

The Dialectical Erotism of Improvisation

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This essay is an extensive abstract of a thesis for the cand.philol. degree in musicology at the University of Oslo, Norway. The thesis is in Norwegian, and the present translation is only a draft. The author is also a professional jazz pianist, with recent trio releases “Changing Places” and “The Ground” on ECM Records. He can also be heard with the duo “aire & angels” with distinguished Norwegian singer Siri Gjære; the CDs “Port of Call” and “At First Light” featuring singer Silje Nergaard; and “First Meeting” and “Contemporary Tradition” with the funky neo-New Orleans band Nymark Collective. Additional information can be found on the web: www.tordgustavsen.com

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Introduction

How does an improviser negotiate paradoxes involving the rationality of constructing musical structure and the "irrationality" of devotion and transcendence? How does he or she handle tensions between the intensity of the moment and the multidimensionality of the overall design of music over time? What are the relations between the need for *controlling* the music and the need for *giving in to* the music? What are the mechanisms of the sometimes paralyzing difficulties – and, on the other hand, of the possibilities for fulfillment and growth – facing improvisers in these dilemmas or fields of tension?

In my opinion, there is a need in musicology to focus on the *Lebenswelt* of the improviser in the actual act of improvising. I want to contribute to this phenomenology of improvisation by exploring issues like the ones raised above. The aim is two-fold: 1) to synthesize and develop theory and knowledge for heuristic reasons alone, and 2) to present it in such a way that it can also be useful for musicians striving to develop as creative improvisers. The theory is abstract, yet rooted in musicianship. I set out to present, discuss, juxtapose and unite a selection of important concepts and perspectives originating from two distinct fields of theory:

- a) Music theory based on Pierre Schaeffer's conceptions of "musical objects" and "scenic consciousness" as presented in the doctoral dissertation of Rolf Inge Godøy "Formalization and Epistemology" (Godøy 1997a), and
- b) Psychological relationship theory based on dialectical models of the processes in which the self faces its surroundings, as presented primarily in Helm Stierlin's "Conflict and Reconciliation" (Stierlin 1974) and Anne-Lise Løvlie's "The Self" (Løvlie 1982).

The need for a unifying presentation of these fields of theory will, hopefully, be made clearer as their basic issues are presented in relation to the improviser's world of consciousness. Suffice it at this point to say the following (and these remarks are also important in explaining some of the *motivation* for writing this essay):

Ad a) Musical improvisation is on-the-spot *composing*, and it also necessarily involves a certain amount of on-the-spot *analysis*. The processes of informal composition and analysis during improvisation are both similar to, and different from, those of conventional composition and conventional musical analysis. To the extent that processes of art made and developed in the moment, and art planned in detail in advance, are the same – or are analogous –, there is reason to believe that conventional music theory can contribute to the understanding of improvisation. Of course, I do acknowledge the many important theoretical contributions already made in the study of improvisation based on notions of harmony, scales, pitch class analysis, motives, formulas etc.. In the present approach, however, I chose to concentrate on a music theory based on the notions of "scenic consciousness" and "musical objects", because this field of theory offers promising perspectives for a genre-neutral understanding of music in general, and also because it is based on a strong focusing on music as *sound experienced in time*. It emphasizes a "radical acousmatic approach", in which notions of "tonality", "Ursatz", "inner structure", "harmonic system" and the like are all subordinate to the notion of "emergent qualities". The focus lies on *listening experience*, and on analysis *based on this listening*. This field of theory offers important insights that are not yet

appreciated by most scholars of jazz – and thus I hope to introduce some important concepts and perspectives that are "fresh" in our field.

Ad b) As important as music theory is for our study, improvisation is still primarily a *mis-en-scene of personality, intuition and self-esteem*; an adventurous "play" with one's own personal skills, desires, limits, obstacles and fears; a universe where the ability to negotiate dilemmas and resolve different kinds of intimate conflicts is just as important as it is in the closest personal relations. Also, I think there is reason to believe that a musician's interaction with the sounding music as a milieu that he or she is both constantly *forming* and constantly *being formed by*, in many ways can be considered analogous to the "individual" (in sociological or psychological terms) interacting with his or her social and physical surroundings in complex, multi-directed processes. This corresponds to the well-known socio-phenomenological dialectics of Berger and Luckmann's "The Social Construction of Reality" (Berger/Luckmann 1967) – and the insights of general phenomenology, hermeneutics and micro-sociology are also the basic foundation for the psychological theory I will be using. Its main focus is the need for *dialectal movements* in the self's facing and acting on its surroundings. This is specified in the need for successful negotiating of dilemmas like *moment vs. duration, difference vs. sameness, gratification vs. frustration, stability vs. stimulation* and *closeness vs. distance*.

Summing up, I want to contribute to the phenomenology of improvisation by reviewing and providing a bridge between a dialectical psychology of relations and development, and a contemporary "scenic" music theory. This is motivated by the characteristics of improvisation itself: As the rational decision-making processes and the more emotional processes involving greater portions of the musician as a whole person are necessarily brought together in the staging of musical improvisation, and as this bringing together will always make up a multi-faced and problematic *whole* in the act of playing, I feel that musicology's approach to improvisation should "take off" exactly from this problematic and challenging whole.

In this, I will also be utilizing some of the more important contributions already made in the study of improvisation. Paul Berliner's "Thinking In Jazz: the infinite art of improvisation" (Berliner 1994) is a major source of data for me; interviews with important jazz musicians presented in this book are cited extensively to illustrate and justify the theoretical concepts. Furthermore, Paul Berliner's own interpretations of his subjects' statements will sometimes also be brought to the front. I will also make references to David Sudnow's classical "Ways of the Hand" (Sudnow 1993), as several of the main issues I concentrate on are already introduced in this remarkable introspective study. Other works will, of course, also be cited, but what has been mentioned so far, does indeed make up my main frame of reference and my main toolbox for approaching the field.

Going on, I will build this essay from a discussion of some basic problems concerning ontological levels and the status of metaphors, through a brief presentation of some of Pierre Schaeffer's ideas as developed in Rolf Inge Godøy's thesis, into the main section exploring the "five dilemmas" using what has by then already been established, while also presenting more theory to clarify the issues.

The need for metaphoric multiplicity

Talking about music or about the making of music necessarily involves the use of metaphors. Every taxonomic system *categorizing* music, every notational system *describing* or *directing* music, and also every informal term used to *label* elements of music or qualities in music, will have to be metaphoric in nature, as the music itself is never equal to, nor contained in, the language used to describe it. Instead of trying to deny this in the way we develop our technical terms and analytical perspectives, we should focus on maximizing the benefits of metaphoric language – and on minimizing its dangers. I see the dangers arising primarily from implicitly or explicitly *identifying* the music with the words describing it; and in the next step in *dogmatizing* these identifying approaches. The benefits, on the other hand, of a humble and *explicitly metaphoric* approach to music lies primarily in the richness of thought and experience that it can produce. Metaphors highlight lived experience, and they also participate in the creative *shaping* of this experience. Used in a non-dogmatic and pluralistic way, yet at the same time with caution and systematic self-criticism, this can provide an environment of creative openness and of growing perceptive fields, without losing its foundation in solid humanistic research.

Relating this to the field of jazz studies, I feel that there is a need for *alternative* metaphors; for new words and perspectives. Apart from informal terms like "groovy", "hot", "happening" and the like, the metaphors of *linguistics* are most widely used in our field when musicians or analysts try to move outside of main stream harmonic or motivic analysis. The favorite metaphor of many jazz musicians and critics alike is no doubt "storytelling". In seeing an improvisation as an unfolding of some kind of a narrative, it becomes natural to focus on the "words" and "sentences" of the music. It also becomes natural to focus on an artist's "vocabulary" – and this metaphor is widely used throughout Paul Berliner's study "Thinking in Jazz" (Berliner 1994): "Improvisation is 'like writing a sentence. The commas, the periods, and the exclamation points have to be very pronounced.'" (Tommy Turrentine in (ibid. p. 157)). Fruitful as this approach may be, I feel that there is something important missing when the linear aspects of the music is always brought to the front, and when one is always looking for some kind of "semantics" in an improvisation.¹ In keeping with the advises of Rolf Inge Godøy (1997a), I favor a multiplicity of metaphors and approaches, a multiplicity of "resolution" in terms of a constant switching between macro and micro levels, and a multiplicity of "aspects" in switching eclectically between different kinds of focuses as to what qualities in the music we are "zooming in" on. A greater variety of metaphors in jazz studies would also help make this branch of musicology more compatible with the many-flavored reality we are actually studying. Ways of thinking, ways of imagining, and ways of approaching the music varies strongly from one musician to the other; and also from one musical situation to the next for the same musician. As stated in one of Paul Berliner's interviews: "The more ways you have of thinking about music, the more things you have to play in your solos" (Barry Harris in (Berliner 1994:146)).

Still, a single study should present some kind of unifying and crystallized point of view. Here, the notions of dilemmas and dialectical processes will eventually provide the unifying theme.

¹ In a sharp remark Jeff Schwarz points to some of the dangers of linguistic metaphors: "The dominance of the Chomskian linguistic model in jazz studies promotes the study of players whose work fits well with the model, and encourages student musicians to develop in similar ways, both of which fit well with the thriving neo-conservative movement in jazz" (Schwarz 1996).

Before I introduce these headlines any further, however, let me review and clarify a very limited number of the very useful terms found in Godøy's major thesis, and also some basic insights from David Sudnow's and Berger/Luckmann's works that are important in making up my theoretical foundation.

Musical objects – emergent qualities

The terms "musical object" and "emergent quality" are rooted in analysis – more specifically, in a *turn* in contemporary musical analysis towards focusing on music *as experienced sound*. Here, one does not start off with a notion of harmony, of tone rows, or of any other abstract systems – rather, one tries to base analysis on a listener's reality as he or she is experiencing music in time. In this, the parallels between visual and aural perception are heavily drawn upon, in the sense that the symbolic *representation* of experienced sound over time is analysis' basic unit, or data. Rough sketch-like hand drawings used to symbolize experience, and computer generated graphics representing aspects of a certain process of sonorous unfolding, are the two most important examples of such symbolic representations. These kinds of representations highlight the *shapes* of objects perceived or musical unfolding processed in the machine, in a manner that brings about *holistic images* instead of reduced "data" (Godøy 1997b:89).

A "musical object" is defined (in the broadest possible terms) as "any segment of sonorous musical unfolding, within defined temporal limits, which we have for our consideration." (Godøy 1997a:36). Accordingly, musical objects may exist on a multitude of levels, from a single tone all the way up to a whole tune or movement or work. Any fixated *entity* of musical substance forms a musical object in a listener's consciousness, and – if verbalized or formalized – in an analysis or a story told to account for the musical experience.

The fundamental paradox of the phenomenology of musical objects is the fact that they are based on sound waves distributed over time, but still present themselves to consciousness as some kind of stable, fixed entities – as Gestalts. The activity of listening thus necessarily involves moving between flux and fixation in a constant interplay between sensing-the-flow and organizing-the-sensations.² There is also a basic "hermeneutical circle" at work here, where we constantly move from a pre-understanding of, and a musical *being in*, the scene as a whole, to focusing on details on a certain level, back to a broader conception of the whole, off to new details possibly on different levels, then back again, etc., etc.. Furthermore, the constitution of musical objects is always based on an interplay between the discontinuities in the physical sound itself – that is, the "natural" limits given by pauses, contrasts, increased or decreased activity etc. – and our tendency to select among, highlight and interpret such discontinuities as *meaningful* in intentional movements in consciousness (ibid. p. 251).

The "emergent qualities" of any musical object are the qualities that present themselves to a given listener in the act of paying attention to the object, thus characterizing it and building its

² This is, of course, a subject already treated extensively in cognitive psychology and general psychology of perception. It comes natural here to refer to the classic puzzle in cognitive psychology in deciding on the relationship between bottom-up and top-down processing; the latter recognizing the importance of our mind's own "hypothesis" constantly operating on, and actually also *selecting*, what our senses take in.

phenomenological profile. Needless to say, different listeners will experience music differently, and no notion of "fundamentals", "inner core" or "most important traits" in music must be given an *a priori* domination over others, as this is something created anew with each listening process. The shaping of a musical landscape takes place *in a listener*, and analysts should respect the status of the listener's consciousness as the privileged ontological sphere of musical reality; rather than trying to reach theoretical "truths" that listeners are *supposed to* experience. This humble analytical approach does not, however, necessarily force the analyst to remain on the "surface of the music" avoiding complexity or notions of compositional techniques. Many listeners will experience music with great sophistication, and – liberal and populist as this kind of analysis may seem – these sophisticated listeners are surely not irrelevant, they are simply not the *only* relevant ones. The crucial concern is that all analysis take into account the ontological levels on which it operates when formalizing musical experience, and also that it be primarily concerned with what really *matters*, in the sense that it tries to thematize those musical qualities that are important in making up the sound that strikes the listener, not necessarily those that gives the composer or the analyst his or her theoretical kicks. Accordingly, analysts should approach the material much more as listeners than as an "experts".

I shall develop these perspectives further in relation to our main field of interest later on. Still, I feel the need for an explicit linkage to the phenomenology of improvisation at this point, to introduce the combining of theory and practice as early as possible. The main lesson to be learnt from Schaeffer's concepts is in my opinion the following: The improviser should be encouraged to *focus on emergent qualities* in the music being produced; neither on theoretical aspects in isolation, nor on "communicating with the audience" leaving out his or her own need for satisfaction and fulfillment. Far too often, improvisers get stuck in a dilemma between doing something "musically interesting" and "pleasing the broader audience". Furthermore, musicians often get stuck in a dilemma between the urge for *expressing* something and the necessity of *evaluating* the music and its effect. In all this, there is a non-productive gap between the "inside" and the "outside" of the music;³ and there is a paralyzing alienation between the musician as an operator and the *music* as accessible sound for potential listeners. What I can suggest here is not, of course, a miracle cure to overcome all such dilemmas. But based on my own experience, as well as accounts from several of my students, I do believe that focusing on *qualities* – on *music as experience* – can be a great help in many situations that are threatened by alienation. This focusing on qualities includes a turn by the musician towards the role of the listener – not necessarily an "unqualified" or theoretically untrained listener, but nonetheless someone who is taking the music in as sound, not as production, nor as vague intentions or personal struggles with the instrument. In this way, the improviser engages in a dialogue between him- or herself as a subject on the one hand and a "generalized other"⁴ receiving and taking in what is created on the other. This has the potential of "opening up" the soundscape in a number of situations that are troublesome; it shifts the focus from technical difficulties and narrow-mindedness in musical traps over towards the *sound* that is actually being realized, thus often

³ The dichotomy "inside" vs. "outside" here corresponds to the "two sides of the musical fabric" as explained by Nicholas Cook in (Cook 1992:122ff).

⁴ The concept of "the generalized other" is essential in the social psychology of the self developed by George H. Mead (Mead 1962). A "taking the role of the other" is a fundamental movement of consciousness allowing the infant to gradually build a conception of his or her person as situated socially in a related-but-separated constellation of uniqueness and belonging.

transforming frustration into curiosity and creative surprises. As stated above, we will return to these crucial issues later on, exploring them further by the use of psychological theory.

Resolution / aspect

In applying the concepts of musical objects and emergent qualities, the key vehicles, so to speak, are the notions of "resolution" and "aspect". These notions are even firmer rooted in the presumption that the "auditory scene" is fundamentally analogous to the visual scene, and they are crucial to a genre-neutral way of theorizing about the experience of music along the lines of Godøy. Briefly summarizing his thorough review of the concepts (Godøy 1997a, see especially the chapters 2.7 and 2.8), it is assumed that we constantly apply different *filters* allowing us to hear certain *aspects* of the sonorous unfolding at the cost of others in a kind of foregrounding (compatible with Gestalt psychology's notion of foreground vs. background). Also, our attention is always focused by way of a *zooming in* at a certain *resolution*. The degree of fineness in the resolution applied will decide what details we are able to hear, and also what *time spans* we are able to grasp: the "finer" our resolution is set, the smaller details can we focus on, but the less are we able to conceptualize bigger entities of sound. And vice versa. Here, there will always be an infinite number of *possible* ways of focusing. And no single way of hearing the music should be given an *a priori* domination in a musicological approach. Thus, analysis must be explicit about its inability to conclude in any ultimate sense of the term. And, it must be explicit in acknowledging the phenomenological, rather than the theoretical (in the traditional "music theory" sense), as its ultimate judge; that is, it has to be measured against, and also draw its main inspiration from, the confusing reality of real people listening.

In my opinion, these considerations are also of great potential importance for improvisers, and for our understanding of the improviser's *Lebenswelt* and its challenges. We stated in the opening section that an improviser necessarily does a great deal of on-the-spot real time analysis. As Godøy's favored kind of analysis is in many ways simply a formalized and acutely awake *listening process*, this kind of analysis is likely to be closely related to the analysis performed by the highly sensitive improvising virtuoso. Analysis necessarily becomes more informal in real time creative acts than in settings involving re-hearings and extensive reflection, but it is nevertheless carried out in the same kind of movement between different resolutions and different aspects in negotiating the musical landscape. And it is, above all, the ability to *handle* these movements with the highest possible efficiency that decides how attentive and flexible a musician can become in the process of improvised music making.

Aspects

According to jazz pianist Fred Hersch, it is important that an improviser be able to "look at a tune from a whole bunch of different perspectives" (Fred Hersch in (Berliner 1994:233)). Subsequently, this is specified to include "... from a textural point of view, from a melodic point of view, or from a rhythmic point of view" (ibid.), and it is made clear that there are also a number of different possible perspectives or aspects *within* each one of the categories texture, melody and

rhythm.⁵ The ability to obtain understanding and inspiration from a combining of several different perspectives on one single musical landscape is crucial to an improviser wanting to create an intriguing, varied and multi-faced whole. Also, this ability is an essential tool for an improviser facing *difficulties* and challenging musical situations – like chord progressions that transcends what has been practiced, song forms that suddenly interrupts the kind of flow established, unexpected musical happenings during performance, etc.. A musician trained in a flexible negotiating of the musical landscape is better equipped for the spontaneous production of solutions to musical challenges, and he or she will less often be stuck in a position having to choose unsatisfactory ways of playing due to creative shortage. An improviser has to be able to grasp any musical situation in terms of its harmonic, melodic, textural, rhythmic and periodic implications, and to be able to process this information in a flow that allows for flexibility and synthesis.

Resolution

Equally important is the ability to combine large scale and small scale focusing. The production of musical ideas – and the establishing of their interrelations in continuity and variation – demands that the improviser negotiate fixations on different resolutions. One way of summarizing these levels of resolution could be the following:

- The level of small details in the production of single tones (attack, decay, quality of tone...)
- The next level of details (intervals, flow of succeeding notes, fingerings...)
- A middle level of phrases or gestures seen as wholes
- Levels of larger units (sections, choruses, unfoldings of solos and the piece at large)

On all these levels there is an urgent need for both unity and variation. At all times, the improviser must balance the heartfelt attention given to one level with the need for quality relations at other levels. For instance, improvised music that contains otherwise brilliant ideas and nice little "happenings", can still be unsatisfactory if the overall flow is missing, and if the form at large isn't compelling. Conversely, a musical unfolding with huge intensity and powerful climaxes, may seem unsatisfactory if the phrases building it are not providing a feeling of uniqueness and expression. We will return to these challenges in greater depth later on – our main objective at this point is simply to *introduce* the practical pedagogical perspectives while reviewing the basics of the theory.

Studying the improviser's world of consciousness, we should also focus on another substantial implication of the term "resolution": the relationship between "general" and "specific" representations of musical ideas. As stated above, the degree of "fineness" in the resolution applied decides what details the analyst can focus on. And at all degrees of resolution, a distinct universe of

⁵ This list of categories and sub-categories would, of course, be *expanded* if we were to provide a comprehensive typology of relevant aspects. Jeff Pressing offers a systematic account in this direction in his classic essay "Improvisation: Methods and Models" (Pressing 1988). This work is extensively reviewed in my Norwegian thesis on which this essay is built, but due to limitations of space, it will not be covered in any depth here. Furthermore, my choosing to focus on Godøy's and Schaeffer's perspectives rather than on Pressing's here, is also based on the assumption that Pressing's contributions are already fairly well known among jazz scholars, whereas there has been little attention given to this other field of theory so far.

qualities to contemplate will emerge. There is reason to believe that – along similar lines – a highly complex and intriguing process of musical imagery is at work in an improviser's conception of the music as realized sound and as potential sound. A phrase can be represented as a contour, a "statement" or as a process. And with all these categories of representation, the level of specification can vary a great deal; everything from rough outlining sketches to detailed programs prescribing note-to-note building can be useful. In the process of improvisation, most musicians probably engage in a constant switching between different levels of exactness in the representations produced and acted upon. Basing his conclusions upon numerous interviews with jazz musicians, Paul Berliner states that "the interplay between the general and the specific features of their musical ideas is a common theme in artists' accounts of creativity" (Berliner 1994:230). To expand on the implications of this "interplay" we quote from Berliner's reflections involving also the relationship between working memory and long term memory storage:

"In the transition between the artist's short-term and long-term memory, the pitches and rhythms of some phrases metamorphize into particular variants. Others transform into more general ideas. These include patterns of harmonic motion, impressions of timbral change, and traces of melodic shapes or time spans, whose precise pitches and rhythms artists fill in when improvising. The latter procedures constantly generate additional, fully detailed figures, which replenish the soloists' vocabulary" (ibid.).

The basic term of a "musical idea" is in itself ambiguous and intriguing in this respect:

"In the language of music, 'ideas' themselves may be specific or general, or comprise a combination of specific and general properties. ... [I]mprovisers sometimes draw upon general musical features or principles to generate specific versions of patterns, while at other times they generalize from the details they appreciate in specific patterns and formulate larger principles from them that subsequently serve as guidelines. The precise circumstances of performances affect this process, of course, for artists must ultimately content with whichever representation of an idea occurs to them in the moment, whether specific or general" (ibid. p. 800 – footnote no. 7).

These quotations highlight the importance of being able to operate on different resolutions – in different levels of exactness – without losing focus and clarity. This kind of *movement* is as useful in improvisation as in analysis and attentive listening. As we shall explore in the following sections of this essay, I believe that the flexibility and efficiency with which an improviser negotiates different levels of resolution – and, just as important, the relations *between* the levels of resolution – is crucial to improvisational skills.

Summing up and moving on

What I have tried to do in this section is to introduce the notion of the "musical object" with its related concept of "emergent qualities", and the genre-neutral analytical tools of "aspects" and "resolution". A short review like this can, of course, not fully present the vast importance and implications of this approach; my aim has been to carry out a brief presentation, and to introduce the relevance of the theory for the study of improvisation as early as possible. What I will try to demonstrate taking this further, is the great potential in combining these analytical tools with a dialectical psychology of relations in exploring the improviser's fundamental dilemmas. Before we turn to these issues in detail, however, we have to establish the most basic dialectics of improvisation and its situations.

Music as environment / a basic phenomenological dialectics of making music

Bass player Chuck Israels is quoted as follows in Paul Berliner's "Thinking In Jazz": "No matter what you're doing or thinking about beforehand, from the very moment the performance begins, you plunge into that world of sounds. It becomes your world instantly, and your whole consciousness changes" (Chuck Israels in (Berliner 1994:348)). What kind of world is this? What phenomenological universe lies beneath the crystallization of improvised musical happenings? How is this world maintained and developed during performance?

In general, I would argue that we need a bringing together of insights from cognitive psychology and insights from phenomenological humanist psychology to explore these fundamental issues. In this essay so far, we have advocated some basic technical terms to tie the study of improvisation to analysis along both phenomenological and cognitive lines, while also stressing the importance of creative, attentive *listening* in general for the development of improvisational skills. The terms we have established are well founded in contemporary music theory and in research on the perception of sound (Godøy 1997a / Bregman 1990). This, I think, is crucial to avoid a sliding of our approach into what can never be tested scientifically. However, we have to go deeper into the holistic qualities of a musical situation. Even though the notion of the musical object is rooted in phenomenology and holistic perspectives of a "scenic consciousness", it necessarily brings about an artificial split in the improviser's *being* in the music. As stated earlier, I believe there is a "hermeneutical circle" at work in improvisation, with constant movements from intuitive conceptions of the whole towards focusing on details, back to a broader conception of the whole, and so on and so forth. Thus, this split in our theoretical conception is *dangerously* artificial only to the extent that it leaves out or *excludes* the holistic perspectives and the notion of an improviser experiencing musical totality. Treated as a "part of the greater picture", this line of reasoning is, I think, not dangerous at all.

Looking for holistic theoretical conceptions of the situations of improvisation, I think there is much to gain in seeing the musical totality as an *environment* or a *milieu*, analogous to the social and socio-material world facing the "individual" in micro-sociological theory. Here, the structures, the paths, the names of things, and the possibilities for action, are all imposed, maintained and developed for the individual in a basic dialectical process in which the world shapes us and we shape the world. This fundamental *forming and being formed* is what the improviser engages in as he or she enters a musical space. What has been played, can never be un-played. What is there, is there. And what goes on in all the different instruments necessarily creates the musical world at any given time. At the same time, this world is acutely flexible; open to different kinds of interpretations, and different ways of highlighting, selecting, elaborating, contrasting etc., etc.. Thus, the improviser also *creates* the world in the process of intentionally focusing on it – and, of course, in *acting upon* these perceptions adding more music.

To me, these insights are primarily linked to the reading of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's classical "The Social Construction of Reality" (Berger/Luckmann 1967). Their conception of the relation between subjectivity and objectivity, between externalization and internalization, and between *action* and the "objective world" of definitions, roles and institutions,

can be immensely fruitful for the improviser looking for new metaphors and new ways of conceptualizing playing. Of course, there is no room for an extensive review of Berger and Luckmann's theory here, but I would like to quote a few central passages that leads directly to our conceptualizing of the improviser's *Lebenswelt*. Undoubtedly, the main terms I am about to present – "habitualization" and "institutionalization" – are also among the most important concepts in the book as a whole.

This theory of society and culture takes off from an imagined "blank" starting point, where definitions, roles and norms are built up from scratch. We are presented with a very general and useful concept of institutionalization, covering all kinds of established prescriptions or *solutions* in social life. The starting point is the concept of *habits*, or "habitualization":

"Habitualization provides the direction and the specialization of activity that is lacking in man's biological equipment, thus relieving the accumulation of tensions that result from undirected drives. And by providing a stable background in which human activity may proceed with a minimum of decision-making most of the time, it frees energy for such decisions as may be necessary on certain occasions. In other words, the background of habitualized activity opens up a foreground for deliberation and innovation" (Berger/Luckmann 1967:71).

Furthermore:

"In terms of the meanings bestowed by man upon his activity, habitualization makes it unnecessary for each situation to be defined anew, step by step. A large variety of situations may be subsumed under its predefinitions. The activity to be undertaken in these situations can then be anticipated. Even alternatives of conduct can be assigned standard weights" (ibid.).

Habits that are established with their related actions and meaning, will acquire a status of "objectivity" – they enter into the "objective" world of meaning, of points of orientation and potential for action that the individual lives and acts *in*. This, in turn, is the basis of Berger and Luckmann's concept of institutionalization – and the "institutional world" thus covers everything from "small" institutions like lighting fires (how, where, when and why) to the definitions and norms concerning marriages in a given culture. Berger and Luckmann's concept of institutionalization thus covers both micro and macro sociology, and it also *combines* these levels in an intriguing way. The main point is that an institution is an objective reality that shapes the individual and its action through internalization, but – at that same time, and with just as much stress – that the institution is actualized, maintained, passed on and created anew only through externalization in action; and that it does not have any *existence* whatsoever outside this dialectical field.

"[T]he objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity. The process by which the externalized products of human activity attain the character of objectivity is objectivation. The institutional world is objectivated human activity, and so is every single institution" (Berger/Luckmann 1967:78).

And then:

"The product acts back upon the producer. Externalization and objectivation are moments in a continuing dialectical process. The third moment in this process ... is internalization ... by which the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness" (ibid.).

Subsequently, the fundamental dialectical process is summarized in the following statement: "Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product" (ibid. p. 79). I believe that this – in our context – can be re-written and extended into a fundamental dialectics of making music: The sounding music is a product of the musician – making music is an externalizing of the musician. Next, the sounding music is objective reality – the components of music are "objective" entities. But now, the musician becomes a product of the music – his or her being in the music shapes consciousness with "form and matter" from the musical landscape. Finally, this perception shaping the musician is in itself an *active* process in selecting, grouping and highlighting (as Gestalt theory and cognitive psychology show us), and thus, the circle is already back to where the musician is creating the music. All of this make up the very basic dialectics of improvisation, and – judging from experience – lots of stimulating moments and musical kicks, as well as new musical ideas, can emerge from just contemplating this while playing.

Sorts of places / sorts of action / ways of the hand

As an inspiring account of how musicians develop and maintain the "places", the "paths", and the boundaries both shaping and limiting their creative potential, David Sudnow's introspective study "Ways of the Hand" (Sudnow 1993) is powerful. Here, Sudnow uses the informal notion of "*sort of*" in a very interesting way; he talks of "sorts of places", "sorts of action" and "sorts of space" in the improviser's conceptions of his or her instrument and of the musical landscape (ibid. p. 53ff). These are categorized representations of elements of the "terrain" in which the improviser operates – both the practical/technical terrain on the instrument and the musical terrain at large. These representations – and their efficient categorization – are crucial to a musician having to make sense of the music going on at any given moment, and they are crucial for the *potential for further musical action* embedded in any musical situation. Hence, in teaching improvisation a basic concern should be the development of a foundation for the student's growth in possession of such cognitive tools, and for the flexibility in his or her *using* the tools.

However, improvisation still is a bodily activity, where the hands (and also the mouth, the legs and other parts of the body, depending on the choice of instrument) seem to be in possession of resources and find the ways (cf. the title "Ways of the Hand") itself. Deciding upon where the "control center" is actually situated in the complex interaction between learned, automated activity and creative, spontaneous approaches to the soundscape, is really not necessary for us. Whether or not it is neurologically correct that "the body has its own memory", is not crucial to the phenomenology of improvisation. What is important, is how the situations of improvisation are in fact *experienced* – what models and metaphors that fit this experience, and that work pragmatically in pedagogical or semi-therapeutic ways providing development and growth in improvisational skills. What we have to try to grasp in order to develop this phenomenology in the right direction, is the *situation as a holistic being-in-the-music*, incorporating in principle whatever instincts, reflexes, strategy making, reflections, obstacles, threats of alienation, potentials for liberation etc., that seem relevant to the musicians in question. This, of course, is precisely the writing together of the different fields of theory outlined in the opening section of this essay – along, also, with perspectives from the physiology of movement, which we will not try to get into here.

Forming and being formed

Developing as an improviser thus is a development of "ways" and "places" (cf. Sudnow); your *potential* as resulting from the totality of your body-and-mind's conceptions of the musical situation and its possibilities, as well as the physical ability to go along with the ideas conceived. In any musical situation, a number of actions are *potentially present*. There is a constant process of strategy development going on, and *choices* are constantly made. Furthermore, the improviser receives constant *feedback* from the sound that is in fact realized, and this feedback deepens and refines the representations that initiated the sound, while also offering guidance and conditions for the actions to be conceived next. All this is part of the basic dialectics of making music as outlined above; the musician is constantly both *forming* and being *formed by* the music – and the "inner" musical landscape is both the source and the outcome of the music being played. There is a fundamental process going on of interaction between the apparatus of mental representations, the physical abilities, and the sounding music itself. On the one hand: you learn from playing – musical action constantly brings about experience and understanding. On the other: you play what you have learned – the music is constantly produced *from* experience and understanding.⁶ This, then, is my conception of the basic dialectics of making music: forming and being formed, which requires a delicate synthesis of inventiveness and firmness in *doing* on the one hand, and openness and humility in *receiving* on the other.

Now, instead of leaving these issues having introduced them (as is often the case in jazz studies), I would like to try to investigate the paradoxes and the need for dialectical solutions further. We turn to the psycho-dynamic theory of Stierlin and Løvlie for a very useful set of terms.

The dialectical challenges

Forming the music while at the same time being formed by it thus is the basic condition for the improviser's being in the music. A musician has to find his or her own way of negotiating contradictions – and no unified theory can of course account for the multiplicity of improvised solutions. Still, I believe that the terms coined by Helm Stierlin in (Stierlin 1974) and developed by Anne-Lise Løvlie in (Løvlie 1982) outlining a few very general, yet precise and thought-provoking, fundamental dialectical themes facing humans, apply very well with empirical data on improvisation, while also painting a broader and more comprehensive picture of musical improvisation as action in life. This theory is rooted both in the psychology of children's development and in psychotherapy with adults; the latter covering both individuals and couples seeking counseling. The theory is *psycho-dynamic* in its emphasis on the experiences of early childhood and their fundamental importance for a person's self esteem, and for the ability to engage in close relations with compassion and openness without "loosing oneself". The tendency to fall into destructive patterns and repetitive conflicts is also rooted in the themes of early childhood; in a failing to come to terms with basic puzzles and conflicts. However, the theory is also *existential* – in its emphasis on flexibility and choice throughout life, and it is *optimistic* in a firm belief in the

⁶ And, importantly, this dialectical process is way too complicated to be captured by a simplistic cognitive model of "feedback" where what you get back from the music is reduced to being a tool for *adjustment* in the reaching of some pre-programmed goal or intention.

possibility of transforming destructive patterns into creativity and growth, however complicated and demanding the processes of therapy or liberation may be.

The "five polarities" are descriptions of dilemmas that mankind is "doomed to" live with and encounter on a multitude of levels – dilemmas that must always be worked through in changing relations and changing situations. As stated in the introduction, the art of improvisation surely is not just a field where you develop ideas of storytelling, narratives, form, harmony, etc. the way a composer does. This art form is just as much a *live act* where the musician *confronts* and *faces* the music, the fellow musicians, and the audience in a very real time situation. A virtuoso improviser not only has to possess impressing analytical, creative and technical abilities, but equally important the ability to *put these abilities into play* in chaotic, multi-faced situations. The improviser has to build a musical unfolding that *works* on all levels of resolution (cf. the theory reviewed above) without having much time to focus on each level separately. The improviser must attach musical activity to a basic "groove" and "mood", while at the same time *challenge* and transcend these relatively stable qualities. The improviser must bring out his or her intensity and affective presence without losing technical control, and without losing the ability to create overviews and orient him- or herself in the musical landscape. All this, in my opinion, ties the art of improvisation closely to the basic challenges of "developing as a human being". And, I believe that psychological and philosophical theory thematizing precisely these dialectical challenges in close personal relations, sexuality and child development may shed a very fruitful light on the analogous challenges in making improvised music.



Moment vs. duration

As we have already explored by applying the concept of the "musical object", the ability to negotiate musical *time* at different levels of resolutions is crucial for an improviser. Stierlin's first dialectical theme explores the intense dilemma between a subjective *now* and the unfolding in time. To make the possibilities and the dangers facing us in this field of tension come clearer, we can specify the following oppositions – one constructive/creative/growth-bringing and one destructive/repetitive/stalling: 1) This polarity embraces the fruitful tension between the *involvement* and the *intensity* in experiencing the moment on the one hand, and the *fullness* and the *reliability* in that which lasts and builds itself over time, on the other. 2) However, on the dark side of the dialectical theme, there is the "blind", restless and isolated moment vs. the empty, boring duration without intensity and absorbing focuses. A main theme for Stierlin and Løvlie alike is exploring – and laying out with therapeutic aims – the *risks* of living in dilemmas like these: the dangers facing us in that the attractive versions of the polarities have a tendency to transform into their destructive "shadows" if a dialectical movement is not initiated in which the one polarity is brought into dialogue with the other polarity – and new consciousness thus created in a process of synthesis. The infant must go through a process from an undifferentiated state of being where everything is experienced immediately in an all-embracing now, towards a familiarity with the passing of time by the experience rhythms and cycles, and towards a coming to terms with deferred gratification. And all of this has a huge potential for creating fear and anxiety (Løvlie 1982:91). The improviser must also learn to unite his or her intense focus on the moment with a backward orientation in a feeling for the implications of musical events that have already taken place, as well as a forward orientation

in a feeling for the "loading" of the situations in terms of qualities that can be developed onwards in the course of the improvisation. He or she must learn to "hold back", to canalize and distribute intensity, and thus to shape a musical substance over time. This is difficult, because the fuel of spontaneity and childlike involvement in the approach must be maintained at the same time.

Negotiating musical form

Orienting oneself in forms and chord changes underlying the improvisation also has to meet such a multi-directional imperative. Paul Berliner states that this is difficult for beginners: "[D]isoriented novices commonly fail to anticipate the chord changes, instead clashing with the underlying harmony. In other instances they manage to complement successive chords but lose sight of the larger form" (Berliner 1994:178). You have to negotiate all the different levels at the same time, and at any given "now" relate yourself to the given location in the basic unfolding of form. Advanced improvisers often possess huge and impressing flexibility in this respect. Guitarist Emily Remler suggests that it can be fruitful to shift her focus towards larger "entities" of time while improvising; to achieve an extended contextualisation and give larger perspectives to the subjective now: "thinking 'in terms of whole choruses instead of two-bar and four-bar phrases'" and "...building the tension over a whole chorus" (Emily Remler in *ibid.* p. 266). The main point here is that improvisers must develop an ability to experience and to "think" their musical now in different contexts, with a manifold, yet intensely focused fullness in perspective. Any given musical incident gains its meaning partly from its *relatedness* to the overall form, to the musical processes activated in dynamics, timbre, rhythm, and – in linear improvisation, at least – to the motivic aspects of what has been going on in the music so far. You have to be completely *there*, in the heat of the moment. At the same time, you have to be completely in control of the unfolding, to be intuitively aware of the time line and the internal relations in the musical texture. And for great improvisation to really happen, this can not be an academic analysis, nor a troublesome *shifting* of focus back and forth; it must be a lived synthesis of man's basic dilemma between the moment and the duration.

Strategies and cross-modality

The ability to unite moment and duration is also crucial in improvised strategy making. Berliner talks of "the mental agility both to imagine and perform new short-range ideas while planning and managing longer-range strategies" (Berliner 1994:214). We quote from his treatment of motivic variation and repetition, for an illustration of challenges in negotiation of time and memory in the forming of improvised phrases:

"[W]hile they are performing their ideas, artists must learn to juggle short- and intermediate-range goals simultaneously. To lead an improvised melodic line back to its initial pitch requires the ability to hold a layered image of the pitch in mind and hand while, at the same time, selecting and performing other pitches. The requirements of this combined mental and physical feat become all the more taxing if, after improvising an extended phrase, soloists decide to manipulate more complex material, developing, perhaps, its middle segment as a theme. In all such cases, they must not only rely on their memory of its contour, but their muscular memory must be flexible enough to locate the segment's precise finger patterns instantly within their motor model of the phrase" (*ibid.* p. 200).

The tension between moment and duration is handled by the use of cross-modal representations,⁷ where muscular-motor memory, visual images of contour, and more conventional theoretical categorization based on harmony and other parameters, are all important in making up the totality of musical orientation. The improviser must possess a highly developed sense of *integration* in these landscapes, as well as a special kind of intense concentration, in order to hold these elements together and use them creatively in the composing-in-the-moment. When such abilities are present, it is precisely the richness of this pluralistic universe of images – and the unique devotion in the concentration on the richness – that assist the musician in producing musical meaning.

Direction

Handling the moment in relation to the flow of time also demands a special sense of musical *direction*. By necessity, any point in the musical unfolding is part of movement in time, but it is the improviser's task to make these directional movements "good", "interesting", and "organic". Harmony, of course, matters a lot in this respect, and we have already dealt with the expression "anticipating the chord changes" as a basic challenge for beginners. An esthetically satisfying jazz improvisation within stylistic borders based on chord changes, demands that you always combine an exploration of the various chords as universes in themselves with movements that foreshadow and prepare the chord to come. Bass player Rufus Reid states: "When I'm playing walking bass lines, I try to have the line moving somewhere. ... This has a lot to do with harmonic phrasing. If I'm playing a ii–V–I progression, I'm not just playing the notes of the chord. I'm moving toward V when I'm playing ii. I'm constantly flowing, pushing toward I. If you think consciously of moving somewhere harmonically when you play, it assimilates this swinging sound, because harmonic sound is motion" (Rufus Reid cited in (Berliner 1994:352)). More generally, David Sudnow says that "[t]o go for a sound is to go for a sound within a course. From the standpoint of the production of sounding courses, it is in terms of securely targeted movements, implicated by preceding-forthcoming-positional-configurations, that the definition of sound is to be sought in the first place" (Sudnow 1993:74). Here, Sudnow touches upon something very crucial in the "moment vs. duration"

⁷ The notion of cross-modality is another fundamental concept in Rolf Inge Godøy's theorizing about the nature of musical experience: "[I]t seems now reasonable to suspect that musical imagery is fundamentally cross-modal in the sense that it will include motor, kinaesthetic, haptic, visual, etc. components as well as 'purely auditive' components" (Godøy 1998:4). We quote extensively from Paul Berliner's work to appreciate the relevance of this for the improviser's world of consciousness:

"As artists explore different approaches to improvisation – whether vocally or instrumentally, or conceptually improvising away from an instrument without vocalizing their creations – their ideas can assume different forms of representation. Improvisers sometimes emphasize aural thinking. At other times, they emphasize theoretical thinking. Additionally, their rich field of imagination can feature abstract visual displays. Curtis Fuller 'tries to paint little pictures' when he improvises. Fred Hersch, too, 'sees things very graphically that way.' He visualizes what he plays as 'a kind of big playground with things jumping around on it, usually in terms of melodic movement: things going up this way, balanced by something going down that way'. Or he will see 'large masses of things moving along: one string of notes jumping up and down, stopping, twitching around. Music has a feeling of space around it; it exists in space, these little mobiles of things. I like to think of music visually like that', Hersch explains" (Berliner 1994:175).

To us, then, cross-modality means the coupling and interaction between different modalities of sensations in representations in the improviser's "musical imagery" – a flexible interaction with lots of different patterns of domination, struggle, equalization and coexistence between the different modalities.

dialectics of improvisation. The improviser's *intentional movements* – both mentally and physically – when he or she executes a "go for a sound" is the main component of improvisation as an activity. The way a sound *works* and acquires meaning in different musical and motor relations, must be a part of the improviser's internalized and embodied *knowledge*. This knowledge is fundamental to the ability to form anticipating "hypothesis" concerning potential sound events. It is also an important component in the ability to efficiently interpret events that have actually taken place – which in turn initiates further strategy making by processes of association, repetition, variation etc..

Perception "in a now" – duration conceptualized in the moment

The paradox-ridden relationship between a constant flux of sensations and the more stable perceptions in objects in consciousness are of great interest to modern music theory and psychology. You have to "step out of time", so to speak, to form objects in consciousness in the constant stream of sensations. An object in consciousness is a crystallized discontinuity in the continuous soundscape, and such crystallization is necessary in order to orient ourselves and make sense of what's going on. "The continuous is only perceivable through the discontinuous, as 'the intuition of a temporal interval takes place in a now'" (Godøy 1997a:63 – with a quotation from Edmund Husserl). A "subjective now" in Husserl's terms contains both protentions and retentions⁸ – that is, both foreshadows of time to come and impressions from preceding portions of time. The improviser's chain of moments is a sophisticated chain of "subjective now"s along this lines.

These insights can also be coupled with Alfred Pike's concepts of "intuitive cognition" and "prevision" from his "A Phenomenology of Jazz" (Pike 1974). These notions capture the improviser's ability to immediately discover and "dig in to" fundamental qualities and possibilities for further development in a given musical event. Pike states: "What is first given must be developed. The incipient jazz image has its future horizons, and the improviser successively changes his viewpoint as he strives for these horizons. The immediate perceptual field contains within itself the potential structure of future fields" (Pike 1974:89). Accordingly, in musical improvisation the present is always in labor with the future – both as "work" and as "giving birth".

"Emergent qualities" as pragmatic synthesis

Here, we should also develop the notions of musical objects and emergent qualities further from the definitions given earlier. In my opinion, a focus on emergent qualities has significant potential for *solutions* to some of the problems facing the improviser in the dilemma between moment and duration. By now, it should be well established that these concepts are meant to help us explore the formation of relatively stable, meaningful object-impressions of musical substance, in the face of a constantly floating musical unfolding. A moment's experience; a quality, a contour, a subtle resolution, a tickling tension, etc., etc. – all is based on a "distributed substrate" sensed over time, but captured "in a now". To comprehend and contemplate – and then, to imaginatively explore – this fundamental paradox in our perception of sound, can be very useful to the improviser.

⁸ A more thorough review of Husserl's phenomenology and its concepts would, of course, be highly relevant at this point, but this would extend the limits of this essay.

The wish to be existentially *present* in the details of the music can harm the ability to orient oneself in the broader soundscape, and to get a grip of what one is actually delivering; that which can be perceived by listeners. I think that this danger can be met by developing an ability to listen for the emergent qualities in phrases or musical events while they are still in the making in the improvisational process. Thereby, one strengthens the skill to perceive and control the relevant *connections* between details on a micro level and perceivable qualities on other levels of resolutions. While one is composing and performing an improvised phrase, some distinct emergent qualities usually manifests themselves – often to the surprise of the improviser, too – qualities that can be purified, developed, deepened or contrasted efficiently if taken seriously and understood in the right way. If consciousness during performance is actively searching for these qualities as *qualities to encounter*, and not only focusing on technique, theory and devices from "the other side of the music",⁹ nor exclusively on the inner creative "pressure" escaping objectivity, the improviser can come closer to a *listener's reality* without having to turn to populist, and often times alienating, ways of "communicating with the audience".

As indicated earlier, this is really about getting the *dialogue* happening in playing; not only with the other musicians (if any) and the audience (if any), but with oneself as a creative subject and an appreciating receiver. Hereby, one strengthens the ability to build musical substance that *works*, in the sense that it offers striking and intriguing emergent qualities. This dialogic imperative demands the ability to negotiate relationships between unfolding in time (production of a distributed sound substrate) and existential *moments* (crystallized musical objects with emergent qualities perceived "in a now"); at a multitude of levels, the improviser must converse different "presences" and intimately *feel* connections between separate details building the larger units and the overall qualities of these units. We will return to related perspectives in our exploration of the dialectics between closeness and distance. In the present section, however, our main emphasis lies on the puzzles of *time* in improvised music making, and we close this with stating the following: Although the dialectics between moment and duration will always represent a field of challenge and risk even for advanced improvisers, an important path to practical solutions and development of improvisations skills in this area lies precisely in the common human mechanisms of sound perception – in the pendulum that is always moving between "floating" substance and stable objects. Contemplating these mechanisms, and developing them to a maximum, is likely to do the improviser a lot of good.¹⁰

⁹ Cf. once again Nicholas Cook's distinction between "the two sides of the musical fabric" (Cook 1992:122ff).

¹⁰ Of course, a more systematic research on the effects of such contemplation would be valuable. At this stage, I can only refer to the statements presented earlier in this section (Rufus Reid and Emily Remler – and also David Sudnow's widely accepted introspective reports) suggesting that my conclusions at this point are in fact valid, while also referring to my own experiences in experimenting with this at the piano – as well as the reported experiences of several of my students. These experiences are, however, so far not formalized in scientifically acceptable ways, and a further development of my project would surely have to include more reliable empirical data.

Difference vs. sameness

Here, we should also start by laying out the difference between a constructive and a stalling version of the polarity. 1) There is a fruitful tension between experiences of separateness and individuality on the one hand and of belonging in immediate at-homeness and understanding on the other. 2) In its destructive counterpart, however, the polarity embraces alienating isolation and lack of understanding on the one hand, and the undifferentiated symbiosis where one lives in repetitive patterns without really recognizing the other as an individual on the other. As in the dilemma discussed in the previous section, the danger of transformation from growth-through-synthesis into stalling, unfruitful patterns faces us when we are unable to encounter the one side of the polarity with the other in a dialectical movement. Humans have an acute need of *both sides* in the polarity in their closest relations and also in their praxis, but the two sides can easily get into a difficult opposition, and the dialectical movement is easily "frozen" in repetitive conflicts. Coming to terms with being separate *and* being connected; indeed, developing dialectical ways of being fulfilled in separateness through tight connections, and being relaxed in connected belonging through the acquisition of secure separateness; these are all basic challenges for the infant's growing appreciation of self, as well as for the adult living the existential themes of human life again and again (cf. Løvlie 1982:91ff). Emmy van Deurzen also explores these paradoxes in her account of existentialist psychotherapy: "The balancing act that we all have to work with is that of going out towards the world whilst maintaining a centeredness and equilibrium at the core. In terms of human relationships, this leads to the experience of the polarities of belonging and isolation, dominance and submission, power and impotence, contact and disconnection, recognition and rejection, participation and avoidance" (van Deurzen:1988:39).

This is perhaps the most difficult of Stierlin's polarities to adapt to the study of musical improvisation, in that its emphasis is so explicitly concerned with person-to-person relationships. Relating it to music-making, it would seem natural to focus mainly on interpersonal relations within a band, and thus develop a social psychological approach with group dynamics and the tension between self realization and collectivism as the main concern. This, of course, would be very interesting. But here, we are trying to develop a theoretical conception of the individual improviser's musical world of consciousness. And, although recognizing the paramount importance of group dynamics and of interpersonal relations also in the very act of playing, I still want to continue exploring the improviser's relating to the musical situation from a somewhat individualistic point of view, and I believe Stierlin's dialectical theme is highly relevant in this respect, too. Two fields in particular seem to be important here: First, the tension between "entering into the music" on the one hand, and analyzing it as something "outside of" oneself on the other. Second, the relationship between continuity/similarity and variation/contrast, which is already well researched in music theory, although not often within an explicit dialectical framework. Both these fields have tight connections to other polarities – the first one especially to "closeness vs. distance", and the second to "stimulation vs. stabilization" – but I do think there is much to gain from treating them under this headline as well.

Familiarity and curiosity – the unstable nature of the acting subject in making music

We have already touched upon the "unstable" nature of the acting subject in suggesting a dialogue between *agency* and *receivment* as the basic status of an attentive creative improviser. The improviser is and must be *different* and *separate* from the music in so far as he or she is making up strategies, analyzing, labeling units, identifying processes, and challenging the material in new ways. At the same time, the improviser is *one* with the music in an infant-mother like *symbiosis* nurturing a need for familiar groove and belonging. The state of combined childlike devotion and adult-like control in relating to the music is crucial. Paul Berliner identifies this paradox in his interviews with jazz musicians; the calls for "letting go" and "let the music play you" are as frequent as the calls for taking control and being active in shaping the music. He states that "[t]his paradoxical relationships between musical actions calling for a passive performance posture and others calling for precise artistic control contributes to the mystique that surrounds improvisation" (Berliner 1994:219). Surely, it is a kind of mystique. At the same time, it is not very different from the mystique that we all live in our coming to terms with the need for *belonging* in familiar intimacy and warmth, and *individualization* in action, divergence and self-evaluation – and contemplating this analogy has a creative potential for musicians.¹¹

Apart from mere contemplation, how does one develop skills for handling this "mystique" in practice? Impressive analytical, technical and creative skills must be united with the courage to let go of control, and the courage to engage in something that you can never know the outcome of on beforehand. You have to dare "losing" yourself without guaranties as to how and when you get yourself back. You have to dare the encounter with the challenging unknown within the familiar. Helm Stierlin talks of a *labor* necessary in human relations in order to live the dilemma between symbiosis and separateness fruitfully and dialectically: "Through this work we transcend the narcissism that keeps us from recognizing in the other anything but what is already known and familiar – that is, ourselves. This work makes us capable of incorporating the other's difference in us. Thereby, we ourselves become more complex, and gain greater opportunities for developing the relationship and our psychological understanding. But thereby, we envisage differences on a deeper level, differences that again has to be accommodated and transcended [opphet / Aufheben?]" (Stierlin 1974:53 – my translation, from the Norwegian version). I do think that this "labor" in many ways corresponds to the improviser's challenges in constantly discovering the music anew, in seeing new "ways" and new solutions, and in bringing fresh curiosity to the situation, while also hanging on to the familiarity and intimacy with the musical landscape, and the self esteem thus gained from feeling like a competent musician. When improvisation is flowing, it is precisely these oppositions that are constantly enriching each other in a dynamic movement. When the music is *not* flowing, the challenges is experienced as burdensome and alienating, and neither oneness nor curiosity is

¹¹ This corresponds to the struggle between the "discontinuous" and the "continuous" in George Bataille's classic "Erotism" (Bataille 1986). We are discontinuous beings in keeping ourselves as separated individuals, but we long for the continuous in being fundamentally tied to the world and to other people. Eroticism is the field of the most intense tensions and battles here. "Erotic activity, by dissolving the separate beings that participate in it, reveals their fundamental continuity, like the waves of a stormy sea" (ibid. p. 22). We strive for unity and continuity, but these states are also threatening to us, as they violate our stable sense of individuality, thus bringing the intensity of life close to extinction and death. I hope to develop the linkage to Bataille in later writing, suffice it here to say that I do believe these fields of tension between separateness and unity are analogous in devoted musical improvisation and eroticism.

blooming. (Still, these are moments that should be lived without too much fear, because they nonetheless represent potential for breakthroughs and radical synthesis through honest search, craftsmanship and strokes of luck as well.)

Of course, no single technique or fixed method of practicing can ensure success in this dynamic field. Still, I would like to suggest the task of playing phrases or making musical events with an explicit focus on combining at-homeness and surprise; with the aim of getting a firmer grip of practical ways to unite with the music and confront it at the same time. This can be done through exploitation of intervals, harmonic contents, registral direction, different voicings, etc., etc. – in short, every musical parameter routinely worked on by aspiring improvisers can be subject to this creative work. Furthermore, in practicing, one should open up to the powerful *experiencing* of analogies between "life" and "art" along the lines drawn above. Much is to be gained for skilled musicians by just letting the music happen while reaching for an existential encounter with the situation as such: reaching for the *feeling* of both being one with the music and being an agent confronting it.

Variation and continuity

As established by now, the improviser must do a "psychic work" to experience the music as both embracing in familiarity and open to manipulation through curiosity. This work can involve drastic personal development and self-therapy. But it can also be found on a concrete, practical level, where the embracing familiarity can be experienced in elements of *repetition* and *coherence*, while the differentiated manipulation lies in *variation* and musical *contrast*. Thus, our somewhat speculative psychological use of this polarity is closely connected to that which ties it to established music theory in fields like motivic analysis and rhythm; fields that are also heavily commented upon by jazz musicians in interviews. In these statements, one can often identify a basic preference for balance or synthesis. Paul Berliner summarizes: "[I]mprovisers are concerned with striking an appropriate balance between repetition and variation" (Berliner 1994:196). The ways in which you can invent motives, repeat them and manipulate through compositional techniques, are well known to most jazz improvisers. Relating his psychodynamic theory to esthetic experience, Helm Stierlin says that "we love a picture or a melody when they combine the beauty of the unknown with the beauty of that which is known to us" (Stierlin 1974:55f – my translation). The basic notion is that of lust: "In our striving for lust, chasing that which is new always walks hand in hand with the need for that which is the same, the need for what is known" (ibid. p. 53). In these matters, Stierlin draws explicit parallels between esthetic experience and the psychology of relations and sexology, and these are parallels that I believe are very useful for the phenomenology of improvisation. The improviser's work in developing skills for establishing continuity and variation, coherence and deviation in the musical substance – and more generally, to achieve the synthesis of secure familiarity and creative surprise – resembles the work needed to develop and deepen an intimate relationship. You have to be devoted in worshipping the familiar, the ritual and the at-homeness of belonging, while at the same time also be devoted to looking for possibilities of development and growth, for new "themes" and meaningful contrasts in interaction patterns. This is, of course, close to what will be treated later under the headline of "stabilization vs. stimulation". But, placing the emphasis on the qualities of sameness and difference, we realize that these challenges are connected to the ways in which we are able to combine undifferentiated *unity* and differentiated *distinctiveness*

in our relating to people and to music alike, and eventually, in the textures of the musical substance we create. And surely, this is a dialectical theme worthy of distinct contemplation.

Schemata theory – prototypes and generative acts

At this stage, we should also refer to a completely different field of psychological theory – cognitive schemata theory. There is, of course, no room for any thorough introduction to such a vast and important field, but I still want to outline this linkage because it offers insights that are particularly valuable to us in exploring the difference vs. sameness dialectics. I take "cognitive schemata theory" to mean a field of research on "*information packages*" and *prescriptions* for action, by which relevant knowledge of a certain kind of situation, scene or activity is held together and integrated in a way that makes it easier for the actor to select sensory data, organize them meaningfully, interpret them quickly, and choose appropriate action on the basis of this. Humans have these kind of schematas for standardized types of actions and typified fields of objects encountering us in our perception.¹²

Here, there is clearly a parallel to be drawn back to our section on "music as environment", in which we presented some of David Sudnow's notions while drawing on Berger and Luckmann's concept of institutionalization. The building of an improviser's cognitive apparatus for interpreting the musical landscape and finding "ways" in it can be understood in terms of schemata theory or in terms of this analogy to socio-phenomenological theory alike. The interaction between more or less fixed schematas and constantly flowing *sensory input* (or, the interaction between "top-down" and "bottom up"-processing of information, as cognitive psychology often refers to) is thus a *specification* of the "basic dialectics of making music" outlined earlier. Furthermore, there is an interesting link between Sudnow's basic terms and the two main *categories* of schematas – "scripts" and "scenes" (cf. Ellis/Hunt 1989:180ff). A "script" is a unified and thematized prescription for action, corresponding to a "sort of action" in Sudnow's terms. A "scene", on the other hand, is a prototype of a perceptive field, in many ways corresponding to Sudnow's informal "sorts of places".

A main point in schemata theory is that scripts and scenes are often *generalized* or *inexact* representations of situations or actions (or complexes of actions). This kind of representation facilitates information processing while also opening up for new behavior and *creative* solutions. When orienting yourself through inexact schematas, you get a quicker grip on the landscape, and you envision possibilities for action in the form of "sketches", not always highly detailed programs. Thus, there will constantly evolve different *variants* of the same schemata, with differing degrees of deviation and "newness". When a schemata is treated so freely that it runs the risk of disintegration, we have the following options: Either, the actor can withdraw toward "acceptable" variations and act in more conventional ways according to the original schemata, or he or she can establish a *new* schemata – related to, but distinct from, the old one.

Thus, schemata theory integrates and specifies familiarity and creative differentiation in one and the same model. Even if there are substantial argument as to how schematas are formed and how

¹² I refer to (Ellis/Hunt 1989:180ff) and to (Solstad 1991:123ff) for general introductions to the subject of schemata theory relevant to us. (Solstad's thesis is, by the way, an interesting introduction to the cognitive psychology of jazz improvisation at large.) Unfortunately, I will have to cut a very long story short in my treatment of cognitive psychology here.

they function on a more concrete level, this way of thinking about cognitive maps is an established insight in cognitive psychology: Forming, sustaining and modifying schematas is a basic human capacity and necessity. On a very fundamental level, then, the improviser works with an innate capacity of creative innovation in secure, familiar landscapes. I would say that the dilemma between sameness and difference has a potential for practical solutions right here: exploring and contemplating this mechanism is likely to be a useful tool in the pedagogy of improvisation. Having a sufficient number of relevant schematas to interpret and handle the musical situations that arise, having sufficiently *profiled* and worked-through schematas to facilitate a quick and efficient retrieval process from long term memory, while at the same time having sufficiently *flexible* schematas to prevent one's musical actions from being automated and predictable – these are all basic keys to flowing musical improvisation.

Creativity in other metaphors – language and thought

Paul Berliner uses the notion of "musical ideas" as the basic unit in the improviser's *Lebenswelt* and its creative processes, and he relates this to creativity in language and verbal thinking in general:

"[I]mprovisers constantly strive to put their thoughts together in different ways, going over old ground in search of new. The activity is much like creative thinking in language, in which the routine process is largely devoted to rethinking. By ruminating over formerly held ideas, isolating particular aspects, examining their relationships to the features of other ideas, and, perhaps, struggling to extend ideas in modest steps and refine them, thinkers typically have the sense of delving more deeply into the possibilities of their ideas. There are, of course, also the rarer moments when they experience discoveries as unexpected flashes of insight and revelation" (Berliner 1994:216).

The main focus here is how the formation of freshness and newness in musical improvisation can be seen analogous to the production of new sentences with familiar words in common language, and analogous to the one develops one's chains of thought by constantly going over old material anew, searching for new constellations and interrelations. This is a highly relevant perspective, but there is a danger in moving too far with these metaphors – cf. the objections to linguistic analogies presented above. It is important to keep in mind that musical "cells" does *not*, after all, have meaning in the same way that words have.

Still, these quotation from Berliner offers a powerful tool for approaching the problem of novelty or innovation in jazz – the endless discussion of *what* can pass as creative improvisation. Here, we often find a conflict between avant-garde attitudes on the one hand and neo-classicist ones at the other, where the first party tries to monopolize the definition of novelty – and, in fact, of creativity at large. Using Berliner's analogy, one can claim that it is totally arrogant not to recognize the freshness and newness happening within familiar stylistic boundaries every time a musician approaches the stylistic area with openness and the desire to "say something" in his or her here-and-now-situation. Basically, one does not have to invent a new language to tell a new story. Anything that is *experienced* as a creative encounter between a devoted musical consciousness and a musical substance, *is* in fact fresh newness – from the point of view of this particular musician at the very least – and must be recognized as such. The fact that other musicians or critics may not necessarily have similar experiences of this musical happening can, of course, be brought into a discussion of

what kind of creativity one favors. But it should not be used in out-defining other people's branches of musical activity as un-creative.

Furthermore, the quoted passage hints to the possibility of the *overwhelming* in experiencing creative processes. When encountering "sacred otherness" in innovations in flowing musical improvisation – be it the freshness inside of known stylistic borders, novelty in "playing with" these borders, or innovations in braking them successfully – familiarity and differentiation is in our terms dialectically united in growth. The improviser has entered into the music and achieved intimacy, while at the same time transcended what is known and safe in a daring act of creativity. These moments are crucial: "It is in dramatic movements from formerly mastered phrases to unrehearsed patterns, from commonly transacted physical maneuvers to those outside the body's normal reach or hold, and from familiar frames of reference within compositional forms to uncalculated structural positions, that improvisers typically push the limits of their artistry" (Berliner 1994:217).

Gratification vs. frustration

Without gratification from one's needs being met, there can be no warm feeling of safety. But without challenging encounters with obstacles and resistance, we will not build independence and skills in problem solving. The infant first and foremost has to experience the world as trustworthy. A "warm care received by the infant in response to his needs" (Løvlie 1982:93) is probably also crucial to the building of trustful relations at later stages in life: "It is this basic gratification that affords the basis for all satisfying interpersonal transaction" (ibid.). But at the same time: "[W]ithout obstacles the infant becomes unaware of himself as the centre for his own actions" (ibid.) – the self is built through experiences of limits, hindrances and challenges. Furthermore, it is suggested that the ability to conceptualize and come to terms with *deferred* gratification is grounded in the initial feeling of safety and needs being met. Løvlie talks of an "optimal" frustration; a kind of resistance facing the infant in the right amount and at the right time, where the feeling of mastery is developed in an environment of challenges in a safe terrain, and where gratification is intensely enjoyed without getting stuck in narcissism.

"Frustration" has a dual meaning here; it is relevant both in the sense of *postponing* gratification and in the sense of *disappointment* or disaster. We are now ready to specify the dialectical theme: Positively, this polarity embraces *sensuous well-being* and *security* through gratification on the one hand, and development through *challenges* and *building of lust over time* on the other. When the polarity is not lived dynamically and the dialectic is "frozen", its negative counterpart emerges: On the one hand, a "blind" desire, that recognizes neither the passing of time nor the other as a separate entity, and that keeps one from achieving the deeper satisfaction based on some form of patience and lust built over time. On the other hand; a constantly frustrated being-in-the-world in which one does not have the ability to really "take in" moments of joy or satisfaction, and where the encounters with problems and challenges fail to bring secure development, because one always moves from one disappointment/dissatisfaction directly to another.

Disappointments and "musical saves"

Relating this to musical improvisation, we start by considering disappointments in the sense of errors or musical events that are experienced as un-satisfying. Jazz musicians often talk of the challenge in *using* such events constructively. In the art of the moment there is no "undo button" – what you have played is unquestionably there. When you disappoint yourself, it is therefore crucial to be able to transform disappointment into a kind of challenge that can enter into a dynamic dialectical movement toward satisfying totalities. Paul Berliner states that "[i]mprovisers cannot retrieve their unintended phrases or unsuccessful 'accidents'. Rather, they react to them immediately, endeavoring to integrate them smoothly into their performances. Mistakes, in particular, they treat as spontaneous compositional problems requiring immediate musical solutions. The solutions result in what may properly be described as musical saves" (Berliner 1994:210). The process of improvisation is always risky, and pianist Kenny Barron says: "[P]art of the act of performing jazz is taking chances, and sometimes the chances you take don't work. But the craft is taking an idea that doesn't work and turning it into something that does work" (Kenny Barron in (ibid. p. 210)). From my own experience I can offer the illustration of a kind of mistake where two neighboring keys are unintentionally hit simultaneously during the course of a phrase, and I go on to repeat the resulting cluster with (hopefully) convincing determination in succeeding motives. These has the potential of reducing the impression of a mistake as a mistake, and if integration is successful, what was in the outset a non-fitting alien element, can become meaningful and at-home in the musical setting. This corresponds to the directions given by Kenny Barron: "[I]f you play something that you didn't really mean to play, play it again. If you repeat it, it sounds like that's what you meant to play" (ibid. p. 212). Barron also remembers an advise from the legendary trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie: "When you make a mistake, make a loud one, because if you're timid about it, then it really sounds like a mistake. It really sounds like you messed up" (ibid.).

Let us see how Berliner reflects further upon these issues:

"[I]ndividual interpretations of unexpected events, changing impressions of the original ideas, and the choice of alternative saves have different consequences for the solo's development at each turn. Through the skillful negotiation of problems associated with particular phrases, artists commonly change their intended emphasis upon them. Nevertheless, in the process, they accomplish the same developmental goals for which they strive during the normal course of performance. Reworking a troublesome phrase at separate harmonic positions within the piece's form can provide the solo with a unifying theme. Alternatively, immediate repetition can serve such a phrase as a satisfying tension-building device, with its successful resolution retroactively imbuing the sequence with the character of a planned motive variation" (ibid. s. 215).

Different "musical saves" can in time enter into the reservoir of standardized improvisational tools available for quick retrieval and use. "Beyond the immediacy of these occurrences, artists sometimes 'remember their successful solutions to past accidents'. The musical saves become part of their musical knowledge, and they can draw on them when they come across other musical circumstances involving similar elements" (ibid. p. 215, quotations from bass player Chuck Israels). Thus, representations of troublesome situations and respective strategies for solutions are parts of an improviser's cognitive apparatus, by way of "scripts" for the handling of certain "scenes" (cf. the presentation of these concepts above). Sometimes, problems, coupled with spontaneously produced solutions of this kind, can make up totalities of so much satisfaction that the improviser establish

new "licks" or conventions on their basis; licks that are to be used intentionally on later occasions. A successful dialectical movement in a troublesome situation thus can result in a new totality that will in itself produce lust at later stages, because it incorporates tension and release in a secure unfolding.

Satisfaction and longing

In the dialectic between gratification and frustration in the sense of *postponing resolutions* or *building lust* there is a clear connection to the moment vs. duration dialectic treated earlier: This frustration is a kind of friction in which you have to let go of immediate gratification in order to achieve a satisfaction on the basis of the unfolding over time. This often takes hard work to understand and carry out. Still, the experience of gratification from a musical landscape will always be based on what we have earlier labeled "emergent qualities" in a "musical object" on some level of "resolution". Unfoldings can only be conceptualized as wholes or Gestalts experienced in a subjective now, and as such they are *moments* of intensity. Hence, gratification on the basis of duration and unfolding will always be phenomena of the moment, although perhaps with a different feeling of *fullness* resulting from its being based on perception or activity spanning over a larger period of time.

The improviser switches, as we have already explained, between different levels of resolution in his or her zooming in on the musical landscape, and the forsaking frustration often lies exactly in the separation between levels: you have to give up your tendency to focus all your lust and attention on one level, because of the danger of loosing the grip of another important level, or because of the danger of lust-based approaches to separate moments leading to a lack of satisfaction with the flow of the unfolding at large.

Sexology as a pedagogue for improvisers?

Here, the connection between the phenomenology of improvisation and that of eroticism and intimate relations is so apparent that we have to develop it a bit further. Stierlin also couples esthetic experience to the field of erotics at this point: "You have to be able to live in forsaking, work with it, to prevent desire from being extinguished in enjoyment. This goes for the gratification of vegetative and sexual needs ..., as well as for the relatively complex and often independent esthetic, affective, social and other human needs" (Stierlin 1974:62 – my translation). The possibilities for gratification will always outnumber the ones you choose to pursue. It is a basic challenge to "liberate gratification from the lack of gratification" (ibid.), so that you can enjoy the releases, culminations and joys that are actually realized without too much sorrow over the possibilities for gratification that are not.

This is, I think, immensely important in human relations and lust-seeking musical activity alike. Improvisers can find growth here: You have to be desire-focused and lust-seeking present in the music, both as a *process* and as *stationaries* of release and enjoyment. In over-simplifying for heuristic reasons a vast and nuanced field, we can draw on the stereotypes of male and female sexuality here; stereotypes where the masculine is characterized by its directedness, linearity and climax-orientation – but also its swiftness and unreliability, while the feminine is more oriented toward atmosphere, presence and duration, a more subtle ecstasy, and less toward the "one, major release" as the ultimate goal. This field encompasses a wide variety of potential difficulties in

intimate relations, but also a wide variety of possibilities for development, growth and fertilization of our perspectives when we live our own intensities in openness and respect for the qualities of the other's. A musical improvisation should perhaps have a resolute and determined feeling, directed toward a climax (or a limited number of climaxes), thereafter getting swiftly down toward an ending rendering determination and releasement as the prime qualities of the musical unfolding. However, it is just as important to be constantly present in, and attentive to, the "little" and more subtle points of gratification, and to be devoted to the sacredness of every detail. You *can* choose to refine and isolate an aggressive, un-compromising style of playing – and you can choose to refine and isolate a searching, humble and receiving style. But, for most musicians, there is probably much more to gain by working on dialectical solutions in this dilemma; solutions where determined clarity is united with contemplative humbleness without getting stuck in a middle-of-the-road kind of non-profiled playing. Precisely here, I do believe that a musician can draw important inspiration from strong androgynous characters where the two sides of the dilemma are integrated in a single personality and praxis, as well as from successful *encounters* between different kinds of intensities and forms of sexuality, encounters where liberation and fertility is actualized and released by the uniting of oppositions in erotism.

Stimulation vs. stabilization

Stability through order and *rhythm* is necessary. But stagnation is just around the corner if we are not faced with elements of stimulating deviation or novelty. The dialectic at this point can be outlined as follows: In its constructive version this polarity embraces the secure and stable experience of reliable rhythm and recognizable order that gives the *predictability* needed to free cognitive and emotional energy for creativity – an on the other hand, the newness of interesting stimuli and creative components that are taken into the system. By the frequent intrusion of fresh elements the whole is challenged, and by the integration and accommodation (cf. Piaget) of these elements the whole is developed dialectically. Thus, the ever-changing, but still reliable, whole, is made both stable and exciting/pulsating. In its destructive counterpart, however, this polarity covers the fatigue of stability where repetitive patterns become un-dynamically stalling instead of grooving – and on the other hand, the restlessness of over-stimulation, where fresh elements craving attention and offering novelty are never given the time or space (physical space, conceptual space, or, in music, timbral space) to really work and be integrated in the whole in thorough processes. Stierlin formulates the need for dialectic movement here: "We need stability in a relationship, so that we can satisfy our need for security and safety. But if stability is left to dominate, it leads to stagnation, and the bonds of safety are transformed into heavy burdens. Thus, in a relationship that is to develop, one must always search for an equilibrium between stabilization and stimulation, and always in new and more complex areas" (Stierlin 1974:66 – my translation).

This polarity is closely related to the "difference vs. sameness" dialectic treated above. What is stimulating will often be something *other than* or *different from* what is presently present. And, of course, stability is often rooted in repetition and sameness. Still, there is a need to thematize stabilization vs. stimulation on its own – especially, in fact, with regard to improvised music with its peculiarities. For it is not the case that simulative and stabilizing elements necessarily must succeed and replace one another over time during improvisation. The dialectic integration of these opposites

in the musical unfolding does not have to happen as changes from one section to another (say, from up-tempo to ballad, from soft to loud, etc.). The integration can happen all the time, in each phrase, and – immensely important – in the fundamental groove.

Tension and release in different musical parameters

In improvisation, dialectics of stimulating excitement and stabilizing release can be constructed by exploiting a host of different musical parameters.¹³ I will briefly discuss a few of them to illustrate:

Rhythm

Rhythmic tension can be established by shifts in *placement* related to the steady pulse or "beat"; you can play "on top of the beat", "behind the beat" or "above the beat", as jazz musician put it. Paul Berliner illustrates this referring to a musician "... manipulating a line's rhythmic feeling ... playing just behind or just ahead of the beat before returning to on-beat performance and resolving the phrase's rhythmic tension" (Berliner 1994:198). The possible variations and nuances at this point are huge indeed, and the way an improviser handles this is constitutive of his or her style of playing; both the degree of flexibility and variation employed as in this illustration, and the unifying characteristics of his or her preferred tendencies in rhythmic placement.

In Berliner's interviews we can also find references to a kind of *rhythmic synthesis* that is especially interesting in our context here. Consider this telling statement:

"See, the triplet feeling in rhythm, 'dah-dah-dah, dah-dah-dah', makes you relax. It makes you hold back; you can't rush triplets. But the duple part of the rhythm is like marches, 'one and two and' or 'one and two and three and four and'. That kind of division of time makes you move ahead, forge ahead, march – 'boom, boom, boom, boom'. That's the push of the rhythm. And that's why it is so nice when you combine those two feelings. Then you get a complete rhythm that marches and still relaxes" (Charli Persip quoted in (Berliner 1994:153)).

This points to what is probably a considerable part of the core of intriguing jazz rhythms. The incorporating of different "feelings" in one and the same basic groove through polyrhythm brings a multi-faced yet integrated whole, that – performed by the best musicians – combines stability and stimulation in a very sophisticated way. Music can combine forward motion with relaxation, directedness with coolness, etc., etc., in one and the same gesture, and in one and that same basic groove.

¹³ Here, I make a connection between stimulation and tension or excitement, and between stability and *release* without substantiating this linkage any further. Not ignoring the difficulties here, and – above all – not ignoring the enormous research challenges in being careful with the handling of ontological levels when treating these qualities that are, after all, *experiences* in listeners – they are not necessarily intrinsically present in the music as sound waves – I still think my common sense based simplifications at this point are heuristically justifiable in this essay.

Periods

Tension from challenged symmetry and fuzzy periods can be established by phrasing in ways that are contrary to the structure on which the improvisation is built or to which it refers: "create interest and suspense by improvising melodic phrases that cross over barlines and assume abstract rhythmic relationships to the meter" (Berliner 1994:198). The form of cool jazz developed in New York in the 1950's with pianist Lennie Tristano and saxophonists Warne Marsh and Lee Konitz as key figures, stands out in particular at this point; to me it represents a unique fusion of stimulation and stabilization through its immensely complex and highly sophisticated use of intriguing cross-meter structure-challenging phrasing, coupled with a carefulness in volume/loudness, and a kind of "laid back" attitude that it shared with the rest of the cool jazz movement.¹⁴

Harmony

Stimulating elements can be brought into the music by way of harmonic content, too. "[I]t is the relative mixture of pitches inside and outside of the harmony that creates interesting melodies" (Berliner 1994:250). What passes for a "right" balance in this respect will vary strongly between different stylistic areas, but most branches of jazz do indeed have *some* conception of this fundamental balance – of what is the correctly intriguing harmonic tension, and of what is the correct way to treat dissonances: "[W]hatever the pitch relationships players choose to define as dissonant within the bounds of their jazz idiom or personal style, they regard the artful handling of dissonance as an indication of mature artistry" (ibid. s. 252). Here, there is clearly a parallel between jazz history and the history of Western art music, in that the conception of dissonance, together with directions for esthetically satisfying treatment of them (that is, those dissonances that are at all tolerated in given contexts), make up a constitutive element of stylistic development. The transitions from modality via simple tonic-subdominant-dominant harmony, complex functional harmony, advanced modal systems, atonality and back to neo-classical and neo-romantic ideals are in many respects the same in jazz (the modal blues [prior to its rigid standardization in tonic, subdominant and dominant chords] → New Orleans jazz related to dance tunes, marches, rag time, etc. with their "simple" chord changes → Swing musicians' careful exploration of the "upper structure" of chords leading into the be-bop "revolution" in complex harmony [although still rooted in standard chord progressions] → modal music employing sophisticated "Western" (Impressionist) techniques of voicings and harmonic coloring [cf. Bill Evans' work on the legendary "Kind of Blue" album] and oriental flavors → "free jazz" with more or less complete atonality → return to tonality in both jazz-rock fusion and neo-bop, although often incorporating the experience and techniques of radical freedom in various ways).

Berendt offers a summary of harmony in the history of jazz in (Berendt 1992:177ff). This chapter is informative and well worth reading, but Berendt is probably over-simplifying the relationship between what is "African" and "Western" (cf. the fundamental critique of conventional jazz history writing on this subject in (Collier 1993:183ff)), and – in my opinion – under-evaluating

¹⁴ See (Berendt 1992:19ff) for a very general introduction to cool jazz and the 1950's. The account given by Berendt is, however, not impressing if one looks for a description of the *fascination* felt by many in the experience of this music.

the originality and fundamental nature of jazz' intriguing harmonic ambiguity and fuzziness, also in its early decades. Berendt simply suggests that jazz *borrowed* its harmony, while contributing a unique *rhythmic* intensity not found in Western music – the "blue note" being the only "original" harmonic contribution by jazz. There is, of course, some truth in this, but I think we have to realize that the *feeling* produced by what I take to be the synthesis of stability and stimulation in blue notes – notes that are in fact both dissonances and non-dissonances at the same time – is both 1) deeply constitutive of jazz feeling and 2) in fact, highly original in music history at large. The ambiguously flexibly flatted fifths, thirds and sevenths are clearly points of stimulation in that they must appear as dissonances of some kind to any ear at all familiar with the experience of straight, well-tempered Western harmony. Still, these notes are clearly points of rest and finality in jazz, in a way that dissonances are usually not experienced in Western tonal music. The blue notes do not necessarily "resolve" into consonance; they are emphasized and appreciated in themselves as fullness and as intense, fuzzy completion. I think this points to a very fundamental stimulation/stabilization dialectic intrinsic to jazz experience and performance.

On a less speculative level, Paul Berliner also identifies a kind of *harmonic syncopation* that is interesting: "subtly offsetting pitch selection from the piece's structure, drawing on pitches that either anticipate the following chord or delay the preceding chord's resolution" (Berliner 1994:198). The *integration* of subtleties like this is, again, a balancing of stimulating deviation and stable normality. In improvised music based on chord changes, the predictability and strictness of the changes is counter-worked by the use of foreshadowing and delaying of the harmonic progression. But the musical unfolding stands in risk of disintegration if you "over-stimulate" your improvisation this way, not being able to "bring it down".

Advanced improvisers often bring all these forms of harmonic synthesizing – "inside" vs. "outside" pitches, blue notes challenging the tempered system, and harmonic syncopation in foreshadowing and delaying – to impressing levels. The richness of variation and ambiguity is integrated in a secure *handling* of the multi-layeredness, and you get a special kind of *fullness* in the harmonic content of an improvisation, based on constant synthesis of what is challenging and what is familiar.

Other parameters

Other areas, too, can stage the dialectics between stabilization and stimulation. Again, Paul Berliner identifies: "... movements creating other contrasts: for example, between increased and decreased rhythmic activity, inflected and uninflected pitches, and registral ascents and descents. Each produces schemes of tension and release, ultimately impuring inventions with a sense of flow. So, too, does the progression among such different musical events as lyrical phrases; driving, finger-generated patterns; intricate chromatically embellished lines; swinging bebop gestures; and diminished chord patterns that depart from a prevailing meter" (Berliner 1994:198). Development over time in phrase length and register can also be effective: "[A]rtists may create a sense of balance and continuity within the larger designs of long consecutive phrases by remembering and using phrase length itself as a model. Alternatively, players develop ideas by inventing consecutive phrases, each slightly longer than the one before, as if an outgrowth from it. ... In other instances, soloists convey a sense of development by gradually expanding the range of consecutive phrases"

(ibid.). Elsewhere, I have devised a quantitative method of revealing patterns like this in transcribed solos. I treat phrase length, harmonic deviation and accenting-contrary-to-the-basic-meter in a way that produces simple graphs showing development over time effectively (Gustavsen 1997).

Repose in tension

In a philosophy of music written several decades ago, the dialectics between tension and release in esthetic experience is described like this:

"The aesthetic experience is a feeling for an object of such intensity as to result in the identification of the person with the object of experience; he becomes one with it and reposes in it. The aesthetic experience is thus a condition of repose in tension, the tension being due to the intense feeling, while the repose arises from the person dwelling in the object. This condition of repose in tension turns aesthetic experience into perfect experience, and therefore leads also to the culmination of human experience" (Max Schoen in (Edwards 1956:16)).

Even though the musician in the act of playing is likely to be more focused on the *craft* and the *production* side of the music than this ideal of contemplative experience allows, an improviser is also connected to his or her music through a similar combination of "repose" in a being *in* the musical objects and the landscape produced by their relations, and a "tension" in the constant intensity wishing to create something. In successful improvisation the improviser often experience being able to *trust* the music as something that *carries* and *gives*. Then, intensity is staged in a secure environment, and the fresh products of efforts and creativity are infused in the whole in constant movements of integration. However, when the music is *not* flowing, soothing repose is transformed into frozen un-dynamics, and the musical efforts that are made, become an un-organic *forcing* of the unfolding. You try to establish the flow, but instead you get a frozen conflict where repose is replaced by uncomfortable un-dynamics, and where creative tension is reduced to an unresolved, unreleased, ever-more-frustrated-erotic-esthetic drive or yearning. The kind of frozen dialectic stalling the creative flow at times like these is difficult – yet not necessarily impossible – to transform into a more constructive process. Sometimes the playing has to come to and end, the musicians call it a day, and get together again later. Other times, the intuitive-intellectual-musical skills they possess are strong enough to bring good feeling back again. Repose in tension is the state of alert calmness, of excited ease, of flexible stringency that we should always go for. It is a mysterious thing, but you can practice it, and thus increase the likelihood of it happening. Employ a combination of

- a) practical training in playing technique (not at all covered in this essay) focusing on muscular alertness-calmness,
- b) training in "musical saves" (cf. above) to strengthen the ability to transform disappointments into creative happenings,
- c) practical/theoretical exercises in harmony and rhythm – create your own normality-deviation dialectics etudes on these and other musical parameters, and
- d) mental training contemplating the quasi-sacred paradox of intensity-in-the-midst-of-dilemmas and flexibility-in-the-midst-of-directedness-and-going-for-it.

Groove – the embodied synthesis of stimulation and stabilization?

Moving on from the paradox of repose in tension, we should now focus explicitly on a term that is already used several times: "groove". In research trying to explain aspects other than the harmonic and motivic ones of "ethnic" or rhythmic music, this term is often a point of both inspiration and confusion – cf. the extended dialogue in (Keil & Feld 1993:22ff) and the more transcription-based reflections in (Monson 1996:26f and 66ff). Numerous attempts have been made to define it. Here, we shall neither try to review these attempts comprehensively, nor set out to make our own concise definition. Most scholars approaching the qualities of "groove" find that it embraces the basic, repetitive rhythmic patterns, but that the term also implies a mystifying "something more". A groove is an extensively repeated rhythmic motion or pattern that can be varied and "stretched", but nevertheless makes up a stable *foundation* for the musical unfolding. A groove is also a kind of *state* – based on these rhythmic qualities. In evaluating music, the adjective "groovy" will mean the embodied successfulness with which this is achieved. In Charles Keil's classic essay "Motion and Feeling Through Music" (Keil 1994), the term "vital drive" is presented as a central aspect of that which is groovy. A groove is something you enter into ("getting into the groove") or establish, and, having entered, the groove then is a stimulating space, place or environment for activity and enjoyment; "[a] groove is a comfortable place to be" (Feld 1994). Simultaneously, a groove is a place that can be challenged and transformed. A groove is an embodied musical phenomenon, where cyclic rhythm and compelling "drive" invite us to participation and motion; not necessarily motion in the form of dance – this participation can also be found in smaller, subtle movements and inner psychic motion.

So, a groove is a field of compelling potential for enjoyment, a field of secure cyclic movement, a field of challenging subtle variation, etc., etc.. In all of this, we can spot a connection to the dialectic between stimulation and stabilization. I believe that groove quality can be taken to represent an optimized dialectical unifying of stimulation and stabilization. In a groove that works well, you are being met, both in your need for safety and in your need for challenge and transcendence. Order and transgression is staged in one and the same act. Paul Berliner explains groove as "[i]ncorporating the connotations of stability, intensity, and swing" (Berliner 1994:349), and he says:

"Within the groove, improvisers experience a great sense of relaxation, which increases their powers of expression and imagination. They handle their instruments with athletic finesse, able to respond to every impulse. ... At such times, the facility artists display as individual music thinkers combines with their extraordinary receptiveness to each other. It is the combining of such talents in the formulation of parts that raises these periods of communal creativity to a supreme level" (Berliner 1994:389).

Closeness vs. distance

In the last one of Stierlin's dialectical themes we highlight the tension between devotion and control by the use of a metaphor of *distance* in relating to the music. First, let us see how Stierlin himself expresses central aspects of this polarity:

"Desire and pleasure request closeness. However, this closeness will be the end of desire and pleasure proper if one does not work for a certain distance – a distance to one's own needs, and to the other who can satisfy these needs. It is through this *work* of

distanciation that we can over and over again rediscover closeness" (Stierlin 1974:68 – my translation).

From time to time, we have to "break our emotional attachment to the other in order to understand him" (ibid. p. 69) – and this involves great struggles:

"This work of distanciation is always difficult. It can ... only happen in a painful feeling of being lonely and exiled. When moving away from others, we hurt the primitive animal inside us that seeks its vitality and power through a primary emotional participation in others. We leave the tribe [or tree trunk – the Norwegian word "stammen" can have both meanings] that carries us. ... The difficulties and pain in the work of distanciation equals the difficulties and pain in the work of creating closeness. We are over and over again presented with both kinds of work" (ibid.).

From Stierlin's somewhat dramatic descriptions we move on to specifying this dilemma to fit our context. On the one hand, this dialectical field embraces the devotional closeness where you surrender to being *surrounded* by the music, to be intimately at its mercy, and to respond to its qualities from an "organic" symbiosis: musician-and-music. On the other hand it embraces the distance needed to switch between different levels of resolution (cf. the exploration of this term above) and focuses on aspects, to differentiate musical objects, to understand what processes are at work, and to see musical "traps" in time to avoid them. Transformed into its destructive counterparts, however, the frozen dialectic leads to the helplessness of undifferentiated closeness and the kind of "at-its-merciness" where you are a victim of circumstances and don't know how to control your actions and their consequences. On the other destructive side lies the alienation in distance where you don't "get in touch with" the music, and cannot break the barrier against emotional participation; where you operate in the musical landscape from strategies that are "un-organic" in that they are not founded in a real musical *presence*. When the one side of the dialectic is left to dominate in a romantic relationship, in a parent-child relation, or – so I suggest – in a musical mind, frozen, destructive, repetitive patterns are likely to develop. We need closeness-and-distance, yet they are contradictory.

This dilemma is in many ways connected to the ones already presented. Closeness will often be a quality of the immediate moment, while distance opens the door for extended conceptualization of unfoldings over time – cf. the theme of *moment vs. duration*. Furthermore, closeness will imply sameness and identification, while distance offers differentiation and perception of separateness – cf. the theme of *difference vs. sameness*. Still, it is highly relevant to treat closeness vs. distance as a separate dialectical theme – it thematizes the relationship between musician and music in the very compelling physical-embodied metaphor of distance (a metaphor that is in fact experienced by many musicians as very "real"), and in a fascinating way it focuses on a *multidimensionality of being present* in the music.

The singing mind

Jazz musicians frequently make references to *singing* as a significant tool for their creative musical agency. Singing can work in many ways for instrumentalists. First, as a pedagogic tool – you develop your "ear" and your phrasing by supplementing playing the instrument with vocal improvisation and vocal imitations during practice. Second, singing can also be a great help in performance – you can sing what you play, either constantly or in parts of the musical unfolding,

and this often makes you phrase better and create more "lyrical" and "organic" lines. Finally, singing also works on a more abstract level as a metaphor for playing – "to play is to sing". The special kind of *embodiedness* or *intimacy with the improvised line* that the song metaphor expresses – and that singing as a pedagogic tool can help to *develop* – is very interesting. Saxophonist Lee Konitz states: "Improvising is a singing, whistling phenomenon when it's really happening. ... It's a matter of getting intricately and sophisticatedly involved with a melodic line so that it is one with the performer" (Lee Konitz in (Berliner 1994:180)). Paul Berliner goes on to conclude: "If you can't sing it, you can't play it. It may be possible to perform phrases on an instrument mechanically ... by translating representations like chord symbols directly into finger patterns without prehearing the sounds for which they stand, but singing requires that artists both grasp ideas firmly in their imaginations and invest them with expressive qualities" (ibid. s. 181).

David Sudnow uses the expression "being singingly present" about the kind of lyrical-devotional closeness that releases strong melodic improvisation in his own playing (Sudnow 1993:87). This is a kind of closeness to the "sorts of actions" and "sorts of places" (cf. the presentation of these terms given earlier), that is not totally symbiotic, yet still deeply *connected* and *involved*. It points to a cross-modality in the cognitive representations of the music, and in the cognitive structures guiding the creative act; a cross-modality that gives fullness and dialogue in improvisational intensity. The improviser converses theory, abstract images of structures, and spontaneous song. This conversing is crucial both to the taking in and understanding of the present music, and to the creating of new elements in the musical unfolding. When the improvised line becomes "one with the performer" through the combination of a singing approach and an instrumental approach, we do not get the lack of perspective in symbiotic unity that can follow from a musician only focusing on his or her instrument, or on the "inner pressure" in isolation; we get a unity between music and musician that is excessively *dialogic* because of its extended multidimensionality, and yet *organic* because of its intimately embodied source.

Closeness vs. distance as body vs. mind

Another way of approaching the problematics of this dialectical theme, is to take closeness as the physical or immediate, and distance as the intellectual or reflective. This is, of course, a very questionable simplification. The physical is never totally immediate – everything we feel is mediated in some way. Still, this cliché can open up for some interesting perspectives. The challenge of finding a dialectical dynamic between intimate closeness on the one hand and clarity from a distance on the other, lies in finding a unity of non-verbal sensing and intuitive acting on the one hand, and conceptualized reflection on the other. The improviser must find a way to be musically present that releases the body's potential for "smooth" executing of complicated movements without having to spend much attentional resources on controlling and monitoring these movements. But the presence also has to release creative and, to a certain extent, *critical* conversation with the learned movements, and it must release the ability to discover fresh musical objects on a multitude of levels of resolution. The analyzing distance can not be allowed to constitute a totally *different* being-in-the-music than the spontaneous closeness; they must integrate in a dialectic.

Paul Berliner reflects upon his empirical data in connection with the notion of "the singing mind": "Under the aegis of the singing mind, there are moments in which musicians see no further

into their evolving line than a few pitches, their body and mind so tightly joined as to be fully absorbed into the performance's immediate progress" (Berliner 1994:189). "At other moments ... the ideas that soloists realize during performances depend as much on the body's own actions as on the body's synchronous response to the mind. The body can take momentary control over particular activities ... while the mind shifts its focus to the next idea" (ibid. p. 190). Here, we see that the bodily presence in improvisation can unite with reflection in mutually enforcing processes, it can almost *absorb* reflection, and it can also *supplement* it so that the improviser has several mechanisms of control or monitoring that work in parallel. However, the feeling of totally separate entities of understanding and agency in music can not be sustained over a long period of time without the danger of alienation. To avoid disintegration of the musical unfolding, one has to move towards *fusion* in improvisational control organs and monitoring, and then perhaps to subsequent re-differentiation for further nuances and flexibility.

"Traveling along the contour of an evolving phrase"

Paul Berliner formulates a telling metaphor for a presence that incorporates focusing on details and overviewing the whole on the level of single phrases in linear improvisation when he describes the improviser as "traveling along the contour of an evolving phrase" (Berliner 1994:187). This metaphor thematizes both the details, the movement and the contour as a whole, or – in Godøy's terms: the distributed substrate, the unfolding and the emergent qualities of the resulting musical object. The "traveling" along a musical contour still in the making is the improviser's attentive, sensible and creative work where the basic "curves" and "dots" of the evolving musical happening are negotiated and experienced relationally, in a holistic movement. The improviser embraces the closeness needed to appreciate the tiny nuances and the potential for *expression* lying on the micro level, as well as the distance needed to be present on several levels of resolutions, where sums of choices made on the micro level make up musical wholes. Here, there is a tight connection between the polarities "moment vs. duration" and "closeness vs. distance", and the advice developed earlier to *listen for the emergent qualities* while a musical object is still in the making, applies equally well at this point.

Also, this metaphor thematizes the paradox-ridden relationship between improvisation as *setting courses* and *directing* on the one hand. and improvisation as *going with the flow* and *obeying the implications of what is already there* on the other hand. When the improviser "travels along a contour", this means both *following* a movement in obedience and *creating* the very same movement. Improvisational choices of path must be taken on the basis of a closeness that makes the improviser really *experience* the musical unfolding and adjust humbly to it, but also on the basis of a distance that makes him or her capable of developing fresh directions or curves in the contours of the music.

The sculptor

We include another telling metaphor from Berliner's book: the sculptor's work with his or her physical material in a constant dialogue between the material facts of the stone and the intentions or strategies of the artist. "A sculptor chipping at a marble block mediates between the initial vision for the sculpture and its evolving shape. Each chisel stroke potentially alters its form in unintended

ways or reveals new features in the grain's internal flow that suggests modification of the artwork's design" (Berliner 1994:219). This is in many ways parallel to the improviser's relationship to the musical substance – although a sculptor will frequently employ a more thoroughly worked out model of the whole of the work before the chipping really starts. Both forms of art demands closeness in that the artists "tune" their bodies in line with the material and let themselves *be formed* by what is actually taking place, while at the same time distance enough to avoid getting helplessly stuck when problems arise, and distance enough to conceive of ideas that do not just follow the material along the most obvious patterns but impose challenges and surprise. Again, it is important to focus on evolving wholes; to be attentive to potentials (both obvious/familiar and surprising/fresh potentials) for establishing emergent qualities in objects – in a process of constant dialogue between physical substance and creativity agency.

Subjectification vs. objectification

The capacity for constant movements of *differentiation* and subsequent *integration* is a central theme for Anne-Lise Løvlie. Perceiving the world from one's own standpoint, with one's own needs and desires as a basis, is important. But narcissism is around the corner if one does not simultaneously understand objects as existing outside of oneself, and if one does not see others as separate agents with ontological status of their own. The immediate, self-centered way of experiencing the world – where "the world is experienced only-as-it-relates-to-his-needs" (Løvlie 1982:29) – is called *subjectification*, whereas the differentiated approach is called *objectification*. Subjectification and objectification in relation to our surroundings must take place simultaneously to achieve the synthesis of passionate closeness and lucid distance. One must expand, interpret and integrate one's surroundings in a manifold *Lebenswelt* of meanings, relations and emotions – and this demands that one dares the movement from the safe and familiar into the insecure and unknown and back, and that one establishes an *intimacy* precisely in this movement – an intimacy that opens up for real integrated integration.

The improviser must – as we have explored in many ways by now – take chances. Making music is an act of courage, and the great moments often arise when secure at-homeness and risky surprises or breaking of new grounds are mutually enforcing each other. You are safe enough to risk something, and the gratification in successful encounters with the unknown (in sound as well as in technique) strengthens and expands the at-homeness and readiness for ever new challenges. This ideal situation requires an apparatus of orientation with which one relates to fellow musicians and sounding music out of a combination of sincere, desire-driven subjectification and attentive, differentiating objectification. The feeling of safety requires a certain gratification and a basic subjectification in the playing situation. This safety can in turn open up for flexibility and courage. When an improvisational potential presenting itself to the improviser is to be pursued and developed, the situation requires objectification to *understand* the potential and its relational placement in the musical landscape. In the act of materializing new stuff into the flow of musical unfolding, you focus again on your desire for musical gratification from this placement, however with a kind of objective clarity needed for the freshness to really take its place without being swallowed by the impatient urge for the most *familiar* forms of gratification.

States of the body bringing closeness and distance into play

We should also touch upon one of the most "personal" and poorly researched aspects of making improvised music: postures and movements of the body. There is, of course, a vast amount of physiological information concerning "correct" positions and technique, and there are pedagogical systems for the achievement of an efficient use of the body, efficient in the sense of getting a maximum of control and potential for playing with a minimum of physical effort. However, among performers there are significant stocks of embodied knowledge in this area that are seldom formalized or verbalized. How you sit or stand, and how you "tune" yourself into your instrument is constitutive to the evolving of the *Lebenswelt* of making music, and thus also to the kind of music you are able to produce.

David Sudnow tries to verbalize something here, and talks of the body's "being at the piano" (Sudnow, 1993:83). He writes about how his own playing developed drastically with inspiration from the mere sight of a particular pianist's (Jimmy Rowles') characteristic movements of the head, shoulders, arms and back during ballad playing. It is clear from Sudnow's descriptions that the establishment of a kind of intimate *dialogue* was a crucial breakthrough for him when employing similar movements himself – a dialogue with his own body and its potential, where closeness and distance together made up a fullness. In Sudnow's own embellished language: "[C]onversation with myself now began to take a certain form, looking down at these hands of mine, their ways, my ways of employing them, seeking practically useful terms for conceiving 'my relationship to their ways', reflecting upon how I could employ them, and what it meant, as manageable practices at the keyboard, to 'employ them' for this music to happen" (ibid. s. 84).

Sudnow discovered that a certain kind of circular movements of the arms expressing and strengthening the "flowing" and the flexible qualities of the music, combined with a tapping movement of the foot expressing and strengthening the more metronome-like pulse aspects of the music, released completely new things in his own playing. There is an interesting parallel here to the quotation presented earlier about rhythmic synthesis between "marching feeling" and "relaxed feeling" in the combined staging of "dah-dah-dah" and "boom-boom". A forward-confident-marching attitude and a relaxed coolness can thus be united in both musical rhythm and physical presence. And whether the bodily involvement takes the form of tiny, subtle movements or more overt, spastic or dance-like movements, this coupling of the body's and the music's rhythm is crucial.

Often times, we may need helping devices or techniques to achieve the right synthesis of distance and closeness, also body-wise. It is easy to be "caught inside", and it is easy to be left "standing outside". From my own experience I know that I can sometimes facilitate the overall musical dialogue with just minor adjustments of the way I sit at the piano: increasing the distance from my head to the keyboard slightly can release a feeling of freedom and control that is easily lost when the desire for intimate involvement in the music leads to a jerky and closed closeness with the instrument. The fundamental paradox of this is that the closeness to the music as an unfolding flowing *whole* is strengthened by a minor distanciation to the physical instrument and to one particular *angle* in the involvement. And paradoxes like this are found all the time. You work your way through involvement and overviews, through intimacy and distanciation,

The fear of extinction

Finally, in keeping with Stierlin's own work, we will take these issues even further; towards a very general – and perhaps also somewhat speculative – level. In Stierlin's writing, the challenges of closeness vs. distance are related to a basic anxiety or *Angst*: a fear of death or extinction – and to the fundamental intra-personal *work* of coming to terms with this anxiety in a multitude of situations and relations throughout our life-span.

"... any development towards a closer relationship to the other will present a challenge to the defense mechanisms ... described as our defense against the fear of death. We are challenged to find a new equilibrium between dependence and independence. Our reward will be the intimacy, the complete recognition, that is the safest guarantee against losing the grip of the balancing But this reward can only be achieved if we dare to wake the slumbering monsters, the archaic anxieties from childhood. The close relationship to the other can thus awaken desire, greed and destructiveness from early childhood, and point these drives to the person to whom we stand helpless, and to whom we have thereby in a way reinstated the child's dependent relationship. We must risk losing our own ego-limits, and be exposed to an inner terror" (Stierlin 1974:69f – my translation).

Stierlin identifies two basic forms of fear of death: the fear of extinction in enormous loneliness, and the fear of extinction in being swallowed (ibid. p. 70). This corresponds to our reflections concerning "left standing outside" and "getting helplessly caught" in the music. As we have repeatedly established, you have to face both these dangers in the process of improvisation. You have to dare to remove yourself from the safe and familiar through a creative distancing, and you have to dare to lose control and be absorbed in closeness. But both these processes must take place in a dialectical movement, or else you will eventually encounter – precisely – "death" or extinction, in the form of a disintegrated musical unfolding, lack of gratification through playing, and loss of self esteem as a musician.

Of course, it is difficult to transfer dramatic motives like these from psychoanalytic theory to music performance, but I have no doubt that the tension between involvement and control is really working in analogous ways here, and that successful improvisation – or, at least, the experience by the musician of successful improvisation¹⁵ – will normally take a dialectical sublation or *Aufheben* of this dilemma. Playing in an intimate at-its-merciness to the music while at the same time being able to change its directions, create new forms, objects, directions or sounds etc. out of overviews and control – this combination is a great feeling and can bring a quasi religious-erotic fulfillment.

What then, on the other hand, constitutes the distressed swallowedness where you do not experience the warmth of closeness nor the clarity of overview, only the helpless and un-satisfying lack of control? Perhaps some of the answer to this can be found in Løvlie's account of an unhealthy symbiosis – in which she also integrates a number of the dialectical themes we have been discussing:

¹⁵ I am aware of the fundamental problem of levels here: experiences during playing do not necessarily correspond to "objective" musical results or experiences shared by a community of competent listeners – although they often do. This is, of course, a paradoxical subject worth studying in itself. But I do think it is justifiable to leave it like this in our present study, as we are primarily interested in the phenomenology of the act of improvisation, only secondarily in the phenomenology of listening to improvised music. Remember, however, our insisting on improvisation as an activity of dialogue with a "generalized other"; an internal conversation between states of agency/expression and states of receiving/evaluating. This certainly does help bridging the gap between these levels.

"The merger-type of symbiosis beyond the appropriate stage is *not* closeness. Nor is it distance. It is a repetitive process where neither distance nor closeness is effected. Only where there is differentiation can there be true merging. This is a very significant aspect of the dialectic model – there can be *no* stability without instability – they presuppose each other – they are entities in a totality. Likewise there can be no gratification without frustration and vice versa no difference without sameness etc. etc. It is only when there is an imbalance – where you *genuinely* do not have either side that there is repetition and consequent stultification of growth" (Løvlie 1982:95).

Summing up and moving on

So, we have explored the situation of musical improvisation eclectically using the "five dilemmas" from Stierlin and Løvlie and the fundamental dialectical line of reasoning that lies behind this theory. Each one of the polarities sheds a different light on the challenges facing the improviser. At the same time, there are connections and overlappings between them, some of which we have also demonstrated. Before ending this essay, I would like now to focus on a theme from jazz history that is, on closer examination, tightly connected to most of the a-historical theory presented so far.¹⁶

Jazz as springing from the crossroads between "African" and "European"

Treating the stimulation vs. stabilization dialectics of jazz harmony, we have already touched upon the issue of "African" and "Western" elements of jazz. This is, of course, an enormous field of study, in which music theory and American history come together in a very intriguing way. Naturally, no attempt can be made here to present a thorough review of existing research.¹⁷ Neither will I contribute a comprehensive account of the field from my own point of view. Still, making references to this historical/musicological/theoretical puzzle is crucial for the empirical placing of our dialectical theory. What I have been treating as the existential here-and-now challenges of improvisation, are of course just as much challenges presented in a specific historical cultural location, with the burdens and the tools delivered by the past operating as "flexible constants" defining and laying out the musical situation.

A whole mythology can be traced in the research on jazz history concerning "African" vs. "European/White/Western", with respect to the music itself (as if music can ever really be separated from people playing and listening) as well as the sociology and social psychology of its subcultures.¹⁸ Here, sensuality is seen as clashing creatively or antagonistic with intellectuality,

¹⁶ Here, the Norwegian thesis on which this essay is built also includes a chapter on Martin Buber's "I and Thou", suggesting that the dichotomy of "I-Thou relations" vs. "I-It relations" can further enlighten and inspire our conception of the improviser's relating to the music's holistic qualities and its elements and its parameters, in that it highlights the tension between relational involvement in encounters (with a Thou or a you) and instrumental clarity and objectivity in analysis or objectivations (of a series of entities or "it"s). I would like to expand on this in English in a separate essay, hopefully some time soon. Also in the Norwegian thesis, the link to Nietzsche's conception of the Dionysian and the Apollonian from "The Birth of Tragedy" is made explicit at this point.

¹⁷ A thorough introduction to early jazz history is given in Gunter Schuller's "Early Jazz" (Schuller 1968).

¹⁸ At this point, I would like once again to recommend the brilliant critique of conventional jazz history in (Collier 1993:183ff). Collier maintains that the role of the Creole subcultures (in particular, French speaking descendants of freed slaves from Santa Domingo (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic) living in urban areas as poor middle class, not as slaves or farm workers) were actually far more important in the forming of early jazz than the African-American slaves and their direct descendants. Consequently, the

groove with semantic-musical content, "hot" with "cool", etc., etc.. The Afro-American traditions of blues and spirituals are seen as sources on the "African" side, while ragtime, marching bands and to a certain extent (while undoubtedly playing a very important role on later stages of jazz' development) Western art music, on the "white" side. The "African" elements of collective improvisation, modal/static harmony and groove with repetitive patterns and driving polyrhythms were put in a fruitful play of fusion with "European" ideals of section-based form, harmonic progression, individual virtuosity¹⁹ – and, importantly, of a constant *innovative* praxis in all of these fields.

The process of fusion between the "African" and the "European" did not happen once and for all. In addition to taking place historically in the beginning of our Century, it keeps on happening in live jazz. Ever new waves of inspiration from neo-classical and contemporary art music are seen in modern jazz. And among jazz musicians (naturally, in particular among Afro-American musicians) waves of consciousness-raising and pride concerning the "roots" in the non-European have also been crucial. With the risk of under-emphasizing the conflict perspectives concerning racism and socio-economic matters, and – surely – under-emphasizing the wide variety *inside* the "African" and the "Western" respectively (cf. footnote no. 19), I still want to point to the very special power of jazz in bringing creative fusion between opposite poles here. One can see the dilemma between the "African" and the "Western" as a theme that must be re-worked dialectically throughout jazz history, and a theme that is also re-worked dialectically in the personal development of musicians. Comparing with the dilemmas presented earlier, the "African" will correspond to the heat of the *moment*, the *stabilization* in repetition (remember, however, the inherent stimulation-stabilization synthesis in groove), the immediate *gratification* in grooving, the *closeness* and *sameness* in physical-sensual symbiosis with the music. The "Western", on the other hand, will correspond to the conceptualization of trajectories and *duration*, the *stimulation* and *difference* of contrasts and novelty, the tolerated *frustration* involved in deferred gratification, and the *distance* of analysis and comparative listening. I would suggest that improvised music has a very significant potential for *healing* or *uniting* in the gap between these sides. Jazz – at its best – builds bridges over a schism that is paralyzing post-colonial culture; the strange and seldom very fruitful combination of antagonism, mystification and idealization in the relationship between the African and the Western. We envy each other, idealize each other, and dislike one another in mostly non-fusion ways. There is a need for healing dialectics. Not in Marxist-like totalitarian revolutionary utopias, but in a

role of the spiritual "sung on the field" is exaggerated in the popular image of jazz' roots. "In New Orleans, nothing is pure," so the argument goes, and this is true to such an extent that our ideal types of African and Western could be said to be completely false, rather than justifiable simplifications of a multi-faced reality. Maybe the roots of jazz are not African (field/tribal music) and Western (concert or entertainment music) in any orderly fashion, the roots might rather be a confused Creole/White/Black-Mixed-Saloon-Entertainment-Church-Art-Concert-Blues-Field thing that can never really be broken down in "elements" of one side or the other. I'll leave this open, as I still think there is much to gain from presenting the sides of a postulated dichotomy to outline a tension and to appreciate the intriguing synthesis.

¹⁹ The focus on individual, soloist virtuosity is of course also found in much African music, for instance in the "master drummer" function, where a particularly skilled drummer improvise solo cross-rhythms to the ever repeating rhythmic ground laid by the other drummers. Similarly, in ensemble work, performers of European art music also experience collectivism and states of being-part-of-a-larger-body-of-music. However, I do think that it is fair to make a distinction between individuality and collectivism as a general emphasis in European art music and African music respectively, as long as we keep in mind that this is an overt over-simplification done for heuristic purposes, not for historical "correctness".

responsible, ethically concerned post-modern dialectical way; opening up for the freedom to transcend and sublimate dilemmas on a personal level while not forgetting the links to social-historical processes and cultural heritage. Once again, let us turn to the practical level to exemplify this:

Unfolding of form vs. music as a state of being

Charles O. Harman describes the potential for synthesis in form. He talks of the African heritage of "music as a state of being" vs. the European tradition of *pieces* of music with a beginning, different sections, and an end, and he states that "[t]he standard structure of a small-group jazz performance brings these different ontologies of music to a truce or compromise – ideally, a synthesis" (Hartman 1991:10). The standard convention for jazz performance in small ensembles is: theme presentation (tutti) – a number of soli, each of which in themselves an unfolding with a distinct dramaturgy, and with the possibility of other players entering in to "comment" or back up the improvisation – a second theme presentation, often with a Coda. Thus, we have a form with sub-forms – a complex, yet straight linear, unfolding. But the whole of this unfolding derives its musical intensity – and, ultimately, its meaning and significance – from a groove and a state. You don't necessarily *have to* pay attention to the theme to enjoy the solos, and a brilliant motivic connection between parts of the unfolding is really not of much value if the overall musical intensity is not happening (It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got...). The groove is, if one is forced to choose – which, ideally, one should not – ultimately more important than each section in itself. Furthermore, musicians should be willing to sacrifice any planned scheme or form if a repetitive intensity is developed that is strong enough to "demand" more time. The length in time of each section is more dependent on the intensity developed in this particular section than on a proportion-like relationship to the length of the other sections. Thus, the logic of plans and schemes is coupled with the logic of spontaneity and situation. And so, the most widely used jazz performance idiom is in itself a dialectical solution to the tension between the demand for music as a state of being, and the demand for music as a nuanced unfolding.

Tempered vs. non-tempered universes of sound

We can also look at the relationship between well-tempered "Western" tonality and the use of blue notes in jazz from the point of view of "African" vs. "Western" (cf. the remarks made concerning the blue note earlier). When jazz developed in the fuzzy encounter between spirituals, blues, ragtime, marching band traditions and others, a field of tension was simultaneously activated between tonality based on tempered intervals and tonic-subdominant-dominant harmony on the one hand, and modal music with a high tolerance for – indeed, preferences for – subtle nuances in the size of intervals on the other hand. This field of tension is brought into play in the particularities of every instrument and its possibilities and limitations in relation to the tempered system. I do think, in passing, that one could write the whole history of jazz piano as a series of attempts to come to terms with the paradox of playing music that actually requires flexible blue notes on a completely stiff, tempered instrument. The different styles, voicings and approaches on the instrument represent different ways of trying to incorporate the ambiguity of blue notes and their consonance-in-dissonance without losing what is, after all, the fascinating qualities of the piano compared to the more flexible instruments. I would suggest that this could offer a very interesting field of study: exploring the paradox in detail – preferably in an historical review incorporating transcription,

textural analysis using techniques from modern signal processing methods, and a more phenomenological approach to the experience of piano sound.

So, I maintain that the tension between tempered and non-tempered universes of sound is also constitutive to the synthesis of "African" and "Western" in jazz (and, subsequently, in most of jazz' children in Western popular music). It is connected to the tension between the subtle flexibility of static harmony (bringing, in successful ritual-like music, *ecstatic* results), and the richness, yet often the rigid stiffness, of harmonic progression in chord changes. And precisely this tension is dialectically dealt with and *played* with in good jazz. In closing, I do not think that the implied link between musical synthesis and personal liberation in the dilemma between the ordered-logical-directed-analyzed-abstracted and the spontaneous-embracing-cyclic-ecstatic is at all arbitrary or dangerous. As long as we stick to a non-authoritarian, metaphor-embracing, locally situated dialectical view of history and liberation, I believe this linking can do nothing but inspire us fruitfully.

Conclusions?

The puzzles of jazz actions are now situated in a broader context involving politics and the history of culture and civilization. However briefly carried out, I do think that this excursion offered a very necessary perspective. Nevertheless, our main focus is the challenges for the individual improviser here and now, and the processes in consciousness of the individual improviser here and now. Our conception of this has both expanded and integrated itself during the essay – by now involving terminology from scenic music theory, a basic phenomenological dialectic of forming and being formed in the musical setting, as well as the five dialectical themes of Stierlin with all the practical musicianship touched upon in our exploration of them. We have to end here, leaving for later the very interesting task of concretizing even further the practical implications of our theorizing.²⁰ Most of what we have presented, does indeed have the double status of being manifestations of what is actually happening in flowing improvisation on the one hand, and implicit suggestions for *practicing* improvisation on the other. To exemplify (and to conclude with something that will hopefully lead a number of readers right toward their instruments, rather than to any more books right now): One should practice handling the tension between long-term and short-term musical perception. One should practice handling the tension between going with the flow and directing the music. One should practice handling the tension between differentiation or directedness of harmonic progressions and a unifying harmonic universe. One should practice being "inside" the music and listening from "outside" in an intimate dialogic presence. Dilemmas are there to be explored and experienced – going for the extremities or going for the intriguing movements of synthesis, but hopefully avoiding ending up in a non-profiled middle-of-the-road state. One should practice giving and receiving, being cool and being hot, being hard and being soft. One should expand one's consciousness contemplating the dialectical erotism of improvisation.

²⁰ The Norwegian thesis on which this essay is built has a separate section suggesting rehearsal tasks for expanding one's musical consciousness developed from (or specified in relation to) the theory presented.

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