting concentration and inward attention (see figures 1 and 2). He leans backward, arching his back and bending his knees in the pose that became an iconic sign for Miles Davis as seen, for example, in the cover image for the 1970 album *A Tribute to Jack Johnson*. Both his facial expressions and physical demeanor thus differentiate playing composed passages from improvising.

When Davis is finished, he steps aside, allowing Coltrane to take his place on stage. This suggests that stage position contributes to the impression of improvisation. There are, in fact, three regions in this performance, which I will describe on the analogy of areas of a baseball diamond. There



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.

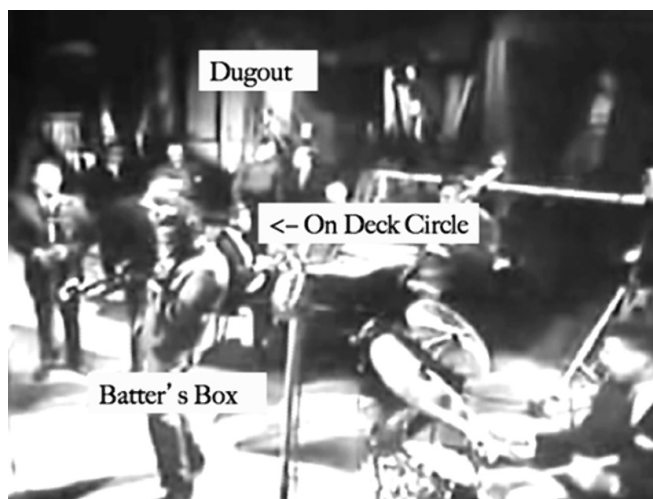


Fig. 3.

is the batter's box, the area in which the mobile soloists (i.e., the horn players, as opposed to the pianist, who also solos in this performance, though he is positioned quite close to the batter's box) stand while improvising; the on-deck circle, where Coltrane stands while waiting to solo; and the dugout, where Davis retires after soloing and where other musicians stand while waiting to play (see figure 3).²²

The actions of other musicians also reinforce the status of the soloist as improviser. When Coltrane is on the "on deck circle," he respectfully focuses his attention on Davis, though not necessarily by looking at him. Coltrane's movements of head and body, even his turning away from Davis, denote that he is giving Davis's solo his full, appreciative attention by following its unfolding (see figures 4 and 5). (Frank Rehak, the trombone player seen a bit later, also bobs his head to show his enjoyment and understanding of Davis's solo.) Coltrane, when soloing, behaves very similarly to Davis. Though he mostly keeps his eyes closed in an expression of deep concentration, he too arches his back away from the microphone as he plays. As he completes his solo, he bends forward, as if bowing, and starts to move backward, out of the soloist's space, thus relinquishing that status and passing it on to the pianist. It is worth mentioning that when performing with his own groups, Coltrane would often stand completely still when playing the theme, with only his shoulders rising and falling with his breaths. When improvising, however, he became much more animated,



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.

bending backward and far forward with facial expressions depicting profound effort and immersion in the moment.

The “dugout” area is a region of the kind Goffman calls “offstage,” even though it’s in full view. The behavior of the musicians in this area is noteworthy, since it combines the respectful attention to the soloist apparently expected of a musician in the on-deck circle with such seemingly opposite behaviors as smoking and chatting (see Figure 6). This combination of engagement and detachment may be at least somewhat specific to the subgenre of jazz being played, since “cool” jazz musicians were sometimes thought to be “emotionally detached from their creation” while simultaneously recognized as virtuosic.²³ The behaviors I have described are both individuated and conventional. They signal the audience to attend to certain passages of music as if they were improvised but provide no guarantee of the actual spontaneity of the music played.

An important feature of Goffman’s notion of the “as if” is that it does not depend on belief. The audience does not have to believe that the performer is improvising; it only has to agree to act as if it believes this. Likewise, the performer does not need to persuade the audience that he is improvising; rather, he must persuade the audience to enter into a social interaction in which the definition of the situation is an agreement on all sides to act as if improvisation is taking place. An example from another genre of music may further clarify this point.

I remember an aging and justly famous star of country music sitting on the edge of the stage with his feet dangling over, thus symbolically breaking through the barrier between himself and the audience, and announcing, “We’re gonna be here all night!” We all cheered, even though we knew no such thing was gonna happen; neither the theatre management nor the star’s own handlers would allow the performance to run much over its allotted two hours or so.²⁴

With jazz improvisation, the audience agrees to act as if something it cannot verify is taking place. In the case of the country singer, the audience agrees to alter its information state and act as if something it knows to be false is true. As an audience, we recognize the claim “we’re gonna be here all night” as a convention of a certain kind of performance and realize that, as a statement, it is false on its face. Nevertheless, we maximize our pleasure in the event by agreeing to act as if it were true.

I have to insist that I am not accusing anyone of cynicism here. In no way am I suggesting that improvisation is all a matter of pretense. Presum-



Fig. 6.

ably, jazz musicians are improvising when listeners think they are the vast majority of the time. As Goffman puts it:

When an individual . . . makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of this kind have a right to expect. . . . The others find, then, that the individual has informed them as to what is and as to what they ought to see as the 'is.'²⁵

Therefore, when a musician stakes a claim to the identity of jazz player, we, as listeners, respect the claim and treat the person as a legitimate bearer of this identity unless and until something happens to discredit the claim (for example, if I discover that a musician is actually reading notation when supposedly improvising). Improvisation is not simply something musicians do (as Godlovitch's notion of agent performance may suggest). It is, rather, a Goffmanian interactional accomplishment, a collaboration between the musicians and their audiences. It derives primarily from a social arrangement between listeners and musicians in which the appropriate response to a musician's claim to be a jazz player is to agree to act as if she is improvising when she is supposed to be even though that fact cannot readily be verified. The musician, in turn, presents a jazz player's persona that is

identifiable by the audience and frames the improvisational moments of the performance differently from the non-improvisational ones.²⁶

One virtue of this way of thinking about jazz improvisation is that it precludes the need for the kind of hairsplitting toward which at least some other approaches tend, particularly those emphasizing the uniqueness and spontaneity of improvisation. It is well known that “the jazz improviser reuses and reworks material from previous performances” of the same material and sometimes transfers ideas from one improvisational context to another.²⁷ This begs the question of spontaneity, since to reuse material developed earlier is not to act fully and exclusively in the present moment of performance. Insisting that uniqueness and spontaneity are necessary conditions for jazz improvisation leads inevitably to threshold questions: How much repetition is possible before something played ceases to qualify as improvisation? If I play essentially the same solo tonight on “I Got Rhythm” as I played last night, perhaps because I want to explore certain musical ideas, but spontaneously alter one note, is that enough to constitute my solo as a unique improvisation? Two notes? And so on. Gould and Keaton have challenged this concept of jazz by insisting that “improvisation is conceptually independent of spontaneity.”²⁸ Whereas Brown and Alperson each emphasize the *temporality* of improvisation, its occurrence and existence only in the spontaneous present moment, Gould and Keaton define improvisation in terms of its *textuality*: “One must view improvisation not in terms of the degree of spontaneity of a performance, but rather in terms of how closely a given performance conforms to the score,” understood broadly as any musical model that informs the performer.²⁹ My argument, by contrast, foregrounds the *social* dimensions of jazz improvisation. As long as both performers and listeners agree to act as if improvisation is taking place, this agreement obviates both the ontological question of spontaneity and the philological question of the relationship between musical text and performance. The pertinent questions are not those concerning spontaneity and uniqueness, nor those concerning the relationship between text and performance, but rather those concerning how musicians and audiences arrive at the necessary working consensus on any given occasion.

With this analysis in mind, I return now to the question of recorded jazz. In at least one respect, live and recorded jazz are identical: one can no more determine whether or not the musician is actually improvising by listening to one than the other. But Brown’s concern stems specifically from the ability phonography gives us to repeat, ad infinitum, music that is, in his view, meaningful qua improvisation only in the present moment of

its creation. When reduced to a repeatable form, whether a transcription or a recording, it loses its ontological specificity as performance and becomes composition.

My argument that the fact of improvisation is phenomenally inaccessible from live performance and, therefore, that the perception of improvisation arises from the social relationship between performers and audience rather than the formal or ontological characteristics of the music, invites the further supposition that our relationship as listeners to recorded performances works in a similar fashion. In other words, if live jazz performance obliges the audience to act as if the performers are improvising, perhaps recorded jazz imposes the further social obligation to act not only as if the music is the product of improvisation but also as if one is hearing it for the first time each time one plays the recording.

In fact, Goffman specifically addresses the issue of repetition in his discussion of theatre. In his comments on our willingness as theatre spectators to operate as if we were in the information state required by the event, he notes that “those who have already read or seen the play carry this cooperativeness one step further; they put themselves as much as possible back into a state of ignorance, the ultimate triumph of onlooker over theatergoer.”³⁰ If theatre spectators who are already familiar with the material being performed can act as if they are not, for the sake of the integrity of the event, why could not listeners to jazz recordings do something similar? It is possible to view someone listening to a recording as a double entity like the theatregoer/onlooker or concertgoer/listener: in this case, the two roles might be called the *disc jockey* (the one who chooses which recording to listen to, sets up the playback, and so on) and the *listener*, which means the same thing in this context as it does in that of live performance. In parallel with Goffman’s account of theatre, acting as if one is hearing an improvisation for the first time every time would represent the triumph of listener over disc jockey.

Brown entertains similar possibilities but rejects them. Discussing the work of the psychologist David Swinney, he examines aspects of memory that may enable listeners to experience afresh things they have experienced before.

Even though we may know at a higher cognitive level what’s coming in the music, at a lower cognitive level we can still experience musical options as open ones. Obviously, these options will be ruled out by the direction the music actually takes as we listen. For an instant, however, we will be kept guessing—at the lower cognitive

level, that is. We are able to savor quasi-suspense, so to say. . . . But the theory doesn't rule out the likelihood of boredom setting in for any music subjected to long-term repetition. The problem is that by the n th time around, the mechanism that kicks in to help make familiar music sound fresh would finally become stale. One would have learned the drill.³¹

Brown identifies another issue specific to recorded improvisation.

The problem is that the Swinney response only has application to our experience of preformed structures to which we have been previously exposed. But improvised music possesses no preformed structure that we could have learned and anticipated. With such music, we're not content with the quasi-suspense described earlier. Rather, we are always on the alert for real surprises. . . . With the repetition that phonography makes possible, we can clearly anticipate the choices a performer is going to make.³²

Even though Brown provides a good description of the listener's active engagement with the unfolding drama of jazz improvisation, it is clear that he conceives the listener as a fundamentally passive entity whose experience is driven by forces over which she has no control, such as the workings of memory and the inevitability of boredom. This listener yearns for authentic experience—"real surprise" rather than "quasi-suspense"—but has no power to bring it about.³³

Goffman, by contrast, describes the audience as an active collaborator with the performers in the construction of the event according to a mutually agreed-upon set of subjunctive behaviors—the "as ifs" embedded in their interaction. Summarizing this view, he states, "In the theater, if the cast, the critics, and the audience all play according to the rules, *real* suspense and *real* disclosure can result" even when the material performed constitutes an experience of sheer repetition for some of those involved, including members of the audience.³⁴ Real suspense or surprise, therefore, is not something performers create for audiences to experience; rather, it results from the collaboration between performers and audience, each of whom plays multiple roles within mutually recognized social frames. I extend this argument not only to musical performances but also to recorded music, to which we assume a listener's role that entails, in the case of jazz, acting as if we are hearing a recorded improvisation for the first time each and every time we listen to it.

This model of listening differs significantly from Alperson's account of the relationship between improvisation and recording. Alperson argues elegantly that, with improvisation, "the object of our attention is not an artifact but the creation of one" and points out that any artifact left behind by an improvisation is "a record of a (unique) action . . . from which we read off, as it were, the original action."³⁵ Drawing on Goffman's idea that successful participation in a performance as an audience requires acting as if we are in a specific information state even when it differs from our actual one, I am suggesting that listening to recorded jazz requires the assumption of an information state that makes it possible to hear the recording as an improvisation taking place *in the present moment of listening*, not as a document that refers us to an original (past) action. The relationship between listener and recording I have in mind is implied in Walter Benjamin's analysis of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," where he states, "in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, [the reproduction] *reactivates* the object reproduced" (my emphasis).³⁶ In other words, the recording allows us to restage the performance where we are, so to speak, rather than to travel imaginatively back to its original circumstances. This reactivation results not just from the accessibility of the performance in a reproduced form but also from the audience's willingness to play a socially defined role in relation to it. From my perspective, the crucial point that Brown overlooks is that it is not just the musicians who are performing: the audience, too, performs, and its performance is crucial to the constitution of music—whether live or recorded—as improvised.

NOTES

1. Lee B. Brown, "Phonography, Repetition, and Spontaneity," *Philosophy and Literature* 24, no. 1 (2000): 119.
2. *Ibid.*, 120.
3. *Ibid.*, 120.
4. Carol S. Gould and Kenneth Keaton, "The Essential Role of Improvisation in Musical Performance," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 2 (2000): 143.
5. Philip Alperson, "On Musical Improvisation," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43, no. 1 (1984): 17–29; Ed Sarath, "A New Look at Improvisation," *Journal of Music Theory* 40, no. 1 (1996): 1–38.
6. Frank Tirro, "Constructive Elements in Jazz Improvisation," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 27, no. 2 (1974): 285–305; Lewis Porter, "John Coltrane's 'A Love Supreme': Jazz Improvisation as Composition," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38, no. 3 (1985): 593–621.

7. Bruno Nettl, "Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach," *Musical Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (1974): 3.
8. Rose Rosengarden Subotnik, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 150.
9. Anahid Kassabian, "Ubisub: Ubiquitous Listening and Networked Subjectivity," *Echo* 3, no. 2 (2001), <http://www.echo.ucla.edu/Volume3Issue2/kassabian/Kassabian2.html>.
10. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 30.
11. Lee B. Brown, "Musical Works, Improvisation, and the Principle of Continuity," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54, no. 4 (1996): 364–65.
12. Stan Godlovitch, "The Integrity of Musical Performance," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 4 (1993): 585.
13. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 129.
14. *Ibid.*, 129–30.
15. *Ibid.*, 130–31.
16. For a detailed discussion of the centrality of the performance of persona to musical performance, see Philip Auslander, "Musical Personae," *TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies* 50, no. 1 (2006): 100–119.
17. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 134.
18. *Ibid.*, 135–36.
19. It is worth noting that, for Becker, respecting the "occupational myth of equality" (172) built into jazz does not yield creative music. It is only when "performers do not interact in a way that respects the conservative etiquette" of improvisation but "agree, implicitly and collectively, to give priority to what, in their collective judgment, works and to give short shrift to what doesn't, and not to be polite about it" (175) that true creativity and innovation can emerge. Howard S. Becker, "The Etiquette of Improvisation," *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 7, no. 3 (2000): 171–76.
20. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 3.
21. The full lineup for this performance: Miles Davis (trumpet); John Coltrane (tenor sax); Wynton Kelly (piano); Paul Chambers (bass); Jimmy Cobb (drums); Frank Rehak, Jimmy Cleveland, and Bill Elton (trombones). This performance is available on DVD (Miles Davis, *The Cool Jazz Sound*. MBD Video, 2005); numerous clips of it have also been posted to YouTube.com. A shorter version of the performance analysis to follow appeared originally in Philip Auslander, "Musical Persona: The Physical Performance of Popular Music," *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology*, ed. Derek B. Scott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).
22. Because it was performed for the camera in a television studio, this performance was staged in an "in-the-round" fashion not at all typical for jazz, in which musicians are usually arranged more linearly and frontally with respect to the audience.
23. Mark C. Gridley, "Cool Jazz," *Grove Music Online*, accessed March 15, 2008, <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

24. Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 48.
25. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 13.
26. My suggestion that the perception of improvisation arises from a social arrangement between jazz musicians and their audiences is compatible with other analyses of the social dimensions of jazz. Ingrid Monson, for instance, argues that “improvisational music . . . is a form of social action, as well as a symbolic system; . . . musicians articulate cultural commentary with sound itself” (313). The issue I am addressing here concerns the definition of the situation that precedes the process of communication Monson describes: performers and audience must agree as to what is fundamentally going on before such communication can take place. Ingrid Monson, “Doubleness and Jazz Improvisation: Irony, Parody, and Ethnomusicology,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 2 (1994): 313.
27. Tirro, “Constructive Elements in Jazz Improvisation,” 286.
28. Gould and Keaton, “The Essential Role of Improvisation in Musical Performance,” 145.
29. *Ibid.*, 147.
30. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 136.
31. Brown, “Phonography, Repetition, and Spontaneity,” 116.
32. *Ibid.*, 117.
33. Although Brown is not alone in suggesting that surprise is an important element of improvisation (Debra Cash agrees, for instance), I am not completely persuaded of its essentiality. Tirro describes jazz solos by saying, “The series of notes may be thought of as a stochastic process, a sequence of notes that occur according to a certain probability system called a style. At any point in time, the present event can be seen to have proceeded from past events. . . . Because both the listener and the improviser are oriented to the schema which limits the probabilities allowable for a solo in a particular style, and since the initial statements in the solo carry implications for what is to follow, prediction and, hence, musical meaning are possible. Listener expectation, analysis, and criticism go hand in hand” (“Constructive Elements in Jazz Improvisation,” 288–89). It is my sense as a listener that having one’s expectations fulfilled can be just as satisfying as being surprised: there is something very gratifying about predicting where an improvising performer is going to go, only to have that performer go exactly where one predicted! I grant that too high a quotient of predictability in an improvisation may ultimately lead to a negative evaluation; perhaps the ideal lies in striking a balance between the predictable and the surprising. The balance may vary according to specific style: some kinds of jazz conventionally seem to entail a higher degree of improvisational predictability than others. Debra Cash, “Response to Becker’s ‘The Etiquette of Improvisation,’” *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 7, no. 3 (2000): 177–79.
34. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 136.
35. Alperson, “On Musical Improvisation,” 26.
36. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 221.