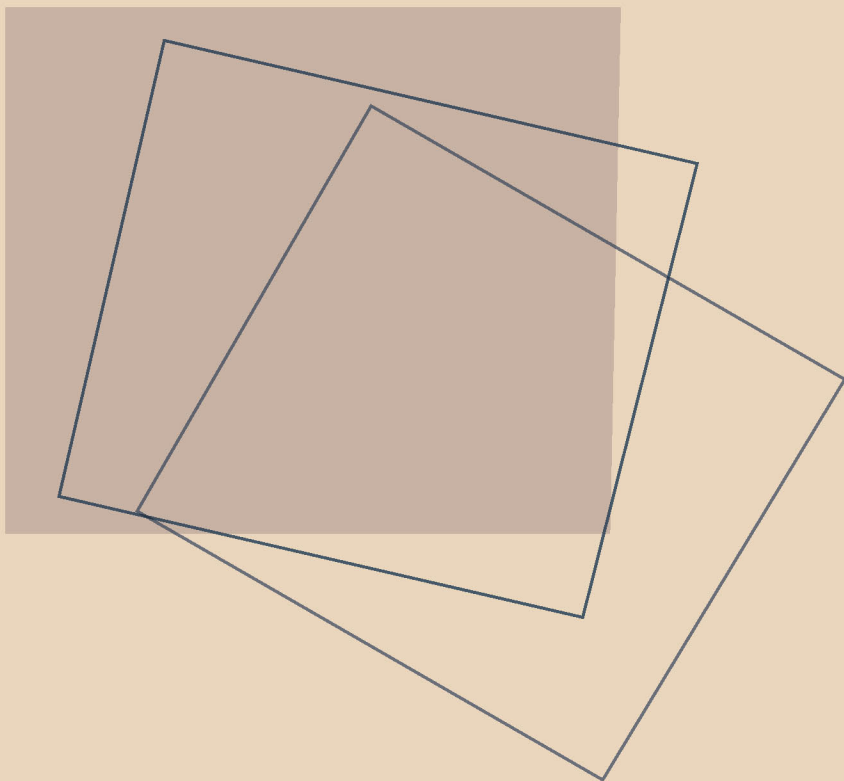# CONTINGENT ENCOUNTERS

IMPROVISATION IN MUSIC AND EVERYDAY LIFE

DAN DIPIERO

Contingent Encounters

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Improvisation in Music and Everyday Life

Dan DiPiero

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To all my people

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Acknowledgments

This is a very personal book for me, and reflects the winding course of my studies, now appearing in hindsight as a series of happy accidents that have culminated in the work you're reading. For this reason, I have many people to thank, from many different periods in my life. I've always had an easier time writing than talking, so I hope readers will forgive my taking an opportunity to attempt to put some things into words.

Bill Ransom is a legendary figure in the Cleveland music scene, a drummer whose musicianship is only rivaled by his accomplishments as an educator. For my part, I count him as my first real teacher, who knew exactly the right balance of rigor and camaraderie that I needed. Bill accepted me as a student when I could not effectively read music, and in two years got me ready for college auditions. In the process, he reframed my relationship to music, making everything else possible.

In college, Bob Breithaupt inducted me into a long jazz drumming tradition that continues to be passed down, and which I feel privileged to be a part of. Those fundamentals still inform everything that I do. Thanks also to Dina Lentsner, who introduced me to the idea of academic research about music in the first place. Many lessons about musicianship from Stan Smith and Mark Flugge are still with me daily. Among my musical circle, their influence is universal and immense. At the time I chose to attend Capital University, I could not have anticipated the close-knit community that I would find there, and here I have to name a few people in particular: Josh Bryant, Alex Burgoyne, Tom Davis, Aaron Quinn, and Kayla Sadowy, besides remaining lifelong friends in music, also understand me in a way that no one else can.

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Darek Oles, Larry Koonse, and in one special course, Charlie Haden. I was experiencing a lot of growing pains during this period, and my thanks go to all of them for their generosity and patience. Of course, I spent the most dedicated time with Joe La Barbera, my third truly great drum teacher. Thanks to Joe for his encouragement, kindness, and wisdom. Thanks too to the friends I made during my short time in Los Angeles: Lauren Elizabeth Baba, Steven van Betten, Megan Broughton, Jessy V. Castillo, Max Gualtieri, Jak Kyokong, James Brandon Lewis, Michael Timothy Lockwood, Ryan Parrish, Philip Rankin, Gregory Uhlmann, and Colin Woodford continue to inspire me.

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In 2010 I enrolled in Contemporary Aesthetic Theory because it was the only class with any slots, and I needed the credit. Deep appreciation goes to Arne De Boever for allowing me into the class having read not a word of any literature, and behind everyone else. The accident of my enrollment became one of those transformative moments in my trajectory, opening up a world that I had not known existed. The following year, I applied to the Aesthetics and Politics program, took the course again, and began my tentative steps into scholarship. Throughout, Arne and Martín Plot were encouraging and invigorating advisers.

In 2014 I returned to Columbus, where I began to try to bring my musical and academic lives together. The Comparative Studies department at Ohio State helped me to do this. Thanks to everyone who makes that department what it is. I am very grateful in particular to my dissertation committee, Barry Shank, Philip Armstrong, Ryan Skinner, and Eugene Holland, for engaging with my project with such care and attention. Ryan helped fill in critical gaps in my thinking, and I thank him for his ongoing and multifaceted support. Thanks to Gene too for his guidance, enthusiasm, and many stimulating talks over lunch. From the beginning, Barry and Philip were the most engaged and responsive advisers anyone could ask for, unfailingly generous, always close readers, and now dear friends.

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Infinite thanks and love go to my family, always. My parents have supported me unequivocally—that I have always known I could count on them is something for which I am deeply lucky and that I constantly feel in my life. Thanks also to my brother Justin, for this completely perfect book cover (and many others along the way), as well as his humor in general. I am lucky to count him as a friend.

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Portions of chapter 1 were published in 2018 as "Improvisation as Contingent Encounter, or: The Song of my Toothbrush," *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Études critiques en improvisation* 12, no. 2. Early versions of some chapter 8 material appeared in 2020 as "Rancière and Improvisation: Reading Contingency in Music and Politics," in *Rancière and Music*, edited by João Pedro Cachopo, Patrick Nickleson, and Chris Stover, 207–29. Edinburgh University Press.

This book was written without the support of any grants, sabbatical periods, course releases, research funding, subventions, an indexer, or travel stipends save the small amount to which I had access as a graduate student. In many cases, this is so because I was preemptively prohibited from applying for such opportunities due to my status as a contingent faculty member. For the same reason, excepting one year, this book was also written without the benefit of an office. I raise this here not to portray some feat or accomplishment on my part, nor to glorify a neoliberal sense of the hustle, nor to vent out of bitterness. Rather, I cannot but take space usually kept for acknowledging institutional support to emphasize the fact that such support is reserved for an increasingly rarefied few, and withheld from everyone else—particularly given the ways in which academic disparities are often overlooked or intentionally obscured among colleagues. Without any illusions about its utility, I want to pause here for the perhaps uncomfortable acknowledgment of the systemic inequalities that suffuse and indeed build academic workspaces, overdetermining who can afford to do research in the first place, or how scholarship is produced. The myth of meritocracy in this industry will have us believing that the fact that most published academic books are written by tenure-track faculty is a result of their having written the best work. But of course, it is exactly the other way around; it is the minority with job security who by and large are enabled to produce the research, and it is that work that we then understand as superior. We will never know what scholarship we are losing because of the unsustainable nature

of employment that awaits all those professors and scholars who have not been lucky enough—in the most literal sense of the word—to land a permanent job. In any case, it is only because of the intellectual, emotional, and material support of the above-named mentors, colleagues, friends, and family that I have been able to write this book. Thank you indeed.

| Introduction

Improvisation as Contingency

Everyday life is improvised to the extent that it becomes invisible.[1]

[This] is an experiment, not a judgment.[2]

This project begins with the suspicion that, although references to improvisation are ubiquitous in contemporary American culture, those references seem to invoke improvisation in different ways, for different purposes, and with quite different stakes. Consider some recent examples. In 2018, Nike announced a new branding project and "philosophy" called "ISPA: Improvise/Scavenge/Protect/Adapt."[3] Kristian Kloeckl's 2020 book on urban planning "makes improvisation useful and applicable to the condition of today's technology-imbued cities and proposes a new future for responsive urban design."[4] Columbia College philosopher Stephen Asma thinks that, generally speaking, "We could all do with learning how to improvise a little better."[5] Meanwhile, food blogs offer "6 Ways to Become a Fearless Improviser in the Kitchen."[6] "Medical Improv" is an emerging term for "the adaptation of improvisational theater principles and training techniques to improve communication, cognition, and teamwork in the field of medicine."[7] Relatedly, business consulting firms advise readers on "How to Improvise Your Way through COVID-19."[8] More infamously, improvisation has been frequently invoked to describe the behavior of the forty-fifth president, for example in articles like, "Trump's Dangerous Love of Improvisation";[9] "Trump's Highest-Stakes Improvisation";[10] and "Donald Trump Ushers in the Era of Political Improvisation,"[11] to say nothing of those that mention

improvisation without including the word in the title.[12] Different still: "Improvise, Adapt, Overcome" is something of an unofficial motto for the United States Marine Corps. In the United Kingdom, Tide's "business current account" is a startup-focused banking service that promises clients "one less thing to improvise."[13] And as we know, it has been a long-established truism in the business world that flexibility, adaptability, and improvisation itself are valuable skills, characterized as distinguishing qualities, uniquely suited for our increasingly dynamic workplaces.[14] Over and over again, we take recourse to the language of improvisation in order to describe something of our experiences in the world, but what that something *involves* seems to be quite different in every case. Such differences have gone underexamined, and we continue to discuss improvisation as if its meaning or function is self-evident across all spheres of activity.

Each of these brief examples help to illustrate two points that will be central for the rest of this book: first, that improvisation factors into our everyday experiences in ways that we often take for granted, but which are quite significant for understanding our participation in such experiences. Second, that improvisation is not one *thing* we can locate in one or another situation; rather, improvisation is utterly dependent on those situations in the first place. In other words, how we understand, experience, and talk about improvisation changes based on the specificities through which the improvisation happens, and therefore, *improvisation itself* also changes.

The primary purpose of this book is to investigate the relationship between improvisation in music and in everyday life. My central argument is that this relationship is best characterized by and explored through the notion of *contingency*—that, in both musical and social situations, improvisation is itself a contingent activity that necessarily emerges in response to and as a part of contingent situations. In both cases, subjects interact with the worlds in which they are enmeshed, responding according to their own life experiences and the constraints of the situation. Fundamental to my overall perspective is the claim that the acting subject is only one element among the plurality of interacting forces that constitute an improvisation.

The idea that improvisation is present outside of musical or other creative practices is certainly not new. But while many scholars and musicians have noted the relationship between musical improvisation and everyday life, the quality and character of that relationship have not been explored in detail. This book aims to examine that connection in

earnest by asking such questions as: Are there meaningful differences between social and musical improvisation? What is it that links these practices? And finally, what are the aesthetic and political implications of that connection?

In this study, I am not interested in exploring music in everyday life,[15] nor am I interested in studying improvisation as an artistic practice per se. Rather, I am specifically interested in improvisation as an "idea," and how it changes or does not change based on its context. In order to explore this idea, I analyze musical and quotidian case studies through the lens of contingency. Critically, in this book, contingency is not only about indeterminacy, but also the structuring presence of quite determined factors—both in and beyond the situation in question—that shape what is experienced as indeterminate. Contingency is not a cognate term for open, spontaneous, or flexible, but references the "open" and "closed" at once. By foregrounding contingency in all its complexity, I propose that we begin to ask different questions about the performances that take place in each sphere. The bracketing—"music" (Part One) and "everyday life" (Part Two)—is the first of many artificial categorizations I erect, as there is not necessarily or always a clear demarcation between them. All such categorical distinctions should be taken as heuristics, made in order to help identify the operation of contingency in what are actually impenetrably complex situations.

Improvisation

Despite its ubiquity within Western musical practices, by the twentieth century improvisation had become, in Vijay Iyer's words, "one of Western music's principal others: constructed as a kind of epistemological antithesis to composition." Iyer notes that, given copyright law's exclusive recognition of "fixed" musical objects, improvisation "enjoys a status of literally zero value in the Western economy of musical 'works'" (Iyer 2019, 3).[16] "Not coincidentally," as Iyer also notes, improvisation is widely understood as a central throughline in African American musical practices.[17] Particularly through early jazz history, attention to and dismissal of improvisation emerged as one of the main logics through which white discourses attempted to discredit and decry the music's validity, further sedimenting improvisation's disparaged status by racially coding it as a base, instinctual modality opposed to whiteness and artistic merit, both discursively located in the notion of the composition as "work" of art.[18] Following George E. Lewis, Eileen Southern, and many others, this move

can be seen as an extension of racist white perceptions that conflated the musical practices of enslaved Africans with "noise," beyond the pale of reason, order, or sensibility.

By contrast, and in some ways as a response to this history, humanities scholarship in the past twenty years has seen a surge of interest in improvisation as a distinct phenomenon, even as its themes overlap with other inquiries into embodiment, performance, and subjectivity. Largely emerging from the efforts of what is now the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI), critical improvisation studies (CIS) is an interdisciplinary field that engages improvisation in a wide variety of capacities, methods, and topics, from the cognitive sciences to continental philosophy. This field has produced critical work on the kinds of practitioners long overlooked in scholarship, finally historicizing and theorizing artists such as the Feminist Improvising Group (Smith 2004), The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (Lewis 2008) and Jeanne Lee (Porter 2013), as well as more canonical (but nevertheless underthought) figures like George Russell (Porter 2008) and Billy Strayhorn (Barg 2017). At the same time that it has drawn long overdue attention to many pioneering improvisers, this field is also expanding the study of improvisation into other disciplinary and cultural spaces, enriching and diversifying the traditional association between improvisation studies and jazz studies.[19] Additionally, much research around CIS works to expand the notion of improvisation outside the arts, using it to rethink questions of aesthetics, ethics, subjectivity, and politics.[20]

Critical improvisation studies is a diverse field of inquiry, with many ongoing debates and no unified theory about the function or nature of improvisation.[21] For the purposes of this book, one of the most salient and central of these debates is also one of the most basic: the question of how improvisation is defined. Interestingly, most scholars associated with CIS defer defining improvisation directly, a tendency that I discuss more thoroughly in the conclusion. Here, I want to briefly address how this deferral inadvertently raises conceptual and political problems in the field. Specifically, while many scholars have declined to outright define the concept, this has not prevented the deployment of a rather specific understanding of the term, what is sometimes referred to as its "ideal" version, as in "improvisation at its best." This version of improvisation, often derived from scholars' analyses of African American musical practices, is implicitly and explicitly characterized as *special*—that is, such studies variously suggest that improvisation's ostensibly distinct and traditionally undervalued qualities have something to teach us about inter-

acting with others. If we study how musicians, actors, and other artists engage improvisation, the idea goes, we might learn something about how to change institutions outside the arts, introducing perspectives from the former in order to rethink the latter.[22] I will call this approach the "progressive theory" of improvisation, which is arguably most visibly articulated through the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice series published by Duke University Press.[23] At the farthest end of this formulation lies what I will call the "utopian strain" of theorizing improvisation, which posits improvisation as a necessarily subversive and liberatory practice. Both the progressive and utopian understandings are relevant when considering Iyer's important criticisms of the field, which in turn bear on this book's framing.

Iyer is straightforward in his critique: while he urges music theorists to take improvisation's historically disparaged status seriously, he argues that "the resurgent academic interest in improvisation" does not offer a way out, "at least not as it is currently studied" (2019, 1). Iyer argues that the turn toward improvisation in academia, without, often enough, even citing Black scholars, bears all the marks of a "rehabilitative gesture, a vindication, a hollow, performative rescue of what society has deemed abject" (2019, 4) and which usually confers disproportionate value on the institutions and individuals who aim to do the rehabilitating. One part of the problem according to Iyer is that improvisation studies has not adequately dealt with the question of difference.[24] Returning to the definitional question I raised above, another way of putting this might be that improvisation is deployed in much scholarship according to a perspective that remains unmarked—that is, it is understood as open and flexible where it is actually both consistent and particular. The difficulty here lies in the fact that thinking, for example, about how the legal profession can be retheorized through improvisation seems to presuppose an understanding of what improvisation is in the first place, a presumption that becomes especially untenable when we consider that most improvisation scholars have tacitly or explicitly declined to define improvisation. On this view, part of improvisation studies' general refusal to define the word, while in some ways testifying to its historically multifaceted deployment, might also be understood as the very means by which convenient assumptions about its ostensibly special qualities are imported without commentary.[25] More often than not, unspoken implications characterize improvisation as a creative and open-minded process, one that is subject-focused and valorized insofar as it represents a departure from the normal way of doing things. In my view, such

assumptions are particularly problematic inasmuch as they mask the exceptions that Iyer raises, diverting attention away from cases in which such liberatory experiences don't apply evenly or ideally onto social life, and in which the consequences of improvisatory scenes vary wildly for marginalized groups and individuals.

This returns us to the utopian and progressive theories of improvisation. Each of these share the view that improvisation is a positive social force; the difference between them lies in that the progressive theory recognizes this force as historical and contingent, rather than inherent and necessary. In other words, the progressive theory tends to study particular cases in which improvisation has produced social good in order to understand how such possibilities—never guaranteed—were actualized in specific contexts. This view allows that oppressive, mundane, or otherwise nonideal cases of improvisation exist, but implies that scholars should focus on improvisation's capacity to foster social change, and that asymmetries born of difference provide opportunities to learn, rather than barriers.[26] In this way, such theories also overlap with and in some ways reinforce the most dominant, "common-sense" deployments of the term in public discourses: this normative understanding, including many of the examples offered in the beginning of this book, consistently characterizes improvisation as open, spontaneous, and socially useful, implicitly contrasting improvised activity with normal, boring, routinized existence.

In contrast to those perspectives which assume or seek to draw out improvisation's special qualities, this book follows Iyer, Lewis, and others who have theorized improvisation as variously *not special*. Emphatically ordinary, improvisation is, for Iyer, simply synonymous with living, or as he puts it, "experience" itself (Iyer 2016). *Contingent Encounters*, as both a project and a term, aims to foreground, elaborate, and probe this minor perspective in improvisation studies, which cuts against the progressive view outlined above, and which posits improvisation—far from a special kind of experience or activity—as simply our mode of being alive. The notion of a contingent encounter is offered here to articulate the particular, embodied facticity of our everyday improvisations, to specify how contingency appears in and structures our lives, concurrently engendering improvisation as a normal matter of course.[27]

Improvisation is everywhere because existence is contingent. It is tempting to dismiss this line of thinking, either because it seems to bear a kind of common sense (and thus appears obvious), or else because it is easy to sublimate the actually interesting provocations this formulation

raises into a dismissal along the lines of, "if X is everything then it's also nothing." But what if we pushed past either what seems so uncontroversial as to be accepted (thus ignored), or else what can be dismissed, both of which amount to the same insofar as they discourage a full accounting? What if we take seriously the idea that improvisation is the same thing as living? How might that change our understanding of improvisation's aesthetic, political, and theoretical implications?

Throughout this book, my approach to that challenge is to show how contingency is the one constant that remains true of all improvisations— that contingency is not a "feature" of improvisation, but rather the fundamental core of what it means to improvise. In conversation with Georgina Born, Eric Lewis, and Will Straw's characterization of the "radically contingent nature of improvisation" (2017b, 11), I ask: What would it mean to take this "nature" seriously, to center it above any other characteristics? Throughout this project, my answers to these questions will involve the following four points, each flowing from the main thesis:

1. Contra the notion of improvisation as a creative capacity developed by subjects, improvisation can be productively understood as coextensive with a contingent encounter between subjects, objects, and multiple environments, where *environments* encompasses everything that has an effect, from physical spaces to the discourses governing how things are perceived or known. In this formation it is the subject's role that has historically overdetermined theorizations of improvisation.

2. Given the radical contingency of every improvisation, each is incommensurate with every other instance, even within the same genre or medium—that is, improvisation is always a singularity.

3. If improvisation is always a singularity, then its ontology must be understood through contingency, and contingency alone, as this remains the only constant from improvisation to improvisation. In spite of every irreducible, irreplicable difference, it is always true that improvisation is contingent, and equally so.

4. The singularity of improvisation tightly links it, on a formal level, with practices in everyday life. This link is so tight, I suggest, that it is not so much that improvisation in music and in social life are identical, but more that all musical and social actions (and the musical and social spaces they create) are inherently improvisatory. That is, we do not act but through improvisation.

One early consequence of this thinking is that improvisation can't necessarily be understood as an open or spontaneous process; against conventional readings of improvisation as a domain of relative freedom, I elaborate how thinking improvisation through contingency shifts our perspective, showing that particular social investments cause improvisation to be read as an exercise in freedom. Rather than necessarily involving openness, risk-taking, or unpredictability, contingency insists that every improvisation simply *depends*. Following this, another consequence might be a recognition of the impossibility of valorizing improvisation, or to paraphrase Iyer (paraphrasing Wadada Leo Smith), the necessity of taking the term out back and beating it to death.[28]

Contingency

Throughout this book, I use a comparative method to explore improvisation across diverse musical and nonmusical spaces, beginning with three case studies in the genre/practice of Improvised Music.[29] One of my overarching claims is that theories of improvisation have been overdetermined by the kind of creative and energizing experiences that can emerge between musicians. However, even as I aim to complicate this musically centered notion of improvisation, it remains true that music is a rich site (among many) for thinking the relationships between improvisation, contingency, and agency. Another important reason that I turn to music for lessons on improvisation is the way that my own performance experiences constitute and inform my research.

Consider for instance a show I played on October 5, 2016, at Brothers Drake in Columbus, Ohio. There, a group of old friends from various points in my life performed together for the first and only time. In the middle of the set, we were playing a composition of mine that is through-composed and relatively simple. The job was just to play the chart down, beginning to end. And yet, at that show, on that night, an improvisation inserted itself into the performance *against* our will. At the end of the piece, we collectively improvised for almost as long as the length of the actual composition. This was not a "free" improvisation (although it was out of time), but one rooted in a chord progression from the tune, a simple I to $IV^\triangle 7$ movement that is very meaningful to me. The improvisation had a form, a style, and a collective dynamic in which instrumental roles were traded among all four of us.

If the task here is to understand something about improvisation, it is, in this situation, not enough to try to analyze what the musicians played

and how, or even why; rather, it is the very presence of improvisation in the first place that is of note, because it points to the following crucial fact: it was not the music but the *something outside it* that unexpectedly produced an improvisation where there was not supposed to be one. Against the ideas with which four musicians entered a performance, an improvisation asserted itself. How can we account for this? My argument here is, rather than an accidental or incidental moment, part of what it fundamentally means to improvise is contained in the encounter of particularities that produced such a result.

The idea is apparently obvious: clearly, improvisers are concerned with contingency, since the fact that an improvisation is unpredictable is ostensibly the characteristic that defines its value, the aspect that distinguishes it from predetermined material. However, pushing the idea further, it is also clear that improvisers do not simply pursue *maximum* unpredictability, as if the success of an improvisation is negatively correlated with its degree of foreseeability. Thus, improvisation must have a particular kind of relationship with contingency.

The performance described here is not a special instance. Rather, I introduce this personal example because my vantage point from inside the performance gives me some retrospective insight into the mechanics behind what happened. I remember, for instance, that it was my mistake during the performance (I missed a unison figure) that precipitated the improvisation. I remember that I made that mistake partially because I had left my music stand at home, and was trying to read my friend's chart from far away. I remember that the trajectory and character of our improvisation (climactic, but also willfully grounded in two chords from the tune, a very specific choice) was the way that it was partially because the tune "called for" a development both coherent and forceful enough to wipe our past mistakes out of the audience's memory, and that noodling around at that point would not have achieved the same effect. I know that the volume of the crowd had, all through the set, pushed us to play louder than we had planned to play, as our softest sounds were simply evaporating beneath us. I know that what happened also happened because of the particular set of musicians collected on that stage, and what we can call their musical "personalities"; *that* improvisation felt like the most musically sensible route to take, given our collective experiences and our familiarity with what makes "musical sense," even or especially subconsciously.

At the same time that these clues reveal something, they don't reveal everything. This anecdote is not intended to portray a linear account of

the causes and effects present in such a moment, to conclude that my mistake caused us to improvise because we had all gotten "off track." Further, I don't intend to turn this into another account of improvisation as "management" of a difficult situation; this is not a narrative about the redemptive power of improvisation. More basically, the problem I am trying to grapple with is how, when four musicians approached an entirely composed score with the intention of playing it down, an improvisation nevertheless occurred. What we know about improvised music, and, I would maintain, about all music, is that it does not correspond to linear cause and effect. The extended improvisation at the end of the piece swelled into a climactic event for a variety of only partially traceable reasons. In any case, as I write in the section below on affect, to think contingency is not, for me, to think in terms of causality and outcomes, questions that implicitly aim to master their materials; rather, contingency is an invitation to an always broader conversation.

Improvise: *im-provisus,* meaning unforeseen or unprovided. My issue is not so much to rework this understanding of the word as it is to expand the parameters we use to identify what factors in a given process are relevant in producing a certain result, and the ways in which we subsequently identify what parts of that process were or were not foreseen. Put differently, I am arguing that to characterize a situation as foreseen or unforeseen is an evaluation that we make, not anything proper to the situation. The second understanding of improvise as "unprovided" could reference improvisation's frequent association with making-do, as that which we employ in times where we are not provided for. But "unprovided" can also signal that the situation in question is not given, not a given, or not given fully—that is, an improvised situation is one in which we recognize partiality and incompleteness. I want to suggest that all improvisations are incomplete in the sense that we only ever have access to a partial perspective. Put another way, while one or more aspects of a process may be foreseeable or foreseen, there are always other elements in the situation that are both unforeseen and unknowable. My proposal to think improvisation through contingency is an invitation to broaden the scope of the picture that we look at when thinking about what is or is not unforeseen, to recognize that wherever there is contingency, there will be features of experience that are both unforeseen and unknowable, even when the activity in question is ostensibly quite predictable.

From this follows my explicit claim that something of improvisation is lost without an analysis of the way that this process happens, an analysis not only of music but also of the total material and social situation

in which the improvisation takes place. Although I had been thinking through contingency long before this performance, the anecdote helps to illustrate its force in a given instance of improvisation: what it is meant to show is that the improvisation in question did not emerge as a result of creative virtuosity, artistic ambition, the score we were reading, or indeed any other single factor; it emerged as a result of the situation as a complex whole, in a way that is irreducible to the situation itself and which is at least partially outside of the musicians involved. Specifically, if we acknowledge here that the crowd, the objects or lack thereof (as in my missing stand), the score, and my fellow musicians all played some kind of role in the outcome, we can say that "the situation" comprises subjects in all their multiplicity, objects in all their mystery, environments in all their complexity, and the interaction between these factors (in all their irreducibility). The particularities of these factors in a given time and place, the specific objects gathered in a specific room, have as much to do with the resulting music as the musicians themselves. I therefore give a preliminary definition of improvisation as a contingent encounter between subjects, objects, and environments. I offer this definition for an obviously multivalent concept in order to propose that shifting the methodological framework to foreground this contingency can yield new insights into improvisation, and that it is this relationship between improvisation and contingency that connects directly to everyday life.

Structure and Method

This book is split into two main parts: Contingent Music and Contingent Life. In each part, I trace contingency through diverse situations in order to understand more about what improvisation is doing. Contingency as I am thinking it here outlines a range of concerns that may be operative in a given musical or social situation, and therefore can't be uniformly located or applied. Instead, what I have in mind is something like Michel de Certeau's "science of singularity" (1984). This "science" points to nothing beyond a rigorous "attention to the specific, located object" (Highmore 2006, 7), if we understand "object" also as a process entangled in social relations. It is a method that attends to the "singular details of the example" (5). This is why, in the music section, I always begin with close listening, and why it is central to my approach. Although for me thinking through improvised music performance means expanding improvisation beyond the strictly musical, it is the specific sounds, as they are situated and reverberating, that lead all the analysis by disclosing

something about their emergence. Throughout this book, I follow close listening out into a variety of other areas and methods: archival research, discourse analysis, historical musicology, as well as interviews and interpretations of context grounded in critical theory, including critical race and queer theory. I do not use each of these methods equally or evenly, but choose what and how to investigate based on the sounds contained in each recording. In short, I follow where the music seems to lead, asking questions it seems to demand. This is one reason that I have chosen musical examples that share a similar aesthetic investment, while at the same time offering opportunities to explore quite distinct social factors.

A contingentist perspective does not impose a structure, method, or set of questions on a given example, but traces its effects through interconnected and co-constituting interactions.[30] By implicating both musical and extramusical factors, tracing contingency out from the event allows a more nuanced discussion of improvisation to take place, encompassing a wider range of concerns.[31] This is not an etiological pursuit, but a polemical one. By this I mean that tracing contingency is not done in order to understand how the improvisation happened from a causal perspective; rather, it aims to expand what we talk about when we talk about improvisation, revealing important information about the cases in question and thus contributing to scholarship in music studies and everyday life.

It is important to recognize that this book's ambition to compare improvisation across different disciplines and concerns has resulted in something of a disjunction, particularly between the two halves of the book. The methods, questions, and registers shift across sections, and I have made the choice—despite potential drawbacks—to maintain this juxtaposition intentionally. While a sense of overarching linearity, unity, or cohesion may at times become lost, my gamble is that the two halves of the book must remain distinct if they are to provide a genuine opportunity for comparison. Moreover, as I've just outlined, I don't believe that it is either possible or advisable to bring the same perspective to different areas of study; even though I chase the same question in both parts, the means by which I do so changes according to the specificities in each case. That being said, there is at the same time a consistent project that ultimately unifies the book, which is the effort to observe contingency and draw out its implications. No matter the disparate cases examined and the varied means of analysis, each case is studied in order to elucidate the paradoxical consistency of their singularity, the operation of improvisation across contingent instantiations.

The remainder of this introduction is devoted to developing contingency as a methodological perspective. Then in Part One, I use contingency to analyze three musical case studies: Eric Dolphy's "Out to Lunch," Norwegian improvising band Mr. K's track "Waves, Linens, and White Light," and the two improvised tracks from Kris Davis and Ingrid Laubrock's 2020 album *Blood Moon*. As I elaborate in the introduction to Part One, these cases have been chosen partially because I encountered them in my own life; more importantly, while they all share an avant-garde/Improvised Music aesthetic sensibility, they nevertheless approach improvisation in distinct ways that will allow for a promising comparative study. In order to follow improvisation, in this section I locate contingency's multiple operations as they emerge in the recordings. At first, this involves questioning what possibilities and impossibilities are conditioned by the performance, and how such "rules of the game" facilitate certain musical outcomes. Second, it raises the contingent social and material circumstances through which the music was made possible. In each case, what I am interested in showing is that improvisation is as deeply affected by discursive, cultural, and material effects as it is by a certain musical approach. Moreover, because improvisation is utterly dependent on such singular arrangements of contingencies, each improvisation is revealed as radically incommensurate with every other—even in this same genre space.

In chapter 2, I listen to Eric Dolphy, whose improvisations sound an eccentric ambivalence that reflects both his musical innovations and the hostility with which they were met, improvisations that simultaneously broke open a rift in bebop and as a result remained incoherent for the white establishment critical apparatus that viewed any Black avant-garde as threatening. Dolphy's improvisations thus created a fugitive sociomusical disjuncture, sounding two historical worlds in one.

In chapter 3, I explore an improvisation with almost no discernible variation at all, a small soundworld composed of pure repetition, which invites investigation into alternative pedagogical and social approaches to improvisation that are particular to the Norwegian context from which this music comes. In the music on *Left Exit*, improvisation does not have to do with virtuosic expression or unpredictable sounds, but rather with the musical result of a single moment in time, when all the elements are assembled, and where whatever would-yet-happen is then respected and held for the duration of the performance.

Chapter 4 takes up the two improvisations that appear on Ingrid Laubrock and Kris Davis's *Blood Moon*, showing how they make audible

practices of deep listening, musical intimacy, and care. Improvisation here produces a feminist affect not because of the "women improvisers" involved but first because reciprocity and intimacy are feminist practices, and second because such close musical relationships are perceptible through the embodied interactions captured on record. In other words, it is not their stylistic choices that mark this music as a feminist improvisation, but their approach to communication and interaction, perceptible in listening as affect or force in vibration.

From even these brief descriptions, it should be clear how incommensurate each musical case study turns out to be, aesthetic similarities aside. In the second section, I move into the space of everyday life in order to conduct another comparison: this time the question is how improvisation appears in social life, and how this appearance compares to the preceding musical cases. To answer these questions, I proceed in the same way as in Part One, tracing the appearance of contingency in multiple interdependent encounters. As with the musical cases, Part Two examines its everyday activities by zooming out from the improvising subject to consider that subject's interactions with their environments, or how subjectivity and agency become constituted through the structuring limitations of an overlapping series of systems in which they are situated. In this second part, thinking through encounters in everyday life leads me to a more speculative and tangential method: working upside down from the first part, the second half of this book moves from theory into diverse examples, again following improvisation where it leads. I am interested again in exploring the question of what contingency helps us to think about: if we consider improvisation as contingency, in what unlikely places might we find it? Throughout, I am less invested in proving my thesis than I am in using it to help us think about what usually passes by unnoticed.

In chapters 5 and 6, I first engage the field of everyday life studies before focusing in particular on de Certeau's "everyday practices." In locating contingency and improvisation in walking, baking, listening, and working, I attempt to defetishize improvisation by showing both its omnipresence and the identity of its presence between artistic and quotidian activities. In chapter 7 I push further, using Merleau-Ponty and Sara Ahmed to elucidate the foundational indeterminacies at the heart of perception itself. As they show, perception is not a passive state but one that must be actively practiced, or in other words, improvised.

Ultimately, then, the second part of this book develops the idea that improvisation is not so much identical between music and everyday life as

it is constitutive of both. In this sense, I mean to build on work by George Lewis, Vijay Iyer, Tracy McMullen, and other musicians who approach improvisation through music, but who, in doing so, come to understand improvisation as a more fundamental, ubiquitous, and structuring phenomenon than a mode of creative performance. This relationship is for me not metaphorical—that is, I don't propose that everyday life *resembles* or proceeds *like* a musical improvisation; rather, I take seriously the possibility that musical improvisation and everyday life are structurally identical. Importantly, this formulation is not only theoretical but also political; reducing improvisation to contingency also, from a certain perspective, threatens to erase the contributions of the Black musicians who pioneered jazz and Improvised Music in the first place. My ambition is to elaborate my case while at the same time resisting this erasure—to empty improvisation of any *necessary* political posture while still showing how it is possible for specific people in specific historical circumstances to take that empty potential and use it for transformative ends. This is why (following Ingrid Monson) I consistently deflect attention away from improvisation *itself* as a political force, and toward the *people* who make improvisation into something compelling.[32] In doing so, I hope to center the marginalized musicians who make this music what it is, showing that any remarkable musical/political outcomes are the result of *their work*, and not some power inherent to improvisation itself.[33]

Thoroughly elaborating and validating my conflation between improvisation and contingency is the first major conclusion of the book. However, chapter 7's focus on the practice of perception also introduces a complexity into that conflation, which is the difference that attention or awareness makes. In music as much as daily living, there is a difference between doing something and doing that same activity with attention or awareness—to *know* on some level that one is engaged with X activity, whatever one's role. In a way, then, the question of attention returns this book to musical improvisation—but no longer in the sense of improvising music; if we consider that improvisation is simply another word for living, *musical* improvisation might be rethought as an attending-to or an orientation toward the contingencies present in a given moment, an awareness of the improvisation that is occurring regardless. While improvisation is always already operative, "musical improvisation" acknowledges this fact as a presupposition, which then affects how we act in the world. I term this kind of attention "musical improvisation" not because I believe that the awareness explicitly cultivated by improvising musicians and listeners is unique to music; far from it, this kind of perception is obviously operative

in theater, painting, and other improvised art forms. Rather, I use the term *musical* following John Cage's distinction between listening and listening musically, which famously draws attention to the ways in which a subtle shift in perception can have transformative effects on our experience. Just as one might learn to hear the music in street traffic, to improvise musically is to attend to the unfolding of a scene in which one is already a part, transforming that very participation in the process.

This new formulation of "musical improvisation" differentiates itself from improvisation in general, posited as the always-already mode of our being alive. The remainder of chapter 7 explores what "musical improvisation" might mean in the space of everyday life, and its relation to questions of the will. In short, while no particular outcome is guaranteed, I suggest that "musical improvisation" is something we can *attempt* to activate in any situation, a set of potentialities opened up by a willful orientation toward attunement and present awareness. This orientation is defined not by a privileged or enlightened mode of attention but by its repeated efforts—more than anything, musical improvisation is defined by its trying or reaching-for.

The concluding chapter follows up on this potential by discussing the aesthetic and political implications that are raised by thinking improvisation as contingency, as well as musical improvisation as an orientation toward that contingency. In the Coda, I also take up the question of collective improvisation, or how we might will together.

Before this project can begin in earnest, we must spend some more time with contingency.

Contingency as Concept

The contingent and the necessary form an opposition that is at (or somewhere near) the heart of Western philosophy. This opposition is arguably centered in Aristotle's understanding of contingent phenomena as those which *could have been otherwise*, where what is necessary is that which *must be*.[34] Already, this understanding contains multiple implications, which I broadly split into two, nonexclusive categories: the "qualitative" and the "causal." For Aristotle, the contingent or accidental is opposed to the necessary or essential. Contingent qualities are those unnecessary to the thing in question, such that, for instance, a blond-haired person is as much a person as a brown-haired person. What contingency designates or identifies in this understanding is something of

the nature of the thing in question, in this case, hair. It is a qualitative evaluation that tells us that the color of a person's hair is both incidental and malleable. It is incidental because blonde hair is not fundamental to the notion of a human being, making it in some way superfluous or unnecessary. It is malleable because that which could have been otherwise may also be otherwise in the future; while one's humanity remains constant throughout a lifetime, blonde hair may eventually grey. Thus, in addition to being incidental, that which is contingent is also of a more mutable nature.

In addition to these qualitative assessments, contained within this understanding of contingency is also an implication of causality. For a contingent phenomenon to exist as potentially otherwise, *it has to exist.* The contingent, as Quentin Meillassoux notes in reference to the term's etymology (the Latin *contingere*: to touch, to meet, to happen), is something that "*finally happens*" (2008, 108). Therefore, in order to potentially have been otherwise, what is contingent must *be*. Contingency is not found, on this view, in the apparently open potential of a decision yet-made; it is instead found in the result that, while in a sense arbitrarily so, nevertheless occurs. Hence, Aristotle's notion of contingency is a retrospective trace that takes place after the fact, an in-the-moment but past-leaning assessment. "*Somehow*," the assessment says, "X came to be." Determining what kind of "somehow" is the task to which contemporary theories of chance, complexity, emergence, and other models of nonlinear causality have been marshalled to answer (about which more below). What is already clear in Aristotle is that contingency marks a distinction with the necessary in part as a question of causes, of how a thing comes to be.

Critically, Aristotle's backward-facing view also invokes the question of temporality. For Aristotle, the contingent is always a past-leaning proposition, for as we see with the causal notion, everything that is contingent is something that has already been fixed into place. While at first the qualitative understanding of contingency appears to open the door toward a future-leaning notion (as that which could have been otherwise may yet be otherwise), according to Hannah Arendt, Aristotle in fact affords no capacity for genuine newness to contingent phenomena. In Arendt's reading, any "new" that may result always actually preexists as potentiality. In this sense, grey hair would be the revealed destiny of blond hair. The contingent in Aristotle thus "implicitly denies the future as an authentic tense" (Arendt 1978, 15) as everything that could be otherwise is accidental, and what appears

as new was (necessarily) already there. Arendt sees Aristotle's view as a result of the hierarchy of essential and trivial qualities, which she in turn attributes to Greek ontology, in which forms and even words returned in eternal cycles. Therefore, "In the eyes of philosophers who spoke in the name of the thinking ego, it had always been the curse of contingency that condemned the realm of merely human affairs to a rather low status in the ontological hierarchy" (28).

If my reading here follows Arendt, it is because she allows us to consider alternative conceptualizations of contingency, including both present and future-leaning notions. Indeed, as a real-time, unpredictable behavior, her notion of *action* is of central importance to this book. Arendt's action is fundamentally characterized by contingency, but involves quite different implications than Aristotle's usage. Arendt follows Aristotle on the point that human action is contingent. But unlike Aristotle, contingency in Arendt is the very source of action's tremendous significance. Furthermore (and unlike Georg W. F. Hegel), this significance is not a result of the fact that action eventually produces philosophical truth; rather, human action is meaningful *precisely because* it is contingent. For Arendt, action allows humans to "start new unprecedented processes whose outcomes remain uncertain and unpredictable," and this capacity is so important that it leads her to declare "uncertainty" as the "decisive character of human affairs" (1958, 232). Arendt's view adds another understanding of contingency to our list, one that noticeably breaks from the first operational definition. Rather than concentrating on that which *is* (but which could have been or might yet be otherwise), Arendt highlights the potential for any action, even "the smallest act" to produce *unpredictable* outcomes—that is, neither necessarily toward or away from truth, nor necessarily following any particular trajectory. This notion of action is something that strongly resists assessments about outcomes, but preserves contingency as a future potential, as a state of indeterminacy. This is crucial in its implicit argument that contingencies need not belong to any larger system to either come into being or to produce effects. Additionally, action clearly distinguishes itself, in verb form, from Aristotelian adjectives around "accidental qualities" and phenomena that "have taken place." Action implies a real-time, process-focused flow of effects—what Arendt calls the "process character of action"—rather than any outcomes. This is the notion of contingency that is most commonly aligned with improvisation, or with any artwork that involves a live, performative element. Furthermore, Arendt opens

the door to a future-leaning view: not only is action itself unpredictable, but it may also have effects that ramify into an unknown future. With action, Arendt thus introduces a temporal divide that will remain central to this book. Each understanding of contingency outlined here implies some relation to time, whether the contingency in question is a potential (prior to), a real-time occurrence (during), or a consequence (after). Finally, action as I see it differs from that contingency par excellence—the event—if we follow Alain Badiou in understanding the event as an occurrence ex nihilo, one that reconfigures the conditions upon which it descends.[35] Action, by contrast, is a small kind of thing.

Contingency as Method: Constellation

At this point, contingency refers to what we can call the *closed* outcomes of some kind of nonnecessary process, as well as to the *open* potential of a real-time activity (and its potential future consequences). The distinction between these two seems to turn on the question of the event itself, such that before the event, the outcome is contingent as in not-yet-known, and after the event, the result is contingent as in could-have-been-otherwise. What appears at first blush a frustrating ambiguity actually points to a useful insight: the fact that contingency can reference both the open (to be determined) and the closed (having taken place) emphasizes the fact that—depending on where we look—at any given time in any given process, there is a particular constellation of openings and closures, of possibilities and impossibilities, that constitute a contingent situation. The contingent does not reference either the open or the already decided but both at once, and always—the question is to do with what specific variables shift, even variables in our viewpoint. The notion of contingency that I aim to outline here therefore moves beyond its traditional opposition to necessity and instead incorporates closures and openings together. The fact that contingency refers to both that which is determined (but could have been differently so) and that which will be determined (and is yet unknown) is an insight as much as it is a paradox; both of these moments are a part of what constitutes a contingent formation. Before the event, the constellation looks one way, and after the event it looks another way. In every case, each closure engenders a new opening, and every opening guarantees a future closure. If we pause the action at a certain point, we can observe the constellation they compose. If we move the freeze-frame forward or backward, we might capture an

opening condensing into a closure, or a closure bursting into an opening. Closures and openings are in this way immanent to one another, each a part of what makes a situation as such.

In developing contingency as an analytic, this first insight is particularly useful in bypassing the binaries that often accompany discussions of improvisation, the open indetermination of which is consistently opposed to the predetermined or closed. While the composition/ improvisation binary has been more thoroughly undermined in recent scholarship, it is still difficult to conceive of improvisation and its significance without a series of associated oppositions, namely: restriction/ freedom, repetition/difference, habitual/extraordinary, planned/ unplanned, product/process, hegemonic/radical, premade/real-time, and what I am calling here "closed/open." Even where improvisatory action is described on a kind of sliding scale (for example, from all the way closed as in classical music to all the way open as in free jazz), the question is always posed between the poles of freedom and restriction.[36] And although the sliding scale model allows for a degree of nuance, it still defines improvisation by juxtaposing it to the restrictions involved: improvisation is the part of this performance that is open, no matter how much or how little of this openness may be present.

By contrast, a contingentist perspective entangles the open and the closed, asking, How can something be opposed to that on which it depends?[37] I do not claim that these oppositions are not at least somewhat in play in a given improvisation, or are not useful for identifying certain tendencies. I do claim, however, that how we identify those tendencies has a lot to do with what we're paying attention to. In particular, theorizations of improvisation and other contingent artistic practices tend to follow from the moment in the process that is privileged at a given point, while neglecting the moments in the creative process that seem less relevant.[38] Consequently, musical improvisation, considered in the "during" moment of creation, has traditionally been about openness, while contingent painting (for instance), considered in the "after" of the process, becomes about closedness (i.e., the result).[39] From this perspective, the way openness and closedness figure into a situation has less to do with the practice itself and more to do with our narratives or particular viewpoints.[40]

Because of the emphasis on the openness of improvised music, thinking improvisation as an unforeseen or unplanned activity is a persistent characterization that has overdetermined theorizations of improvisation writ large. Alternatively, the first consequence of thinking improvisation

according to contingency is that the open/closed binary collapses, complicating readings that rely on associated political notions like restraint/freedom, or vertical/horizontal. Rather than viewing improvisation as something that is more or less present, more or less open on a sliding scale, contingency invites us to consider every improvisation as nontrivially *different*—a constellation of openings and closures both, in a singular arrangement. This insistence on the closed and the open at once is critical, and what distinguishes my use of "contingency" insofar as I wish to avoid turning it into another vacuous term along the lines of openness, interactivity, empathy, and so on, terms that claim to describe the ostensibly unique characteristics of improvisation while neglecting the parts of improvisation—or indeed, other examples—that might not correspond with these more progressive concepts. As I will elaborate, a one-sided emphasis on either the closed or the open will result in readings of improvisation that don't hold up under scrutiny.

Contingency as Method: Interdependence

If the first characteristic that contingency points to is the entanglement of openings and closures, the second, tightly linked, is the fundamental state of interdependence that constitutes all contingent scenes. Indeed, several scholars have written on the interdependence of improvised music performance. Nick Nesbitt (2010), for instance, has described musical interactivity in Deleuzean terms through the notion of an assemblage. Relatedly, David Borgo (2005) and Marcel Cobussen (2017) have each written about improvisation as an emergent phenomenon, noting both its embodied and situated qualities. Vijay Iyer (2002) also discusses embodiment and situated cognition from a neurocognitive perspective. Additionally, Edgar Landgraf (2014; 2018) uses systems theory and critical posthumanism, and Chris Stover (2017) uses affect theory to discuss the force of bodies on other bodies. Each of these methods is a way of approaching interactivity, or how external factors contribute to and make possible a given instance of improvisation through a nonlinear, emergent process.[41] Contingency as I am thinking it here builds on such interactively oriented theories in three ways.

First, it invites us to consider factors external to the scene of improvisation itself. While not in any sense prohibited by the above theories, each of them exhibits a tendency to focus on the interaction between elements that are present in the improvised scene. Contingency, to the extent that it also factors in things like memory, emotion/affect, socio-

political considerations such as gender, or the way that minority groups are racialized in dominant power structures—in short, to the extent that contingency attempts to account for *everything* that makes a given improvisation singular—it may allow us to take into consideration a broader range of factors than the typical musician-venue-instrument-score-listener formula, including many factors that are either not present at the time of performance or are particularly nonmusical.

Second, contingency takes the premise of interactivity to its furthest extreme, into interdependence: on this view, it is not that discrete, isolated entities connect themselves to form something greater, or even that phenomena emerge through complex, nonlinear chains of interaction. Rather, the distance between one body (say a musician) and another (say an instrument) is not clearly defined in the first place. Whereas subject-oriented analyses based in what Erin Manning (2016) calls the "volition-intentionality-agency triad" see external factors as subordinated to the acting subject, the notion of contingency emphasizes the fact that the improvisation, in a deep way, *depends*—that is, it is not made up of component parts that are utilized and controlled by the subject, but rather that the component parts do not preexist as isolable entities; they only become what they are through their engagement in the event. Or, as microbiologist Kriti Sharma puts it, "Their stability arises precisely from their interdependence—they keep each other in place contingently" (2015, 100). In this sense, my argument about improvisation mirrors Nina Sun Eidsheim's theorization of sound itself: she writes, "sounds are contingent on the material circumstances in which they are created and experienced" (2015, 55), a claim that also requires thinking both the production and consumption of sound through specific bodies, constituted as they are by dominant discourses, cultural formations, and physical/material parameters.[42] Indeed, this insight is one that applies as much to improvisation as it does to sound. "*Much like daily life*," Tracy McMullen attests, "musical improvisation is a complex system of interaction, negotiation, and co-arising" (2010, my emphasis). In this sense, improvisation is a kind of action that privileges, highlights, or emphasizes the contingent interactions from which being in the world emerges, foregrounding the interdependence of life itself. The factors present in a given improvisation account for a particular arrangement of potentialities even as they give rise to one another. This interdependence and interaction produce the unique formation of a contingent event, but this formation itself is not static. An event is a process in motion, which we artificially break down or move around inside, provisionally identify-

ing bodies and affective forces. "All of these connections—all of these relations—are irreducible in the sense that none takes priority over any other; performing bodies, historical contexts, sonic materialities, and affective forces exist in an ongoing flux of mutually constitutive relations" (Stover 2017, 6).

Third and last, contingency shifts attention away from complexity theory's focus on causes/outcomes and toward the indecipherable, the nonconscious, and the affective.

Contingency as Method: Affect

This third point introduces a kind of asterisk or disclaimer: what I have described as the arrangement of participants and the determination of their potentialities should not be taken as categories that can be fully quantified, measured, or accounted for. Certainly, some parameters can be assessed. But the question with contingency is never only what happened or even how it happened in a causal sense; contingency is also concerned with the affect of experience, with the color of sound, with the preconscious forces that specify an improvisation as of this moment and no other. In other words, it is not strictly the outcomes that interest me, but the affect of the interactions themselves—how they feel, how they move, what unspeakable forces traverse the body. Such questions further distinguish a contingentist perspective from associated views on nonlinear causality. This has important theoretical and political implications.

In using affect to guard against full comprehensibility, I also mean to guard against the possibility that my methods veer into new materialist ontologies. Although my concern with contingency clearly resonates with those theories invested in unpacking the complexity of material interactions, not only are such ontologies often predicated on a problematic opposition to so-called representationalist social theories, erasing past feminist work (Ahmed 2008); they also, when applied to sound, tend to naturalize as universal a particular Eurological framework that Marie Thompson terms "white aurality" (Thompson 2017b).[43] Relatedly, new materialism also dispenses with questions of subjectivity and difference at precisely the moment when queer/critical race theories had successfully entered humanistic disciplines, too easily aligning itself with so-called hard science disciplines/epistemologies, "and all the prestige (which is not unrelated to its whiteness and cismaleness) that comes with [them]" (James 2019, 105).

By turning to contingency and interdependence, I do not wish to

tread down this materialist path. In contrast, my use of contingency attempts to emphasize elements in a situation that may not be the traditional focus of interactive/improvisative theories (particularly sociopolitical factors such as racialization and gender performance), as well as the impossibility of accounting for certain forces, the opacity that persists in analysis, the uneven ways in which those forces affect different people, and the nonempirical aspects of affect that are always caught up in what we might identify as the material. In short, this book attempts to deploy a feminist affective perspective that emphasizes the contingency of things in all their messiness.

This is, in part, why the work of Sara Ahmed is threaded throughout so much of this book: her work on affect and contingency as relational forces helps me to ground what we might identify as the factors in a given improvisation not by cataloging them, but by speculatively unpacking the intimacy of such contacts, the repeated touch of contingency and, the marks it leaves behind. While chapter 4 in particular explores the idea of musical intimacy as a feminist practice in a specific recording, this book also attempts to deploy a kind of musical intimacy in its general method, by listening deeply to its material, and by following this listening without the aim of rational outcomes or total mastery. I aim for this approach to be an explicitly feminist one insofar as I am able to pay attention to my own orientations toward the material, insofar as I can attend to my own decisions around what scholarship I pursue and which methods I avoid, and insofar as it resists new materialism's various erasures. In short, my ambition is for this book to evince a feminist project even when feminism is not the explicit subject, as an effect of where I attempt to align my perspective, toward what work I am orienting, and with what materials I choose to practice.

In part, my perspective is formed in opposition to those theories of musical interactivity that (a) overlap implicitly or explicitly with new materialism, and (b) which practice a kind of will to mastery in their ambitions to capture or catalogue what in traditional accounts of improvisative activity passes by unnoticed. I am resistant to such methods not only because of the ways in which they can obscure questions of difference and sociality, but also because they seem to me to pervert the nature of experience itself, whether musical or social: affect helps us to think about and attend to the ways that experience is always *too much* for us, the ways that it is inexhaustible even or perhaps particularly when we delude ourselves into thinking we can fully grasp it. In contrast to such efforts, I aim for this book to produce rigorous but

intentionally partial accounts of its objects, accounts that are attentive to their limitations and which probe the unquantifiable, immeasurable depths of experience not in order to exhaust them (which is impossible) but to see how we might be changed by doing so, to see how our notions of well-worn concepts (improvisation, contingency, music, everyday life) might change by coming into contact with a different set of questions. As I elaborate below, this is contingency in the sense of contact or touch, exposure, or intimacy.

Indeed, de Certeau made this point long ago by writing of people walking through a city that "Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities" and that in the face of such overwhelming contingency, sociological attempts to map or survey the routes that walkers take "miss what was: the act itself of passing by" (1984, 97). In this way, the map selectively emphasizes an outcome-oriented view of the activity, and the experience of walking itself becomes lost. In de Certeau's words, "The trace left behind is substituted for the practice" (97). Just as the experience of walking can't be reduced to a paper representation of where the walkers went, so too does the dynamic mapping of improvised musical interactivity reduce musical experience to the outcomes of interactive collaborations. Indeed, I would suggest that it is crucial, in a field so historically dominated by questions of textually based analysis, to move beyond the implicit or explicit emphasis that complexity places on questions of outcomes. Regardless of the fact that one may arrive at these conclusions by analyzing the interactive dynamics of subjects, objects, and environments, so long as we remain focused on outcomes, we reduce the experience of music to that which can be notated, to the paper-bound analyses that have dominated and continue to dominate Western thinking on music, where musical notation is the analogue of de Certeau's map of footprints.

Affect is the outside that constitutes the inside, making a thing or experience the way that it is, not on paper but in lived experience. As a space in which meaning, signification, emotion, and sound vibrations circulate among and through participants, improvised music performance is a field of affectuation. Music perception—whether because of a state of "flow"[44] or because of the fact that sound vibrations themselves are a form of affect—does not solely reside in conscious experience.[45] There is always an excess of affect that escapes capture, dependent on but irreducible to any one factor. My reliance on the term contingency is as much about this unknowable excess as it is about the particular constellation of possibilities and impossibilities that may be present.

In my view, it is through this overflow of affect that contingent experience reveals itself as something that, no matter how causality is traced, defies definitive analysis. As Robin Mackay puts it in a different context:

> The ideologies of probability and chance, no less that of divine necessity, hallucinate a universe in which—at least—the *parameters* within which events may take place can be circumscribed. But an event, a real contingency, is precisely something that overflows this compartmentalization and management. (Mackay 2011, 2)

What Mackay refers to here as a "real contingency" has to do with Meillassoux's almost transcendental notion, an event, for example, like the big bang. But through the notion of affect, which singularizes each and every situation by exceeding that very situation, it is also possible to read any quotidian event as something that overflows our ability to manage and conceptualize. In this sense, all contingencies are always already "real."

Even while one is perceiving music, something is exceeding you. Contingency references this excess that is partially outside all perceptive experience, but is especially present in music, whose vibrations linger in silence. Is not sound, which moves with affective force, also exactly something that overflows us?

Contingency as Method: Singularity

The collapsing of binary oppositions into a constellation, the interdependence that forms this constellation, and the affect that connects all factors in experience, all lead to the conclusion that improvisation, when considered as a contingent encounter, is *always* a singularity.[46] Certainly, scholars have already noted that improvisation is understood differently in different contexts. For Georgina Born, Eric Lewis, and Will Straw, it is these differences that are of "greatest interest" since they help us to understand improvisation through comparison (Born, Lewis, and Straw 2017b, 11). But further still: it is not only that different genres and cultural practices understand improvisation differently, but also that each improvisation *within* a given context is radically contingent. Put another way, understanding what improvisation is or isn't doing involves something different every single time it is enacted. Viewing improvisation in this way does not mean that music happens ex nihilo or that its history doesn't matter. Rather, it requires that we understand how such histo-

ries become embodied and enacted in a specific moment. It requires, as Brian Massumi puts it, "regenerating" our terms so that neither the presence nor effects of their operation are presupposed. Placing contingency at the center of the inquiry points to the necessity of recontextualizing, over and over again, what improvisation *means* in a given context (and how), not only because it might be understood differently between cinema and music, for example, but also because from the viewpoint of contingency, those genre and historical conventions are only one of the many interacting factors that determine the significance and actualization of improvisation to those practicing it in a singular moment—and because those conventions *themselves* are contingent.

It is critical to maintain, following Deleuze, that when I raise "singularity" I do not mean to oppose it to universality.[47] In the same way that "contingency" here combines both openings and closures, singularity in the Deleuzean sense is not opposed to universality but rather incorporates it. There are always general conditions that are reproduced from event to event; but these generalities never exist without singularities as well, no repetition without difference (see also Massumi 2002). To return to Born, Lewis, and Straw: media formats, cultural discourses, and specific understandings of improvisation (or anything else) *do* create contexts that influence what improvisation is/does, and those contexts carry forward in time. But equally, those contexts do not preexist as static blocs within which people practice according to corresponding viewpoints; rather, media formats, cultural discourses, and specific understandings only exist as they become actualized by specific people in specific times, places, and situations, as they are enacted among the relations of subjects/objects/environments. Elements of history and of genre or cultural conventions repeat as they are carried forward; but as Deleuze reminds us, they do not repeat without difference that is productive, difference that is introduced when ideas are performed in specific, contingent situations.

Contact Tracing

Before moving on, it is vital to visit one last way of understanding contingency, which both encapsulates the points I have tried to make in this chapter and further nuances them. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed writes, "It is useful to recall that the word 'contingent' has the same root in Latin as the word 'contact' (*contingere: com-*, with, *tangere*, to touch). Contingency is linked in this way to the sociality of being 'with' oth-

ers, to getting close enough to touch" (2006, 103). After having moved through this chapter's points, the full implications of thinking contingency through touch are clear: as a point of relationality, contingency is how we move or are moved by others—it is only in such contact that things happen, closing a window of potential, and it is only through the closure of such windows that new potentials open. It is also by touching that we are able to feel, whether we are considering the physical contact of other people, or the pressure of sound vibrations on skin. Such contact is always and obviously irreducible: what could a touch's description be other than a reduction or representation? In short, it is *in the encounter* that we find contingency in all its complexity.

Ahmed makes clear how our contacts shape who we are and how our energy is understood and directed. For example, as I elaborate in chapter 6, thinking through the orientation of bodies in space shows how those bodies are never really "in space" as much as they are in contact with it, affecting it and being affected. Like Merleau-Ponty's touching hands,[48] people are shaped by space as much as they shape it in turn, to the point where the distinction—though real—is impossible to locate. Another way of saying this is that a space can only be experienced through the body that comes into contact with it, and will be experienced differently between any two bodies. This is why space does not exist *as such* but rather exists *for*. A room can feel different to you and to me, and how we perceive that room might change again when a third person enters.

How, then, could we propose to speak about improvisation—what it is, what it does, what it means—as if it exists independently of the specific people practicing it? As I have tried to show throughout this chapter, the "what" we might identify at a given point (playing a major scale, for instance, or a composed line) cannot go without an accompanying "how" that attempts to grapple with the specific contingencies involved. Improvisations are always practiced and experienced by particular people, with particular bodies and orientations, which have been shaped both by desire and by contact with the outside world (in ways both empowering and oppressive). In short, it matters who is doing the improvising, because my contact with X experience—whether musical or social—will be different from yours. In the same way (but differently) that a suburban street can feel inviting to a white man and threatening to a Black man,[49] a musical improvisation will be experienced differently by different people, even or especially if they are playing the same material. Or, as I discuss in chapter 6, theorizing improvisation in everyday life can't stop at a description of the improvisative act, because navigat-

ing a contingent event like the COVID-19 pandemic requires more or less from those starting from different places in a sociopolitical and economic hierarchy, whether we consider the simple act of encountering others in the grocery store, or the more long-lasting consequences of the global reaction to the crisis, still spilling out.

In agreement with Iyer, thinking about improvisation in this way brings questions of difference to the fore. Speaking of the innumerable instances of Black Americans being punished for performing routine, everyday behaviors, Iyer writes that these dynamics too involve improvisation in ways that scholars have heretofore declined to address:

> What I hope to indicate is that such clearly improvisative moments that are contiguous with everyday life—events of extremely minor import, the innocuous actions of innocents—are systemically suspected, abhorred, criminalized, punished. So this kind of systemic struggle is what I wanted to study: the very unequal distribution of experience itself, the differential ways that the world "shows up" for different populations, in the real-time, improvisative flow of everyday life. Because if we can't even agree on that, then what do we mean when we speak of improvisation in music? In whose music? Improvisation for whom, and compared to what? (2019, 5)

In this way, the full social implications of the claim that "improvisation depends" become clear: any desirable outcome depends on who you are, to what resources you have access, to what purposes your improvisation is directed, and further variables. Musical improvisation is often lauded for its ability to produce emancipatory outcomes in nonmusical spaces, for example by fostering "community." But a community can segregate its neighborhoods or gentrify its downtown as easily as (or likely, more easily than) it can build public housing or fund its bus system. "Community" is no more a benevolent term than improvisation, because both depend on their contexts of use. Rather than consisting in an abstract theoretical space, then, I aim to ground improvisation in concrete examples in order to compare the singularities of experience. Whether considering musical improvisation or everyday life, the cases that I examine here are designed to do the exact same kind of work: to locate what contingencies appear, and to describe the differences that such differences make. In doing so, the singularities of each example will reveal not only the differences that matter, but also the throughline of improvisation, unifying each case through their incongruities. To

think improvisation as contingency is to consider the one fundamental that remains true of any improvisation, whether musical or social: every improvisation is contingent. No matter the qualifiers we might use to characterize one or the other example as good or bad, "liberating" or "oppressive," "breathtaking" or "banal," it is undeniable that improvisation is *there*, in the encounter between ourselves and our circumstances.

Fold

An event is a nonexistent node in which we condense diverse experiences into a location so as to understand time and change, or what happens to us. An improvisation is an event. In the next section, I compare three musical events and their bleeding out in past and future directions in order to show how improvisations are radically singular. The guiding question is: what does it mean to improvise here? In re-posing this question, I hope that something will be revealed about what it ultimately means to act, whether in musical or social situations. Throughout, I will employ a contingentist framework in order to render this chapter's theses useful, constantly mindful of the limitations of this enterprise. All of these theses apply to music as well as everyday life: sound and experience overflow us. Everything is interdependent. A closure is an impossibility, a willful belief in absolute negation. By contrast, a fold is a crease that leaves a mark that makes a difference. A fold is a closing that maintains a space inside itself, the space of the opening that is proper to it.

PART ONE

Contingent Music

Or

Attempt at Exhausting Some Moments in Improvisation

Intro

Listening to Contingency

In this section, I bring contingency to bear on improvisation by analyzing three "moments" of contingent music, on multiple levels and to varying degrees. Like many references in this book, these cases have been chosen partially because they happened to me. But at the same time, I focus on these recordings because they are both similar enough (sharing a common free-jazz vocabulary) and distinct enough to prove promising for comparison. Before beginning this comparison, however, it is important to address an obvious tension: if my aim is to compare instances of contingency in improvisation, why subsequently select three examples from the same genre space in a Western musical tradition? My choices are perhaps especially strange given that, throughout this book, I make the case that aesthetic and political theories of improvisation are overdetermined by a particular reading that derives from the immediate, microsocial interaction between musicians playing what is most often music in the Western, avant-garde, and jazz spaces. This is therefore a critical question to ask, and my answers may be only partially satisfactory.

The first answer is that one of my primary goals is to distinguish and nuance improvisational practices even/especially within similar or associated paradigms. I am particularly invested in showing that even when the music in question is understood through a similar aesthetic viewpoint (say free jazz), contingency is something that transcends these frames of reference. Contingency particularizes each musical instance, not only between genres and traditions but also between performances of ostensibly identical music. Theories of musical improvisation that focus on the relative presence or absence of perceived musical "freedom," the

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configuration of certain musical-theoretical rules/genre conventions, or else ontological type-forms threaten to lose track of the social, historical, political, and affective factors that make even apparently similar performances unique. Being able to show distinctiveness even among music commonly assumed to be the same or similar helps to sharpen my point, and, as I stated above, allows me to ask different questions regarding the nature of improvisation itself.

The second answer is that, if the conflation between improvisation and freedom (which I dispute) most often derives from studies of jazz and free jazz, returning to the "source" of this argument can become a means of more thoroughly undermining it. In other words, comparison to other genres certainly troubles those readings that equate Western liberal democracy and Western improvised music (see Monson 2017); but even *within* those same practices, I want to suggest that the conclusion that equates improvisation itself with democracy and freedom is actually incoherent.

Third, as I have already shown, the interrogation of my own musical experience is a central aspect of this project, and I am situated in jazz and popular music studies. If it is well-established in critical improvisation studies that performance is a form of knowledge, then my experiences constitute a kind of practice-based research. The insights and suspicions that were generated through playing and studying music became the foundation of this project, and those performance experiences are reflected in the choices I have made for my analysis. Put simply, I am more intimately familiar with the sets of practices and discourses presented here, and this familiarity not only more effectively helps me with my research, but also allows for a more detailed reading of the sources I have selected. That said, I situate myself here not in order to claim expertise, but to disclose the partiality and particularity of my starting point. Indeed, notwithstanding important differences among the three case studies I have chosen, insofar as we can group them into a broad (and complicated and nuanced) Western avant-garde, it is important to acknowledge that, as a white, cis, mostly straight guy who was raised in the upper middle class, my familiarity with such traditions has been informed and facilitated in part by my schooling in the kinds of expensive music programs that have been variously/historically exclusionary to other people, and which in many ways still center white, cis-male priorities and Eurological frameworks, regardless of the histories of the musical traditions that are taught in such spaces. This is another reason why it has been important for me to select musical cases that not only

allow me to undermine the traditional jazz/freedom conflation, but that also raise a series of important questions about the intersections of identity, belonging, and social life.

Thus, even as the following three case studies begin with music analysis, I have already argued that music is never "just music." Therefore, questions that will become more central in the second part of this book are nevertheless present in the first. The social and the musical, the quotidian and the virtuosic are constantly entangled with each other, and improvisation is omnipresent throughout. In this way, music becomes an opening through which to discuss questions of identity, politics, and larger structural forces that shape our experiences in the world. In the second part of the book, such social questions move forward, and music, while still present, recedes. In emphasizing one or the other category of experience, the shadow of the other nonetheless remains. Between the two, improvisation structures everything.

Finally, just one more word on the question of method, on how I intend to perform these comparisons, and what it might mean to "trace" contingency through a given instance of improvisation. What does it mean to trace in this context? It does not mean to capture, to comprehend, to catalogue; in the same way that Duchamp's *Large Glass* does not contain the event of its fall (but bears its marks), a trace is an inclination, a suspicion, an argument. It "strain[s] toward a possible meaning" (Nancy 2007) and is thus more properly a practice of listening than of recording. What I will be doing in this section is listening, as much as possible, to contingency.

TWO | Out to Lunch

"Out to Lunch" (1964) is the title track, fourth of five, on what is widely
considered Eric Dolphy's magnum opus. The track itself embodies every-
thing that makes the album seminal, sounding both the development
and the foreshortened possibilities of Dolphy's artistry: it swings and
does not swing, it is rooted and experimental, propulsive and nuanced,
lush and angular at the same time. Each musician on the album is indi-
vidually and forcefully virtuosic, but the band accomplishes *something* col-
lectively, a together synergy that prefigures music to come. As an album,
Out to Lunch! is centered around such paradoxical forces—it refuses to
give way to either chaos or coherence, existing in a liminal in-between
that allows for all kinds of possibilities. When Richard Davis (bass) and
Tony Williams (drums) want to swing, the groove is both expressive and
absolute. When they want to abandon the tempo or do not agree about
it,[1] the improvisation breathes in a way that allows Dolphy (alto on this
track), Freddie Hubbard (trumpet), and Bobby Hutcherson (vibra-
phone) to capitalize, suddenly, and so enthusiastically it is as if they had
just been waiting for a chance.[2] When a rhythmic motif presents itself,
there is nothing stopping the entire band from smashing into it, over
and over again, because there is no fear of losing one's place, no anxiety
about being able to "get back to one."[3]

My primary goal in this chapter is to draw out the singularity of Dolphy's
improvisations both musically and socially—to illustrate the ways in
which the musical and the social are not distinct but co-constitutive, and
to explore how these relationships are audible in Dolphy's music. In my
reading of Dolphy, the critical function of his improvisations lies in the
way that they force a radical tension between established, "acceptable"
jazz aesthetics and a future sound that was read as eccentric. Eccentrics,

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as we will see, are defined through their ambivalence: it is that which critics do not understand and which they fear that is also the source of an eccentric's great power. This ambivalence, this both-at-once quality is not only a testament to Dolphy's musical innovations, his ambitious and earnest genius, but also the policing to which his music and his career were subject, a policing born of the fact that musical sounds are always already racially encoded, and of the fact that the Black avant-garde has always been greeted with fear by those white arbiters of "good" musical "sense." Dolphy reveals this sense to be contingent and arbitrary, making inescapable the social particularity of its grounding in whiteness rather than timelessness, and thus delivering it a mortal wound.

Illustrating these dynamics will involve tracing contingency where it leads, a tracing that is as much about Dolphy's compositions as it is his soloing, as much about his racialization as it is about his open ears, because these factors are all interdependent; we don't have Dolphy's music without his social life. The musical must be brought into conversation with the social and the personal, the material and the ideological, the historical and the speculative. Lines of thought must be followed and then doubled back, over themselves and down new paths, tracing a pattern or etching into relief what is already there. As with every case in this book, I am testing the hypothesis that foregrounding the operation of contingency in its multiple senses will push the definition of improvisation outside its traditional framing, and will provide an opportunity to explore issues that are both crucial to this music and at the same time are extramusical.

Sounding Ambivalence

"Out to Lunch" begins with a four-bar snare solo by Tony Williams in a march-style, with the hi-hat on all four beats (see figure 1). The melody picks up on the "and of four," an anticipatory upbeat that prepares the hard-swinging, syncopated melody, played in unison between alto sax and trumpet. From Williams's introduction to the first bar of the melody, "Out to Lunch" sounds perhaps like any hard-bop treatment, as the opening line descends what is essentially a d-minor chord. But things get more complicated rather quickly: beats three and four of the first measure hammer two quarter-notes, a descending B♭ and an A♭. The B♭, following the d-minor chord, is a bluesy set up; the A♭ is the punchline, delivering a hard chromatic turn into a new phrase. The second bar of the melody is in 5/4 and features some characteristically angular

Dolphyisms. These sound natural in the context of what's going on, but at the same time, the 5/4 meter complicates any effort to tap our feet along—sense and nonsense at the same time. The melody continues in this way, by which I mean that it continues to groove while also remaining inscrutable. Throughout this chapter, my reading of "Out to Lunch" is focused on the ways in which this music establishes and bridges multiple binary worlds: sense and nonsense, tradition and innovation, background and foreground, solo and collective—all of these oppositions and more exist at once in "Out to Lunch," establishing the key thematic of the tune, which is a deep and structural ambivalence, a double dynamic that betrays something bigger about the social significance of Dolphy's sound. As we will see, this ambivalence manifests in a variety of ways, including the ending gesture of the melody: hear how the final two notes are pulled between the poles of a resolution and a stretching open-endedness, a liminal zone sounded exactly by the major-seventh, that interval that is as much consonant as it is dissonant.[4] This stretched, both-at-once feeling is structured into the composition centrally, multivalently, and is essential to the performance itself.

We have in the end a nine-bar melodic phrase, essentially made up of two parts, A (bars one through five) and B (bars six through nine), where B extends and elaborates A's quarter-note cadence. A nine-bar tune with no chord changes, while not necessarily unusual in the post-bop era, adheres to no standard song form. It sounds as one through-composed idea in two parts, a minimal yet explosive statement. At the same time that the composition is unconventional, however, Dolphy's band plays this head through twice, as is standard practice for any song form, as one would do for a conventional blues or rhythm-changes. The notes themselves strongly imply chords at certain points, but we are not relegated to a key center (in fact, all twelve tones appear in this short melody). The through-composed melody does not have a clear key center or harmonic progression, but, while unmoored from tonality, it nevertheless flows extremely logically from one note to the next, in spite of some interesting intervallic leaps. Because of this, it is difficult to discern which notes belong "properly" to a given (implied) chord and which are chromaticisms we simply move through on the way to somewhere else—the band drives ahead, caught between tonality and atonality. Again, these poles of ambivalence are not simply stylistic quirks; they are foundational to the social and musical expression we hear as "Out to Lunch." What does it mean that Dolphy appears so stretched, in between spaces?

During the head, the rhythm section creates an effect similar to the

Out to Lunch

Transcription of the Recording

Figure 1: Transcription, Eric Dolphy's "Out to Lunch" (head in).

stable/unstable feeling in the melody. Each rhythm section part has its own clear, internal consistency, but these parts don't "add up" into a cohesive picture. Bobby Hutcherson, for instance, repeats the same motif for the duration of the melody, a completely consistent series of thirds (played on beats 1, 2, 3, and the and-of-4) with a blatantly dissonant minor ninth thrown in at the top of the tune. This clanging interval signals quite clearly a kind of "reset" that breaks the cyclic motion of the rhythm section's parts; Williams and Davis also participate in this break, helping give Hutcherson's strange sounds a sense of form. But even as the melody weaves in and out of different scale patterns, Hutcherson stays grounded in the notes of a G♭ major triad, juxtaposing an almost childish, obstinate stability against the winding chromaticism of the melodic

Figure 1 continued

Figure 1 continued

line. This is to say nothing of the bass part, which, like the vibraphone, repeats consistently. Unlike the vibes, however, the bass part features mostly "white-key" or natural notes. Thus, although Hutcherson's part itself is quite conventional, it sounds uncanny when paired with both the melody and the bass, and fixes a juxtapositional tension at the heart of the tune. Williams is performing a similar balancing act by stretching rhythmic patterns across barlines: even though his hemiolas make it difficult to ground our ears in a pulse, they nevertheless mark form, changing from A section to B section and again at the top of the chart. That is, his rhythms are both destabilizing at the same time that they are grounded in the music.

Through all this tension, "Out to Lunch" comes together as a tune that grooves, both seriously and strangely. But as with the strategic phrases in the melody, this sensibility is only established in order to be wrecked. From the very first note of Dolphy's solo, high and pinched, he immediately dispenses with any lingering illusion that this will be a tune

like any other. Very suddenly, something different is happening here, something beyond what the melody may have prepared us to expect as listeners of bop, even as listeners of more adventurous players. Dolphy's jagged, looping phrase starts on a high C and navigates a series of runs and leaps before landing on a D, nearly three full octaves lower than the starting note, a phrase that in only one measure covers nearly the full range of his instrument. This is the characteristic leaping for which Dolphy is known, the intervallic jumps across oblique chord extensions, sounding somewhere between Boulez and Bird.

But it is not just Dolphy's idiosyncratic soloing style that destabilizes the listener here; the band, *his* band, is stretching to meet him. Immediately after finishing the head, for instance, Davis stops walking, slamming on the brakes while Dolphy goes flying (happily) through the windshield. Davis's preparation—as much as Dolphy's solo line—performs this break, away from the melody and toward unknown futures. Meanwhile, Hutcherson is comping,[5] but as with his role during the melody, it is unclear what relation his harmonies have to the overall composition. His vibraphone sounds invariably abstract, jumping between different registers, playing tone clusters or single notes apparently unrelated to anything else. And yet, Hutcherson doesn't sound out of place in the context of what is going on around him; his comping swings, in time, and for all its dissonance, compliments and further develops the cumulative sound. All the while, Davis is investigating the question of what counts as a bassline, developing essentially the same two-note idea he started with for at least a full minute before exploring other motifs, always swinging but never quite walking. Similarly, Williams's groove is present throughout the track, but the ride cymbal pattern is like a ghost more than a focus; instead, Williams builds tension by repeating rhythmic hemiolas, or by developing short phrases that are dispersed through all his voices. These ideas are steady enough (syncopated, in-time, grooving) to keep our ears planted on the ground, but are sufficiently irregular (stretching across the imaginary bar lines that our ears impose) that they engender a feeling of relief when he does simply play time, even if no one else in the band is joining him in doing so. The hemiola that begins to transition out of Dolphy's solo and into Hubbard's lasts almost a full minute, finally giving way to the only instance where Davis and Williams swing together in the track, triumphantly and so briefly, from 4:15 to 4:25.

Throughout this twelve-minute track, there are moments when it is difficult to know if each or any musician is at any time soloing or comping—the distinction itself feels under scrutiny here; linked as

both practices are by improvisation, they feel pushed toward their logi-
cal conclusions, dissolving into one another. One of the more obvious
zones of indetermination is the remarkable devolution that occurs just
after Hubbard finishes his fiery (if comparatively conventional) solo, a
breaking-apart that clears away adequate space to appreciate the wild
sounds of Hutcherson's vibraphone solo. The rhythm section plays in
this space, moving eventually to a place where any consistent sense of
pulse is lost (roughly 7:30–8:15); it is the closest we come to a space of
complete indeterminacy, of flying without a safety net, a delicate, amor-
phous atmosphere in which to play. Here too, and like Williams's subse-
quent experiments with the second Miles Davis Quintet, it is still difficult
to know if the tempo has been abandoned altogether, or if it is still pres-
ent in the background, holding things together, however loosely. There
are rhythms in this abstract space, motifs that surface before disappear-
ing, and just when the band sounds as if they have definitively crossed
over into a space of absolute oblivion (the end of Hutcherson's solo,
8:13–8:16, a series of descending fourths that Davis picks up), at that pre-
cise moment the walking bass returns to establish order, even briefly.
As it turns out, Davis is walking only in order to propel his own solo
forward, which he plays alone before the band comes back in with force.
In the end, Dolphy and Hubbard trade with Williams, but because Davis
continues playing for a time, this section sounds on another border, the
edge between classic bop trading and collective improvisation. Finally,
Williams takes a new solo and prepares the head out, a theme to which it
would have been difficult to imagine returning just moments ago.

There are too many intricacies and microinteractions to catalogue
here, too many events and textures, too many directions moved in col-
lectively, individually, or in various combinations. What are we to make
of this as listeners? What kinds of improvisations are we hearing, and on
what do they depend in order to sound this way? How are we to under-
stand these wild gestures and their rootedness in tradition, their outward
bound trajectories and their firm grounding at once? Blistering horn
lines, ruminative textures, pure fire on the drums and intricate harmo-
nization on the bass: what we hear is both the end-game of bebop and
an experiment beyond it. In light of these genre conventions and their
breakdown, the improvisations that take place in "Out to Lunch" both
are and are not special. Collective improvisation has existed since jazz's
earliest days in New Orleans, but it did not sound like it did on Ornette
Coleman's *Free Jazz* (1961). Equally, Dolphy's band was not the only band
redefining what it meant to improvise in a jazz setting,[6] but no one else

sounded the way they did in their explorations. *Out to Lunch!* is a particular space, constituted in part by Dolphy's compositions, by his own personal approach to improvisation, and through his musical project as a whole. The other musicians present have been invited to respond to, participate in, and explore this project, collectively, without knowing what would result. To hear how this recording sits in a distinct place, between a gap, to hear how it simultaneously emerges from bebop and reaches beyond it, we have to connect the contingencies in the musical performance to those contingencies outside it—the genre conventions present and the histories that inform them.

Score | Genre

How does contingency play in "Out to Lunch"? The question begins, but never ends, with the score. We have already established that our conceptions of time and process will alter how contingency makes itself apparent—the contingencies involved in making the work are different from the contingencies that result from the work. The analysis must be bracketed into at least three moments, each one partially imaginary: before the performance, during it, and after. Clearly, these categories are artificial in the sense that they actually overlap one another; the score is an "object" that precedes the performance and participates in it at the same time, existing both prior-to and during. I begin with the score here because of all the contingencies that will remain unknown, the score at least points to those over which the musicians exercise a degree of conscious forethought. According to what rules do the musicians aspire to play in this moment?

The score for "Out to Lunch," housed in the Library of Congress, consists of individual parts written for each instrument, each limited to the melody (see figures 2–5). There are no chord changes, although there is a synthetic scale underneath the trumpet part, suggesting an approach to improvising over the tune.[7] Why this scale would be more or less appropriate for a tune with no chord changes is a mystery, except to the extent that we can say that Dolphy was "hearing" it. That he was hearing *something*, however, should not come as a surprise; "Out to Lunch" is a composition in a complete sense, and the lack of changes should be read as a deliberate construction rather than an absence. In other words, just because there are no changes here does not mean that there is not musical material that intentionally conditions sound possibilities.

First of all, the mere existence of a score distinguishes this improvi-

Figure 2: Trumpet lead sheet, Eric Dolphy's "Out to Lunch." Scans provided by the Library of Congress with permission from the Eric Dolphy Trust.

Figure 3: Alto saxophone lead sheet, Eric Dolphy's "Out to Lunch."

satory situation from other approaches to collective improvisation, as the musicians have a certain kind of framework (however loose) within which to work, or from which to take some influence. Second, the fact that there is a melody at all dictates that in a given performance of "Out to Lunch" some possibilities will be allowed while others are disallowed. Dolphy has decided for instance that he wants this melody to be played each time the piece is performed, so that we can say the note selection in this composition is "closed," where the timbre, tempo, articulation, phrasing, and volume are "open" for each performance. Similarly, it appears that he has settled on the instrumentation, except for the fact that we have in the collection a piano part, rather than a vibraphone part. At any rate, at least on the day of recording, for *that* performance, the otherwise open question has been decided.

The Dolphy collection at the Library of Congress includes one piano part (treble clef only), plus one trumpet, alto sax, and drumset part (Dolphy, Mingus, and Schuller 1939). The drum chart shows only slash-marks through the form, indicating that the drummer should improvise. The bass part is apparently missing. I am interested in considering the form that these lead sheets take because they so clearly differ from the transcription of what was actually performed on the recording. Among others, one implication of this discrepancy is that more information is reflected on the lead sheets than the literal set of notes: the way that Dolphy notates this melody, without any additional explanation or instruction, also speaks to a jazz sensible that goes without saying, a paradigm of lead-sheet interpretation emerging from the bop era.[8] Here, it seems, while aspects of the composition break with the past, in other ways, standard genre conventions will be more or less adhered to. What assumptions inform this "common sense"? What are the conventions that we can expect in the post-bop era? Beyond the stylistic advancements inaugurated by bebop—extended harmonies, dense harmonic progressions, increased rhythmic complexity for rhythm section instruments, and so on,[9] there are more basic assumptions at play here: we know what instruments are most commonly associated with bebop, we know that a typical performance of a typical tune involves a melody (head in) followed by soloists, the possibility of some trading, and then the head out (likely with a coda or a tag). We know that eighth notes will be swung (unless the tune is, say, a Bossa), that the drummer will play time, that the bass will walk (however loosely, in this case), that the rhythm section will comp during the solos, and so on. These are not merely stylistic particularities in the development of jazz, but expectations that would have

Figure 4: Piano lead sheet, Eric Dolphy's "Out to Lunch."

Figure 5: Drum lead sheet, Eric Dolphy's "Out to Lunch."

been present regardless of style, and we know that the free jazz era, in which all these conventions come into serious questioning, has not yet taken hold in the way that it would. Nothing beyond the head is written, but this very fact proves the point: everything else need not be said. The roles for each instrument are established according to a tradition, and this tradition is a part of the frame that conditions performance; the obviousness of the answer is implicit in the lack of instruction.[10]

My aim in pointing to these assumptions is not to claim that Dolphy was the only one breaking with them, or to deny that the entire notion of jazz does not in some important ways center on the question of conventions to begin with. My point is only that such conventions, as much as any physical objects or physical parameters, matter in the contingent moment of performance. The entire history of jazz is a metaquestion about its own boundaries. But the argument presupposes that there are some boundaries to begin with, some boundaries to be defended. Let's not forget that some of these conventions are not mere formalities or bland repetitions of precedent; some of them signify, and are thus crucially tied to identity and to the past.[11] Performers are invested in some conventions as equally as they challenge others; this is true of all genres and jazz is no exception. Such assumptions form a musical limit in which the limit of the score is situated. Like the score, this limit is not a rigid mechanism that governs behavior; rather, it is a virtuality that affects and is affected, each time it is performed. Even staying within the tradition, we should not assume that Dolphy would have always played any tune the same way in every performance, or that it was impossible for variations within this frame—it would not be impossible, for instance, that Davis take the first solo instead of Dolphy; rather, the lack of specific instructions in the score simply gives us an idea of a kind of general starting position for the band.

From this, two points emerge: first, conventions matter, and second, it appears that in "Out to Lunch," nearly every bebop convention is simultaneously deployed and also undermined. Tony Williams keeps time, but that he does so without swinging on the ride cymbal and playing the hi-hat on beats two and four is highly irregular;[12] Richard Davis accompanies and grounds the performance, but that he does so largely without walking is highly irregular; each soloist has a turn to improvise, but their doing so in unmetered time and with overlapping turns is highly irregular. Crucially, however, "Out to Lunch" also incorporates or abides by many typical conventions at the same time: it is still true that standard solo-order is adhered to, that there are soloists and accompanists, that

there is swing, a melody played twice through at the beginning and at the end. Thus it is more accurate to say that the band uses jazz's conventions and mutates them from the inside out, experimenting with what they can do in this space. Rather than a radical break, "Out to Lunch" takes the bebop premise and pushes it as far as it will go.[13]

The constellation of contingent possibilities arranged in this score make manifest the presence of a discursive musical space—the genre conventions that go without saying—at the same time that tradition itself is rendered in sound not as some kind of prescription that preexists the performance but as a whole series of internalizations and subconscious processes that are actualized in a moment. Each musician synthesizes this information in their own ways, with their own instruments and affective styles. The performance or representation of these roles has a nonconscious expression. Not only that: the tradition that is inherited and interpreted is always already what Amiri Baraka calls a "changing same" (1967). That is to say not only that each individual anywhere interprets traditions in their own ways, but also and equally that the Black radical musical tradition in particular is at its core a refrain that repeats with a difference. This is the zone in which musical genre conventions and group subjectivity overlap, inasmuch as one expresses the other. In a given performance, all of this is encountered by individual musicians and comes out according to an individual expression; it repeats with difference. In the instance of this recording, the interpretation and synthesis of the bop tradition, itself a new instantiation of Black musical aesthetics from the past (and the future) is so radical that together in the studio, Dolphy's band is helping to construct the new difference that will from here on repeat.

So (and as listeners of Dolphy know), these "traditional" or "conventional" "roles" are not approached rigidly, and this is part of how *Out to Lunch!* organizes itself around opposing forces. The bass walks in "Out to Lunch," except when it doesn't, and how it walks is another matter entirely. Often, it is difficult to discern which of the two is happening, because this track exists in-between the cracks of tradition and innovation. It is a yearning or a striving that, because of what it searches for, discloses some of what it is after.

In this context, the absence of changes, once again, both is and is not radical. It is not radical because we know that Dolphy was influenced by Coleman, because the pursuit of new approaches to improvisation was already underway in a variety of settings, and finally because Dolphy did not need any such experimental permission structure in order to play

the way that he did. It *is* radical, however, in the sense that it allowed the interaction that we hear on "Out to Lunch" to come into being. This site is not a zone of complete indetermination, even in terms of harmony; the improvisation that unfolds, while it proceeds according to no explicit "instructions," is conditioned by the frame of the composition as a whole, both the melody itself and its formal structure as a head in, head out lead sheet. We already noted how this affects the form of the improvisation, but it also affects the thematic development and interaction between the musicians. For example, the mere presence of repetition in the melody conditions further repetition, even or especially subconsciously. The melody sits between past and future in the sense that during improvisation, it is the declarative theme that has already been sounded and to which the musicians know they will return; the melody therefore contributes to the production of an improvisation that belongs to it. In this sense, although possible, it is unlikely that the band will explode into a completely "free" space, divorced from the composition that comes before.

Granted, Dolphy's alto break immediately after the melody is an explosion of sound, a tear made all the more radical by its proximity to the relative grounding of sense and repetition in the theme. Although we have no key center from which to become displaced, the circuitous trajectory of Dolphy's line destabilizes by shattering the logic of melodic progression, where one note leads to another and culminates in something sensible. And yet, Dolphy's line *is* sensible; even as it feels to come from outer space, it also coheres. By the time our ears have followed Dolphy to his bottom note, we remember: yes, *this* is a solo. Like coming to after a blow to the head, our ears acclimate even slightly to Dolphy's sound. There is just enough melodic sense to keep us centered, and there are enough surprises to keep us in that giddy confusion. Thus, Dolphy's entrance in "Out to Lunch" performs the rupture that his music also accomplishes over time: not a refusal but a rift in the fabric of sense, a slow tear, a space that bridges two worlds. The closure of the melody engenders a specific kind of opening, a space of play that is colored in a certain shade. In the space of that opening, Dolphy fully manifests its thesis, setting the terms for the soloists who come after him. The opening of the melody is encountered by a particular set of musicians who collide with it and play inside it, expressing their interpretations through their instrument-extended subjectivities in real-time. This real-time is a singular space: in what way could we possibly say that the experience of "Out to Lunch" as jazz improvisation resembles the improvisations that

these musicians may perform later in the same week or the same day, with a more conventional band?

Voice | Subjectivity

Where questions of contingency *during* the performance center the "rules of the game," thinking contingency *before* the performance raises all the specific and singular developments that came to constitute the musicians' personal voices (and here I focus on Dolphy's). This contingency refers not to the unexpected event, nor to the random play of chance, nor the possibilities inherent in a certain game; rather, it refers again to the Aristotelian notion of accidental qualities, those particularities that could have been otherwise, those indefinable aspects of a personality that, when added together and set into the complex environmental (inter)actions that produce human subjectivity, resulted in Eric Dolphy's specific tendencies, predilections, abilities, and so on. To this notion, contingency adds an excess: it overflows outward from Dolphy such that it is impossible to say where his intuition ends and the environment begins. What we can understand is therefore limited to the set of influences of which Dolphy was conscious and which he pursued in his lifetime—as well as the ways in which we perceive those influences coming out of his horn.

To this point, most of what constitutes Dolphy's musical "voice" has been attributed to his unconventional and virtuosic soloing, particularly on the atypical bass clarinet and flute.[14] There are good reasons for this fact. From very early on, Dolphy's ear perceived harmonic relationships where others heard only dissonance. Not only his note selection, but also his way of navigating from one to the other seemed to stretch the limits of what it meant to improvise. But no matter how far from the tonality his ear took him, there was always a thread connecting him back home, at times as fine and imperceptible as fishing line.[15] What's more, Dolphy often returned on that thread not gradually but with apparent joy, leaping down the stairs and missing four or twelve. These characteristics and his unwillingness (inability?) to constrain them produced a musical personality so strong that it seemed to fundamentally alter *every* performance in which he participated. No matter the aesthetic goals of the group in question, Dolphy's sound was too big to be subordinated.

In addition to Dolphy's soloistic style, his voice is also associated with his timbre, or his tone while playing (no matter what instrument). As Amiri Baraka put it, "Once you heard Eric you can never forget that

sound. . . . But Eric was also a sensational technician as well as a won-drous feelnician. . . . He could stretch all the way out into the waygone-sphere and still be bulletproof funky" (Baraka 2009, 236). As we can feel in this description, Baraka heard Black music itself in Dolphy's sound, particularly to the extent that he heard the human voice in Dolphy's tone, which for Baraka was fundamental to the Black tradition. Through his timbre as much as through his wild intervallic leaps, Dolphy taps the throughline of the changing same. Yes, there are good reasons to fix-ate on Dolphy's soloing. However, a contingentist perspective reminds us that his soloistic style can't be divorced from his other (non)musi-cal activities; rather, as I suggested above, Dolphy's playing is a part of an overall approach to sound, a wholistic approach that is expressed in multiple modalities.

Consider again the material in the Library of Congress's Eric Dolphy Collection: in addition to his own scores, both finished compositions and unrealized sketches, there is also music from a list that reads like a who's who of the mixed avant-garde: Gunther Schuller, Randy Weston, Helen Parker, Milton Babbitt, Sonny Simmons, Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Edgard Varèse, Charles Ives, John Coltrane, J. S. Bach (including original arrangements), Wayne Shorter, Jaki Byard, Billy Strayhorn, Igor Stravinsky, and more. There is piano and vocal music for Carbo Menendez's "Ya me cansé de ti," there are "synthetic scales, intervallic studies," and a "Concerto for Flute and Orchestra." There is a graphical representation of the galaxy. There are notes about compos-ing for other instruments including guitar ("written octave higher than actual sounding note"), cello ("[showing interval] these two notes play together") and bass ("[showing interval]: this is very difficult"). There are workbooks like "25 daily exercises for saxophone," "The art of clari-net playing," "The developing flutist," "Daily drills for clarinet," "Grandes exercises pour flute," "L'indispensabile—a complete modern school for the flute" in addition to the variety of jazz lead sheets one might expect. While the Eurological avant-garde often distanced itself from jazz, the reverse was almost never true; since the beginning jazz musicians have studied myriad musics in part because hybridity is at the core of jazz in the first place. Dolphy is clearly no exception here but is rather more obviously prodigious. Through practice, Dolphy took these materials into his body obsessively, repetitively, enthusiastically, in the process of developing his personal sound, in the process of self-constitution; he did not consume and digest them so much as they continued to exist inde-pendently and as a part of him, following him around, hovering near

his body, coming in and out of his mind or subconscious as extensions and as dreams. Dolphy practiced every manner of scale permutation and studiously internalized the music of great composers in multiple musical traditions. We hear the results of his practice in his soloing, but we equally see the results of his study in the scores he composed or began.

Two interrelated points again emerge from this archive: first, Dolphy the composer should be considered no less and not separately from Dolphy the soloist, because all his activities contributed to his development as a complete musician.[16] Second, this development is marked by a particular capaciousness, a trait shared by many of the great jazz musicians of his time, but which is uniquely present in Dolphy's music. Thus one crucial aspect of Dolphy's musicality is an avant-garde sensibility that he did not belong "in place," or that his place in the jazz tradition was more properly speaking a place in a *musical* tradition. In other words, his interests did not stay bounded by notions of genre, nor even the larger discursive worlding by which the Eurological and Afrological were kept apart. It is along these lines that we can understand or contextualize the sounds we hear in "Out to Lunch," can understand the compositional and soloistic practices that informed the interactions on record. Like his collaborator George Russell, as well as musicians that followed in the lineage of developing unique musical systems (Henry Threadgill, Wadada Leo Smith, Anthony Braxton, and many others), Dolphy synthesized his practice into an individual approach to the shared concern for new sounds. Therefore, while Dolphy's avant-gardism is most often attributed to his soloistic voice, his compositional voice cannot be discounted as somehow a separate idea. In contrast to the view that Dolphy's innovations are limited to his solo style (too easily read as "natural" in spite of Dolphy's rigorous and well-known practice regimens), what I suggest here is that what Dolphy was doing goes beyond innovative ways of navigating chord changes; what he reaches for is a whole new sensible. Part of my fixation on the actual composition "Out to Lunch" is an effort to correct the unbalanced focus on Dolphy's soloing and indeed to explicate how that "new sensible" is irreducible to the extended harmonies and substitutions he navigated in his solos. Dolphy's voice represents a complete aesthetic project, not just a soloistic style, because composing and performing were two different modalities of *getting at* his search for new sounds, of finding ways to make those sounds *his own*. We can talk about Dolphy's musical voice not only because it is so powerfully audible but also because he was continuously searching for it.

In addition to being constituted by an interconnected musical praxis, Dolphy's voice is also dependent on his collaborators and his environments. A well-known anecdote illustrates that Dolphy's voracious musical appetite extended beyond the realm of music to that of sound itself: we take for granted at this point that Dolphy played with the birds who sang outside his Los Angeles home, learning to bend in-between pitches in a manner that cut against the Western emphasis on clarity. But while it is important to understand the influence of the birds (or of nature, or of sound, or of Indian music) on Dolphy's development, the idea of Dolphy as sonically omnivorous is most often sublimated into the "genius narrative" so common to jazz history. This narrative allows that Dolphy was influenced by a great many sources of sound, but then takes these influences as resources that Dolphy, with his unique skills, absorbed, manipulated, and synthesized, wresting them to his own purposes. What this view misses is the extent to which Dolphy himself—or more specifically, the musical subjectivity that we define here as his ear or voice—did not preexist these influences; rather, Bach, Varèse, the musicians with whom he collaborated, and the birds in his backyard *constituted* Dolphy's musicianship through contingent interactions. Think too of the instruments here: it is obviously the case that Dolphy could not have bent pitches with the birds if he had grown up playing the piano. His uncanny sound is utterly dependent on specific instrument-objects to come into being.

In addition to birds, instruments, scores, and recordings, Dolphy's voice emerged through his peer interactions and through his peers' respective studies of music history. What in some ways amounts to a simple truism is nevertheless worth emphasizing insofar as standard treatments downplay the networks of relations that inform any musician's sound, even or especially those jazz innovators, of whom Dolphy is surely one. This is another way of saying that Dolphy's avant-gardism did not spring from nowhere. As George Lewis writes, Dolphy was developing his sound in Los Angeles in conversation with Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry, and Charles Mingus, and their music would continue to develop when they encountered other versions of "the new thing" in other cities (Lewis 2008, 40). Practices that we today associate with this avant-garde were being variously pursued as far back as the 1940s, and Dolphy was nothing if not an avid student. But more than that, Dolphy's musicality also developed as a result of the rich and experimental environments in which he was situated. His close working relationships with Coltrane and Mingus are well known, and probably the most significant, given the ways in which both encouraged Dolphy to continue developing his ideas. But

in addition to specific collaborations, Dolphy was also constantly situated in and surrounded by music. Even in the early Los Angeles days, an immense number and variety of musicians passed through Dolphy's small rehearsal space, including both local and touring bands. From there, his collaborations only intensified, playing in Chico Hamilton's band, touring the country, coming into contact with figures like Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk, and beginning his career as a consummate session player. By the time Dolphy joined Coltrane's band in 1961, "he had a musical background marked by an immense variety of associations" including important work with Russell and Mingus (Jost 1994, 27). These points of contact were influential on Dolphy not only because many of these figures were also great innovators, but also because of the way in which such encounters were woven into Dolphy's life: consider for instance that the recording of Dolphy's album *Far Cry* came *the same day* that Dolphy played on Coleman's *Free Jazz* recording.

What these anecdotes are meant to illustrate is not so much one or two important events in the trajectory of Dolphy's music but more his constant, unrelenting exposure to and interaction with others; playing, listening, and otherwise being-with were simply the *modi operandi* of Dolphy's life as a working musician. More to the point, what we identify as his voice would not have been possible without these interactions. They constitute a musical fabric, too numerous and too omnipresent to be precisely traced. It is too simple, for example, to say that Dolphy learned to bend pitches when he listened to the birds, or that he learned to disregard chord changes from Coleman. What we can say is that these interactions produced and continued producing a singular musician, not as an end result but as an ongoing process.

Finally, there is no discussing Dolphy's voice—and therefore his improvisations—without also discussing blackness, without discussing his situatedness in "the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption that arranges every line" (Moten 2003, 1). This situatedness persists in spite of the fact that Dolphy tended to talk about his music in terms that were less overtly political than some of his contemporaries, both because of the racialization of Black people in general and because of jazz itself.[17] Given Dolphy's associations and certain details of his biography, we could make the argument that Dolphy was conscious of and aligned with the political framing of jazz as a musical expression of Black political struggle. But that is a separate question. What I focus on instead is first, the way that Dolphy's improvisations come into clarity (that is to say, opacity) when read with and through Fred Moten's ontol-

ogy of Black performance; and second, the ways in which this reading also finally raises the sociopolitical signification of the genres his music straddles, and the consequences he bore for breaking them down.

For Moten, "the material reproductivity of black performance" has an "ontological condition" that is "the story of how apparent nonvalue functions as a creator of value" (Moten 2003, 18). What this means (following Randy Martin) is that race, class, gender, and sexuality are "the materiality of social identity" produced whenever dominant power subordinates by appropriation, and that the avant-garde (in this case, Dolphy's) is an aesthetic consequence of said production. Among other things, Moten's *In the Break* is a theorization of just such an aesthetics. Contra the Eurological framework that renders the Black avant-garde "oxymoronically—as if black, on the one hand, and avant-garde, on the other hand, each depen[ding] for its coherence upon the exclusion of the other" (32), Moten articulates the "sentimental avant-garde" as an aesthetics produced by displacement and deterioration—displacement of the subaltern, deterioration as disinvestment of and in form, a deterioration that also rematerializes by "disrupt[ing] the phantasmatically solipsistic space of bourgeois aesthetic production and reception" and by moving "further and further into the heart of lightness, the city of light . . . the asylum of the West" (40). The sentimental avant-garde both takes place by breaking down (as "a certain aesthetics, as an effect of disinvestment, as a psychic condition") at the same time that this negation is productive: "something is given off in these encountering migrations . . . such production—such radically ensemblic, radically improvisational objection—is the unfinished, continually re-engendered, actively re-engendering project of the black (and blue and sentimental) avant-garde" (40–41).

Following this line of thought, we can say (not as a dismissal but as a separate question): it does not *only* matter whether or not Dolphy cared to view his music in political terms. For Moten, Dolphy's music always already has and produces an ontological politics, and this is what I mean when I say that it cannot be understood outside the notion of blackness. It is crucial not only for his own understanding of improvisation but also in how it functions and circulates in a contingent discursive space, how others understand improvisation and its significance. If there is no understanding Dolphy's voice without blackness, there is also no understanding of these improvisations—what they do, what they mean,

how they sound (and to whom)—without it, and without understanding what blackness itself meant in the jazz discourse of the 1960s. These discourses are not ephemeral, but material inasmuch as they *affect things*. Thinking contingency here foregrounds the too often overlooked fact that improvisation is something that is as determined by such extramusical parameters as it is by musical ones; it is social and musical at the same time, and this overlap is impossible to dissect.

That Dolphy's music constituted a *Black* avant-garde was anyway a fact that jazz critics well understood, however polemically it cut against prevailing notions of Western art music, and whatever their conclusions about it. Of those critics, it was of course Baraka who most forcefully articulated a connection between the aesthetic avant-garde and blackness *as* avant-garde. As he wrote, "There was a newness and a defiance, a demand for freedom, politically and creatively, it was all connected. . . . And we felt, I know I did, that we were linked to that music that Trane and Ornette and C. T., Shepp and Dolphy and the others, were making, so the old white arrogance and elitism of Europe as Center Art was stupid on its face" (Baraka 1997, 261 and 267). For white establishment jazz critics, however, Baraka's line of thinking was dismissed in correspondence with the music. The "new thing"—in spite or perhaps because of its sonic resonances with the respectable European avant-garde of the time—was infamously if not uniformly derided as "anti-jazz," a discursive policing that was as much ideological as it was aesthetic.[18] This is to say, as Lewis writes, that the reaction of the mainstream press was caught up with race, rather than some ostensible musical offense, confirming rather than denying the link that Baraka posited between the "new thing" and a Black radical aesthetic. As Lewis writes, "The criticism of the new music as 'just noise' can be seen as a holdover from antebellum days" (2009, 44), the sounding of a kind of constitutive outside of white aesthetic sense regimes or what La Marr Jurelle Bruce calls the "*normal* within a given psychosocial milieu" (2021, 8).

Dolphy occupies a specific position in this formulation. Not as sonically heretical perhaps as Cecil Taylor, but certainly outside white bourgeois sensibilities, Dolphy's in-between-ness as both jazz sideman and uncompromising soloist, within and outside of sonic legibility, performed a disjuncture by juxtaposing his personal voice against even the most conventional settings. Dolphy figures here because no one yet knew what his music was, and because it is still "excessive of any analytic" (Moten 2003, 71). Simply put: no one can really hear what Dolphy is doing. For

some, this indiscernibility is total and permanent. But even for those who "heard" Dolphy—who may have been amazed, but who never conflated the unknown with the threatening—there is something *else* that his music reaches for, something that we can only partially make sense of through repeated listening. There is a difference, in other words, between illegibility and incomprehensibility. To be rendered illegible is to be classed as noise, whereas music can be both beautiful and incomprehensible at the same time. "Musical listening transforms our auditory attention just when we decide that the sounds we are hearing are music" (Shank 2014, 4). Dolphy forces this question on our ears: the disjuncture he produced forces a divide that makes it necessary to "decide" whether or not the sounds we hear are musical. This disjuncture is articulated through the squawks, bird calls, and abstracted harmonic relationships that were heard as Dolphy's voice/body/subjectivity, and for this reason can be considered as a kind of aural eccentricity so long as we follow Carla Peterson in

> insisting on [eccentricity's] double meaning: the first evokes a circle not concentric with another, an axis not centrally placed (according to the dominant system), whereas the second extends the notion of off-centeredness to suggest freedom of movement stemming from the lack of central control and hence new possibilities of difference conceived as empowering oddness. (Peterson 2001, xi–xii)

Daphne A. Brooks (2007) was the first to use Peterson's notion of eccentricity to think Black performance practices. Following Brooks, Francesca T. Royster (2013) has used eccentricity to theorize queer sexuality in Black performance in the post-soul era. For each author, eccentricity is both a term leveled against Black Americans and also a means by which Black performance can empower the performers. In my use of this term, I do not mean to elide the differences in our meanings, or to ignore the specific development of this term in Brooks or Royster.[19] Rather, I mean to draw a limited parallel between the aural eccentricity of Dolphy's musical voice, and the way in which perceived eccentricity is used in whatever case to mark an "outsider" in a certain discursive/physical space. In the same way (but differently) that Peterson writes of the coding of Black female bodies as eccentric and therefore subject to policing, exploitation, and subjugation from white supremacy, so too did Dolphy's musical audacity invite policing as it gave voice to white fears and form to imaginary threats.

Eccentricity: Powers, Punishments, and Politics

In addition to his imbrication inside blackness, my description of Dolphy as eccentric hinges on two other interdependent axes, each of which is corroborated by Dolphy's professional activity, critical reception, and his own statements about his career. Though Dolphy was well-respected in certain circles during his time, and though he is now hailed as a "prophet" (see Dolphy 2019), his struggles to make ends meet and to pursue his most personal creative ambitions testify to his treatment as eccentric, bizarre, or otherwise "out" by a white-dominated music industry. As we see in the "anti-jazz" critique, these dynamics were a fundamental aspect of Dolphy's career as a leader, and would culminate in his decision to remain in Europe after what turned out to be his final tour. As he put it, "I'm on my way to Europe for a while. Why? Because I can get more work there playing my own music, and because if you try to do anything different in this country, people put you down for it" (in Spellman 1964). Ultimately and tragically, the racialist paradigm governing interpretations of his music and his subjectivity followed him across the ocean, where stereotypes about drug-abusing (Black) jazz musicians helped Berlin doctors to ignore Dolphy when he collapsed due to an undiagnosed diabetic condition, resulting in his death at age 36.

I will return to race, this first axis of Dolphy's eccentricity, below. The second axis is to do with Dolphy's gender performance. From the bebop era into the Black Arts and Black Power Movements, progressive Black political struggle often contained or operated via strongly heteronormative and masculine articulations (see Harper 1996, for example).[20] Such articulations could also overlap with a kind of celebrity, pop-cultural status, best seen during Dolphy's time through Miles Davis, who "was and always will be the icon of old-style cool" (Winnubst 2015, 133). For Shannon Winnubst, Davis is archetypally cool because of both his brilliance (his musical prowess, his constantly evolving creative ambitions, his commitment to speak about race and racism) as well as his flaws, including his aggressive and sexist masculinity. Critical to consider here is how Davis conveyed or performed his coolness/masculinity in the public sphere: his detachment, nonconformity, and masculine-coded command are powerfully communicated by (for instance) his physical presence, his dress, and his (in)famous, disinterested posture toward audiences.

Contrast this cool demeanor with Dolphy's, as described by Han Bennink, the drummer on what became Dolphy's final recording:

> He shot to the microphone, like a hawk, straight into those big intervals on the bass clarinet. I had never seen such an attitude in other jazz musicians, not even when I first saw Coltrane with Miles and his quintet. Coltrane moved to the microphone in a lazy way and played his solos, which were unbelievable. But Dolphy beat everyone. That fanatical trait is reflected in his music, as are those awkward movements of his. (Bennink in Hylkema 1991)

If we combine this description of Dolphy's physical comportment with both the above musical analysis and with descriptions of his personality, a clearer picture emerges. I return to his music below. As to his personality, there exists no description of Dolphy by one of his collaborators, as far as I know, which does not describe him as kind, gentle, or otherwise benevolent. As pugnacious a figure as Charles Mingus revered Dolphy as a friend, and the impression of Dolphy as something close to "angelic" is shared by seemingly everyone who knew him well.[21] In addition to angelic (as well as "sweet," "kind," and other synonyms), Dolphy is also often described as "unusual," "straight," or "clean." Apparently uninterested in drugs, alcohol, or partying, Dolphy was a determined practitioner who showed up prepared and well-dressed, who shot to the microphone when it was his turn to play, who took care of his colleagues and friends as much as he was able. In a word, especially where music is concerned, Dolphy was *earnest*, the polar opposite of cool when considered "a controlled detachment that enshrines irony and a muted claim to nonconformity as highly valued, preferred social postures" (Winnubst 2015, 111). To the extent that coolness and heteronormative masculinity (seen here through Miles Davis) are mutually reinforcing, Dolphy's eccentricity invites a degree of policing and dismissal insofar as it can be read as out of synch with dominant forms of masculinity.[22]

To elaborate this point, we can consider something of the same dynamic through one of Dolphy's peers: Ornette Coleman was another jazz musician whose musical innovations painted him as eccentric, and who sparked outrage and even violence. It is true that his plastic saxophone and apparent disregard for harmony seemed to fly irreverently in the face of jazz orthodoxy. But, as David Ake writes, "to explain the negative reactions toward Coleman through musical style alone ignores the historical situation that gave rise to these stylistic changes in the first place" (Ake 2002, 64). For Ake, part of the negative reaction to Coleman also had to do with his illegible sexual presentation, and the various ways in which he displayed no need to pay homage to the masculinist culture

of bebop, whether through "cutting contests" or by dressing the part. As Ake writes, Coleman's musical-personal presentation was "at least partially . . . a conscious rejection of jazz identities" and this is as true of his comportment among musicians as it is of his physical appearance. Coleman had long, straightened hair and a long beard, which "in itself was enough to attract the attention of racist cops" (77); he did not model his saxophone playing on Bird or any other bop greats; he did not "pay his dues" in "the approved jazz circles." Coleman furthermore declined to participate in the aggressive male sexual culture practiced by many of his contemporaries. In the postwar era, where bebop had become a means of asserting cultural capital in Black communities through a decidedly masculine and competitive aesthetic, to be illegible in this way was to invite harassment.

Dolphy shares some of these dynamics while he departs from others. Although both players were decried as jazz heretics, Dolphy's behavior and appearance were not read with the same hostility as Coleman's, presumably because he was less aggressively nonconformist within the jazz patriarchy, and because his style of playing reinforced that interpretation to a certain degree by retaining some identifiable markers of the bop genre. Rather than fully mirroring Coleman's gender dynamics, Dolphy's personality and demeanor presents an alternative model of what we might call progressive Black masculinity, one defined more by devalued and effeminized personal qualities like kindness and earnestness than by heteronormative coolness. But for however progressive or admirable Dolphy seemed to those who knew him, his oddness still put him at a distance from both dominant models of coolness (masculinity) and from white aesthetic sensibilities, opening him up to the kind of backlash that we see reflected in his critics' statements, in the incredulity with which his music is met.

This returns us to Dolphy's music, and the third axis of his eccentricity: the musical dynamics charted throughout this chapter, the in-between, "both/and" quality of "Out to Lunch" can be more succinctly characterized according to Dolphy's overt pursuit of "outness." "Out" is one of many terms in the jazz lexicon that emerged from African American Vernacular English, and while it appears to have been initially used as a synonym for a particularly effective performance (like "hot" or "out of this world"), there is today an additional, more specific connotation likely deriving from the Western idea of diatonic key centers: when improvising, playing "inside" means remaining within the tonality of the composition, whether in terms of the base key or the chord at a

given moment. To play outside is to depart from the harmonic center of gravity, whether temporarily (in order to invoke a certain effect) or structurally (by experimenting with nontonal compositions, for instance). Given its association with nondiatonic sounds, the term's usage has now stretched to potentially encompass any avant-garde jazz at all (in contrast to "straight ahead," i.e., "traditional" jazz). Despite this latter broad sense of the word, I want to suggest that the inside/outside relation is still the core of outness as a concept, or at least the relevant consideration in terms of Dolphy's music. That is, to be out, one must first have a context from which to depart—this is what makes outness ambivalent, rather than free.

In an important sense, as both Moten and Lewis show, to be both avant-garde and Black in 1960s America was to be treated as eccentric or even mad no matter what. Specifically regarding bebop, as Lewis writes, the shift from jazz as entertainment to a more explicitly experimental art practice "was viewed as a direct challenge, by extension, to the entire social order as it applied to blacks in 1940s apartheid America. . . . Indeed, the musicians were often called crazy 'as a way of dismissing and disempowering what was perceived as threatening'" (2004b, 135). This helps us to understand what is at stake in jazz discourse's arguments over Dolphy's music, and whether or not that music should be interpreted as "correct" (adhering to jazz conventions deemed acceptable, perceived as safe or nonthreatening), "incorrect" ("anti-jazz," "crazy," dismissed) or eccentric (described here as both-at-once): these are not really musical debates, but political and racial ones.

Given these stakes, it is interesting to note how outness becomes a name for something creative and desirable for Dolphy and his colleagues. Dolphy constantly pursued outness both in his music and in his naming of it, almost as if reappropriating criticisms made against him.[23] But when pressed to explain his approach, he consistently referred to his music in almost universal terms, challenging the white normative interpretation of his creativity as something aberrant—that is, by describing his own music (understood by white mainstream discourse as eccentric) in such neutral, nonsensational terms, Dolphy attempted to recode "outness" to more accurately reflect what it meant for *him*, which is to say simply creativity, artistic ambition, and a presupposition that such explorations were admirable rather than threatening. Again, rather than promoting a project that leaves musical conventions behind or purposefully wrecks them, Dolphy's constant chasing of the out seems intended

toward the freedom to use those conventions as one sees fit, perhaps particularly a freedom to do so without professional harassment by a music industry invested in certain notions of what Black musicians should and shouldn't be doing.

Dolphy consciously characterized his music as departing from the norm while resisting the idea that this should be seen as unusual, because aesthetically speaking, this departure simply equates to a creative exploration; but socially, this self-conscious placement outside mainstream sensibilities too easily tracks with Dolphy's race and with his gender performance, becoming conflated in public discourse, condensed into a figure of eccentricity, both praised and feared. Hence, each axis of Dolphy's eccentricity is inseparable from the others, and we return in a circle to the third axis of race.

As I discussed above, Dolphy's blackness indelibly informs his sound, but also overdetermined the material parameters of his career, first by prohibiting him, for example, from pursuing his childhood ambition of joining the Burbank Symphony (Black musicians were barred from doing so), and subsequently by contributing to the interpretation of his music as eccentric, an interpretation which resulted in his perpetually struggling to find work. As producer George Avakian put it,

> Eric's kindness extended to the way he faced the one big disappointment of his life: the fact that somehow he had not caught on with a big enough section of the jazz public to be able to make a decent living from his music. Lesser musicians borrowed from his bag to get jobs he couldn't. But Eric never had a harsh word for anyone who might have given him work but didn't. He knew he had to play as he felt was right. (in *DownBeat* 1964, 10)

Dolphy's lack of work is a material parameter, a contingency influenced by the oppression of Black Americans in the Jim Crow era, and one that according to colleagues like Gunther Schuller negatively impacted his health throughout his life. In short, "Poverty, intolerable working conditions and a general assault on his creative spirit hastened his early demise" (Kelley 2018, 13). Despite or perhaps because of these difficulties, Dolphy maintained an urgent desire not only to work, but to perform *his own* music, how and with whom he wanted.[24] Producer Alan Douglas, who organized the sessions collected on *Musical Prophet*, began those sessions by asking Dolphy what he wanted to do. Dolphy answered

simply: "Just to play—nobody lets me make what I want—with musicians who I love'" (in Lemesre 2018, 35). Only in the last years of his life did Dolphy begin to have this opportunity.

Out to Lunch! was recorded just after Dolphy finally signed with Blue Note Records, at Rudy Van Gelder's famous Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, studio. The date was February 25, 1964, 125 days before Dolphy's death. Shortly after the recording, Dolphy left for his flurry of European activity, a tour from which he would not return. Almost immediately after his death, he was inducted into the *DownBeat* hall of fame. In hindsight, he was recognized as a fearless innovator, and today appears on every essential jazz list you can find, earning five out of five stars in publications like *Allmusic, Rolling Stone,* and the *Encyclopedia of Popular Music.* In his time, Dolphy's eccentric musical voice—an expression of his subjectivity—elicited reactionary responses from a mainstream press who feared the change that Dolphy's music ultimately inaugurated. They feared this change not only because it challenged their own aesthetic sensibilities but also because those sensibilities were discursively bound up with the broader sociopolitical context of the 1960s. The general jazz context on the day *Out to Lunch!* was recorded—some four months before the signing of the Civil Rights Act—still reflected a critical discourse that, as Baraka writes, "enforce[d] white middle-brow standards of excellence as some criterion for performance of a music that in its most profound manifestations is completely antithetical to such standards—in fact, quite often is in direct reaction against them" (Baraka 1963, 17).

The crucial point here is that if Dolphy's music does not sound eccentric to our ears, this is not just because we are more "used to" such adventurous sounds or because jazz has further "evolved"; it is also because we cannot recapture the contingent historical space in which Dolphy's musical voice *signified what it did then.* Dolphy's eccentricity and innovations, his legibility and his weirdness sounded as such at least in part because it was 1964 and not solely because these qualities reside somewhere in the sounds themselves. His music is the collision between a contingent discursive moment and a differently contingent sound. There is no way to insert ourselves into 1964 and to hear how "Out to Lunch" sounded, when these selfsame notes and sound combinations signified differently than they do today, when these improvisations both meant something different and functioned differently in the cultural sphere, signifying Dolphy's Black eccentricity as threat. What this means is that the "music itself," partially dependent on that space, has also changed. That Dolphy sounded eccentric then contrasts with his acceptance today

into the canon of jazz greats; what the eccentricity of his musical voice signified is altogether another matter, one that I have tried to detail here as both ambitious reaching and as perceived threat. This is the connection between the closed contingencies of Dolphy's musical subjectivity and their collision with the musical/discursive space in which he sounded—it is also the significance of his willful mutations of by-then accepted bebop signifiers.

Dolphy always sounded eccentric and trailblazing, and this band entered that space with him by breaking down conventional meter, by questioning what an instrument could do in its "proper" role in an improvisation, and by moving to answer those questions collectively, following or counterbalancing each other in shifting relations. To do all of this was to reach for a new sensible, for a new way of being that is both irreducible to any political position and is unknown in any case; what counts is the reaching-for and the sound it makes.

Notwithstanding the persistence of white supremacist hegemony, it is this entire aestheticopolitical context that Dolphy's music disrupted, since concurrent with his eccentricity's provocation of the jazz press's aesthetic policing was its line of flight, its "difference conceived as empowering oddness." As Royster writes, "Eccentric performances are fueled by contradictory desires for recognition and freedom" (Royster 2013, 9). Thus, although Dolphy's music invites attack from the jazz press, it also produces a break precisely by its contradictory sounding of two worlds in one, its inside/outside gap, its jazz/not jazz ambivalence. This is how we can so intensely feel in Dolphy's music what Anthony Reed names the "fugitive voice" in an effort to identify "what is excessive or dissonant in a performance vis-à-vis the tradition or conventions it is supposed to exemplify, and the ways that excess makes retrospectively visible the social contradictions out of which formal innovations, as indices of the struggle over the sensible, emerge" (2021, 29).

This eccentric excess, this fugitivity, is precisely how *Out to Lunch!* contributed to the breaking of the distribution of sense that allied white middlebrow tastes with universalizing judgments of aesthetic validity. In Jacques Rancière's terms, Dolphy's style sonically asserted a new jazz sensible, performing a tear in the established order that determined what counted as "speech" and what was merely "noise" by bridging both worlds and making apparent the distance between them (1999). That the jazz sensible was ruptured does not mean that white supremacy in the music industry disappeared, or that the old sensibility simply receded from view. Rather, what Dolphy's break emphasizes is the deep interconnect-

edness of music and the social, and in this case, the connection between aesthetics and politics as articulated through a redistribution whereby noise is recognized as speech. This reorientation or conflictual staging, is, for Rancière, the definition of politics: far from partisan maneuvering or normative processes such as voting, politics emerges when "those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common a wrong that is nothing more than this very confrontation, the contradiction of two worlds in a single world" (1999, 26–27).

"Out to Lunch," as an extension of Eric Dolphy's musical project/subjectivity, foregrounds "the contradiction of two worlds in a single world" and in doing so destroys the appearance of their separation. "Out to Lunch" is in this sense a profoundly political recording insofar as it inaugurates a new community of sense, insofar as it performs this politics through a tear in sensory fabric that forces us to reevaluate our listening practices. Like (but differently) the lunch counter protests of the early 1960s, it forces an audio/visual disjuncture by bridging two worlds, inhabiting the space of an "as if" that models a possible world, a contingent promise that might yet be real if only.

Legacies

Perhaps more so than any other figure, Dolphy personifies the singularity of a moment in jazz history during which an event was *in motion.* As Rancière writes, neither political nor aesthetic freedom are achievable endpoints, but are activities in service of redistributing the contingent order of the sensible. Each redistribution will eventually solidify into a new, contingent formation, which necessarily produces an excess of its own. If Coleman cracked the order of sensibility in this music, Dolphy was the one who, before the solidification of a new order, straddled the space in between past and future orientations, not in a precise temporal moment but in the indetermination of the event. "Out to Lunch" in this way reflects "black performance" as "the ongoing improvisation of a kind of lyricism of the surplus . . . both rooted and out there, immanent and transcendent" (Moten 2003, 26).[25]

What does it finally mean to improvise in the context of "Out to Lunch"? We see a singular encounter of musicians, instruments, and circumstances, in which the participants simultaneously adhere to the bop tradition and push so far it bends, and in this extended reaching staged a contradiction, a future music in a now that was not and would never

be prepared to hear it. At the end of this section what I have emphasized is the historical moment in which the recording takes place, as well as the musical personalities who have gathered there and the effects of the music that they produced. The point is not that one of these factors matters more than another; the point is that understanding improvisation is entirely dependent on all of them at once.

It is point blank impossible to improvise like that anymore.

The frame of reference has been broken and expanded and manipulated in all manner of ways since then, and trying to pretend otherwise results only in a pale imitation of what they were doing, or more accurately what they were reaching to do without full comprehension of what that meant. This is an improvisation that is utterly dependent—for its urgency, for its risk, for its *sound*—on the moment in which it was made. Dolphy—so creatively ambitious, yearning not only for unknown future sounds but also to get the stuff in his head *out there*, and so backstopped by his professional life as a sideman—comes into *his own session* with a lot to say and with musicians who want to talk. His solo entrance at 0:44 communicates everything. It all happens in this moment.

THREE | Waves, Linens, and White Light

Saxophonist Karl Hjalmar Nyberg and drummer Andreas Skår Winther form the improvising duo, Mr. K. On their 2015 release *Left Exit*, they are joined by Klaus Ellerhusen Holm (reeds) and Michael Francis Duch (bass). The subject of this scene is the track "Waves, Linens, and White Light" ("Waves"), the third on the album, lasting two minutes and forty-seven seconds. Almost immediately, it is clear that this music involves collective improvisation of an entirely different kind than that which was explored in the previous chapter; in fact, it is only through knowing in advance that this music *is* improvised that we are capable of necessarily recognizing it as such. In order to listen critically with this music, this chapter will veer into disparate territories—exploring the mutability of repetition (in both musical performance and in repeated listening), the history (and historiography) of jazz in Europe, and the different approaches to teaching improvisation that have established themselves between the US and Norway in part as a result of this history—under the suspicion that these conversations are essential if we want to understand, in a limited way, what improvisation is doing here. Far from neutral or abstract, the meditative, textural sounds we hear in "Waves" emerge from a concrete history of European musical discourse, and the ways in which that discourse has been instantiated in institutional structures, most particularly, the school where these musicians honed their approach to sound.

Sounding Repetition

"Waves" begins abruptly, as if we have just tuned in to something that had already been taking place, a fully formed event that exists indepen-

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dent of our listening. We first hear a trio of notes, but these do not seem distinct from one another, really; instead, they are nestled inside one another, adopting similar timbres and moods such that we hear more a single fabric of sound, rather than distinct instruments. These three notes (B and C# bowed in the bass, a major ninth, and an E in-between, played by the saxophone), repeat consistently, if not precisely in-time. The notes overlap one another, sounding in and out like the waves invoked in the title, tumbling over themselves. The chord is not a drone; the instruments in question must rearticulate as Hjalmar breathes, as Duch reverses direction, pulling his bow back across the neck of his bass. Thus, we hear the physicality of the instruments in their rearticulations, the breath of the musicians and the sounds they produce.

The effect of this soundscape is (at least) double: first, these notes produce an ambiguous tonality, which, while not necessarily destabilizing the listener, at least delays the possibility of grounding our ears in a key center. Second, the rolling in and out of these notes produces an atmosphere or sonic texture, so that we feel we are inside something while listening, a small, infinite world. This world is both texturally warm (the timbre of the bass and saxophone is breathy, earthy) and tonally distant (the chord being played is beautiful, but because our ears can't quite ground it, its beauty feels detached in space). The notes are still and serene, but in their ambiguity, in their ceaselessness, they are also disquieting. They paint the white light of the moon glowing your backyard. And like the moon, the cumulative effect of this chord sounds of something eternal, something not much to do with us. Listening to this track or watching the moon in the middle of the night, we are left with a flattening of human experience—the feeling that everything makes just about as much sense as everything else, that each sound can be as meaningful as any other, in the proper context, with the proper attention. It isn't that there is no coherence; it's that coherence is immanent to sound itself, that sound does not need an externally imposed structure in order to become so. It's the feeling that sound does not need our ears to keep sounding, that the moon will still hang without our eyes on it.

Soon after this soundscape is established, Holm begins improvising on the clarinet. These improvisations are mostly textural and extremely sparse—taps, whirs, and high notes that flit through, above, and inside the tonality running underneath. The sounds do not assert themselves so much as weave underneath (dynamically) and above (in pitch) the dominant, recurring tones that have been established since the beginning of the piece, and which continue throughout. As such, the impro-

visation seems an extension of, rather than a departure from, the initial gestures. Holm does not give his improvisation away for what it is, but hides it in the shadow of the moon; it is so much a part of the landscape that we barely register its happening.

But then again and also, in a subsequent listening, the white light of the cold moon becomes the white paint of a stucco wall blistering in the sun, the notes we've been hearing all along, in seeing the laundry that flaps against that white backdrop, become transformed: rather than detached and distant, they are as close as our breath, as warm as this pavement. The piece becomes a moment of complete presence, a moment that is outside of time because it is somehow now. The music is a reflection, a time out, a nap on the driveway. The linens are a sound and a smell, the clarinet is now a bird.

I am describing the effect of this recording as it appears to me in listening, as it works itself through me in writing. But one of the many specific qualities of this recording is that it *is* a recording. This fact forces certain implications, forecloses certain possibilities, opens up others. I am capable of revisiting this same moment as many times as I want, only to find that the moment is not identical. And through this repeated listening, the track opens itself up to me. "I needed repetition, repetition, repetition to make sense . . . of what at first blush passed as formless, unvectored noise" (Grubbs 2014, x). This opening does not happen in one direction; I am also opened by the music as I internalize it through repeated listening. It is *doing something* to me. The second listening is imprinted on my body with the first, and the twentieth also collapses into this same fold, vibrating the layers beneath and thus changing them.[1] It is the repetition with a difference of my repeated listening, growing from but also affecting the listenings before it, a movement perfectly encapsulated within the smaller, internal repetitions of the sounds rolling in from the bass and saxophone. The notes on the recording will never be different notes, but that doesn't mean that they don't change. The music is different to me each time I hear it because I am in a different room than yesterday, with a different mood, because I turned to this recording for comfort after a stressful day, because it came up unintentionally, on shuffle, while I was making soup, because I am not the same person that I used to be.

If I and the world are changed each time I encounter the recording, then the music also changes over time. Moreover, the recording differs not only from itself but also from the performance that the recording purports to have captured—and yet both are a part of the "object" we

call music. We have known for some time that the constellation consti-
tuting a music-object is, as Georgina Born puts it, "multiply mediated"
by technological, social, and cultural changes, as well as by assemblages
that cohere into "particular historical shapes" (2005, 8). The intergroup
interaction is different from the performers/audience interaction, is
different from the recording/listener interaction. Before the record-
ing/listener interaction, the recording is itself already the result of an
interaction between the performance and its technological mediation.
Such mediations do not reproduce any original but transduce it, change
it, and in so doing, contribute to the quality and character of what we
now hear. As with the performance and the space in which it occurred,
the "sounds themselves" are always already audible as such because of
the contingent media through which they flow—they do not exist but
through. Thus, one of the early implications from this track is one that is
equally true of all recordings: a record is still a contingent object. It is not
completely closed but only closed in a certain way.[2] It can still produce
effects that ramify into the future.

   The first shift in the sonic landscape occurs around 0:32, simultane-
ously subtle and dramatic: the E that Nyberg has been consistently hit-
ting on his saxophone shifts down one whole step, to a D. The effect of
this single movement, in the context of such tonal ambiguity and such
consistency, is startling: for the first time, a strong tonality is suggested,
with the D contextualizing the C# from earlier (still sounding) as a major
seventh. Not only does this suggested chord produce a new affective reg-
ister; it also recontextualizes the first chord of the piece by suggesting
movement—*we retroactively hear the E as the root of the first chord*, where
previously the three notes seemed of equal or indeterminate function.
The chord presently coheres through its recent past. This moment is
strikingly beautiful to my ears and is made all the more dramatic by the
fact that it is both delayed (the first major change we hear in the entire
piece) and brief; before long, the D folds back into the original chord,
and is gone. It also illustrates something profound about how contin-
gency functions by showing how in-the-moment decision-making con-
structs a dynamic sound environment, both opening up new possibilities
for future sounds, and also affecting sound-decisions that have already
occurred. "Musical interaction is not a passive interaction . . . it also
generates structure—it has its own sonic trace, which becomes part of the
same interactive environment, and is perceived as contributing to and
altering this environment" (Iyer 2004, 165). Here the affective landscape
shifts its orientation or tilt.

There are other events, if not developments. Nestled inside the rolling repetition, there are brief moments of drama that play out, almost imperceptible. In the end, these too are subsumed in the predominant movement, and only the sustained shaking of small bells signals what becomes inevitable: the sounds drop out one by one, the bells are last to go.

How are we to hear the almost limitless repetition that composes this track? In its commitment to building a consistent sonic universe, "Waves" is a recording that pushes the boundaries of what is most commonly understood as improvised music. More so than expressivity, risk, interchange, surprise, or spontaneity, this track sounds something deep about the closed contingencies of material, about time, place, and participants. In placing its sounds against one another—and staying with them—"Waves" reveals how improvisation is not exhausted by the notion of setting a creative, musical personality against a set of structuring limitations. Rather, the repetition we hear in this music casts improvisation as a kind of disclosure, as an unfolding of a certain set of sounds made possible only through the strike of contingency that is heard and then accepted and then probed. Given this, the question becomes: what specificities, what elements do we hear colliding in this sonic space, and how do they help constitute the sounds we hear? Shifting attention now to this represented, mediated performance, how can we trace the contingency of an event that has already taken place, that only exists in a new form and which does not contain the event itself? It is partly impossible, but we have important clues. If improvisation is a contingent encounter, we have to account, to the extent possible, for all the forces at play.

The Studio

What do we know about the environment, and about how this may have affected the music? We know, first of all, that this album was recorded at Øra Studio in Trondheim, Norway. This fact already contains two important implications: first, because recording in a studio is quite a different experience than recording at a live performance, and second, because Norway, as both a country and a member of a certain geographical region, has a specific relation to improvised music that has developed over time, and which affects the approach that players take toward the practice. This latter point will be discussed in the next section. Related to the studio, there are at least two pieces of clear evidence that the setting has somehow affected the musical outcome.

In the first place, the recording studio provides for certain sonic possibilities that are not afforded by, say, a noisy bar. If, in my introductory anecdote, our band had difficulty playing quietly because of crowd noise, the studio, in its pristine quiet, is the ideal atmosphere for producing delicate sounds. The modern studio—with soundproof walls and dynamic microphones set to capture each individual sound down to the breath—facilitates and accommodates the kinds of intimate, delicate, fully textural sounds that we hear throughout *Left Exit*. That is, it makes thinkable, audible, and possible that which in another setting would not be. "Recordings contain information about the spaces in which they were made, whether or not the represented space is made explicit" (Grubbs 2014, 55). Moreover, there is a trace of the studio not only in the recording, but also in the *music*. The band would have played differently if they were struggling to be heard, if they were struggling to hear.

The second point is one I understand from an email exchange with Winther, who told me that, while all of the music was improvised live (without editing), some of the final tracks were selected and isolated from longer improvisations (2017b). This means that, while the music in the moment did not depend on editing technology to come into being, the music that we actually hear, in some ways, did. Furthermore, the foreknowledge that such editing would be possible would have undoubtedly affected—even subconsciously—the band's approach to playing. If one knows in advance that one can select a part of an improvisation out of a whole, it could for instance generate a feeling of ease, so that the pressure to "get it right," or to "say everything" that one wants to say is diminished. If one knows that one has, essentially, all the time in the world, the music will be free to develop more gradually than if the band had only three minutes to play. This would be particularly pertinent if one's intentional aesthetic had to do with "settling in" and letting space establish itself as the music develops. We can hear this kind of patience in the static progression of this music; its unforced, contemplative trajectory is partially a result of the environment's effect on the performers.

Norway and the Progressive Imperative

Beyond the physical mediation of the studio space, considering multiple environments also raises questions of cultural, geographic, and historical context. Chief among these factors here is the fact that the four musicians on *Left Exit* each have strong ties to the conservatory at Trondheim, a distinct pedagogical space in which they would have been encouraged

to think about and approach improvised music in specific ways, ways that I suggest differ substantially from dominant approaches to improvisation pedagogy in American universities. To understand how this is so and what effects it might have had on the music we hear, this section briefly discusses improvisation pedagogy and European jazz history, not in order to suggest a problematic "here/there" binary, but in order to elucidate the ways in which improvisation—a typically unmarked term—is always improvisation of a particular kind. In other words, while it is in some ways tautological to claim that the musical training of the performers affected the music we hear them playing, lingering on the question of education reveals how no one simply learns how to improvise; rather, one learns how to improvise in specific ways, according to certain traditions.

It is widely understood that the Trondheim conservatory represents a distinct approach to improvised music, and holds a special place in the narrative about Norway's contributions to the form.[3] By "narrative" I mean that through the complex history of jazz's spread across Europe, musical/aesthetic developments in Norway coemerged with a reinforcing discourse about the imperative to innovate. Music historiographies, funding infrastructures, jazz festivals, music journalism, and music education in Norway work together to establish a comprehensive framework, viewpoint, and approach to improvised music, which now takes for granted the efficacy of efforts to depart from "traditional" American jazz. This is not to say that traditional jazz can't be heard in Norway (in fact, there are robust "trad-jazz" scenes across Europe); it is only to identify a dominant strain of jazz discourse that continues to shape musical developments.

In a post on National Public Radio's jazz blog, Michelle Mercer effectively captures this discursive framing (consolidated in the figures of George Russell and Jan Garbarek), which undergirds improvised music infrastructures in Norway. She writes,

> The jazz tradition Norway does claim is founded on native innovation of the form. . . . Today, many in the Norwegian jazz industry believe every note should be shiny-new; that the best concepts are the most outlandish ones and improvised music should advance faster than the speed of sound. (Mercer 2013)

For shorthand, I will term Norway's overall investment in innovation a kind of "progressive imperative," which can be understood as more or less coextensive with Norway's understanding of its own, unique

approach to improvised music.[4] At the same time, however, we also need to understand this imperative as a part of a shared set of historical circumstances seen across Europe, and born in part from of the kinds of existential anxieties that George Lewis describes in an important 2004 essay on jazz and European identity (2004a). As he writes, after a period of unidirectional cultural exchange characterized by obvious American hegemony, European jazz musicians began to question not only how to produce nonderivative jazz, but also what it might mean to play this music—so intimately linked with the African American experience—*in* Europe *as* Europeans. As Lewis writes, "The situation would eventually lead to a kind of declaration of independence from that [American] hegemony" (3) across Europe, and in spite of regional differences in how that declaration was taken up.

The foundational moment in this metaphorical declaration was an actual one: in a 1977 essay, Joachim-Ernst Berendt invoked the end of chattel slavery by describing the European break as "the emancipation," a term that has since "entered the general lexicon of German jazz historiography" (2004a, 3-4). For Lewis, "There is little question that this term, with its explicit recall of the 19th century freeing of American slaves, references notions of blackness" and this is essential for understanding the complex entanglement of sound and group identity during this period. The critical function of this declaration was less its reification of a decisive break and more its articulation of a pan-European musical identity, the creation of a condition of possibility for the concept of "European Improvised Music." In other words, the consolidation of an entire continent under one "strategic essentialism" was necessary in order to conceive and articulate a particularly European approach to improvised music, and this is why considering German jazz history is relevant for understanding the cultural discourse of jazz in other European countries, including Norway. Ironically, as Lewis writes, this nationalistic/geographical framing was inspired by African American efforts to carve out a distinct musical space for themselves in the face of consistent appropriation and misunderstanding in the American context.

This problematic and effective European articulation illustrates the complicated ways in which racial and ethnic identities get conflated with certain sounds, at the same time that it contributed to European efforts to resolve their identity crisis through an implicit understanding of that very conflation. In short, musicians made concerted efforts to replace American and/or jazz signifiers with sounds that were understood or could be aurally coded as European, most prominently, traditional folk

music and European "new music" in the avant-garde tradition.[5] By con-
flating musical sound, creativity, and personal identity, European musi-
cians were able to assert that such a thing as a distinctly European style
of Improvised Music existed. This style of music was from the beginning
both indebted to "traditional" American jazz, at the same time that it was
intimately connected to the Black avant-garde pioneered by groups like
the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM).
Indeed, in some ways it was the emergence of free jazz in the US that
made the European emancipation conceivable in the first place, inso-
far as the free jazz revolution allowed a degree of reflexivity regarding
jazz's perceived conventions—even, as Andrew Wright Hurley notes, the
convention that jazz *had to be American* (2011). The simultaneous use of
improvised forms and the turn away from jazz musical aesthetics became
the hallmarks of "Improvised Music," a type of playing which was not per
se exclusive to Europe, but which was articulated in a particular way by
European musicians.

Some further caveats are necessary here. First, besides Europe's iden-
tity crisis, the framing of European Improvised Music as a distinct cultural
product was also a practical one that helped musicians find work. As both
Hurley and Ekkehard Jost note, the reasons that such efforts were suc-
cessful in consolidating a European approach to improvised music had
as much to do with leveraging funding opportunities and promotional
terminology as anything else, given that "European jazz" became a mar-
ketable category of new and exciting music. Second, it would be a mis-
take to attribute the development of European Improvised Music during
this time solely to emancipation discourse/sentiments, or to character-
ize it strictly as a response to a crisis of European musical identity. In fact,
as Benjamin Piekut shows, some European efforts during the time strove
to emphasize the *commonalities* between various avant-garde musics—
whether European or American—that maintained improvisation as the
core of their musical practices (Piekut 2014b). What is important here
is that regardless of the complex, contradictory motivations undergird-
ing such efforts, the idea that European musicians had something to
contribute to the development of improvised music is a powerful ani-
mating discourse that emerged during this period, and which continues
to inform cultural understandings of jazz in many European countries.
Significantly, these efforts also produced much adventurous new music,
or at least gave attention to and expanded approaches in improvised
music that incorporated increasingly diversified sounds.[6] Finally, it is
important to clarify that the history of jazz in Europe is obviously much

more complex than I can adequately address here. My point is not that these developments were uniform or universally experienced, nor that Norway's jazz history stands in for European history writ large; rather, I want to sketch a limited parallel in order to draw attention to the ways in which an imperative for innovation took root across Europe, even or especially if that imperative was more discursive than it was "real."[7]

Today, Improvised Music in Norway and in other European countries continues to be discussed as unique by writers like Luca Vitali, ethnomusicologists Tor Dybo and Mike Heffley, as well as by quasi-official history projects like Norwegian Jazz Base. Intimately connected with the maintenance of this discourse are the ways in which this music has been grounded in material functions. For instance, Norway continues to enjoy comparatively robust funding for jazz and Improvised Music in a variety of modalities, the most visible of which are its many festivals. Not only do such festivals continue to promote "Norwegian jazz" as a unique cultural product internally and across Europe, but they have also become so ingrained as to have developed their own regional characteristics.[8]

The jazz infrastructure in Norway is indeed an impressive and sustained effort. It also illustrates how opportunities for funding continue to influence aesthetic choices or priorities in Norwegian musicians (first, toward the "new," and second, by linking such newness with the uniqueness of the Norwegian approach). For my purposes, however, the most direct means by which this notion of improvised music has taken hold in Norway is its institutionalization in higher education. Returning to Mercer's NPR profile also returns us directly to the conservatory at Trondheim:

> Innovation obsession is nurtured at the influential Trondheim Music Conservatory Jazz Program. Its graduates include many of Norway's most successful (and well-funded) musicians. As Jazz Program director Erling Aksdal explains, his teaching philosophy reflects the "highly egalitarian culture in Norway where authority of any kind is always questioned and people's general sense of self-value is high." This gives a jazz student, Aksdal says, an "inventor's belief in her/his uniqueness." (Mercer 2013)

Critically, the ethos or approach to jazz education described above manifests not only as a generalized attitude, but in specific pedagogical choices that differ considerably from dominant US approaches. I will detail these choices below. However, in order to situate the *significance* of

such choices, I first detour into a discussion of the hegemonic model of jazz pedagogy in the United States, which reveals what is at stake when discussing any alternative, politically and musically. My point in discussing differences between the US (broadly) and Trondheim (specifically) is not to generalize and then draw hard distinctions between them; rather, I aim to emphasize that the processes by which jazz was legitimated and institutionalized in the US and Norway differed and has had lasting (if not totalizing) consequences: where legitimization was made possible in the US through appeals to European high culture (as in the discourse of jazz as "America's classical music"), the legitimation process in Norway was invested, as we have seen, with creating a distinctly Norwegian approach to the music. This is reflected, in part, in the lasting differences in the ways that improvisation is taught and learned.

Pedagogy and Institutionalization

In contrast to a progressive imperative, the dominant educational paradigm in US institutions has approached jazz education from an emphatically conservative historical perspective,[9] reflecting how jazz's path to legitimization in the US has resulted in what Tracy McMullen helpfully terms its "museum" and "memory" cultures (2019). In short, in order to become accepted into the academy (and the concert hall), jazz had to adopt many of the conventions that would allow it to become legible within a pedagogical context dominated by Eurological models. As David Ake writes, "by demonstrating that certain solos or compositions worked 'just like the classics,' music departments could rest assured that they were still teaching their students 'serious music'" (2002, 119) in a context where jazz was still stigmatized by persistent, racialized stereotypes regarding its unseriousness. In particular, Ake focuses on the ways that students pass through jazz programs by demonstrating that they are proficient in executing the correct scales at the correct times, or by executing written material in much the same way that a classical musician would. Rather than focus on potentially ambiguous notions like "creativity," these predetermined criteria are more easily utilized as benchmarks that students either can or cannot meet.[10]

Such incorporative efforts have successfully elevated the status of jazz into a kind of high art category in the US context. But this recognition has undoubtedly come at the explicit exclusion of improvised music that can't be easily evaluated by "conservatory-based measures of excellence." The reduction of variegated musical possibilities to a set of proscribed

output criteria dovetails with both the broader neoliberalization of higher education (increasing since the 1970s alongside the rise of jazz in academia) and with the specific intertwining in the late 80s and early 90s of neoliberalism and neoclassical jazz, the most prominent and arguably still overrepresentative public face of the genre.

Represented most of all by Wynton Marsalis and his cohort of "young lions," neoclassical jazz was an approach to the genre that from the beginning incorporated a polemical and revisionist argument about jazz history, demarcating boundaries of aesthetic purity that often mirrored the dismissal of contemporary Black culture in broader conservative media discourse. As Dale Chapman writes, "Many advocates of jazz neo-classicism have contended that the music is based upon a nonnegotiable set of musical fundamentals (swing, feeling, functional harmony, and a well-defined set of rhythmic, formal, and melodic procedures)" (2018, 41). These formulae are precisely those that jazz advocates found were capable of fitting inside the Western musical pedagogical model, existing alongside and overlapping with the "white racial frame" (Ewell 2020) or "possessive investment in classical music" (Kajikawa 2019) around which US music pedagogy has been constructed. This is also the kind of jazz that was adopted by corporate America, and which continues to over-lap with neoliberal finance capital in powerful ways (Chapman 2018). Indeed, in the past thirty years American universities themselves have been radically reorganized according to the logic of neoliberal markets, a trend that I discuss further in chapter 6. The alignment of neoliberal education paradigms with neoclassical jazz further reinforced the domi-nance of a particular jazz-educational paradigm, based in bebop, and upheld by a host of institutional frameworks, including nonprofit orga-nizations like the Jazz Education Network, as well as the installation of big band jazz programs throughout the country's high schools (with its attendant cottage industry of composers, arrangers, and so on).

With the acceptance of jazz into the academy, improvisation also appeared in higher education—yet improvisation only appeared inso-far as it accompanied jazz, defined by a specific set of historical-musical genre parameters. In addition to excluding improvisatory musics from other cultures, an understanding of improvisation rooted in such legible performance metrics also brushes aside many of the qualities of jazz itself that do not easily fall in line with the musical standards according to which music education is evaluated in university settings, particularly the music and histories of the Black avant-garde. In for-malized jazz education, such avant-garde traditions and the alterna-

tive approaches to improvising that they developed are not so much dismissed as never acknowledged in the first place. Thus, "while jazz has always been a combination of African-American and European American traditions . . . It is important to consider the extent to which [aspects of the] African-American tradition may be declining as jazz is increasingly taught and performed under the aegis of various institutional structures" (McMullen 2019, 98).[11] Together, these developments have resulted in an approach to teaching improvisation that is centered in "traditional" jazz styles, and which is taught through a kind of neoliberal, skills-based epistemology, where students are instructed to input and execute—with a high degree of technical proficiency—a set of predetermined, quantifiable, music-theoretical and stylistic patterns that are seen as essential to the form.

It is this focus on technical proficiency and historical reproductive accuracy that in part accounts for the experience of John Pål Inderberg and Terje Bjørklund, who in 1979 established the first jazz course at Trondheim in explicit opposition to the "Berklee Model," which had served as a consistent reference or benchmark for Norwegian musicians at the time (Vitali 2015, 61). A few years later in 1983, Torgrim Sollid (the drummer in Jan Garbarek's first quartet) visited Berklee after having begun teaching in the Trondheim program. He was struck by the difference in approach, reporting on the visit as follows:

> It was like a factory. It was directed by musicians my age or a few years older, who were terrified by the idea that be-bop could vanish. While going out of their way to save it, and to save the jazz tradition with it, they were destroying all the rest. Everybody was focused on how to listen, learn, and interpret that music, how to play those licks as fast as possible. It was a constant running up and down the scales, all the students were playing the exact same phrases. It was the exact opposite of what we were trying to do! (Vitali 2015, 63)

Following its establishment, "The Trondheim educational model, quite unlike the one followed in the United States, was a source of inspiration for all the conservatories that were established afterwards, which all contributed to freeing the Norwegian jazz scene from the influence of the American tradition" (Vitali 2015, 62).[12] This model, as Mercer outlined above, focuses "primarily on nurturing the students' personalities, rather than on skill and technique as was done in Boston" (61). What this means in practical terms is that students are empowered in a variety of ways to choose their own musical paths, whether through their cur-

ricular choices or through private instruction.

To more fully situate the kinds of learning experiences that Mr. K experienced during their time, consider Winther's description of the program, which he relayed to me via email:

> This is a school where the lectures are mainly focused around learning by ear and [are] kind of rooted in "American jazz." However the actual time we spend in school having lectures and "teacher-student"-time is very limited . . . mostly we are left to ourselves and the rest of the students. (2017a)

Here Winther first describes learning "by ear," which is tremendously significant from what David Borgo calls an "ecological" pedagogical perspective (2007). As opposed to the dominant Western paradigm in which notation is central, learning by ear taps into the active and embodied *doing* of improvisation. By contrast, Borgo argues that a notation-centered model—which we might well identify in dominant "chord-scale" approaches to improvisation seen across American institutions[13]—reflects a "cognitivist" view of pedagogy. In such models, the mind and body are understood as separate entities, and education consists in acquiring new objects of knowledge that the brain can process, decode, and retain (so that, in the case of music, the body can subsequently execute the correct patterns). In this way, "the process of learning 'what' and 'how' to improvise is conceived of as occurring prior to, and separate from, actually 'doing it'" (Borgo 2007, 65). By-ear training disrupts this input/output paradigm inasmuch as it treats knowledge as embodied and situated (hence "ecological")—as something that must be experienced through the activity itself, rather than absorbed in advance, absent all relevant context. An ecological model of pedagogy foregrounds doing above all, understanding knowledge not as a prerequisite to experience, but as emerging from experience itself. As David Dove succinctly puts it: "The music is the pedagogy" (2016).

Corroborating Winther's perspective is the following explanation from Michael Francis Duch, who both attended Trondheim and now teaches there. As he relayed to me,

> Most of the teaching at the jazz department here is [done] aurally: we learn tunes by ear by singing the melody, basslines, broken chords and then taking turns singing choruses. When we know the music by heart (or by ear) we can play it using our instruments. The idea is that by this point you can play the tune in any key. The method is more

or less derived from the Tristano-tradition and has been applied here since 1979. (Duch 2018)

This method of instruction more directly taps into the active, learn-by-doing pedagogy of an ecological model. It also opens up the possibility of focusing on aspects of musical creativity that may become lost or underemphasized in a pedagogy focused on measuring achievable goals. As Borgo writes, programs that are based in notation tend to overemphasize those aspects of musical learning that can be represented on paper. Alternatively, by emphasizing aural learning practices, Duch is able to focus on such areas as the quality of sound itself, on those nuances that "do not easily translate to paper."[14]

The second point Winther describes above—the limited amount of student-teacher interaction—is also fundamental: the seemingly benign fact that the students are left to their own devices belies a profound pedagogical strategy whereby the students are given ample space and time to explore musicking on their own, individually and in groups. Unguided, unobserved playing time allows students to synthesize their learning in applied, creative settings, and the absence of an instructor speaks to a kind of learning that is based in finding one's own way. In other words, students are left on their own not because Trondheim is less pedagogically rigorous, but because it is understood that students will fill their time with the most important music education exercise of all: actually making music.

Finally, it is also important that the ecological approach sketched here not be understood as limited to one or another genre of improvised music, but rather as an approach applied to any music depending on one's interests. As Winther explains it:

> It is a very diverse school in terms of genres, and the teachers have different fields like American jazz, avant-garde, free-improvisation, modern classical music and so on. Klaus and Michael are teachers at the school, so that's how we met them. Me and Karl have spent a lot of time listening to classic jazz music and learning this, but have found other forms of translating this into different kind of more free/experimental music over the years. (2017a)

Here we finally return to the progressive imperative, which manifests in Trondheim's emphasis on stylistic diversity, as opposed to US approaches that seek to educate students primarily in service of replicating a limited, historically grounded notion of genre.

What is the significance of all this? Again, it is not to draw hard distinctions between American and Norwegian approaches to pedagogy, nor is such a distinction meant to uncritically praise Trondheim's approach to jazz education; for while there are many aspects of Trondheim's program that I personally admire and in which I believe, one of the very commonalities in jazz education between Europe and the States remains the ways in which processes of institutionalization and legitimization—no matter the differences outlined here—continue to produce jazz as an increasingly white, male, middle-class space.

What I have tried to show here is simply that these historical and educational factors *matter*—that beyond music-theoretical discourses that foreground questions of technique, compositional approach, or the balance of so-called composed vs. improvised elements, the historical, educational, and political considerations raised in this chapter are actually central in producing the music that we hear, and furthermore, are perceptible in it. This is to say, again, that what it means to improvise is singular, is informed by and exists in dialogue with multiple pasts, and cannot be considered analogous with any other improvisation.

Donuts

In the end, this repetitive music in "Waves" signals an approach to improvising that grows out of the contexts traced throughout this chapter, and which implicates contingency not from an emphasis on openness, but from closure. The notes we hear in "Waves" almost define repetition, supposedly the opposite of improvisation's "quest for the new" (Sparti 2016). Neither the track, at two minutes and 47 seconds, nor the sounds themselves are long enough to constitute a slow development, as longer improvisations (such as those from Pauline Oliveros's Deep Listening Band) might. Instead, the short sounds we hear are mostly repeated, again and again. There is, apparently, almost *no* contingency in this improvisation; but that would only appear to be the case if we limited the question to one specific understanding of contingency, which is the one conflated with notions of "openness," "newness," of unpredictability or ever-renewing possibility. Taking into account the full range of interpretations, where in "Waves" is contingency, or how does it function? In three overlapping phases:

1. <u>Before the performance</u>, these four musicians prepared for it by collecting all the necessary ingredients, which is to say everything that is singular to the performance. The history of Norwegian Im-

provised Music, and the way it combines with pedagogical train-
ing, listening, musical friendships, and all the other relations that
influence a certain approach to sound are conditioned over years.
These specificities, these singularities, are historically contingent
in that they could have been otherwise (closed), but they are
also always contingent insofar as they condition new possibilities
(open): they are interdependent, singular, and bristling with virtu-
alities to be actualized.

2. <u>During the performance</u>, everything that I have just listed was mo-
bilized according to a certain procedure. This procedure is where
musical contingency operates in real-time. In this case, the opera-
tion is not governed by adherence to a certain musical form, or
by the inclusion of written material that must be played, returned
to, begun with, and so on, and so is completely dependent on the
outer frame of possibilities to generate music, the frame of what
we might call the players' musical "personalities." It is a particular
kind of contingency that is not reducible to chance, indetermina-
cy, or even song-based improvisation, as in jazz. It is a contingency
whereby the musical form as well as the content are unknown in
advance, and which emerge through interactive improvisation. Be-
cause of this, the singularity of the outcome is an extension of the
singularity of the factors gathered. That it is singular does not stop
it from being similar to other performances; it is not creation ex
nihilo but one conditioned by a certain shared language.

3. <u>After the performance</u>, the recording is a contingent object that
opens itself to listeners as they open to it. As such, it is vulnerable
to discourse, interpretation, political appropriation or significa-
tion on the part of individuals and groups, in addition to the fact
that it remains open to changes in perception brought about by
ongoing life experiences.

My attempts to elaborate these points through the course of the chapter
have not been made in order to understand how one or another of these
factors caused one or another outcome; the point is rather to under-
stand that the improvisation we are listening to is entirely and situation-
ally dependent on a range of forces, that speaking of improvisation only
at the level of formal musical characteristics is inadequate to the task of
understanding what is happening in the situation as a whole.

It is now possible to ask the question, What is improvisation *doing* here?
It would indeed be difficult to answer if we considered improvisation

according to many of its most persistent characterizations. Improvisation here does not sound as a virtuosic capacity for self-expression, nor as music that "cannot be readily scripted, predicted, or compelled into orthodoxy" (Caines and Heble 2015, 2). This completely improvised track departs even from improvisation's own etymological connotations: as "literally that which is unforeseen," improvisation "refers to that which cannot be anticipated" (Sparti 2016, 184). By contrast, this track quickly *establishes and satisfies anticipation*, revealing not any predetermination on the part of the performers but rather the limitations of the concept of improvisation as it is most commonly understood. "Waves," though improvised, becomes foreseeable or even predictable and remains so. In discussing this track, then, improvisation might as well be left out entirely; this could be a minimalist composition, for all intents and purposes.

However, from the perspective of contingency, first of all, the repetition we hear is not repetition at all; rather, through the physicality of the specific instruments—the fact that wind instruments must be blown, the fact that the bass bow is only so long—we hear in each rearticulation the physicality of the notes themselves. And by virtue of this physicality, we are made to feel how each repeated note is always also different—"just the same, but brand new."[15] Improvisation, considered as coextensive with contingency, has to do in this case not with the open and limitless potential of the music but with the singular magic, the closed specificity of *these* musicians selecting *these* notes, meeting in *this* context. Yes, the improvised performance is ostensibly open, but it is always only open in a certain way: the performance is conditioned by the musical histories of the participants themselves, and their group aesthetic as it has been developed over a period of years. This results not only in unique music but in a context-specific approach to improvisation. The question is not about the openness of the music but the delight of contingency that occurs when these four musicians set their musical voices against one another. The resulting music is in a way closed, as all recordings are, but it is no less contingent for it, especially given that each closure is already again an opening: the fold of the recording opens up when we hear it again. The notes themselves will never again be different notes, but that does not mean that they will not change. The difference is in the set of possibilities and contingencies involved.

FOUR | Gunweep | Elephant in the Room

Ingrid Laubrock and Kris Davis are prolific composer-improvisers who have established themselves at the height of the contemporary New York avant-garde and Improvised Music scenes. In this chapter, I listen critically to the two improvisations that appear on their 2020 duo recording, *Blood Moon*. In the previous two chapters, I examined only individual tracks in order to emphasize the kind of exhausting implications that can spill out from a single recording. Here, I bring two tracks into conversation with each other because of their context: "Gunweep" and "Elephant in the Room" are the only full improvisations that appear on *Blood Moon*, and the pair that they form resembles the binal collaboration that is central to my reading of the album. This chapter asks what it means to improvise in the intimate space of a duet, a space shaped by years of collaboration, and by the deep knowledge that comes from inhabiting similar worlds. Davis and Laubrock not only share a certain aesthetic vocabulary; they are also women improvising in a shared context. The historical development of both jazz and experimental music carries a specific, radical political valence, while also emerging as a male-dominated and often misogynistic space. What does it mean then to improvise: as women, in this set of musical traditions, in 2020, and in ways that result in the sounds that we hear on *Blood Moon*? As with the other cases in this book, addressing such questions helps us to think about how improvisation functions as a total social phenomenon, linking together contingent forces in a moment. My answers to these questions emerge from listening closely both to the music and to Davis's and Laubrock's words about their music. These lead consistently to a view of improvisation that sounds a musical intimacy, based in friendship, and which I suggest produces a feminist affect in the music. As I will elabo-

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rate, this affect is feminist not because we are listening to "women in music," but because of the ways in which an improvisatory praxis of care and reciprocity becomes inherently political in the context of our capitalist and patriarchal culture.

Sounding Intimacy

"Gunweep" is the first fully improvised track on *Blood Moon*, appearing in the third slot. At first we hear Laubrock alone, in the upper register of the soprano saxophone. Her sound is ethereal: aside from occasional punctuations in the lower register, Laubrock weaves around breathy pitches, at times sounding like a flute, particularly when bending notes out of shape. "Gunweep" is not necessarily built around such microtonalities (as for example "Blood Moon" is); but this distinctive sound is nevertheless a part of the vocabulary that marks the album as a whole. The feeling here is ambiguous: a bit haunting, a bit melodic, but mostly anticipatory. At 0:51, what we didn't know we were waiting for happens out of nowhere.

The way I hear it, Laubrock was simply landing on an E—"simply" meaning that the E was not "intended," per se, to signal anything new or to indicate a change in the improvisation—at the exact moment that Davis decided to begin playing for the first time. Hearing Davis enter, however, Laubrock turns the E into a pedal point, a platform on which Davis begins to dance. Davis is flying here, running rapidly across huge ranges of the piano; but rather than simply taking off into a soloistic display, she picks up on the pedal E that Laubrock established, and makes that the focal point of her movements, returning to it time and again. This is an early and critical example of how these musicians communicate deep listening: it is not just that they "respond" to each other, but that their responses directly acknowledge what the other has communicated by restating or further developing the sounds of the other. Meanwhile, Laubrock has now inverted her initial approach by exploring the "squawky" articulations that were previously points of structuring contrast against breathy, fluttering sounds, and which are now more central.

These explorations—improvisations within and utilizing the thematic material that has presented itself—culminate when Laubrock takes the pedal point back, this time fluttering on it rapidly with double or triple tonguing, before Davis slams a low A in a gesture that unequivocally communicates the end of this section of the improvisation, lasting almost exactly one minute. What is striking here again, besides the virtuosity,

is the economy of gesture, or how effectively communication happens. Many improvisations, most especially unstructured ones, can be characterized as successful or unsuccessful almost exclusively by how well musical communication is perceived and how decisively its messages are acted upon. In other words, the difference between an unconvincing performance and a convincing one often comes down to nothing more than the extent to which musicians waffle indecisively versus "choosing," based on an utterance from their peers, how to respond. It is difficult to describe what I mean by this, because there is no quality of the low A that Davis plays which necessarily signals "I intend for this section to end now, please follow my intention." In fact, if Laubrock had responded differently to this note, in retrospect we might have heard *that* response as the most appropriate, and might therefore hear the A as functioning differently than as we hear it now. There are a variety of ways to respond to a gesture like that, any number of which would be convincing enough to mark Davis's note as signaling X musical event. It is only because the choice we hear, the choice to "move on" was selected so instantly and so decisively that we now hear it as a clear and unambiguous signal.

Within this performance, there is no gap, hesitation, delay, or static; Laubrock stops playing at precisely the moment Davis hits that A, and the next section of the improvisation begins immediately, with both players musically aware (if not consciously) that this is what's happening. They move together in unison from saxophone solo (1) to development (2) to this now third, new space, contributing to each section collaboratively, but in different ways. Laubrock and Davis are deeply in synch, and the track has a definite structure as a result. The connection between these two musicians and the seamless musical responses it allows are central to my reading in this chapter. But so too is the fact that this music, however seamless, is not entirely linear; in this track we can hear both musicians invested in codeveloping what they have sounded to each other, rather than moving endlessly forward.

The next section of the track sees Davis punching thick chords in a syncopated rhythm, a backdrop that distantly recalls the famous dance section in *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Davis adds more space, however, and changes the chords regularly, building tension that Laubrock almost ignores—that is, for a while anyway, she is soloing motivically and lyrically, above the fray. Her quiet, glossy tone slides around, and instead of complimenting Davis's aggression, balances it through contrast. Rather than hearing this contrast as divergent, it sounds to me as another form of support, this time by balancing or counterweight, so as to let both

parts shine. This contrast is soon left behind, when Davis holds out a chord a little bit longer than previously, and Laubrock jumps all over that space—her solo becomes aggressive, and the two of them play in this louder zone for just a moment. Afterward, as Davis is moving clustered eighth notes upward on the keyboard, Laubrock joins, playing in time (mostly on the downbeats), and winding the dynamic level collectively downward. This circuitous movement—in time, directional—sounds transitionary, but also lasts for a significant period of time, from 2:52 arguably until the end of the piece (4:34), becoming a section in its own right. It begins to unspool itself a bit near 3:11, when Davis moves from eighth notes to dotted-quarters, setting up a hemiola with Laubrock's quarter notes. This riff eventually inspires the ending motif, which sees Davis move back and forth—in time, but highly syncopated—between two chords, an extended sus-chord and its chromatic embellishment.[1] This repetitive motif, on top of which Laubrock improvises, lasts until the very end, when an unresolved chord is held out, dissolving.

In "Gunweep," every movement signifies a specific function, and every group of movements forms a section. It is not a free-wheeling improvisation, though it is unstructured; rather, each section is first built and established by the two musicians, before it is explored, however briefly or thoroughly. Finally, any aspect of any section can become the germ that spawns something new; neither player knows what this germ will be, but when one or the other acts as if *this* gesture is, the other responds by accepting that premise. Nothing is moved through or passed by arbitrarily. Laubrock and Davis follow each other into a range of spaces, turning them inside out and making new ones from some remainder.

Rather than foregrounding communicative immediacy, "Elephant in the Room" models a more deliberative and spacious exchange, where music happens in the spaces that Laubrock and Davis leave for one another. They each offer slow, long, quiet gestures, one at a time, first Laubrock and then Davis and then back again until these gestures have accumulated into phrases, and phrases into layers. Each musician waits for the other to respond, leaving space to hear how the other moves. Improvised music is nearly constantly described as conversational, an analogy I find both problematic and tiresome. And yet, the beginning of this track proceeds in a way as comparable to a dialogue as any music I can recall. I don't hear it as a "call and response," which is too discrete and declarative a description for the slow, accumulating project here; rather than vacillating between individual statements, "Elephant in the Room" is a project that Davis and Laubrock build mutually. It is patient,

deeply predicated on listening, and it moves conjointly through periods of relative density and dynamic variation. In short, it is "duo music" at its core. There are clear moments of movement, where both players take something and run with it in respective directions, overlapping more than taking turns. There are also clear moments of settling, where both players wait for the sounds they have just made to finish creating space, allowing time to breathe and to open their eyes so as to see the shape it has taken. Eventually, the back-and-forth quality gives way to a more mutual construction—but even in the climax, where both players patiently build tension, something of the initial mood remains intact. In contrast to "Gunweep," "Elephant in the Room" never escalates too much, never develops per se or strays too far from its initial gestures. The track is mostly meditative, with undertones at times lyrical and unnerving. There is something being turned over here, not so much interrogated as felt out. Although it does move, I hear this improvisation as a single, contemplative thought, explored patiently and expanding only internally. The initial impulse is respected throughout.

Between these two tracks, then, we have a kind of dialogic pair: the first consists of multiple, thematic sections, and includes a range of moods from lyrical to fiery. The second track asks and answers what it means to explore a single premise, patiently and collaboratively. Together, the varying ways in which both improvisations are collaboratively constructed evinces what we could call "musical intimacy," a kind of care in sound that is made possible by deep listening and shared experiences, both musical and social. The fact that we can perceive this care as listeners is what causes me to claim that this music produces a feminist affect.[2]

Language | Format

Feminist affect is not an overt political position, nor is it traceable to certain combinations of sounds; rather, it is an irreducible yet perceptible force that we feel in the way that improvisation is handled: as opposed to the interactive linearity of "Out to Lunch," as opposed to the infinite repetitive depth of "Waves," both improvisations on *Blood Moon* create and then probe small soundworlds, collaboratively and reciprocally—it is this mutual exploration of a shared construction that make perceptible the musical and social relationships between Laubrock and Davis (which in turn make the music possible). These interconnected qualities— shared musical approach and shared life experiences—are central to this chapter, and will return continuously through various invocations

of musical intimacy. In using shared space to create shared space, these musicians express a deep musical connection in a world where intimacy of any kind is still coded feminine and therefore subversive, leftist, disparaged. Given the political valence of friendship among women, I propose that this audible relationship is an inherently political one.

Consider, for example, the musicians' own description of their musical vocabulary. In the liner notes, Laubrock is quoted: "Over the years we've just developed a certain language that's our language." And later, "I don't know many people I could do this with other than Kris. Musically, we are kindred spirits" (quoted in Jones 2020). There are three points here: first, that such a musical sensibility feels shared between these two performers is one aspect of how listeners can perceive intimacy and collaboration in the music, producing an aesthetic of care that is perceptible through the affect of sound more so than any genre affiliations. Second, the musical language that we hear in both the compositions and the improvisations is a lexicon that has been codeveloped over a period of years. Laubrock and Davis could hardly draw upon such language, could hardly utilize it and continue to refine it if it had not been established through shared experiences. Third, beyond the importance of the stylistic or strictly musical vocabulary, this partnership, this personal/professional relationship is in and of itself critical, since it is the heart of *Blood Moon*, the most central condition of its emergence. To situate it more completely, we need to think about the nature of the duo in improvised music generally, and the nature of this duo specifically.

In improvised music, the duo format holds a particular significance. Some players maintain that the duo is so special and forceful that every band, at its core, forms itself around the energy (whether complimentary or agonistic) between two players. If this theory holds any validity, it is not because such organizations are intentional; rather, members of the band, as they attune to the music that is made collectively, orient around certain forces, situating themselves in relation (whether in the center or the periphery). For many, this is a compelling theory because of the experiences that we have had playing in duos. When improvising with only one other person, there is a feeling of immediacy, intimacy, and directness that is difficult to fully reproduce in other situations. There is less mediation in a duo format, less distance to traverse, or fewer things standing in between your music and their music. The time it takes to respond can be more immediate, and the music is more responsive as a result. Because there are only two musical "intentions" at a given time, those intentions are in constant conversation, and never have the oppor-

tunity to become passive. The duo format is therefore prized as a peda-
gogical exercise; through playing with one other person, we learn what
it means to listen deeply. In a way, all improvisations aspire to the kind of
intimate listening that is more easily and perhaps only possible between
two people.

Where this particular duo is concerned, it is clear that Davis and
Laubrock play together as they do because of a shared history, and
because of accumulated trust. In an email exchange, Laubrock explained
it to me this way:

> Kris Davis and I have been playing together since 2009 when I moved
> to Brooklyn. We have played a lot of each other's music ranging from
> my groups Anti-House, her quintet Capricorn Climber and even
> my orchestra music. We also had a trio called Paradoxical Frog with
> Tyshawn Sorey that played original compositions. We know each
> other very well musically, while still being able to challenge ourselves.
> Musically we are kindred spirits and we are also close friends. There
> is a lot of trust between us, which helps the music. (Laubrock 2020)

But beyond the trust necessary for improvising, the logistical mechanics
of the composing and recording processes were also dependent on the
relationship between these musicians.

> Because of that, we were able to put this record together very quickly.
> I am not sure what Kris' compositional process was, but I wrote my
> share of the compositions in 5 days, which is faster than I usually work.
> It helps knowing who you write for! We then had two rehearsals and
> two warm-up concerts and went to the studio, all within the space of a
> week. It was concentrated yet still felt fresh, which is important for the
> improvisational pathways we weave into the compositions. (Laubrock
> 2020)

This quote illustrates the full extent of what it means to claim that Lau-
brock and Davis share a musical vocabulary. While it might be possible
to identify shared chord patterns or motives through a music-theoretical
frame, the more relevant "metric" here is Laubrock's description of the
recording process, which testifies to the musical intimacy that makes this
music possible in the first place. Their history is what makes a "concen-
trated" production work, and the concentrated period in turn keeps the
music "fresh."

Thus the intimate two-ness of *Blood Moon* is not incidental but fundamental. "Intimate," like "contingent," refers to magic through contact: the Latin *intimare*, means to impress, to make familiar, we might say, through touch or contingency. Through repeated collaborations, through multiple contacts, Laubrock and Davis touch each other's music, making an impression that becomes a part of their own sound. Also relevant to the duo is the sense of the adjective *intimum* as inmost: with less mediation, this contact is as close as it can be. Such musical intimacy does not always or necessarily speak about personal intimacy; but when it does, this should not be understood as an accident. Not only are Davis and Laubrock friends outside of "work," but Laubrock also regularly performs in duo format with her husband Tom Rainey—in fact, the first time they played together was as a duo. Beyond such immediate personal connections there are also others. For instance, Laubrock writes: "*Blood Moon* is the second installment of a duet series with pianists. The first one was *Kasumi* with Aki Takase, a pianist I first heard as a teenager and was probably the first woman I ever saw play jazz" (Laubrock 2020). Here, a direct link is made between the duo project and a meaningful encounter, meaningful in part because of Takase's gender.

Gender | Affect

It is critical to address gender here, not to point out that Laubrock and Davis are "women in jazz"—a persistent framing which, however intended to help identify the scene as male-dominated and to offer correctives, often ends up performing ambivalently[3]—but rather because thinking improvisation through contingency necessitates thinking through the ways that "subjectivity is a complex negotiation of lived embodied experience and social forces that work to regulate behavior and therefore shape that experience" (Siddall and Waterman 2016, 3). That is to say that while the meaning and significance of these improvisations is not reducible to gender, these improvisations are also not possible as such without the people who made them.

In Susan McClary's groundbreaking book *Feminine Endings* (1991), she famously argues that classical music contains a sexual politics in its formal qualities, qualities that had, in the (still) white-male-dominated tradition of Western music theory, been understood as neutral or "purely musical." Overturning the traditional musicological/music-theoretical conceit that music exists independently of its cultural environment, McClary shows how classical music narratively constructs conflicts that

are staged and eventually overcome, conflicts that are explicitly gendered and follow gendered narratives inherited from Western patriarchal discourses. Building on her analyses of opera characters and the music that helps to construct their stories, McClary shows how chromaticism and minor-key movements are coded feminine and are presented as challenges that both male protagonists and (coded male) tonic key centers must overcome. After such middle movements, where "madwomen," "hysterics," or sexually deviant female characters present conflict in the narrative (and in the original key center), the eventual triumph of the male character (and his virtue) is musically signaled by the return and reassertion of tonic major, read as sanity, moral clarity, masculine rationality, and so on. While such narratives may be more obvious in operatic works, the power of McClary's intervention lies in how clearly it shows identical dynamics in so-called Absolute Music like Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony.

In "The Gender of Sound," Ann Carson traces such sonic dynamics to the Greeks, and the way that (gendered) sound factors into the notion of *sophrosyne*, a certain model of virtue and sound-mindedness that translated differently for men and women. As Carson writes,

> Female sophrosyne is coextensive with female obedience to male direction and rarely means more than chastity. When it does mean more, the allusion is often to sound. A husband exhorting his wife or concubine to *sophrosyne* is likely to mean "Be quiet!" (1995, 126)

In this framework, the sounds that women make or are perceived to make become conflated with "unacceptable" behavior (for its lack of deference to patriarchal authority) or otherwise undesirable personal characteristics deriving from ostensibly inherent female traits. Thus, instrumental music and indeed sounds themselves carry historic, powerful semiotic codes that contribute to and interact with our cultural discourses. These codes are contextually specific: chromaticism does not signal hysterical femininity, for instance, in the jazz tradition, where extended harmonies and complex chromatic embellishments are routine. Rather, improvisation in what we might call "traditional jazz" genres has been explicitly gendered masculine.

Beyond the fact that jazz discourse and opportunities within the industry have been dominated by men, the actual sounds of jazz improvisation—especially given the centrality of the soloist—themselves connote masculinity by virtue of a series of historical associations. As I

referenced in chapters 2 and 3, bebop provided a means for Black musicians to accrue cultural capital in a racist society through demonstrations of mastery and masculine prowess, traits that have now been divorced from their original context and intensified by jazz's institutionalization in competitive music programs. Such demonstrations often occur in jam sessions and "cutting contests," public performances that facilitate competitive approaches to the music. In this sense, as Jayne Caudwell notes, "jazz and sport share aesthetic, embodied and socio-cultural practices that define participation and styles of play" (2010, 241) and "achieving [the] ideal improvisatory-aesthetic is often entrenched in an unfettered competitiveness in which embodied battles for rank are evident" (244). Over time, both musical vocabulary and jazz cultures have cohered around a certain set of gendered dynamics or taken-for-granted, "common-sense" constructions, for example: "singers are not 'real' musicians, women are largely ignored, and men are portrayed according to how well they can play—the better a male musician's 'chops,' the more likely he is to be idolized within the canon" (Willis 2008, 294).

There is obviously nothing inherently masculine in the sound of jazz. But because of this history, it continues to signify masculinity, particularly when it comes to individual soloists and venerated male visionary figures. This semiotic coding is reinforced by sexism in the jazz industry writ large. Creating and maintaining spaces where there aren't many women, nonbinary, queer, or otherwise non–straight/cis men makes it easier to continue to discursively construct jazz as a practice for men, even or especially if this "discourse" goes unspoken.

Beyond historical and interpersonal associations, the masculine coding of jazz is also partially enabled by the form of jazz tunes themselves. While much has been made of the collective, interactive elements of jazz performance, it is nevertheless true that collectivity and interactivity take place within proscribed parameters, all of which are supportive of and subordinate to the soloist of the moment. Therefore, the more apt of the traditional characterizations of jazz performance is the one in which "everyone has their say," a description that was always distinctly meaningful for the Black Americans who created this music, and whose lives in racist American society did not provide comparable opportunities for agency and expression. In this way, the practice of giving everyone their say dovetails with the increasing conflation between improvised soloing and masculinized performance during the bebop era: at the same time that jazz provided an opportunity for Black agency, this agency is arguably achieved through a format that

focuses on competition and performative prowess, albeit in collaborative contexts.

In contrast to this kind of one at a time procedure, emphasis on the individual is often consciously left behind in Improvised Music. For the composer-improviser Anna Webber, "[improvised music is] definitely much more based on building something together, rather than 'this is my moment to have a fucking solo and you guys have to accompany me in this way'" (quoted in Hannaford 2017 6). To what extent, then, can we read the improvisations on *Blood Moon* as nonmasculine, or as a kind of feminist intervention in that competitive individualist model? As Ajay Heble and Gillian Siddall ask, is it this kind of "'out jazz' that might be seen to do this kind of [feminist] political work?" (2000, 146).

Despite the potential for such unconventional sounds to signify progressive politics, reading either Improvised Music as a whole or else *Blood Moon* specifically through the lens of genre is of limited use. As Heble and Siddall note, there are plenty of examples of avant-garde music that are still heavily coded as masculine, regardless of any progressive connotations, and there are plenty of difficulties with mapping hegemonic and counterhegemonic readings onto genres in general—particularly given that industry practitioners continue to favor men at all levels. Noting such difficulties, the authors take a more qualified approach to their question by examining specific cases over general genre arguments. For an example that will return later, they write for instance that "[Pauline] Oliveros's aesthetic of receptivity . . . rehabilitates a model of creative practice that, because of its reliance on intuition, has been traditionally devalued as 'feminine'" (2000, 159).

Similarly focusing on a single case, Julie Dawn Smith (2008) argues that the conscious deployment of hysterical aesthetics in the improvisations of Les Diaboliques perform a specific reappropriation of the tropes of the hysterical woman: by utilizing sounds that deliberately signify gendered madness, Les Diaboliques purposefully break conventional musical bounds (read as "rational"), deploying this established feminist practice as a way of asserting subjectivity through improvisation. This analysis is not predicated on genre alone, but on a specific analysis of embodied and gendered performance and its intersections with gendered discourses that attach themselves to sounds.

Writing in *Music Theory Online*, Marc Hannaford theorizes another specific approach by locating what he calls "subjective (re)positioning" in the improvisations of Laubrock and other contemporary women musicians Linda May Han Oh, Shannon Barnett, Caroline Davis, and Anna

Webber. Hannaford describes subjective (re)positioning as "an aural demonstration of agency" that "testifies to the trust between ensemble members" (Hannaford 2017, 2). This demonstration allows women improvisers to push back against dominant identity discourses by creating a space of trust in performance. After having interviewed these musicians, Hannaford suggests that we can hear such moments of agency in their music. It can be taken for granted, to a certain extent, that women improvising their own music will express agency. But Hannaford helpfully locates that agency in specific sounds and movements, helping us to understand the ways in which music that may appear on a surface level analogous with other improvised or avant-garde sounds nevertheless carries traces of the specific people who are making it. Indeed, my concern here is also to do with the traces of our living bodies that linger in sound: in my view, the political significance of these improvisations lies less in the semiotic interpretation of genre and more in the degree to which they produce a feminist affect.

Political Discourse | Political Embodiment

We come to the notion of embodied affect in part through Laubrock's own words. Before exploring embodiment in detail, then, it is important to also consider the way that Davis and Laubrock talk about the political trajectory of their own music and careers, since talking about music—especially in public discourse—is one of the important and limited ways in which sociopolitical notions become attached to sounds. In the beginning of this chapter, I asked what it means to make this kind of music in 2020, and this is a question that I also posed to Laubrock:

> DD: Moving out from the record a bit, I'm interested in how you think about your music in a broader context. On a very basic level, I wonder all the time about what improvised music means right now. In the 1960s, jazz, free jazz, and experimental music all had a clear orientation toward politics, however complicated those positions might appear to us now. It seems to me that today, improvisers don't talk much about politics, while on the other hand, popular music has taken over as a space where we have many conversations about politics (in the broad sense—particularly when it comes to issues of identity such as race and gender). Does that seem to be the case to you, or have I missed something? And in either case, can you reflect

a bit about politics in this music scene, however it appears to you or however you think about it? I'm thinking here too about the sort of perpetual rediscovery of gender inequity in really all music industries, but particularly instrumental Western genres like jazz.

IL: You might be right there. At times I shy away from it because I so often see musicians use it as a promotional and publicity tool under the mantle of "using their platform" as an artist and I don't want to exploit that. Having said that, I am definitely politically aware and interested—I went to 5 or 6 of the recent protests for example—but I tend to keep it separate from music. Our music is so left field that I know that my audience's opinion is pretty much aligned with mine, I talk to a lot of them.

Having said that, all emotions filter into the expressive part of improvising, and music has always been a cathartic outlet for me, so whatever I feel about issues does get expressed—if not with words. We are musicians and that is the best way I can express. We do talk about politics A LOT amongst musicians and female musicians often bring up gender issues. It's important to address these, especially as so much of the jazz scene is a bit of an old boys club. I will always call out sexist behavior personally and stand up for anyone if I see an injustice, but I think that performing publicly for so many years now and producing regularly is also a way of (hopefully) inspiring younger women, possibly more than what I could do with words. (Having said that, there are people who write very well and express themselves well and I salute them using that gift of course. The singer Fay Victor comes to mind for example). (Laubrock 2020)

There are several implications in this nuanced response that are helpful for understanding this case study. First, Laubrock points to the use of gender by some of her peers as, in her perception, a kind of marketing tactic or "publicity tool." This impression speaks to a notion of liberal identity politics that, as Nancy Fraser and others have argued, emerged in tandem with neoliberalism and which replaces concerns about structural inequities with questions of (often superficial) representation (Fraser 2013). Similarly, Sarah Banet-Weiser elaborates "popular feminism" as a spectrum of widespread feminist messaging, "where spectacular, media

friendly expressions such as celebrity feminism and corporate feminism achieve more visibility, and expressions that critique patriarchal structures and systems of racism and violence are more obscured" (Banet-Weiser 2018, 4). This connects to Laubrock's description insofar as, for popular feminism, "Spectacle is key: feminism is performed as ethical consumption and personal branding" (James 2020, 4). Such "branding," as the only really viable currency in neoliberal culture, is the defining feature of popular feminism's promise as well as its perils: its widespread visibility helps to "raise awareness" of gender inequality, while simultaneously obscuring the way that such inequality is dependent on deeper social structures. Feminist messaging that is approachable and accepted within contemporary neoliberalism is inherently unthreatening to that system, and treats visibility itself as an end-goal rather than a means to an end (Banet-Weiser 2018).

Instead of trying to address or change underlying structural conditions of oppression, Laubrock's comment implies that some artists align themselves with superficial displays of "pro-woman" politics, a kind of performance which, while it might articulate positive cultural messages, also arguably reinforces rather than weakens neoliberal political structures: if it appears that "diverse" groups of people are being "included" in a given industry (jazz, in this case, but substitute the field of your choice), that industry as it exists structurally can continue to operate as normal. Rather than contesting "diversity," therefore, mainstream neoliberal culture welcomes it as a token gesture, turning its exclusionary mechanisms not toward those who are different, but to those who are inadequately profitable, or who otherwise exist outside the bounds of what the market has deemed acceptable behavior (Winnubst 2015; James 2019). In this paradigm, appearing to align one's "personal brand" with ostensibly progressive values can help to accrue cultural capital without necessarily doing anything to address the issue about which one is speaking.

I read Laubrock's reticence to speak publicly about gender as an effort to avoid this type of performative or branded feminism. At the same time, Laubrock provides a kind of ambivalent response about her own approach to politics. She is on the one hand "politically aware and interested," and she talks with her friends "A LOT" about these issues. She also writes that it is "important to address" gender issues, but that her preferred means of doing so have to do with performing and producing music. These are not contradictory points, but ones that shed light on each other: by referencing her actions, Laubrock does not defer speaking about feminism as much as she draws attention to her manner

of speaking through specific practices, demonstrating a practice-based alternative to the kind of performative identity politics she critiques. Focusing on her work as a musician seems to be Laubrock's way of avoiding a kind of popular feminism while also maintaining its importance in her practice.

For her part, having been named an Associate Program Director at the Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice, Davis is a visible avatar of feminism in Improvised Music, and as a result, she has been asked about her political perspective in several interviews. Her response to one such question gives us some insight into her view:

> KD: Terri [Lyne Carrington] offered me a position at Berklee, where she teaches, in her new Institute for Jazz and Gender Justice. . . . I teach with one group on free improvisation and with another on contemporary composition. We also receive many guests every semester who discuss issues related to gender equality and inclusion in jazz.
>
> MJ: That's really interesting. How [have] you evolved [on] the gender issues in music/jazz?
>
> KD: I think it is important to discuss gender issues in jazz, because that is how people become aware of these issues and that progressive change takes place. In my work, I focus on discussing gender equality with young musicians, because they are the ones who will ultimately contribute to the paradigm shift. (Davis in Jouan 2020)[4]

While in some ways it appears in this quote that Davis is willing to explicitly discuss her views of gender and/in jazz, I read her response more in alignment with Laubrock's—that is, both agree that it is important to address issues of gender in improvised music, but both seem to defer speaking in detail about their perspectives, instead answering the question by describing an action-based aspect of their practice. Where Laubrock speaks of conversations with friends and music fans, as well as performing and producing new music, Davis references her work with young musicians. Pressed to speak a bit further, the next exchange proceeds as follows:

> MJ: Have you [experienced] situations regarding [the question of] gender issues in your life as a musician? And what about now, since #metoo for instance, has it changed?
>
> KD: Of course there is heightened awareness around gender issues

> not just in music but in all fields. I feel there is progress being
> made, but again, I am focusing on the younger generation to
> create awareness around these issues, because I believe they
> are the ones who will make a serious impact around change.
> (Davis in Jouan 2020)

Asked about her own experiences of sexism, Davis defers here, again
raising her work with students. However, Davis goes further in a more
recent interview on the new music website I Care If You Listen (Norris
2020), which is part of a funded initiative explicitly concerned with
"amplifying today's women, trans, and nonbinary artists." Here, Davis
elaborates her views of racism and sexism in the jazz world, again focus-
ing on education by describing both the gatekeeping function of tradi-
tional jazz pedagogy, as well as the potential to change the industry by
changing the conversations happening in schools:

> For decades, jazz education has focused on teaching within a narrow
> scope, specifically the jazz canon of the 1950s and 1960s—a practice
> saliently reflective of racism and patriarchy. As with any tradition,
> studying its language, craft, and historical context provides neces-
> sary, invaluable understanding; unfortunately, along with teaching
> these critical elements of the music, guard rails have been imposed
> as to what jazz is and isn't. For instance, this criteria includes play-
> ing rhythm changes at extremely fast tempos or knowing a lot of jazz
> standards by memory. . . . Not surprisingly, this approach of mentor-
> ship has aged poorly, and continues to alienate many talented young
> musicians—especially women—pushing them away from the music.
> (Davis in Norris 2020)

Here it is clear not only that, but also how, Davis's praxis is explic-
itly informed by gender: as with Laubrock, these themes are not overtly
expressed either in the "content" of her music or in public discourse
about her music. Rather, a gender-informed perspective is most appar-
ent in other aspects of Davis's professional life. Beyond her new role at
Berklee, for instance, in 2016 Davis also created a nonprofit record label,
Pyroclastic, through which she can directly and materially support women
in Improvised Music. In a different interview, she describes this effort:

> I'm trying to encourage artists who are thinking about gender equal-
> ity. So male artists who are hiring women and mentoring them or
> choosing to work with women, also to find some kind of gender bal-

ance in their groups, is really important to me. So it is a part of the decision-making process going forward. And also hiring women as leaders too. So I'm trying to find a balance over the year of these elements. (Davis in Sharpe 2020, 12)

In her capacity as producer and label-owner, Davis wields her own kind of gate-keeping power, power that has traditionally been the purview of white men, and which can function in ways that pursue social justice as a corrective to the kinds of exclusionary mechanisms for which the music industry is notorious.[5] This, along with her teaching, is a critical aspect of how gender factors into Davis's praxis as a composer, performer, educator, and producer.

Neither Davis nor Laubrock tend to describe their music in political terms. Rather, they discuss their politics in the context of their actions as music professionals. Similarly, the feminist affect generated by *Blood Moon* does not emerge from any overt content in the music but instead comes from the effects of the specific approaches that these musicians take toward playing together. I insist that this affect is perceptible—as Laubrock puts it, "all emotions filter into the expressive part of improvising" (Laubrock 2020), attesting to the fact that her own political orientation in the world is inseparable from her music, even if it is not discussed. This is how we return to the notion of a feminist affect, an embodied and irreducible force that is produced by the traces of subjectivity Laubrock and Davis leave in sound.

What does it mean to speak of improvisation as an embodied practice? First, that the accumulation of who we are, in flux with a moment, is present and agentic at the time of performance. Not only our intentions, conscious thoughts, artistic ambitions, but also moods, emotions, and the ways that our identities have been shaped by power and by cultural discourses—all of these parameters, and whatever else constitutes the experience of subjectivity, are required and brought to bear in a given improvisation. Some of these elements are known to us and are within our ability to affect; others are not. The first implication of thinking improvisation as embodied is that the way our social experiences in the world structure our own subjectivity—as gendered people, for example—is a critical contingency on which the music depends.

Second, it is not just that our particular bodies make the music in question possible; embodied improvisation also means that, like the traces of physical space that linger in recorded sound, traces of subjectivity are perceptible by listeners. It is not enough to consider that Davis

and Laubrock are playing a certain genre of Improvised Music; we must also consider *how* they do so. Like jazz singers who assert their subjectivity in songs written by men through the "grain" of their voices (Willis 2008), this music is particularized and expressed in specific and forceful ways. Thus, the feminist intervention that I hear in *Blood Moon* is not necessarily one that derives from an analysis of song forms, musical structures, or other music-theoretical considerations. To answer the question of whether or not this music can be read as producing a feminist orientation, I turn now to the way that embodiment lingers in sound.

Feminist Affect | Musical Intimacy

Blood Moon's affect emerges as a result of the multiple dynamics that have been analyzed throughout this chapter: collaboration, composition, deep listening, industry activism, musical intimacy, pedagogy, and duo improvisation between two women friends, embodied in a moment. Certainly, the formal qualities of the music are involved; but unlike semiotic analysis, it is not about the aesthetic style or musical form as much as it is how these musicians proceed in their playing. Feminist affect emerges here from a specific combination of musical vocabulary, touch, timbre, communication, and an overall practice that departs from masculinist approaches to sound. In particular, the "responsiveness" we hear is a kind of nonconscious anticipation or feeling out of the other's needs, where "needs" sounds too literal, and refers only to a coevolving feeling of what will make the music sound right according to a preexisting familiarity with one another's aesthetic and personal sensibilities. To do this cannot mean executing certain patterns or memorized rules; it requires sensitivity and intuition built by years of experience.

As we have already heard, this deep and expressive synergy between Davis and Laubrock makes itself felt in breathtaking moments of clarity, where, as in "Gunweep," the bottom suddenly drops out (1:47) or a new spark is lit, conjunctively (0:50; 1:57; 2:49). It makes itself felt in the way that one musician's gesture is held and supported by the other, in multiple ways. (For instance, in "Elephant in the Room" Davis's repeated motives support by providing a backdrop for Laubrock's more forward-sounding lines, from 1:00–2:00. Other times, support means going along for the ride, or moving in synch, as both players do when escalating the dynamic and the range upward from 2:30–2:54. Or else, support can mean deliberately contrasting one movement with another: notice how Laubrock takes space for just a moment, at 2:13 to embellish a solois-

tic line against Davis's dreamy, more elongated chord tones. But notice too how even in this brief flourish of contrasting expression, Laubrock both ended her previous phrase [2:06] and began the phrase in question by playing notes that Davis was *also* playing—how even contrast is not a departure but a balance based in acknowledgment of the other.) Through these gestures and more, we begin to feel a shared musical vocabulary that isn't built from phrases and licks as much as it is understanding of what the other's music is asking for and how to provide it. Davis and Laubrock do this equally for one another, while remaining discernibly distinct as musicians.

The improvisations on *Blood Moon* thus uniquely create a feminist affect by sounding the deep listening and close connection between these two musicians, in sounding what I have been calling a musical intimacy: in turning on a dime, supporting through contrast, holding space for one another, and collectively building improvised sonic worlds, Davis and Laubrock perform a musical intimacy that is more direct than in their compositions. "Gunweep" and "Elephant in the Room" are unequivocal in their presentation: they foreground, aurally and haptically, the relationship that makes this music what it is, because we can hear deep listening and responsive support partially due to our knowledge that it's happening in real-time.

In the same way that Laubrock and Davis have—separately and together—established spaces for themselves and those close to them in an industry, in an artistic lineage, they also craft sonic spaces together, moving about and pushing sounds around as an expression of their desires. This collaboration and synthesis, this balancing and exploration—in short, the way that each musician hears what is needed and offers it—this kind of musical intimacy is the core of the feminist affect generated by *Blood Moon*. More than intimacy in general, intimacy among women has a distinct history as both the target of patriarchal violence as well as a central and life-sustaining force for feminists, queer people, and those for whom friendship is "a way of life."[6] And this, it seems to me, is the key issue: more than anything, what it means to improvise here is to perform an affective politics by foregrounding a close and virtuosic friendship.

Research on feminism and friendship is well-established. It is generally agreed that the political valence of friendship is a queer/feminist one,[7] insofar as friendship—particularly same-sex friendship—(a) develops alternatives to heteronormative relationality and intimacy grounded in the heteronuclear family structure, (b) pushes back against the abstract individualism of neoliberal capitalist culture, and (c) insofar

as the critical centrality of friendship and networks of care, as a matter of both social and scholarly concern, originates in queer communities and in antipatriarchal social practices (Rich 1980; Friedman 1989; hooks 2002; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004; Roseneil 2006; Lorde 2007; Devere and Smith 2010). Although friendship is not understood as a panacea (Taylor 2013), "friendship is seen as political solidarity, as constitutive of feminist movements and the basis of collective identity, and it is seen as a mode of personal support, intimacy and care, and, as such, productive of self-identity" (Roseneil 2006, 323–24).

Caught up in this formulation is "care," another notion with a long history in feminist scholarship. "The gendered dynamics of care have long been, and continue to be, a key concern for feminist scholars, particularly as responsibilities for care labour still fall disproportionately on women and are often devalued and rendered invisible" (Berridge and Portwood-Stacer 2017, 297). Given this history, then, one prominent aspect of feminist scholarship on care has been to revalue care practices, to center them in an effort to highlight the work that they do to contest dominant practices of patriarchal power (Ouellette and Arcy 2015). In contexts like these, care is linked to friendship, but is not reducible to it, insofar as care practices can lead to and strengthen friendships at the same time that they can be shared among relative strangers united by a common communal framework or an intimate public.[8]

Care and self-care are also linked together, for example, in Audre Lorde's famous theorization of self-care as a political practice, one of survival or even warfare (2017). But importantly, Lorde also links (self) care to the erotic, where the erotic is considered "an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (2007, 55). Already, then, both friendship between women and care practices are understood as inherently political, contributing to and reinforcing my reading of *Blood Moon* as a feminist project to the extent that we can hear and feel care in the way that these musicians listen to each other. But pushing further, this connection between erotics and care is also developed by Amber Jamilla Musser (2018) in a way that directly links to practices of listening, as well as indirectly to music, suggesting that such relations might become audible, which is to say perceptible through the body.[9]

One of Musser's central formulations in *Sensual Excess* (2018) is "feminine jouissance," which for Musser "emerges from a relational structure that locates pleasure in being a body that is oriented toward an Other and

her pleasure, opaque though it must be" (2018, 79). Musser writes that this orientation is a process of "learning, or what [she calls] deep listening" that offers an alternative to phallic jouissance centered in the dissolution of the self. "Feminine jouissance" rather "emphasizes moments of connection with the world; it shows the self as a being-toward someone/where else" (80).

For Musser, feminine jouissance "emphasizes moments of connection" through practices of deep listening. Curiously, Musser does not cite Oliveros here, who formulated deep listening as a notion, practice, series of educational programs, musical initiatives, and way-of-being, and who was herself a queer woman invested in rethinking musical relationality. In a 1995 essay, Oliveros describes deep listening and links it to the sensuality of sound itself:

> As a musician, I am interested in the sensual nature of sound, its power of release and change. In my performances throughout the world, I try to transmit to the audience the way I experience sound both when I hear it and when I play it. I call this way of experiencing sound "deep listening." . . . Deep listening is my life practice. (Oliveros 1995, 19)

Both Musser and Oliveros link back to Lorde insofar as deep listening is for them an erotic practice, predicated in receptivity toward another. Importantly, however, it is not only listening for Oliveros, but sound itself that is sensual. In characterizing sound in this way, Oliveros articulates what Martha Mockus calls a "lesbian musicality" that—like Musser's deep listening—is not invested in "power over" relations of masculine creativity but is rather circular, open, and receptive (Mockus 2008). To be receptive in sound, in the reciprocal practices of listening and performing, is to perform sonic care toward another in a way that leaves traces, one of many ways of producing a feminist affect.

These connections are resonant with one another insofar as they each articulate something about the reciprocality of certain sonorous practices. Whether "deep listening" "lesbian musicality" or "erotics," the point is that each of these terms help us to understand how care practices might become expressed through or caught up both in listening and in music, a relationality via sonorous media, with a certain openness and receptivity toward another. Inasmuch as we can hear this openness in the music, all of these practices might actively contribute to the construction of what I have been calling musical intimacy, an intimacy that

is, by nature of its context, political. I hear this kind of intimacy in *Blood Moon* in a way that is irreducible, nonspecific, and yet absolutely particular. This is what brings my reading into the realm of affect.

Forces

In listening deeply to their deep listening, I hope to have explicated how we can perceive a feminist affect in Davis and Laubrock's improvisations, not in this case through an overloading of musical parameters, nor in avant-garde semiotics, but rather through their expression of intimacy and nonmasculine virtuosity (erotics), expressions that are grounded in and informed by real-world actions. Thus, it's not just that Laubrock and Davis have a certain aesthetic vocabulary that accounts for the sounds that we hear and the ways in which their intimacy is perceptible. Nor is this perceptibility strictly attributable to their genders, their friendship, or even their political orientations; in addition to all these factors and more, the music we hear comes about through the life experiences of these two musicians, including and especially the work that they perform as leaders in an industry, in a field, where their actions can change things. The work that each of them has done in a feminist vein, the cultivation of feminist tendencies, resonances, musical and personal relationships, and material labor inside the industry to promote these orientations— all these practices contribute to the embodied experiences of these two musicians, which become expressed through sound, and which then goes on to further affect things, reciprocally.

Sound to action and action to sound, the music on *Blood Moon* shows us musical praxis as a way of life, as a mode of friendship, as a space-making practice in an inhospitable industry. It shows a full range of experiences that cannot but present themselves in music, which only actualizes itself through the body. This logistical work—booking gigs, recording projects, composing and performing for each other, finding each other at festivals, playing in each other's bands, in short, the work of building a scene that is vibrant and that supports you in return—this work is also a part of the tapestry of experiences that makes Laubrock and Davis's sounds possible. In the same way that they improvise musical spaces, imaginatively and deliberately constructed, they also build space for themselves in an industry where space is not readily available. Against the backdrop of both a jazz industry and a neoliberal culture that characterizes itself as a democratic and level playing field, this space-making cannot but be political.

We therefore return to a notion of politics that is expressed at the level of sound, not as a style of music but as a vibrational force that pushes in a certain direction. The direction that it pushes is not uniform, because the people it touches are all themselves differently positioned. The direction that it pushes does not guarantee any certain outcome or set of actions. Instead, what we can say is that these sounds make an impression: "We need to remember the 'press' in an impression. It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace" (Ahmed 2004, 6). *"Intimate," like "contingent," refers to magic through contact: the Latin* intimare*, means to impress, to make familiar, we might say, through touch or contingency*. We cannot reduce a certain trajectory from this impression, cannot speculate about how different people will be touched. Still, "A movement requires us to be moved" (Ahmed 2017, 5); and this music moves.

What must be clear is that this movement and any of its effects cannot be traced to improvisation alone; improvisation is not the force that generates feminist affect, but the medium through which *Davis and Laubrock* do. In this singular articulation, *Blood Moon* synthesizes the contingencies of its creation into a feminist affect with a political force. Through affect and vibration, the contingencies of its creation operate in new contexts by reaching listeners, by pressing our bodies in sound. The impression that this music makes is not comparable to any other improvised music, even those sounds with which we might associate *Blood Moon* most closely. The work that these improvisations perform, aesthetically and politically, cannot be reduced to a trope about genre, or a stylistic descriptor, or a music-theoretical explanation. Their singularity lingers in the body as a thumbprint or a trace, a mark that could, if pressed over again and reinforced, become strong enough to move us.

Outro

Improvisation and Contingency

In this section, my goal has been to demonstrate how foregrounding contingency elicits a different kind of conversation about what it means to improvise. In "Out to Lunch," improvisation forces an ambivalent, contradictory inside/outside relation that stretches Dolphy out as a bridge between sounds recognized in 1964 both as legible and as eccentric, each with racial and political connotations and consequences. In "Waves, Linens, and White Light," meditative, repetitive sounds disclose a hybrid improvisational practice emerging from a European pedagogical context that approaches improvised music from a genre space deeply informed by New Music and European jazz history. In "Gunweep" and "Elephant in the Room," improvisation sounds a personal relationship through the vibrational force of musical intimacy, and resonates in a context that would render such intimacy political. Attending to all these differences finally demonstrates the *utter incongruity* of improvisation across these cases. All three of these cases involve what we can call "free jazz" or "avant-garde improvisations." But to end the discussion there is to belie the social, physical, historical, affective, political, and (yes) musical specificities that render each improvisation singular. Thus, the conclusion of this comparison confirms that—and elaborates how—improvisation is *always* a singularity. The consistency of this "always" creates a paradox: improvisation is always contingent, which means that it is always different, in every actualization. To insist on the "always" of this difference means that the structure of improvisation—as contingency—is fundamentally *identical* in every case.

In describing this paradox, it can be helpful to use the language of

the virtual and the actual. As virtuality, the view of improvisation that I have tried to show here is identical from context to context—it is an archetype, a form, or a framework that can be identified in each situation. As actualized, this form or framework becomes filled in, beyond itself, with the singular details of time, context, and participants, becoming utterly singular. The virtual structure still exists, but is now a part of X unique instance. On this view, defining improvisation as a contingent encounter renders improvisation as a contingent, empty, or Deleuzean universal, a claim which means two things always, simultaneously, and equally: first, that improvisation has some kind of stable framework as a concept that will allow us to locate it in all musical and social situations. Second, that the frame contains an empty space as a constitutive feature of its form, such that the details of the improvisation—who is doing it, what factors are involved, how these factors are understood, and so on— remain particular to the circumstance. This dual aspect must be considered fundamental if the contingent encounter is to maintain logical consistency. Attending to both movements as equally true will help us to clarify the operation of improvisation in music and in daily life, toward which I now turn in earnest.

Contingent Life

Or

L'infra-ordinaire

Intro

On the Nature of This Comparison

This book's guiding question asks what we can say about the relationship between musical improvisation and quotidian improvisation. I have spent the first part of this book illustrating the extent to which improvisation can be understood as a contingent encounter, or a relational process that engages the total social situation, in such a way as to be utterly singular. In the second part of this book, proving that the same is true in everyday life will involve asking the same questions that I asked in Part One, to see how everyday life is equally composed of contingent encounters, no matter how stable, predictable, or routine it may at times appear. First, however, it is important to address some of the ways that others have discussed the relationship between musical improvisation and everyday life, for as I noted in the introduction, this is a relationship that is often acknowledged by improvisation scholars.

Already in the first chapter we saw Tracy McMullen directly compare musical improvisation to daily life, and Vijay Iyer remark that improvisation is the same as experience itself, so ubiquitous as to become invisible. I read Iyer's view as building on George Lewis's earlier work, which characterizes improvisation as "fundamental to the existence and survival of every human formation, from the individual to the community" (2007, 108). Running with Gilbert Ryle's argument that thinking "is, at the least, the pitting of an acquired competence or skill against an unprogrammed opportunity, obstacle, or hazard," Lewis maps improvisation as a given, fundamental part of living. Similarly, Lee Higgins and Roger Mantie have written that "improvisation is a distinctive way of being in and through music that reflects the fact that the act of living is largely

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improvisatory" (Higgins and Mantie 2013). Although again in apparent agreement with the above views, this last quote is a good example of a kind of easy extrapolation that attributes a kind of structural importance to improvisation, while not necessarily following up on how that translates: is there not something of a contradiction between the claim that improvisation is "distinctive" and also ubiquitous?

As improvisation has become increasingly visible in cultural studies scholarship, statements like these have established a kind of "common-sense" consensus regarding improvisation's presence in multiple spheres of human activity. The presence of improvisation in social life makes a kind of intuitive sense, perhaps particularly for those who play music—who among us has not compared musical improvisation with the act of speech, with learning a vocabulary so thoroughly that we no longer need to think about the order of verbs while talking? At the same time, however, this is a specific line of thinking that seems to cut against other predominate ways of understanding improvisation, especially those that derive from the composition/improvisation binary: beginning from this musical opposition and drawing social analogues, routine or everyday behaviors (predetermined, fixed, predictable, or in some sense "composed") are often seen as the very opposite of improvisation when considered as an unscripted, creative act.

As I wrote in the introduction, this binary has been seriously undermined if not outright abandoned in recent improvisation scholarship. And yet, as I also wrote, there remains a persistent attachment to viewing improvisation in a special light, particularly when extrapolating from music into other spaces. Thus, when we go looking for improvisation in everyday life, we are likely not searching for it in the habitual, the pre-given, the mundane or the ordinary. If, for example, improvisation involves listening to others, doing something unpredictable, or undermining established orthodoxies, how can improvisation also be a part of even routine activities? How can there be such a thing as an "everyday life improvisation" when "everyday life" is itself often defined in opposition to the creative, the extraordinary, or the novel?[1] Different still is the question of what it might mean for improvisation to be not only present in social life, but so omnipresent as to become invisible.

One possibility would be to allow that even within the routine space of everyday life, moments of spontaneity can emerge. When we are asked to draw on our resources, to creatively respond to situations, or to listen deeply to a friend, such moments could be understood as improvisatory even inside a quotidian space. In this case, however, we still adhere to

the binary logic that attempts to identify improvisation in opposition to repetition, a move that problematically prohibits repetition itself from involving improvisation. Another possibility would be to distinguish between "skilled" and "unskilled" improvisations, or to discuss "uncreative" improvisations that bear some kind of structural similarity to creative acts.[2] In this latter case, some kind of parallel between the musical and the social still exists, but the social is relegated to a kind of vapidity or inconsequence, as if navigating traffic did not involve a specific set of embodied skills.

As opposed to these perspectives, I believe that there are more radical implications in the formulations presented by Iyer, McMullen, Lewis, and others. To fully flesh out this argument, this section of the book attempts to locate contingency in everyday practices. In this first chapter, I explore the "structure" of everyday life through an extended analysis of walking. In chapter 6, I expand from walking into other everyday practices, including baking, listening, and working. Then in chapter 7, I discuss perception itself as a practice that must be improvised. These activities in no way represent an exhaustive examination of the everyday, but rather an attempt to locate contingency in certain moments or themes that, as in Part One, I suspect will be useful for comparison. Again as in the previous section, moments here have been chosen in some cases because of my involvement in them or for my vantage point, while others have been chosen because of the ways in which they have been historically significant for thinking everyday life, a phrase which itself requires some explication.

FIVE | The Structure of Everyday Life

In this chapter my aim is to establish a comprehensive homology between two ostensibly opposed terms: "improvisation" on the one hand, and "practice" on the other. Specifically, I propose that Michel de Certeau's notion of an everyday practice is structurally identical with the view of improvisation that has been explored in this book, as a contingent and relational encounter. In making this case, I focus first on the single activity of walking, because it allows us to clearly consider the broader theoretical and political issues raised by this conflation in a particular example—that is, it allows us to consider what is gained or lost by speaking about improvisation (ostensibly magical, novel, visionary) as quotidian (ostensibly routine, predictable, and common). Establishing this parallel concretely will then set the groundwork for broadening the discussion, from walking to an array of other everyday activities. It is these activities which constitute the everyday.

On the Everyday

As Ben Highmore succinctly notes, "Everyday life is a vague and problematic phrase" (2002b, 1). Conceptually, it points to a range of concerns, encompassing both the specific microactivities of daily experience and the macrolevel commonalities that tie communities together. As Michael Sheringham writes in *Everyday Life*, far from an oversight, the indeterminacy of the everyday (as with improvisation) is seen by many as a defining characteristic of the concept. In his book, Sheringham explicates how everyday life was conceptualized by four key French thinkers: Henri Lefebvre, Roland Barthes, Michel de Certeau, and Georges Perec. I mention these figures here only in order to emphasize the fact that,

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irrespective of the nuances in their thinking, each advances a view of the everyday as a kind of philosophical category, rather than a specific set of circumstances, a category that purposefully maintains its ambiguity and openness.[1] This open-endedness is fundamental to my understanding of the everyday, and goes at least part of the way toward addressing my approach in this section, especially when contrasted with sociological methods. Rather than drawing on accounts of people's lived experiences through ethnography or statistical analysis, "everyday life studies" in this tradition tends to theorize from genres, forms, and concepts. In this chapter, I follow in this tradition by thinking through formal practices over and above any particular occurrences or examples drawn from any particular life. I do so because, at the same time that I aim to demonstrate the singularity of any given improvisation, I am also trying to understand the dynamics through which improvisation emerges, regardless of who happens to be improvising, or in what conditions.

Nevertheless, it is critical to acknowledge the limitations of this approach: namely, focusing on generic or virtual structures in everyday life raises the risk of falsely universalizing what are at the end of the day singular experiences, practices that become exercised by specific people in specific circumstances.[2] What constitutes "the everyday" will differ between groups and individuals, which makes any discussion of everyday life potentially fraught. As Highmore writes, the question of "whose everyday life" counts as one that has been often enough ignored, resulting in the universalization and therefore dominance of particular values and worldviews (2002b, 1). For Highmore, one prerequisite of practicing everyday life studies is then "to recognize the partiality of any attempt to inscribe the everyday: this is a field that doesn't admit to exhaustive scrutiny" (2006, 103). Rather than throwing up our hands at the possibility of accounting for everything, we have to acknowledge that theoretical blind spots are not random, but tend to be concentrated around questions of difference in much literature on everyday life. As with Iyer's critique of improvisation studies, the epistemological categories that we use to think improvisation/everyday life can become exclusionary concepts, formulated around an ostensibly universal Western subject, and which therefore don't apply evenly to "non-normative," othered subjects (2019).

We can think about this dynamic more thoroughly through one of everyday life's most famous avatars, the *flâneur*. Notwithstanding Benjamin's critique,[3] the archetype of this character is a privileged one: the *flâneur* is understood as one with both leisure time and with access to

the whole of the city. As many scholars have pointed out, the *flâneur* must also be legibly both white and male in order to walk the way that he does, in order to be understood as a *flâneur* in the first place. So long as we focus on the philosophical categories or generic activities of "city walking" or *flânerie*, we miss the fact that the creative, inventive stroll of the *flâneur* was not just a particular comportment but a privileged mode of being, unavailable to others. Put differently, we can't discuss the *flâneur*'s mode of walking without acknowledging that the figure capable of practicing it is always already a privileged one, classed, raced, and gendered.[4] This was the essential point first raised by feminist literary and media theorists: whatever one makes of the shifting and increasingly nuanced ways in which we understand the intersection of gender and space in nineteenth-century Paris (or for that matter, the figure of the *flâneur* himself), what is nevertheless true is that the presumption was from the beginning that the *flâneur* was or could only be a man, a presumption that instigated the feminist intervention of the *flâneuse*. What the *flâneuse* illustrates is not simply that women were left out of artistic and theoretical discussions of *flânerie* just as they were excluded from walking in the same way (and in the same public spaces) that men walked; more crucially, the *flâneuse* shows that we can't actually talk about walking through "Paris" as if that city existed in the same ways for men and for women. The constitution of space itself is affected by one's gender and race, by one's place in the social framework that dictates where one can go, how one inhabits space, how that space appears and feels and is available or closed off. How can we speak today of walking through a city when we know that both the experience of walking and the city itself are differently constituted?

And yet, while it is true that women in nineteenth-century Paris did not have the same access to the city that men did, and while it is true that today someone living on minimum wage and walking to work is not experiencing walking as a *flâneur* would, it is also problematic to imply that in our current situation, someone existing precariously would not be capable of enjoying a walk for the sake of a walk, or does not do so. Therefore, I don't point to the limitations of the notion of the *flâneur* in order to imply that marginalized people are simply incapable of leisurely taking in a city (even if, on a larger scale, such capabilities are unevenly distributed and experienced); the point is that certain ideas about walking through a city do not on their own account for the fact that other people who also walk experience fundamentally different realities while walking. In other words, we would have to account for the fact that Black

flânerie (for example) would be constitutionally different from the beginning, if it were even possible,[5] because of the ways in which Black people are racialized in our cultural context. When we speak (as I do below) of an activity like "walking through a city," who is the subject assumed to be doing the walking? For that matter, in which city do they walk?

Ethnographic studies avoid this type of ambiguity by finding out about people's practices. We might think of these as studies of everyday *lives* (rather than of everyday life), and these have taught us much about the invisibility of some everydays, about the differences that make them incongruous with dominant accounts. The tradition of Black sociology stretching back to W. E. B. Du Bois long ago proved that everyday life is anything but neutral, being composed of differently available opportunities,[6] differently distributed justice,[7] and ostensibly similar scenarios that are differently experienced.[8] It is mainstream social theory's ignorance to this fact that animated much of Du Bois's sociological documentation of African American lives in the US, particularly around the color line. Meanwhile, the systematic exclusion of Black sociology from the canon (represented by Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber) reflects an answer to the question of "whose everyday life" counts—an answer that is only recently being revised. From foundational texts by Du Bois, St. Claire Drake, Ida B. Wells, and Anna Julia Cooper to contemporary studies by Elijah Anderson, Michelle Alexander, Saidiya Hartman, and innumerable others, there exists a variegated and multidisciplinary counter to the French tradition of thinking everyday life, a rejoinder that renders visible those perspectives that were never accounted for, and through such accounting, the ways in which everyday life is structured by the interconnected forces of place and identity. Du Bois describes the population of African Americans in Philadelphia as "a city within a city," illustrating how our identities and experiences of the world partially constitute our living spaces. Put differently, "There are as many spaces as there are distinct spatial experiences" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 340). Consequently, the white sociologist cannot fully enter Du Bois's city within a city, not because it is physically unavailable but because a white person's experiences of the world are different, and because these experiences in turn constitute a different world, a different city, overlaid.

Taken together, feminist literary critiques and Black sociological studies raise the impossibility of a universal subject of everyday experience, and thus the central contradiction inherent in writing about "everyday life." Although sociology, critical race theory, and other cultural-studies scholarship has by now added critical perspectives to the conversation,

there is still no way that any study of everyday life could "see" from or incorporate all of these perspectives—certainly not all at once—but in many ways never at all.

Still, I do attempt to think "everyday life"—even staying with this problematic phrasing—for several reasons. The most obvious of these is the already established link that improvisation scholars have made between improvisation and the quotidian, and the ways in which this book is indebted to and immersed in that work. Second, there are also long-established bodies of work that theorize everyday activity as an alternative or supplement to "properly" political actions: beyond the phrase "the personal is political," feminist, queer studies, subaltern, and postcolonial studies work has decisively illustrated the ways in which the everyday is a site of conflicts over meaning and power, a space where hegemony is practiced and upheld or contested and disturbed, a space that at the very least figures crucially in what is at stake when we discuss the intersections of politics, economics, and social life. Given this book's engagement with Sara Ahmed, I think here of her figure, the "feminist killjoy," who disrupts "pleasant" family meals by pointing to the functioning of patriarchy in language (see Ahmed 2017). To dismiss the everyday as a term with no purchase is to deny that actions undertaken outside the "properly" political sphere matter to the construction of meaning, or else to conflate all levels of social experience without distinguishing the still political and yet separate work that can take place over dinner.

Finally, it seems to me that improvisation and everyday life share some theoretical similarities that I take to be indicative of their interconnectedness:

1. The first similarity is the already noted and shared risk that both improvisation and everyday life are terms that universalize what are in fact particular experiences. Rather than gloss over this risk, it is more generative to probe it, even more so if it is one that is (tellingly) shared by both terms.

2. The second link is the (purposeful) imprecision of each phrase, which reveals something important about how both terms are being thought: both improvisation and everyday life function as concepts in some large part due to their inability to be pinned down, or their use of indeterminacy (I would say contingency) as a paradoxical foundation.

3. Third, again like improvisation, the dominant understanding of the everyday is not as much an object of study as it is a set of

practice-experiences, "a process" that "emerges" (Sheringham 2009, 22).

4. Fourth, we come to my own argument, and the means through which I attempt to address the difficulties raised in discussing everyday life: as I argued about improvisation, there is a kind of paradoxically consistent inconsistency at play whereby everyone improvises and everyone has an everyday life; but no two improvisations nor everyday lives are the same. Each is a universally shared condition that is singular in its manifestation. This makes "everyday life," in my view, another empty universal, a virtuality with a consistent, general frame to be filled in as the idea is actualized. Lefebvre for instance approaches this paradoxical structure through a rhythmic analytic: "Everywhere there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy there is rhythm. . . . This supplies the framework for analyses of the *particular*" (2004, 15). For Lefebvre, rhythm was a general framework through which to understand specific situations. While I don't conceive of rhythm as my framework, I am nevertheless similarly trying to think about the relation between a structuring frame (on the one hand) and its content (on the other). Both improvisation and everyday life carry this formal consistency at the same time that they are *always* and necessarily different.

By distinguishing between the virtual and the actual, I attempt to navigate the potentially fraught subject of everyday life, presenting a view from my own positionality, but attempting to foreground the virtual structure over any *one* instantiation. With this in mind, I am asking: what can be understood about how improvisation and contingency appear during activities that are most often regarded as ordinary?

Walking as Archetype

Like musical improvisations, everyday practices are active processes that emerge through the particularities of the situation at hand. In this section, I examine Michel de Certeau's specific formulation of everyday life (2011), the whole of which can be approached through the metaphor of walking through a city. Indeed, "Walking plays a key role in explorations of the *quotidien*" in part because it exemplifies what de Certeau terms a "practice," those everyday activities that engage the body's capacities and which involve "rhythm, repetition, non-accumulation, an activity

that is concrete, open-ended, private as well as social, limited to the here and now but capable of embracing distant horizons" (Sheringham 2009, 57). Already, in its invocation of rhythms, bodily aptitudes, its rootedness in the present and simultaneous reach beyond, this is a highly musical description of walking, and helps us to sense the parallel that this chapter is dedicated to exploring.[9]

Let's begin with a simple but effective analogy. In chapter 7, I discuss more fully Ahmed's invocation of the "desire line" (see figure 6), the landscape architectural term for those "unofficial paths, those marks left on the ground that show everyday comings and goings, where people deviate from the paths they are supposed to follow" (2006, 16). In considering the activity of walking vis-à-vis musical improvisation, the desire line represents an ostensibly improvisatory impulse. Like a musical score or lead-sheet, the sidewalk or designated path illustrates a given means of moving from one place to another, a structure that outlines a more or less "intended use." Literally outside this framework, the desire line represents a different means of reaching that same or similar destination, a means that individual subjects conceive and act on based on their encounters with a situation, based on the intentions or desires conjured therein. Faced with a set of conditions, walkers improvise the quicker, better route, or at least the one that feels "right." Of the many diverse experiences we could consider aspects of everyday life, the path/desire line opposition is an especially clear social analogue of music's inside/outside or composition/improvisation binary, where transgressing the structure in question signifies improvisation.

It is a simplistic metaphor, to be sure; but I propose that it can be useful for identifying the normative way in which improvisation is identified in everyday life, and the issues at stake in the discussion. Remaining inside the composition/improvisation binary would allow us to claim that walkers on the sidewalk are following a composed process, where walkers who make their own way are improvising. But as we saw in Part One, this binary distinction breaks down under closer scrutiny. To move beyond it, we need to employ the same perspective that we did with the musical cases, to see events in their full contingency. De Certeau's theory of everyday practices helps to do this.

For de Certeau, walking operates through the creative logic of all everyday practices, a logic that makes it metaphorically interchangeable with other activities such as reading, speaking, or (for my purposes) playing an instrument. What matters here is not a particular walk (which person, which route) but the process through which walking happens,

Figure 6: A "desire line." Photo courtesy of the author.

what Highmore calls the "poetics" of walking, and what de Certeau calls "the formal structure of practice." This logic always emerges through a structure that is regulated by governing principles, rules, or affordances, which is to say a total context. However, de Certeau famously calls attention to the ways in which our agency is not per se delimited by a given structure, which contains within it alternative possibilities beyond those most apparent. If the path laid out in front of the walker constitutes a

first level of structure, the walker's choice to amble in the grass consti-tutes a kind of second level, written by the interaction of the subject with their environment, the articulation of creative possibilities from within and through the system of rules, constraints, and affordances, or the entire set of limits in a situation. The presence of the path as structure may in certain cases determine the walker's trajectory; in other cases, it might merely affect that trajectory, in a way similar to the effect of gravity—both the path and the force of gravity, as structuring limitations, condition possibilities, opening some up and foreclosing others. The possibilities present in a given system are affected, but not exhausted by that system's most apparent or intended use.

For de Certeau, we see this relationship in all everyday practices equally: the same way that a reader's internalized virtuosity—built through experience—helps them to imagine and invent through lan-guage that is given to them, a walker can also leap over a pre-given path structure only by virtue of that structure itself. This common framework implies other consistencies in the everyday: because no two readers or walkers journey to the same places (or in the same way), practices begin to necessarily invoke multiplicity and singularity. Following this, because all practices are singular, they also offer a kind of resistance to the logic of power, to universals, to the violence of structure itself. This does not mean that everyday practices automatically resist policing, hierarchy, homogenization, or control; rather, it points to the fact that these practices are inherently contingent and therefore can't be reduced to a monolithic interpretation. The operation of everyday practices is dependent on the constraints through which they move, no matter if that movement adheres closely to the rules or transgresses them, and it is the emergence of the practice through the subject/environment interaction that guarantees each everyday experience is singular, even if it appears repetitive.

Together, these features characterize de Certeau's everyday practices as creative and generative activities, a view that polemically denied read-ings of everyday behaviors as banal, or else as overdetermined by capital-ist ideology or sociological conditioning. This is and has been a critical intervention. But at the same time, to fixate on de Certeau's polemic is to miss the essential point of his formulation: the only way that the polemic can work in the first place is through his detailing of the interactive rela-tionships between contingent system, contingent actor, and contingent moment, a constellation that may or may not produce liberatory out-comes. In light of the preceding chapters of this book, another way of

putting de Certeau's conviction would be to say that everyday practices are necessarily improvisations. That is, they do not involve or contain the possibility for improvisation; rather, they do not exist but through improvisation.

On this point, let us hear from de Certeau himself. Writing of walking in the city, he clarifies:

> First, if it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities . . . then the walker realizes some of these possibilities. . . . But [the walker] also moves them about and he [sic] invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements. (2011, 98)

Walking, like any activity in the space of everyday life, is not altogether dictated by forms of social control, since within the larger structures governing collective life there is a kind of agency that can be exercised. In the following passage, de Certeau demonstrates the same point while linking the acts of reading and dwelling:

> The thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces. A different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place. This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment . . . carried to its limit, this order would be the equivalent of the rules of meter and rhyme for poets of earlier times: a body of constraints stimulating new discoveries, a set of rules within which improvisation plays. (2011, xxi)

Or take this description of reading, that normatively consumptive act that is for de Certeau anything but passive:

> In reality, the activity of reading has . . . all the characteristics of a silent production: the drift across the page, the metamorphosis of the text effected by the wandering eyes of the reader, the improvisation and expectation of meanings inferred from a few words, leaps over written spaces in an ephemeral dance. (2011, xxi)

In all three of these quotes, de Certeau invokes improvisation in order to describe the creative potential in each activity. As in musical improvisation, walking takes place inside and is generated through complex

systems (Western harmony, for example, a given composition), is multiple (given the individual walking practices of unique persons, given how many possibilities contained within their walking vocabularies), and works against the pure rationality of a closed system, the objective fiction that sees practices reduced to outcomes. These are essential parallels between everyday practices and improvisations.

Given these features, there is a case to be made that everyday practices engage the contingencies of their circumstances as much as musical improvisations do, so that, as with musical improvisation, the improvisation of walking does not reside solely in those moments that most obviously transgress boundaries, those moments that counteract pathways (paved roads, say, or a blues progression) because walking has *already* been identified as a singular articulation, which is to say, contingent. There is no walk that does not involve contingencies that are navigated, no matter how small they appear, no matter how subconsciously they are engaged.

For Highmore as for me, although it remains his most polemical contribution to cultural studies, the possibility of "everyday resistance" is just one insight derived from a system of analysis in de Certeau that deepens our engagement with ostensibly routine activities. By contrast, it is the uses of de Certeau's work within cultural studies that have often focused, in a rather limited way, on the possibilities that such practices carry for resistance to hegemony. Therefore, "Exegesis and employment of his work is often caught between a celebratory account of minor acts of 'transgressive' opposition (ripped jeans, fanzines . . . and so on) and the condemnation of such celebration in the name of a more pragmatic politics" (Highmore 2006, 103). Rather than simply formulating practices as a means of resistance, de Certeau "insist[s] on an attention to the concrete particularity of activities" (*poesis*) while at the same time a *poetics* of everyday life "generalizes about the forms that such actualizations take" (2006, 107). Taken together, "Everyday resistance is not seen as the confrontation or contestation of 'discipline' but simply as that which isn't irreducible to it" (108).[10] Put another way, the fact that de Certeau points to the possibility of everyday resistance is not the final point; the point again is not to discount the contingency of any practice by forecasting what it does (or does not do) in advance. Walking is not improvisatory because it subverts social order, and the improvisation in walking is not found by locating possibilities for free-play; walking is already improvisatory because it is always a singular encounter, differently experienced and performed, emerging within and through unique circumstances.

In the City | In the Wake

De Certeau is essential for showing how improvisation is always already present within everyday activities—even if they follow a tightly prescribed path. While it may seem more of an abstraction to argue that walking along a prescribed route is still improvisatory, no one would question the improvisatory nature of a musician "walking along the route" of a tune. That a composition like "All of Me" contains in its form openings, inde-terminacies, and opportunities for interaction is no different than the walking path, which is situated in a context that is also full of unknowns and potentialities. In sum, the inside/outside binary represented by the path and the desire line appears as flawed in the case of walking as it does in the case of musical performance. In a more positive wording, the walking interaction is much more dense than it may first appear, because of the myriad contingencies on which it depends.

Having established this parallel, it is critical now to zoom out. In the first part of this book, the "path" represented by the score was only the starting point of any analysis, because it only guides musical parameters and is itself deeply entangled with extramusical ones. If a walking path functions metaphorically as a kind of score, we likewise cannot neglect the "extramusical" contingencies that also affect the performance of walking. The path in this analogy represents the rules of the game the walker plays. But outside this game, other limits constitute the game's possibilities in the first place. The walker's improvisation takes place not only in relation to the path but also through their emotional states, phys-ical capabilities, places of destination (or lack thereof), reasons for going there (or nowhere), the relative difficulty of the path leading there, the leisure time to amble (or the made-necessity of hurrying), the specific negotiations required of gendered and racialized and disabled people in certain spaces and the kinds of walking available to them, the orga-nization of city spaces and the ease or difficulty of accessing them, the political pressures that provide or deny transit options, and so on and outward. Such limits condition the possible and the impossible, or what counts as freedom. It is simultaneously true that walking preserves pos-sibilities for free-play and innovation at the same time that these possi-bilities are themselves conditioned, selected, and constituted by external limits. The walking path/desire line opposition is, as I said in the begin-ning of this chapter, a particularly clear social analogue of the composi-tion/improvisation binary. At the same time, the example is also limited insofar as it doesn't account for the construction of that path in the first

place, or how that path might be inaccessible for some people, how it might have been put there to allow some and disallow others.

There is a danger here, for the language of variable possibilities, differently available, to belie the outsized, even ontological weight that some of these differences can exert over centuries. It matters where the path is located, and what it was put there to facilitate or make difficult. In the same way that public transit is hostile to or even deadly for those with small children, in the same way that there are only limited, specialized spaces where women, people of color, queer people, or disabled people can be in public alone without attracting varieties of attention or harassment, most urban planning is designed to facilitate the needs of able-bodied, straight, cis, white, bread-winning men (Kern 2020).[11] Thus "the extent to which anyone can simply 'be' in urban space tells us a lot about who has power, who feels their right to the city is a natural entitlement, and who will always be considered out of place" (114). For anyone whose body marks them as "out of place," trying to live normally in such spaces may not only be more difficult; it may also return, feedbacking, to affect those very bodies. We know for example how, by living in such spaces, women are trained to take up less of them, and how the poor and marginalized have traumatic stress—exacerbated by gentrification and decades of public disinvestment—imprinted on their bodies, adversely affecting health. In this way, space not only conditions what is possible or impossible in a moment, but also affects who we are over lifetimes.

In *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), Saidiya Hartman uses de Certeau's everyday practices to describe the profound ambivalence of practices deployed by the enslaved, the "tactics of resistance, modes of self-fashioning, and figurations of freedom" (11) along with the "terror of the mundane and quotidian" (4) and "forms of violence and domination enabled by the recognition of humanity" (6). That is, Hartman explores how "innocent amusements" and "harmless pleasures" factored into the lives of enslaved people as both a kind of release or resistance (through enjoyment) and as a mode of control, always conditioned by the oppressive institution of enslavement. Hartman explores this ambivalence through the notion of practice: "Practice is, to use Michel de Certeau's phrase, 'a way of operating' defined by 'the non-autonomy of its field of action'" such that "The tactics that comprise the everyday practices of the dominated have neither the means to secure a territory outside the space of domination nor the power to keep or maintain what it [has] won in fleeting, surreptitious, and necessarily incomplete victories" (50).

Such everyday practices situate us far from the "ripped jeans" and

"fanzines" invoked in Highmore's critique above. They speak to the trans-Atlantic slave trade as outsized parameter, as a limit so total as to produce, by some accounts, social death. Within such conditions, practice was simultaneously a tactic of resistance and an ambivalent necessity always governed by immovable power. Later, in *Wayward Lives* (2019), everyday practices persist in Hartman's work as ways of operating, as embodied knowledges, as resistive navigations that take their form through indomitable structures of oppression. Hartman writes here of young Black women in the early twentieth century navigating their "established orders." Of the "errant paths" of Esther Brown, for instance, Hartman writes that "Wandering and drifting was how she engaged the world and how she understood it; this repertoire of practices composed her knowledge" (2019, 234). Here, the streets of Harlem present different structures that Brown navigates, and which engender an "*everyday choreography of the possible*" (234). The domination of white supremacy still undergirds those Harlem streets, but clearly not in the same configuration as during chattel slavery. The arrangement of (im)possibilities has changed, while the dynamics by which they are navigated remain the same. De Certeau's everyday practices help to theorize contingent circumstances through a logic of engagement that is common no matter the particulars of a given scene.

While Hartman studies everyday practices as resistance that is engendered by the environment it cannot escape, Fred Moten presents Black aesthetic practices as similarly irreducible to oppression even as they are produced through it, as the "diffusion of terror" in performance. Indeed, for Moten, the relation between blackness and antiblackness is less dialectical than it is one of diffusion, where diffusion is importantly not about a lessening of particulate concentration. Rather,

> The concentration [of the violence of the slave owner/settler] is both constant and incalculable precisely in its being non-particulate. At stake is an ambience that is both more or less than atmospheric. . . . It is a pouring forth, a holding or spreading out, or a running over that never runs out and is never over. (2017, xi)

In this sense, Moten's formulation of Black art as diffusion brings us into contact with "the wake," Christina Sharpe's multimodal term for the paradoxes of Black life, "as a means of understanding how slavery's violences emerge within the contemporary conditions of spatial, legal, psychic, material, and other dimensions of Black non/being as well as

in Black modes of resistance" (2016, 14). For Sharpe, the wake is not an event. Wake is a state of consciousness, a track left on water or the line of recoil (from slave ship, from gun, from cataclysm). Wake is what bleeds out from the singularity of slavery, "at which space and time are infinitely distorted by gravitational forces and which is held to be the final state of matter falling into a black hole."[12] Wake is a vigil.

From these senses of the word and more, the wake becomes a multiple way of accounting for how slavery continues to live in and affect everyday life as parameter, as power, as governing structure that is not a static thing. For Sharpe, "to be *in* the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding" (13). In contemporary life, the wake traces lines out that touch everything. We can see its unfolding in the prison industrial complex; how it spills out in housing discrimination; in the employment, pay, and wealth gaps between Black and white Americans; how its consequences persist in segregation (neighborhoods/schools); in funding (neighborhoods/schools); in police brutality; in white flight and then gentrification; in the southern strategy; in the way that bias informs and builds every industry including healthcare, where for example the Black maternal mortality rate is two to three times higher than the white rate; in environmental racism; in the school-to-prison pipeline; and in the other component parts that compose a system of white supremacist power.

But in spite of the holistic ways that such systems affect daily living, perhaps no example is more pertinent to this discussion than the recent name given to a pervasive phenomenon or state of being known as #LivingWhileBlack. Particularly since 2018, when cell-phone documentations of everyday incidents started going viral (and the above hashtag emerged as a response), even mainstream news outlets became cognizant of the fact that Black Americans can be and often are punished for doing "all kinds of daily, mundane, noncriminal activities."[13] From cooking barbeque to bird-watching,[14] these incidents are a contemporary iteration of "a much older tradition: the invocation of the property law concepts of nuisance and trespass to exclude Blacks from spaces racialized as 'white'" (Henderson and Jefferson-Jones 2020, 863). Considered in this way, everyday life—the ordinary, routine, and regular, for Black Americans—overlaps with the extraordinary, with events that can fracture or shatter life. Hence Moten writes that Hartman's work "requires our skepticism regarding any opposition between the mundane and quotidian, on the one hand, and the shocking and spectacular, on the other" (2017, x).

One of the ways that Sharpe thinks this nonopposition is through "the weather," in which "antiblackness is pervasive *as* climate." The weather of antiblackness is the "totality of our environments," a kind of ur-condition that seeps into every structure. As condition, structures erected within it bear its marks, and shape behaviors accordingly. In the wake, the governing conditions of Black and white lives are not the same. Thus, the possibilities and impossibilities that structure an everyday scene or resistance to it are also affected by these differences. My aim in pointing to such differences is not to imply some novel deployment but rather to note the relative lack of Black studies perspectives in literature on improvisation and everyday life. If it is clear that an everyday practice like walking constitutes an improvisation, a navigation within a given system, then that system must nevertheless be understood through the different contingent encounters that bring it into being. The weather in Sharpe's sense is not the same kind of condition as the physical layout of a city block or the force of gravity, not the same kind of condition as poverty or wealth, sickness or health, as a car or a bicycle. But like each of those examples, the weather is capable of conditioning, of affecting, of touching through contingency.[15] Indeed, the weather is so total that it touches everything. In contemporary life, the weather structures what is possible or impossible and for whom, delimits what actions, perceptions, sounds, sights, and practices are permissible and understood or illegible and therefore punishable. Every city is different, and every walker within each city experiences it as an unfolding, singular experience. But no matter what city or what walker, everything is situated inside the weather of antiblackness. There are arguably other conditions that also touch every city on every continent. The wake and the weather provide particularly powerful examples of how certain parameters of power and history continue to condition what is possible for all of us.

To return to improvisation itself, Sharpe writes that "The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies" (106). This is the one time that the word "improvisation" appears in *In the Wake*, and what it's telling us is that the weather *necessitates* improvisations. Here, improvisation is not a handy resource or a means of salvation but something that is required, demanded, of some and not others, something that is left in the absence of structural supports, something like the ambivalent practices that are central to Hartman and Moten's respective studies as condition-of, not exception-to.

Walking as Improvisation

I do not fixate on the limitations of everyday practice to argue for its futility but rather to clarify its relationship to improvisation. It is true that the city may still offer "the promises of pleasure, freedom, excitement, opportunity, and encounter," or the space in which to build communities that sustain us.[16] Likewise, it is still true that improvisation under such conditions can lead to flourishing, enrichment, or better social lives. The point here is that such possibilities are still limited, unevenly distributed, and conditional—that they do not depend on categorical notions ("the city," "improvisation," "community") but the contingent details on which each city, each improvisation, each community depends. Because of the tendency to understand improvisation as analogous with moments of resistance and expressions of agency— especially when juxtaposed against structures that are understood to be stable—thinking through everyday life can help to break out of limiting paradigms that have overdetermined conceptions of what it means to improvise. Everyday practices reveal the utter virtuosity and overwhelming singularities of ostensibly routine or normal living, at the very same time that none of these characteristics should be valorized as novel or as pathways to freedom; in some cases, improvisation, in its traditional sense, is something with which the privileged need not be bothered, not a blessing but a last resort for those without more consistent resources.

I am clearly invested in undermining this normative reading of improvisation, where novelty is glorified over the "predictable."[17] De Certeau helps to do this, because even as he privileges the creative capacities contained in everyday behaviors, he is also aware of the kinds of limitations and external contingencies discussed above.[18] In fact, one of the defining features of a *tactic* in de Certeau is its inability to transcend its circumstances—it must instead make use of them. Thus, the type of freedom, creativity, or resistance invoked by thinking everyday practices with improvisation should not be confused: any possibilities for resistance are conditioned by structural limits. Power, though it receives perhaps less attention in de Certeau, is one such conditioning factor. In our terms, power is another affordance in a situation, another set of parameters like the history of a genre or the size of a room. These parameters are *not commensurate*; but they nevertheless each help to constitute an improvisation in its specificity.

The reason that I take such pains to clarify the role of resistance in de Certeau is because—if we are to locate improvisation in everyday

practices—locating improvisation only in those moments of transgression returns us to a social analogue of the composition/improvisation binary, where the path before the walker represents the composition, and the freedom to deviate from the path represents an improvisation. This view of improvisation is limited and inherently contradictory inasmuch as it is governed by a deliberate narrative construction that closes our eyes to the openness in structure and the closedness in freedom.

If we consider the singular encounter experienced by a single walker, neither the choice to adhere to a given path nor the choice to deviate from it encapsulates the experience of that walker during a moment in time—instead, these choices, which map only outcomes, abstract and represent the experience by drawing our attention to a restricted data point. De Certeau insists on returning attention to the aspects of experience that exceed such plotting, and that is what makes his work useful for thinking improvisation: de Certeau is not a thinker of resistance or freedom but, through his insistence on the singularity of everyday life, de Certeau is a thinker of contingency. Thinking with this framework, we can finally say that the jazz soloist's improvisation is no less contingent for adhering tightly to a given musical form; equally, the choice to follow a walking path is no less improvised than the choice to deviate from it, as if the former forecloses all contingencies from existing, as if walking along a prescribed route prevents one from improvising thoughts or pace or a song in the mind, as if the environment is not in process all around you.

This, for me, is de Certeau's crucial point: not that everyday practices can become forms of resistance, but that they are just as contingent as any other activity and are thus equally sites on which all kinds of possibilities play out. Therefore, "there is no need for the deliberate injection of the aleatory—the 'comportement lyrique' of the Surrealists, or the 'dérive' of the Situationists. For Certeau, well aware of these precedents, the operations of walking are in themselves 'multiformes, résistantes, rusées et têtues'" (Sheringham 2009, 224). And *why is this?* Only because walking is contingent. Because "walking" cannot be reduced to the brute activity of moving a body, given that it comes about in and through contingent encounters between body/self, environment, and others. This is not a romantic description; the contingency of any activity can cut both ways, depending. Walking can indeed be poetic and virtuosic, and beautiful and resistive. But walking can also be required when one's car breaks down, or when one lives in a place with poor public transit infrastructure. Walking can feel threatening or invite violence if one walks in

the "wrong" place, or if one walks while reading feminine. While walk-
ing can indeed be revelatory or life-giving, it can also be deadly and all
points in between.

An everyday practice is one in which a subject's irreducible multiplicities
interact with the contingent circumstances of a moment. After clarifying
this structure, is there anything of walking that is not also and equally
true of improvising music? Each activity takes place in a scene of enabling
constraints; each is multiple (interdependent) and singular (situated in
a unique constellation); each involves, through a process of repetitive
learning, an expressive capacity exercised by the actor, whether trans-
gressing or walking the path that is given by the rules of the game, rules
that are in turn established through and affected by larger sociopolitical
affordances. Finally, neither of these activities can be reduced to a paper
representation of the activity itself.

Given the account of walking presented here and the ways in which
contingency figures therein, it seems impossible to seriously entertain
the existence of *any structural difference* between musical improvisation
and everyday life at the level of form, between a saxophonist navigat-
ing the parameters of the jazz tradition according to the vocabularies in
which they are immersed, and a pedestrian on the street navigating their
respective parameters by walking home (according to the vocabularies
in which they are immersed). Musical improvisation begins to appear
here as strictly homologous with de Certeau's everyday practices, meta-
phorically interchangeable with any other in its mode of operation. And
if this view holds, *as a practice*, one cannot be more or less creative than
the other, more or less skilled. This is not to say that there are no differ-
ences between the two, for as we've seen throughout this chapter, dif-
ference is nearly everything; it is only to say that improvisation engages
these differences identically, through the same process or form.

It will be objected that musical improvisation and walking are funda-
mentally different practices, and this is indeed true. It is also true that
improvising a successful chorus of "Oleo" might be more difficult than
taking a stroll. But first of all, that is only true because most of us have
more experience with walking.[19] Secondly, the role or presence of impro-
visation is the same insofar as in both cases it is the means by which we
engage, respond to, and produce from a series of interacting contingen-
cies, from what is available (including experience), no matter how well
or how poorly. To get hung up on the differences between musical per-
formance and the performance of everyday life is to get caught in *genre*:

it is the differences of context, not of improvisation itself, that result in the differences of outcome. Improvisation is a *mode* that makes use of what it can, however, and in whatever situation. In its form as an empty universal, improvisation is always the same process, even if it becomes radically different as it actualizes itself. To improvise in a complex genre or a thoroughly ubiquitous one, poorly or virtuosically, publicly or privately, from joy or from terror, for good or for ill, is *still to improvise.*

SIX | Everyday Practices

From walking as archetype, I now move through other everyday activities in order to further explicate the ways in which everyday life is produced through improvisation. In each case, I am invested in thinking about these practices not because they are special but because they help to emphasize aspects, effects, or functions of improvisation that are often underexplored, unacknowledged, or which have become nonintuitive for the concept, including the virtuosity in repetition and the oppression in flexibility. Thinking through these activities, I consistently raise a distinction that is more heuristic than it is real. The metaphorical schematic that walking through a city illustrates—between structures and environments ("the path") on the one hand, and navigation and improvisation ("the walk") on the other—is made in order to better situate everyday practices as singular, contingent, and therefore in the end, as dissolving of those very oppositions that help us to recognize them. In reality, as we have seen and will continue to see, the opposition between structure and agency is no opposition at all, but a co-constituting interaction that unfolds one in the other perpetually.

(Doing) Baking: Repetition and Identity

The similarities between music and cooking are well established. Both require prior knowledges that are set into motion (to deglaze, to trade fours) both culminate from emergent combinations of small, repetitive actions (the arpeggio, the julienne), and both, famously, involve improvisation. As Luce Giard notes in the essay "Doing Cooking," one "has to know how to *improvise* with panache, know what to do when fresh milk 'turns' on the stove, when meat, taken out of the package and trimmed

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of fat, reveals itself to be not enough to feed four guests" (Giard 1998, 200). Here again we begin with a view of improvisation as adaptation, like the quicker route offered by the desire line. And it is true that such examples are useful for showing how cooking, even the same meal, will always involve contingencies that must be navigated. But as with walking, it is not only such pivots that constitute the improvisations, not only the adaptations to circumstance or the moments when one veers off-script; in fact, the script itself is improvisatory because the recipe is a score, containing only a ghost of what it ultimately proposes:

> By carefully following the same recipe, two experienced cooks will obtain different results because *other elements intervene in the preparation*: a personal touch, the knowledge or ignorance of tiny secret practices . . . an entire relationship to things that the recipe does not codify and hardly clarifies, and whose manner differs from one individual to another. (1998, 201, my emphasis)

Here, the recipe represents an even more literal analogy with a musical score than the walking path. The inside/outside relation—to follow or to deviate—is an important but limited consideration when discussing a process that is irreducible to such a choice, from which in any case bloom new unknowns.

Giard understands and addresses this complexity comprehensively, theorizing food culture as a complex entanglement of material necessity and subjective pleasure, a deep reservoir of experience and memory, a "way of being-in-the-world and making it one's home" (1998, 154); thus, one cannot taste the same almond cake that she can (having grown up with it) any more than a first-time listener can hear *Sweet Baby James* the way I do (having grown up with it).[1] And if eating is as listening, cooking is as performing: "Once returned from the store," she writes, "we used to carefully sift the flour before using it. . . . This gesture was done gently and in a measured fashion, restrained and silky like the touch of certain pianists" (204–5).[2] What is important in the parallel is simultaneously the universality of the embodied practice (anyone can sift) and the singularity of its manifestations and meanings (but not like I do).

Expanding further, it is also critical that Giard's understanding of contingency and cooking is not exhausted by any actions of any one cook. Rather, food culture itself, as a series of "exclusions and choices" reflects a "silent piling up" of whole historical systems, the interaction of "an ethnohistory, a biology, a climatology, and a regional economy" with

social inventions and personal experiences (1998, 185). All of this, for Giard, depends on and reflects "the *indecipherable contingency* of individual microhistories" that bear on what it means to cook (185, my emphasis). This indecipherable contingency cannot be reduced to behaviors that are either known or unknown, predictable or unpredictable, consistently repeated or absolutely new; what emerges as a food culture is a field of interdependent closures that open up possibilities, a field into which we act, just as the cooking process and its results touch our own lives, daily.

No matter how many times a recipe is prepared, cooking is improvisatory first because it is different each time (open), and second because each iteration further embeds memory and time into a fabric of living (closed). To say that a repetitive behavior is "different each time" is not to deny the repetition involved, or to discount the fact that any such differences might appear incidental; it is only to suggest that the fixity of repetition, the idea that I am "once again cooking this recipe" is simply a compelling narrative about what we are doing, a narrative that claims the parts of the process that appear consistent to our eyes are the most salient. Broadening our perspective to attend to those parameters ostensibly "outside" (but actually constitutive of) that routine practice—the weather, the emotions I bring to the process and how they are affected by it, the conversation I am having while baking, the new apartment I'm in this time, the different brand of flour, the better-quality Bundt pan I recently purchased—these differences, however small they appear, change the process we normally insist on describing as the same.[3] To attempt an act of pure repetition is to understand haptically how impossible pure repetition is, because we are always nested in contingencies; and this, in turn, reveals the improvisation that is always already a part of habit and repetition, the often small but sometimes transformative actions engendered by each circumstance. In short, to cook or bake is to already be improvising: this is not only true for elaborate preparations, but also for a single, ostensibly identical loaf of bread.

To bake bread is to cultivate a habit. Twice a day, just after I wake and just before I sleep, I feed my levain with a mixture of flour and water.[4] Over twelve hours, the yeast and bacteria in the culture digest the sugars in the grain, expelling in the process the gases that will raise the eventual loaf of bread. There is a peak in this cycle, which, if I have timed everything right, will occur around the twelve-hour mark. At that point, it is time to either harness the potential of the levain, or to discard most

of it, feed it again, and start the cycle over. Already, several things are happening here. First, the action is repetitive, or is marked by a certain rhythm. However, the regularity of this repetition already contains its own irregularity: "No rhythm without repetition in time and space. . . . But there is no identical absolute repetition, indefinitely. . . . When it concerns the everyday . . . there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive: difference" (Lefebvre 2013, 16). For example, the differences in the temperature of the room and the water affect the rate of fermentation, causing a too rapid rise one particularly hot day (in which case, if I notice, I will add a third feeding). Factors like the weather, water quality and temperature, and the variety and grind of the grains affect not only the rate at which gas is produced (rise time), but also the flavor of the resulting loaf. In short, each factor is already a multivalent and unstable process, to say nothing of the variables taking place outside the bread-making (for instance, my state of mind). As with the musical examples in Part One, such "external factors" condition my experience of the "internal" process, affecting it as they are affected. Over time, some memories and emotions attach themselves to certain smells. And on the topic of attachments: research suggests that the unique qualities of each sourdough culture are engendered not only by variables in grain, air, and water, but also by the unique bacterial makeup on the hands of the baker.[5] In other words, the multivalent and unstable process of bread-making is so by virtue of its interdependence in a network of relations. The levain is changed by the baker's hands, and in return, the bacteria on those hands are also changed by sustained exposure to the sourdough culture. The levain itself is unique, not as an object but as a living process, which feeds on what is around it; with each feeding cycle, the culture is metabolizing and changing. The gases given off during fermentation will double or triple the size of the levain. If left to ferment too long, it will collapse and become acidic. If left next to other fermented foods, bacteria will gravitate from one to another, a kind of microbial entrainment. There can be no strict schedule in this process because it varies each day; what is required is attention and intuition, built by experience. This is why sourdough recipes consist of four ingredients and pages of description: all they can really convey is what one might expect in a given situation, what might go wrong, signs to watch out for and corrective measures that can be taken. The process is thick with description, description that already knows it will not completely prepare the baker for the affective experience itself.

As with the apparently simple activity of walking, the baking experi-

ence is not removed from discourses or power structures. I bake this way because I can, because I enjoy it. The improvisation of bread-baking may not be possible for those who are too busy, or for whom the grocery store loaf is more affordable than the flour to which they have access. In one way, sourdough baking can be considered one of de Certeau's tactics insofar as it is shared (a standard recipe makes two loaves) rather than sold, insofar as it therefore fosters community, and resists (by offering an alternative to) dominant power structures of the global food corporations that, because of a particular postwar capitalist history, stripped everything nutritious out of our bread before injecting it back in the form of synthetic vitamins, corporations that continue to market cheap, addictive food that makes us sick and keeps them profitable. As a process almost elemental in its history, its simplicity (the antithesis of mass-produced bread), and also as a ritual out of step with the demands of our moment, sourdough baking is at one and the same time an act of resistance to power and a privilege in an economy that cannibalizes our time by stripping our jobs of their security, benefits, and wages, forcing families to take second and third gigs. The improvisation of bread-baking might, for some, involve simply buying it. This does not mean that the improvisation is any less improvisatory; it only means that, within each constellation, we engage our contingencies in the ways that we are able.

The process of baking this loaf is particularly illustrative for thinking about improvisation: unlike a cake or pastry, this kind of baking often frustrates bakers for its imprecision, or the degree to which its multiple stages depend on variables, different each time, which must be navigated by intuition. Right from the beginning, the baker makes a judgment about the levain's readiness (is it strong enough to raise the loaf?) by smelling, jiggling, or dropping some in water (to see if it contains enough gas to float). Then, after mixing the dough, it is periodically folded during fermentation (a gradual, gentle kind of kneading) until it has the "right" texture. When the dough looks ready, (bulk fermentation can take anywhere from three to eight hours or longer, depending on the temperatures involved), the dough is spilled onto a board, divided in two, pulled into taut circles, left for thirty minutes, folded according to which technique the dough feels capable of handling, and then dropped into baskets for further fermentation, either at room temperature (for a shorter amount of time) or overnight in the refrigerator. Finally, the dough is slashed with a razorblade (to control where steam escapes) and baked. At every stage, decisions are made based on little externally identifiable criteria and a great deal of experience: I shake

the tub, I smell the dough, I feel its strength or weakness as I fold it into shape, a different one than last time, because a dough of this elasticity can stand to be stretched further (where last week this was not the case). At every stage, the next might be delayed (I expected it to do *this*, but instead it did *that*), which might require adaptation and adjustment (if I can increase the temperature somehow, or now that I have more time, I will . . .). These judgments and my reactions to them—the way I am learning how to maneuver the dough quickly, the way I can use a bit of water to help extricate myself from a sticky situation—these responses constitute an adaptive vocabulary, a process of intimacy that presupposes ongoing change. The contingencies of the environment and of the process assert themselves even partially, and I act into this field that is more legible to me than it was six months ago.

I am engaged in this dynamic situation through repetition and perpetual guesswork. The daily performance of these motions is the very means by which I transform myself. How is it that my hands contain a skill that last year they did not? It is due exclusively to repetition, potential loosed by the most limited activity. Habit therefore "might be the mechanism that allows for the continuation of 'business as usual,' but in other ways it is the name that recognises the phenomenal ability of human life to be transformed" (Highmore 2011, 169). Far from the well-worn anxiety regarding the possibility that habits might penetrate improvisation's pursuit of novelty, "Acts of improvisation can readily incorporate patterns of behavior" (Iyer 2016, 75) and in fact depend on those patterns. I learn to make bread by repeating the same steps every day, and it always turns out differently (from both the previous loaf and especially from my neighbor's—after all, my skin bacteria is in there). Like playing an instrument, baking the same loaf of bread three times a week *is* the means by which I learn how to bake that loaf of bread. By "learn" all I mean is that I have experience with something through repeated contact, a process I have described as intimate.

Pushing further, and again like playing music: it is not just that repetition harbors future transformation within it; rather, the repetition *itself* is improvisatory. Otherwise put: of course repetition is the dialectical underside of variation. But equally, repetition is also variation itself, is always already corrupted, entangled, and plural. Taken in its multiple senses, practice is never only training (practice *for*) but also and equally an act in itself (as in "to do"). To practice is to do something, which always engages a context at the same time that it changes us, our capacities, our experience of the world. In sum, *repetition is not repetitive.* The

scale that I practice repetitively in order to later improvise is *also* a parameter that I navigate, equal to but different from the tune I practice it *for*, a parameter that varies, that changes me as I change it, this time faster than the last.

I am baking a loaf of bread that both is and is not the same as the loaf I baked yesterday and will bake tomorrow. The making of this loaf does not involve the same processes, ingredients, or connotations that it did fifty years ago, does not mean or involve what it does in Italy, where the grain is different, where the economy of food and its relationship to communities does not mirror that in the United States. The experience of baking is also different for women, whose relationships to culinary activity has been historically overdetermined by patriarchy, and in which I am also situated, but differently. On paper, as recipe or score, I am repeating the same behavior day after day, producing the same loaf of bread each time. But paper is a poor indicator of what this behavior means and does. I know in advance that I will feed my levain tomorrow morning; but that knowledge and that outcome are only part of the point. I do not know what it will be like or how it will feel when I do it, whether it will smell too sharp (it must have been warmer than I thought), what else will be going on in my head or on the phone, how the apartment will feel or affect me in the morning, in this light, while I mix the flour. Foreknowledge of the result (the levain will be fed) does not replace the experience of the process (having fed it). Ultimately, my foreknowledge might be useless; sometimes things happen, and I or the dough do not do what I expected either of us to do. I am starting to more consistently bake bread that I like. Occasionally, a catastrophe ruins three days of work.

Listening: A Brief Survey

Listening is of course a concept with its own literature in music and sound studies. Even staying limited to the question of listening as an everyday practice, it is impossible to adequately address in this space. Nevertheless, just touching on a few points already reveals the centrality of contingency as an inescapable throughline, destabilizing any "as such" theory of listening practices by tying them to specific circumstances. Here, the argument regarding listening is not an argument at all but a documentation of variegated modalities composing a sense of something nonquantifiable.

<u>Listening as Heightened Perception:</u> Often posed in opposition to "hearing" (understood as passive relation), listening focuses sound per-

ception with an intention. Pauline Oliveros further partitions listening into "focal" and "global" modes, where the former involves a limited scene and the latter aims for a comprehensive perspective. Bringing these two modalities into balance is a key goal for deep listening, an active practice that involves "listening in every possible way to everything possible to hear no matter what you are doing. Such intense listening includes the sounds of daily life, of nature, or one's own thoughts as well as musical sounds" (1999). As we can see here, deep listening resonates with meditative practices of mindful awareness, as well as with the modes of musical listening made famous by John Cage and Pierre Schaeffer, in which everyday, noisy, or otherwise ostensibly insignificant sounds are treated as musical by virtue of a shift in attention.[6] Although each of these figures develops listening practices in distinct ways, all share the view that sound, in and of itself, is worthy of our attention; moreover, they each posit that everyone can experience this value through the development of our listening practices, can transform what we hear from background noise into something more by means of a practiced musical listening. Paying attention in a sustained way to the sounds that we typically take for granted foregrounds sonic experience in a way that is distinct from our habitual immersion in sound, transforming what passed as seamless background into an object of interest, depth, and singularity. By focusing on sounds that usually drift by unnoticed, we make the familiar strange, destabilizing and potentially reconfiguring our sense of the world. Insofar as such modes of listening change our engagement with the external environment, they carry the potential to transform how we understand and relate to others. This potential has a utopian or at least critical valence; indeed for Oliveros, deep listening is explicitly ethical, a practice that puts us in touch with our relationality, fostering empathy.

Listening as Labor: In response to the fact that listening is often gendered feminine, ethical and relational theories of listening serve as key notions within feminist praxis as reappropriations of a skill deemed extraneous under neoliberal capitalism. In this vein, listening is used as an artistic method, a valued care practice among friends, and a means of building community. The potential of listening to improve the world is not only raised by feminist theory, but also by broader discourse as well. In the case of #MeToo, for instance, "the idea that being heard is crucial to social transformation and gender-based justice appears once again, whereby the making audible of testimony can help to reconfigure imaginations of the world" (Thompson 2018). For Marie Thompson, however, in addition to its promise as a care practice, there is also a danger in

overinvesting in listening inasmuch as empathetic and liberatory modes of listening then become "valorized and ontologized." In an argument that in many ways mirrors my own position on improvisation, Thompson grants that listening may in fact function as a powerful tool of connection and transformation. However, she also argues that "the tendency to romanticize and idealize listening, and to ontologize the ethical hopes attached to it" often deflects attention from instances where the politics of listening involve more exploitative relations (Thompson 2018). Some of this ambivalence is attributable to, for example, the ways in which listening, even or especially "good" and "attentive" listening, "has become commodified in various fields of paid and unpaid work" (2018).

Like improvisation, listening is a practice that is inevitably implicated in racialized and gendered hierarchies. Therefore, the imperative to listen in a certain way becomes unevenly distributed, becomes a demand or a recourse for some people and something unnecessary to others. As feminized, affective and emotional labor like listening is placed by mainstream culture onto women and others who fall outside of dominant notions of masculinity. Whether in service industries (see Hochschild 2012), relationships, home-family units, or contemporary human resources literature, listening helps facilitate and optimize the social reproduction of the capitalist laborer in keeping with other, often unacknowledged and gendered labor, such as housework and childcare (Federici 1975; Thompson 2018). While in service industries, this labor is often explicitly offloaded onto women (Hochschild's quintessential example here is the flight attendant), in interpersonal contexts, it may also fall to women by a kind of default, insofar as they have been trained by our culture to listen as a reflex. That is, while listening is lauded as a valuable skill for everyone to learn, under capitalist patriarchy, women may not be able to *stop* listening, given that "women remain the default managers of the intimate" (Berlant 2008, xi).

Moreover, and again like improvisation, a certain kind of corporatized listening has become rather suddenly fashionable: training programs, webinars, and infographics proliferate about this ostensibly transformative skill (where "skill" is used intentionally here to reflect how listening is approached in such contexts as an imputable competence for enhancing a worker's value, marketability, or neoliberal brand, something akin to proficiency with Microsoft Office). Corporatized listening is characterized as a series of steps one has to perform ("demonstrate concern"; "use brief verbal affirmations") in order to make the other person feel as if they are "being heard" (see figure 7). Reflecting on

Figure 7: "Active listening skills." infographic, The Balance Careers.

the function of such efforts, we might say that listening is described in this superficial and performative manner because such demonstrations make it easier for management to dissolve the situation as such by turning "active listening" from a precondition of action to a utility in and of itself. Rather than listening in order to then address harm, "active listening" is cast *as* the solution, as a practice which promises to optimize interpersonal relations, insofar as "optimal" or "efficient" reads as smooth and conflict-free. Put another way, in business parlance, to "hear" someone itself becomes the end-goal, a potentially awkward but necessary step in order to facilitate changing nothing—allowing the complainant to feel "heard" through rehearsed, memorized performances of affirmation is seen to dissolve the need to complain further.

This dynamic has been extensively documented by Sara Ahmed's complaint project, which shows how, when teachers or students try to voice a complaint, higher education administrators often deploy bureaucratic mechanisms that forestall or outright deny the possibility of the complainants being listened to—worse, administrators and human resources reps may hear without listening, or may listen to prevent other actions from taking place, as for example, when the head of the department nods, and nodding becomes "the only thing that's happening."[7] In many of the scenarios outlined here, the labor of listening is dispro-

portionately placed on those in the less powerful position, leaving those higher up in the hierarchy free of the listening burden, a burden which takes its toll on the body. For Thompson, then, it is not that listening is incapable of helping us to reformulate relations of gender, power, and care, but rather that we should take care not to privilege this potential at the exclusion of attending to listening's equal potential as capitalist technology, as weaponized demand, or its capacity to reinforce and reproduce those same structures of power.

Listening as Technology of the Self: Perhaps the most common sense of listening vis-à-vis everyday life is the example of listening to music. In this process, everyday listening helps us not only to identify affects, ideas, and sounds that resonate with our self-conception but also to construct that self-conception in the first place (DeNora 2000). Although such listening practices are often performed in isolation, musical listening links up with larger communities when it helps to form an intimate public, where shared sentiments are located in and felt through music understood to be in common. As in individual cases, music sometimes reflects and reinforces group identities while at other times it participates in constituting those identities. This often happens when certain kinds of sounds are understood to be beautiful for the first time, forming a new community of sense and shared experience (Shank 2014). Music in everyday life also helps to modulate affects, to shift moods, help us climb out of one, or amplify others (Anderson 2015; Eriksson and Johansson 2017). Music in this sense can serve as an affective technology, paired and selected based on desired experience or what desire has been manufactured for us, often in order to sell something.

But of course music is not the only kind of sound we listen to in everyday life. Sound technologies or "orphic media" (Hagood 2019) such as white noise machines and noise cancelling headphones modulate our sound environments to optimize what under neoliberalism we are encouraged to understand as performances such as studying and sleeping, as well as to block out "undesirable" sounds (and the people who make them). In this sense, while listening to music or modulating sound environments via technology can be seen as agentic practices, listening can also be weaponized against others.[8] Perceptions of what counts as "noise" are imbricated within physical environments and discursive power structures that therefore race and gender certain sounds as desirable or undesirable by what Jennifer Lynn Stoever (2016) calls "the listening ear."

Listening as Police: The listening ear is the aggregate frame that over

time "normalizes the aural tastes and standards of white elite masculinity as the singular way to interpret sonic information" (Stoever 2016, 13). This standard establishes and maintains the "sonic color line" that encodes certain sounds with certain identities, delineating boundaries of noise/music as well as acceptable/unacceptable behavior according to its standards. As we have seen throughout this book, sounds are inextricably linked to our perceptions of who or what makes those sounds, as well as interpretations over what activity is involved in sound production. Differently put, certain sounds signal both behaviors and identities, both who is making sound and how. Such "signals" are, as Nina Sun Eidsheim suggests, often more reflective of the listener's perspectives, biases, and investments than they are of an empirical situation that the ear "decodes" (Eidsheim 2019). In this way, "although often deemed an unmediated physical act, listening is an interpretive, socially constructed practice conditioned by historically contingent and culturally specific value systems riven with power relations" (Stoever 2016, 14).

The listening ear, which polices the sonic color line, hears sounds that it doesn't like as indicative of boundary-crossing: the speaker or the listener in question has transgressed outside their "proper place" in the structure of power by performing some activity that signals this transgression sonically. Far from abstract, the consequences for crossing the sonic color line can be deadly, as we continue to see in the violence exacted on Black people—often children—for making noise or simply playing music. When such violence is exacted over music, it is always exacted over music understood to be "Black." Sounds that come to be associated with femininity, with blackness, and/or with other affective markers of minority identity positions can elicit policing from the listening ear, from the white perspective that senses something "amiss" in those sounds, something threatening or destabilizing to its own centrality. Listening in this way becomes a weaponized mode of policing, where "common sense" assumptions about "acceptable" sounds are used to enforce dominant modes of power. In this context, listening becomes a kind of surveillance technology, a sensory perception used to police social and political boundaries.

Listening: a practice of heightened awareness and a means toward transformed, empathetic social relations; a form of gendered affective labor in monetized and nonmonetized contexts; a performative mechanism for allowing the continuation of business as usual; an agential technique of self-making, community-building, environmental modulation,

and behavior optimization; a perceptive technology of surveillance and policing, wielded by white supremacist patriarchy against all categories of sound associated with the Other. Even these variegated senses do not exhaust possible or even prominent genres of listening activity and the uses to which they are put. Like baking or cooking, listening is an element of everyday life so repeated it is ubiquitous, and thus its divergent functions, appearances, and contexts recede into the background. But also like baking or cooking (or walking or reading or speaking) listening is a *productive* practice—we bring ourselves to the act such that identical sources of sound are perceived differently by different people. Given this productive element, it is clear that every instance of listening is regardless produced through a collaboration between sounding event and listening perceiver, who in part constructs any event by bringing to it a particular, active interpretive frame. In the same way that de Certeau posits reading as an act of generative production rather than passive reception, listening involves an encounter through which the listener helps to constitute the sounding event as-such. Therefore and quite simply: listening is always improvised, no matter its context. Flush with contingency, listening is never neutrally receptive, but a relational mode of improvisation, perception, and production at once.

Working: On Contingency and Labor

While in many ways working is a distinct practice within the space of everyday life, I still consider it to be pertinent to any discussion of the quotidian insofar as it is increasingly and thoroughly imbricated into any ostensibly separate modes, such that any distinction between "work time" and "leisure time" is increasingly difficult to defend. But rather than raising the entire field of research on labor in/as everyday life, I focus here on one aspect of our current economy where contingency is the governing organizing principle: precarious labor. Specifically, I raise the widespread (global and increasingly suffusing every industry) issue of precarity through contingent academic work, as the corporate university is one of the most casualized sectors of all (Gill 2014; Champlin and Knoedler 2017). I choose to spend some time on this problem because of the ways in which it clarifies why "openness" or "adaptability" cannot be valued in and of themselves, as concepts devoid of any human particularity. Here, far from revolutionary, emancipatory, or even promising, contingency (and its embodied equivalent, improvisation) has defined the experience of brutal labor exploitation, abjection, and betrayal at

every level of higher education. This situation, with us in some form for decades, is now reaching a breaking point due to a different kind of contingency: the COVID-19 pandemic itself is a contingent event whose fallout, among other effects, further binds the precariat to a perpetual present in which any number of possibilities may yet occur, and from which, because of this fact, the future is unimaginable.

As I write, higher education in the US is convulsing under what might well become an "extinction event."[9] As with the unfurling crises in healthcare, unemployment, and other sectors, the pandemic will not have caused the collapse of universities, but rather tipped over the house of cards on which US schools have purposely been erected. For as much as we might like to imagine that higher education has a more noble purpose than any of the string of retailers who have filed for bankruptcy during COVID, universities have been consciously built so that they too are susceptible to fluctuations in consumer (read: student) demand.

It is common knowledge among those who work in academia that university systems have been deliberately restructured, in the past forty years, from public institutions into neoliberal corporations, where "neoliberal" signals both broader cultural values as well as the specific labor policies through which universities are run. Such policies are organized by administrators and corporate boards, whose invasive presence is inherently antagonistic to students and teachers insofar as they see or are compelled to see the former as customers and the latter as "human resources," to be used for profit-generation. Under this corporate paradigm, students, whose ever-rising tuition rates provide income to the university with no restrictions on use, have experienced skyrocketing rates of student loan debt in this country.[10] But instead of funding the education for which students ostensibly pay, these tuition dollars have instead funded lavish facilities, six- (or seven-)figure administrative salaries, hedge fund managers for endowments that can't, apparently, be used even in times of crisis, and more.[11] Teachers, on the other side of this interconnected picture[12] have been systematically precaritized, because contingent faculty are less expensive for the administrative bottom line (Champlin and Knoedler 2017). "This move to precarity . . . in the name of profitability has been ushered into the American academy through corporate language, logic, and practices, such as relying on management consultants who make the increasing exploitation of underpaid academic labor both possible and defensible" (Navarro 2017, 509).

Contingent labor can refer to any category for which a regular period of employment cannot be assumed. In higher education, contingent fac-

ulty typically fall into two broad categories. "Visiting Faculty," postdoc-
toral fellows, and other non–tenure track, full-time faculty look relatively
comparable to their "permanent" faculty colleagues insofar as they often
receive benefits (healthcare, retirement), can attend faculty meetings,
are provided offices, and receive a salary (albeit at a lower rate than their
permanent colleagues). These workers are contingent, however, inso-
far as they are hired on a contractual basis, and can be fired without
being fired—that is, if their contracts are not renewed. Importantly, for
many of these job categories, contracts *will* inevitably *not* be renewed, as
attached to the positions is an expiration date, after which period (often
one to three years) the jobholder who was doing quality work will no
longer be "needed." Typically, rather than being granted a permanent
contract, those workers will be replaced with new contingent faculty in
the same contracts, doing the same jobs for the same pay, which never
has to increase, thus continuing the cycle of precarity (and the cost sav-
ings to the university).

There is a good degree of variation in the way that the other
category—adjunct faculty—are compensated. What is common to all
of them is the temporary basis (usually semester-to-semester, although
it can be longer) on which they are hired. In the best cases, adjuncts
are paid a baseline salary per course, with the "per course" rate set at
a livable wage. In this case, one could make a sustainable living, pro-
vided you are assigned enough courses (compare this with tenure-track
faculty, for whom there is no necessary association between a wage and
their course load). At worst, adjuncts are paid by the "contact hour,"
in other words, the literal hour during which they are in front of stu-
dents. As a result of this payment scheme, adjuncts often earn below
minimum wage, which itself has not kept pace with inflation, nor has it
been raised in the past decade, to say nothing of the fact that they are not
compensated for doing all the necessary work that takes place outside
of the "contact hour" such as grading, meeting with students, syllabus
planning, researching, lesson prepping, and so on. Here as in other sec-
tors, women and minority groups are disproportionately represented in
the ranks of the contingent.[13] However, in the United States, the vast
majority of the university professors are now contingent faculty, totaling
around 73 percent.[14] Hence, per an August 2020–2021 report from the
American Association of University Professors, "The typical U.S. college
professor makes $3,556 per [sixteen-week] course" without benefits.[15]

Increasingly, precarity is a shared condition among those who teach.
Thus it is no longer possible to entertain any of the number of myths

that rhetorically sustain these conditions, from the myth of meritocracy (the best will inevitably rise out of contingency) to the myth of work as its own reward (professors stay in unlivable jobs because they love the work)[16] to the myth that these jobs are dues-paying prerequisites before better, future work. In the same way that Naomi Klein (2000) described the replacement of stable union-jobs with "McJobs" in the service sector, contingent faculty jobs are not training positions, despite the fact that they are often justified as such; increasingly, rather, these are the *only* positions that anyone who (a) wants to teach and (b) is looking at the current job market can reasonably expect to have. As Rosalind Gill writes, "Today precariousness rather than security is one of the defining experiences of academic life" (Gill 2014, 18).

Contingent faculty are, quite simply, exploited workers, paid the least amount possible by an employer who passes cost savings not to students, but to itself. Thus "It is no longer enough to say that Universities are <u>like</u> businesses; Universities <u>are</u> businesses" (Gill 2014, 17). Highly profitable for the administrators at the top, increasingly speculative in financial markets, and dependent on student "demand," universities had no safety nets in place when COVID-19 hit.[17] Whether their enrollments are declining, expected to decline, or merely hypothetically declining, responses across the country have predictably involved austerity measures from the neoliberal playbook. Ohio University is one of many that cut hundreds of faculty, even though their budget woes are a result of administrative spending.[18] Miami University chose not to renew the contracts of over 200 contingent faculty—a decision explicitly justified through projected declines in enrollment—even though enrollment and extramural funding both ended up setting record highs rather than declining.[19] Up the road, the University of Akron has lost a quarter of its faculty for similar reasons.[20] City University of New York laid off 2,800 adjunct faculty[21] and further examples are too numerous to list. Positions like "teaching faculty" (another nontenure invention) that were once seen as relatively stable are becoming increasingly precarious.[22] In the world of contingent labor, we've now seen what flexibility amounts to: for teachers, flexibility means little more than the freedom to be fired.[23]

In this paradigm, contingency means toxic uncertainty: uncertainty over where to meet students (since an office is not provided); uncertainty over whether one will work next semester (since adjuncts are continuously rehired on a course by course basis); uncertainty over how to make ends meet (since the wages are so low); uncertainty over what you will do if you aren't hired back after all (since you've spent a decade or two training for *this* career). Adjunct faculty often teach at multiple schools

in order to piece together a living. What will they do if their car breaks down? What will they do, without health coverage, if they become sick? In contrast to most discussions of contingency in music, the existence of many potential futures is a source of perpetual anxiety for the contingent worker, primarily because so many of those likely outcomes are disastrous. The "ifs" of this life prevent any stability on which to grow or simply to live. In these conditions, improvisation is not a privilege or an innovation, is not creative or empowering, is not empathetic, communicative, democratic, fair, or meaningful. Improvisation is simply a demand placed on some workers and not others. Improvisation is survival.

Contingency functions here (as everywhere) in extremely specific ways: by overloading contingency onto one group of workers, contingent employment frees up administrators to improvise at will, to move budgets around, shuffle numbers, and otherwise run their corporations with as little resistance as possible. On the other hand, improvisation is forced on the workers whose real lives lie at the other end of that number-crunching. In this way, contingent faculty share much with the gig economy workers whose "essential" services have been so critical during the pandemic, but not critical enough to warrant a raise in wages to the threshold of livability. The irony behind calling workers "essential" while paying them starvation wages is not in fact an irony at all, but is rather reflective of the actual function of their jobs in this economy. As with Uber drivers, part-time grocery store workers, and delivery service contractors, very specific types of contingencies are forced on precarious workers, while agentic improvisation—the powers of flexibility, adaptability, and choice—is reserved for the capitalist class. It is the latter who possess both the kind of open flexibility that allows agency and the closed stability which makes open improvisation possible: reliable income, a retirement account, any measure of healthcare, and savings in the event that any of the above become disrupted. Clearly, both groups improvise, making use of their constraints to maneuver or invent or live; but look at the specificity of those constraints, and one immediately sees how incommensurate improvisation can be.

Guy Standing identifies seven types of security that are denied the precarious worker, which range from wage instability to the kinds of destabilizing fallouts that can occur when a financial (in the US, often medical) emergency occurs (Standing 2011). For the contingent worker, then, it is not more flexibility but more *rigidity* that would be the truly liberating change. Importantly, this rigidity should not be seen as the kind of restriction that facilitates *more* improvisation (read as freedom)

but a qualitatively *different kind* of improvisation. What's more, it is clear that the discourse used to justify such labor conditions illuminates how improvisation becomes a key ideological weapon for companies who don't want to pay their workers.[24] When companies are able to successfully characterize gig work as "flexible" rather than debilitating, the ostensibly increased capacity for improvisation on the part of workers is transformed into the key feature that justifies contract labor in the public imagination. In a grand form of projection, this ideological reframing takes the very thing that's exploitative and recasts it from an imposition into a perk. This not only has the effect of concealing power relations (particularly in public discourse, where worker flexibility passes for worker satisfaction) but also serves to reinforce the validity of treating workers like they're not workers; these companies have, as it were, preempted any attempt to force better working conditions by defining contract work as a gift to be preserved, and ostensibly *for the benefit of workers.* Improvisation, as an ideological justification of this system, is oppressive then not only insofar as it is simply what workers must do in order to survive, but also in that it is used to validate the structure of their labor contracts. The lie here is that workers prioritize the capacity to improvise above the capacity to earn a living wage.

Contingency is also debilitating in another way: by adding an asterisk (or several) to every job, contingent labor forecloses the future by binding workers to a perpetual present in which anything might yet happen. Whether the dream of a tenure-track job, or the calamity of a health emergency, the uncertainty that marks contingent labor prevents precarious workers from planning anything at all, a feeling that is, again, more acutely felt and by more people during the current pandemic. More of us now feel what it is to *not know* what will happen, how our industries will be affected, what opportunities, if any, will be available, and when, and to feel what happens to our sense of self as a result of pervasive uncertainty. We are also more familiar with the debilitating effects of uncertainty on our mental health.

This is another sense in which contingent faculty and gig economy workers are governed by the same forces, which is the biopolitical sense. For contingent faculty (who do most of the teaching, and often, the most important teaching from an enrollment perspective)—as well as UPS drivers, caregivers, and other "essential" workers—essential has come to mean expendable, and precisely: the administrators of our universities and our industries require us to be fed into the machine of capital in order to keep its gears running.[25] It is the cultivation and use of a precari-

ous workforce that feeds and sustains those with the most power. This has all the racial and class effects that one would imagine it does, with poor and minority communities the most disproportionately affected by COVID-19, and the most likely to be in precarious working conditions.[26] The situation is well-illustrated by Diana, a worker quoted in the New York Times's breakdown of racial disparities in COVID-19 cases:

> Diana, who was born in the United States but moved to Guatemala with her parents as a small child before returning to this country five years ago, is still battling symptoms. "We have to go out to work," she said. "We have to pay our rent. We have to pay our utilities. We just have to keep working" (Oppel et al. 2020)

Diana lives in one of the wealthiest parts in the country, exemplifying what it means to claim that the exploited are being put to work not *while* the privileged quarantine, but *in order for* the privileged to quarantine. Indeed, for Saidiya Hartman, the bottom rung of our society "is the place of the 'essential' worker, the place where all the onerous reproductive labor occurs . . . in large measure, this world is maintained by the disposability and the fungibility of Black and brown female lives" (Hartman 2020). Essential workers must work because their wages are so low that they can't afford to stay home. Apparently, the state understands that this arrangement is to its benefit: without essential, expendable workers, the wealthy wouldn't be able to navigate this crisis in the ways that they have. Thus, the United States provided only $1,200 in relief over the first nine months of the pandemic, while other developed nations issued monthly checks.

Contingency, improvisation, and freedom are all inadequate concepts for understanding these dynamics; they must be read as "contingent *on*," "improvisation *for*," and "freedom *to*." All of these terms exist in specific configurations, and how we recognize them is affected by those particularities. Improvisation can signify the free-play allowed by structures of support, but improvisation can also become the necessary flailing that remains when support is withdrawn. How improvisation looks or is recognized in either case differs substantially. It is the latter flailing that Lauren Berlant notes is an increasingly normal part of everyday experience: "conventions of reciprocity that ground how to live and imagine life are becoming undone in ways that *force* the gestures of *ordinary improvisation* within daily life into greater explicitness affectively and aesthetically" (2011, 7, my emphases). In sum, stability provides freedom

to maneuver, and a lack of stability requires working no matter the cost. Both scenarios are contingent, but one is oppressive. Contingency is in this sense unevenly distributed, and what people are free or unfree to do is revealed in these statistics as a variable set by structural conditions, conditions of white supremacy and capitalist exploitation.

Returning to the academy, one effect of the neoliberalization of higher education has been to turn faculty culture itself into one of technologized bureaucracy, "individualised, responsibilised, self-managing and monitoring, and increasingly carrying their office or workplace 'on board' at all times in a mobile device" (Gill 2014, 13). This state of affairs makes it all but impossible to organize around or even cognize the systemic issues at play, too busy are faculty making sure that they, individually, are going to survive, however miraculously. "Indeed, it has become increasingly difficult to speak of anything resembling faculty culture apart from the competitive, market-based, high-performance habitus designed for them by management" (Bousquet 2008, 13).

As with for-profit healthcare, possibly and finally revealed in public discourse as dysfunctional by the pandemic, it is possible that the COVID and its aftermath will cause faculty to wake up to what is necessary here, a prescription that again stands in sharp contrast to all valorizations of flexibility, adaptability, and contingency. Instead, what higher education needs to save itself from extinction is clarity in the form of concrete, focused actions and concrete, focused demands. No more negotiations, theorizing, or open letters to administrations; what it needs is stability, predictability, and unity in the forms of unionization and direct action.[27] As for the demands, these too have to do with stability, not only in demand for livable wages, but for consistent, reliable, predictable funding of our state institutions from government.[28] This is not to say that direct action would not itself involve contingency, practice, and navigations, as if it was a solid *thing* that can be activated; it is only to say that in important ways, contingency is the exact enemy in this struggle, an enemy that has tended to dissolve clarity of purpose into bureaucratic reforms. It is to say that there is no way out of this situation unless the structure of corporate flexibility is decisively and permanently reshaped. In this way, the struggle invokes a different sense of the word "contingent," which is a group in solidarity.

SEVEN | Perception, Situation, Orientation

Building on this section's conflation between improvisation and everyday practices, chapter 7 takes the premise further by arguing that perception itself is an improvised activity: far from passive, neutral, or universal, perception depends on our particular subjectivities, constituted as they are by particular historical circumstances and experiences in the world.[1] Beyond this question of positionality, how we experience the world also shifts on a more immediate timescale, as we navigate it. What we might see or not see changes as we adjust our positions, and how we understand or feel or respond differs from other people at the same time that it defies a kind of objective characterization. Perception is indeterminate even when we think we're sure of something—thus, being alive is synonymous with improvising.

In considering perception this way, my view of improvisation as coextensive with living is fully articulated. But rather than end the conversation there, thinking about perception also forces a kind of metaquestion that is critical to consider as a kind of addendum: if perception itself is necessarily improvisatory, how do we perceive *that fact*? In other words, what might change if we perceived and attended to the improvisatory nature of living? In the same way that our perception of music changes when we know that it is improvised, does our perception of everyday life shift when we take seriously the possibility that improvisation is our only access to experience? In the end of the chapter, I answer this question affirmatively: while there are a host of qualifications to consider, I propose that awareness of the fact of our own improvising does change how we perceive those activities, and therefore, what is possible.

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Perception: Improvising the World

What does it mean to speak of perception as a practice, and why does it matter if we do? Colloquially, perception might be understood as something prior-to, something on a different register, since everyday practices are predicated on the ability to perceive in the first place. But following theories of embodied and situated cognition, the ability to perceive is also predicated on practice: we only perceive the world inasmuch as we participate in it. Moreover, as Sara Ahmed will show, it matters how you approach things. This participation, in my view, carries all the hallmarks of an everyday practice, and therefore, of an improvisation. In this section I turn to Merleau-Ponty, for whom the active nature of perception is central. Subsequently, Ahmed uses and extends Merleau-Ponty in order to trouble the question of what kinds of bodies are doing the perceiving, to show the power of objects that pull or direct us affectively, and to consider the possibility of practicing otherwise.

For Merleau-Ponty, perception is possible not because we have access to the world but because we are in it as we are of it. We cannot conceive of vision, for instance, as "an operation of thought that would set up before the mind a picture or a representation of the world" because we are always already "immersed in the visible" through our own bodies (2007a, 354). As with our discussions of embodied listening, perception is not a passive relation that apprehends what simply appears before the perceiver. Rather, the perceiver actively participates in the world, helping to construct it and its appearance around them. Crucially, for Merleau-Ponty, this takes place through the medium of the body, which connects us to the flesh of the world.[2] This view is a formulation of embodied cognition, which breaks from the cognitivist perspective described in chapter 3, and which points to the fact that perception is a kind of specialized aptitude that we have developed as surely as that of language.[3] To open onto the world and to be opened in return is an active and ongoing process. This process manifests contingency in several ways.

The closed sense of contingency is the sense in which every uncountable detail in both their facticity and in their affective qualities form a constellation of singularities as they are in a moment, as if caught. This closure gathers everything that could have been otherwise, that which *is* in a given scene (despite the ultimate opacity of this "is") and is distinct from all other situations. But crucially, as we have seen throughout this book, what appears as simple fact or reality is such only though the active

participation of the perceivers involved. Therefore, the closed constellation of contingent specificities is identifiable but provisional, never closed in actuality but appearing so by virtue of its very openness. This reversibility between "external" situation and "internal" experience is the "interrelationship of mind and world, the interdependence between knowledge and its context" (Iyer 2016, 77).

At the same time, the open sense of contingency is also operative in perception insofar as any perceived situation contains inexhaustible indeterminacies. Merleau-Ponty asks, "How can any thing ever really and truly *present itself* to us, since its synthesis is never a completed process?" and concludes that the "unity of the subject or the object is not a real unity, but a presumptive unity on the horizon of experience" (2002, 385). Experience here is everything—it is our access to perception, the only means by which we engage with the world. But this engagement can only ever be partial, since there is no privileged position from which to survey or to perceive in totality, and since the flesh that connects all visibility in experience is also linked from one body to another through a hinge or a gap, what Merleau-Ponty called the "chiasm." Although I am connected to the world as equally seer and seen, I will never see but from my own vantage. I am both in and of the world at the same time that I am distinct from it, and this foundational indeterminacy structures my whole experience. Thus, "consciousness, which is commonly taken as an extremely enlightened region, is, on the contrary, the very region of indetermination."[4] This indetermination is so fundamental to our experience of the world that Merleau-Ponty (echoing Arendt) claims: "Ambiguity is of the essence of human existence, and everything we live or think has always several meanings. . . . Existence is indeterminate in itself, by reason of its fundamental structure" (2002, 196).

The ambiguity of experience opens up the possibility of thinking perception as a practice, mutable, active, and which can change us as we change it. Ongoing and contingent, perception depends on a whole series of variables, some of which depend on our performances even as our performances make perception possible. Ultimately, then, there is at the heart of perception, both practice and indeterminacy, not only in the sense of open possibilities but also of inexhaustible mysteries. How we react to those mysteries even as we perceive them is the realm of improvisation, an active doing that is always in-response-to because we are never not situated in something. In other words, "We make choices based on what's at hand, what's allowed, and what's desired, and also based on what we are taught, trained, forced, or empowered to do, or

on what we are experienced in doing" (Iyer 2016, 75). But again and still: if improvisation is a contingent response engendered by (and a part of) contingent encounters, it is not just our responses that count. More precisely, the question is not limited to the "choices" we make, since we cannot easily determine where our responses begin and where the influence of the environment ends.

Perception is indeterminate and in a variety of ways. This alone makes it clear that perception necessitates and engenders improvisation simply as a function of living. But there is more: to acknowledge the contingency in perception—which depends on each body, not "the body"—is to acknowledge that some people will perceive and/or be perceived differently than others. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed focuses on "how bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced by how they extend into space" (2006, 5) or as matters of orientation. While her project is more concerned with bringing phenomenology and queer theory into relation, it is also critical for understanding how perception is not neutral, how it is affected by what we do or where we turn, how new worlds can emerge where what was "given" seemed inevitable. Building on Merleau-Ponty's description of a disorienting spatial experience as queer, Ahmed proposes that we can extend Merleau-Ponty's analysis to consider how a queer sexual orientation puts the queer subject out of alignment with the "vertical" world, and how that world "direct[s] life in some ways rather than others, through the very requirement that we follow what is already given to us" (2006, 21). In other words, "compulsory heterosexuality operates as a straightening device, which rereads signs of queer desire as deviations from the straight line" (23). To identify how queer is made to be out of alignment with this world gives us yet another way of understanding the contingency of perception, as well as the political implications of this contingency. "Perception is a way of facing something" that alters what we see, what we do not see, and how we understand possibilities. "What we perceive is dependent on where we are located, which gives us a certain take on things" (27). What Ahmed points to with queer phenomenology is the possibility of facing something differently.

Let's return to the example of walking for a moment, and Ahmed's use of the desire line, that deviant path produced in opposition to the sanctioned route. One consideration left out of the discussion in chapter 5 is the way that desire lines can only be carved with enough repeated foot traffic to testify to the need for its own existence. Ahmed writes:

> The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition. To say that lines are performative is to say that we find our way and we know which direction we face only as an effect of work, which is often hidden from view. (Ahmed 2006, 16)

While I have stressed that no repetition is ever purely repetitive, it is nevertheless true that we encounter the singularity of everyday life according to genres and refrains that come up again and again. Faced with a set of circumstances, it may be better or imperative for survival to continue to walk a certain path, to continue along it or to repeat its route. To improvise never only means to make it up as you go; rather, it can also mean following those paths that make sense to our contingent lives, encountering what we will. It can mean following a desire consistently, over and over, repetitively but no less contingently, because one must practice in order to practice. "The work of repetition is not neutral work; *it orients the body in some ways rather than others*" (Ahmed 2006, 57). How we choose to move, in relation to our environments, is therefore political, contingent, and anything but passive. In orienting this way or that, the world appears differently.

These differences are not incidental but fundamental, and sometimes even unbridgeable. As Iyer reminds us, incommensurate perceptions of common experiences can produce deadly consequences, as for example, when people and actions become "mis-tracked." We see the consequences of such mistracking in the many instances when deeply ingrained white fear has time and again seen and acted on *perceived* threats from Black men, or children, and how a whole apparatus of state-sanctioned violence coalesces to *uphold* and validate this perception of "reality," even or especially when it is contradicted by the view afforded from other angles, as in a cell-phone video.[5] To perceive is necessarily to improvise, insofar as perception must be enacted in a web of contingencies, and this is not a romantic proposition. How we approach or engage that web matters: it is an improvisation because we are trying to make a way, because we do so in our own ways, and because we are trying to do something without knowledge of what will result. We may not even know what it is that we are doing; it is only by moving forward that we have some sense of it. As soon as we entertain the possibility that perception is a practice that engages our environments, the contingencies of our lives leap to the fore, revealing the point to which all others have been

leading since this book began: to live is in itself to improvise. This is not the case only because a noncontingent situation cannot exist, but also because how we perceive the world is anyway through our participation in it. There is improvisation anywhere there is contingency, and there is never not contingency.

Situation: Scenes in the Ordinary

As I have argued throughout this book, the factors that contribute to a practice or improvisation do not exist as-such but rather emerge through encounters, in situations, sometimes only making themselves felt or affecting things at the moment of convergence. Practices are singular because they aren't type-forms we can point to, but adaptations engendered through a total scene that we may not fully understand or apprehend or feel. Turning toward the event in its presentness is critical here insofar as it reminds us that the everyday consists not only in practices, but in the situations that engender, challenge, or require them.

The idea of a situation or scene helps us to break down an interactive scenario where a subject engages their environments, turning it into an interdependent and noncoherent singularity through what Kathleen Stewart calls "ordinary affect." Such affects don't belong to their objects or subjects, nor to the genres to which we might attribute a given scene in the ordinary (the romantic dinner, the shopping trip). They "are not the kind of analytic object that can be laid out on a single, static plane of analysis, and they don't lend themselves to a perfect, three-tiered parallelism between analytic subject, concept, and world" (2007, 3–4). Ordinary affects are instead "a problem or a question": they suffuse each scene of which they are a part with contingency because whatever we call a "scene" is itself shifting, singular, or new, even if it seems familiar. An everyday scene might be one in which ideology or haptic attachment or repeated behavior is in play. Equally, a scene might be a collection of forces that we try to identify according to a genre with which we are familiar, and the labeling of some genre as such then affects how we act around it. In other words, the taking-shape of something *as* something we identify can become like an object that orients attention, intention, reaction, affect, and so on. Labeling or understanding a situation through a given prism turns that situation into a *thing* that then affects what we do. This is not to theoretically solidify a situation but to point to the ways in which our perceptions reify them regardless.

Sometimes, everyday life is so scrambled that identifying what is hap-

pening is impossible. This is the kind of messy everyday that Lauren Berlant explores, where pleasure and mere survival are often indistinguishable. The ordinary is the conjuncture where forces are felt: and while improvisation can sometimes be marshalled to navigate a tricky situation, it is also already the means by which we apprehend those forces or don't, come out fine or not, in short, the way that we are in a situation at all. Here too, the above discussion of perception and orientation illustrates that it is not only our bodies, orientations, and actions that structure perception; it is also history, memory, affect, and how our emerging consciousness of a situation might come to affect that situation. Perception is always improvised and always contingent, because our take on things can be redirected by other bodies, human or object or ephemeral force. This is all about improvisation—the ordinary, but at the same time world-making improvisation that helps us to feel out potential, define genre, and make our way among incoherence. No musical improvisation, I would suggest, is responsible for so much, is as virtuosic, demanding, or magical.

The situation as a whole can change how we perceive the situation as a whole, even as our understanding also depends on how we come in. This attention to the real-time, to the unfolding, to the particulars *as they are* in a situation is the final critical turn in thinking the improvisation of everyday life, and the relation between improvisation and attention is the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Orientation: A Theory of Musical Improvisation

In Part Two of this project, my focus has been to relentlessly explicate the ways in which everyday experience is not so much suffused with contingency as made of it, to probe the singularity (closed) and indeterminacy (open) that compose every situation, necessarily eliciting improvisation. Having made this argument and now turning toward an interpretation of its potential significance, is the result, as I wrote in the introduction, an impoverishment of the concept of improvisation to the point where it is rendered meaningless? From a scholarly perspective, what do we gain or lose if improvisation disappears?

Far from discounting a given improvisatory performance, I suggest that one consequence of this thinking might be a redirection of our attention away from improvisation itself and toward the situation in which improvisation is operative. If we can't ascribe significance to the act of improvising per se, then we have to locate answers to our scholarly

questions elsewhere. Without improvisation, where does our attention shift? What's left in the situation is what was there all along, what compelled our attention in the first place: the sounds and the people, the histories and circumstances, the agency of the performers in telling their stories, which, while never omniscient, help us understand what they might have experienced or what they feel is important to articulate. If we lose improvisation as an answer, we have to instead keep asking questions. In my view, this would be a worthwhile trade to consider. If improvisation is shown here to be ever-present, we lose the ability to reify it as a special force or activity. But in return, we potentially reprioritize what is most important in any case: relationality, contingency, singularity, the people and contexts which make a given situation what it is. In short, if improvisation disappears, it makes things easier to see.

Finally, it is worth reiterating that the perhaps polemical nature of my argument is belied by the fact that many of improvised music's greatest champions take it as a matter of course. In other words, I would again suggest that we take Eric Dolphy seriously when he claims that "jazz is like a part of living, like walking down the street and reacting to what you see and hear" (in Hentoff 1962); or my teacher Vinny Golia when he claims that "you're improvising when you're brushing your teeth"; or indeed Vijay Iyer when he argues for improvisation's omnipresence and identity with experience. For musicians like these, the quotidian aspect of improvisation is not at all contradictory with its centrality in their innovative work.

This position is promising to me for its potential to both demystify musical improvisation and to remystify everyday life. In the following chapter, I take up the aesthetic and political implications of thinking improvisation in this way. However, at the same time that I insist on the equivalence drawn between improvisation and living, the above discussion of perception has raised an additional, critical question, which will be essential for the remainder of this book: perception, like everything, is improvised—but is the reverse also true? *Is improvisation perceived?* Furthermore, why does this question matter?

Sometimes, it is fair to say that we are aware of our own improvising, or the ways that we are situated in and responding to contingencies that bloom in a moment. That kind of awareness is often with us, for example, when playing music, when altering a recipe to suit our needs, when we are guessing at how best to help our friends, and many other times besides. But perhaps most times, other narratives obscure the emergent negotiations that we perform, and which are subsumed under social genres like

"watering the plants" or "doing the dishes." Indeed, "For [de] Certeau, we invent our own unofficial everyday through the *improvised* ways in which we go about our daily activities (inhabiting, shopping, reading, conversing). . . . *Whether we recognize it as such or not*, everydayness is what we invent through the way we conduct our activities" (Sheringham 2009, 387, my emphasis). In this quote, Michael Sheringham fully corroborates a view of everyday life as improvised, and further, clarifies that it is so "whether we recognize it as such or not." In making this distinction, Sheringham raises the question of what changes when we *do* recognize it.

If improvisation is everything, some improvisations are invisible, while others are experienced deeply *as* improvisations. If it is true that contingency is everywhere, it nevertheless makes itself perceptible in uneven ways. And once we make this distinction, it seems immediately clear that being aware of our improvising changes things. Unlike the improvisation we might not notice, the improvisations we do perceive involve an active engagement whereby the indeterminacy and ongoing flux of a given process is embraced or understood rather than resisted or invisibilized. We might say, then, that in the same way performers and listeners change their approach to music when they are knowingly engaged in an improvisation, awareness of one's improvising becomes a *performative capacity* that makes a difference in what we are doing.

What is the significance of this distinction or capacity? Simply that it affects things. Although every musician improvises insofar as they navigate contingencies, a musician who considers and engages with this fact plays differently from a musician who does not. Likewise, in everyday life, the awareness of our improvising can itself become a factor that affects the situation we are attempting to navigate. In short, there is a difference between improvising, which we cannot but do, and being aware of that fact, actively. This kind of live and aware improvisation is therefore a state that equally may or may not be operative in music and/or in everyday life. But insofar as contingencies are always already present, and insofar as we can attune ourselves to those contingencies in a given situation, the act of trying to pay attention reveals what we might call "musical improvisation" not as rarefied behavior but as a potentiality hidden inside every moment.

"Musical improvisation," as I outlined in the introduction, follows John Cage's notion of "musical listening" in that it takes an activity in which we normally participate thoughtlessly and adds a kind of formal attention to its unfolding, where formal signals only that we are trying to organize dynamic multiplicities into some kind of shape we can feel. "Musical improvisation," then, is not an exceptional skill or the outcome

of specialized training; rather, it is a practice of attention that may be activated in any situation. Fundamentally, improvisation as contingent encounter requires that even being unaware of the fact that we are improvising would not mitigate the fact that we are doing so (as in a "bad" version of "Giant Steps," where the drummer is thinking about dinner instead of listening);[6] but unawareness does mitigate the force, efficacy, effect, or magic of improvisation. Once we become engaged, we activate new potentialities.

Further exploring this mode of awareness, Sheringham gets quite close to describing what I mean by "musical improvisation" when he summarizes George Perec's note-taking process: during three consecutive days in October, Perec made notes of his observations of Place Saint-Sulpice in Paris, from four different locations. Perec wrote as he observed, noting the people who strolled by, the traffic patterns, and what he's had to drink. These collected notes appear in translation as *Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*—but in contrast to the "exhaustive" implication in the title, the endeavor was not, as Sheringham notes, a vain attempt to capture each innumerable detail on each of these days. Rather, Perec's was an effort to *attend to* the contingencies that compose a life, to "explore the lived experience of an individual subject seeking to apprehend a dimension of his own reality that is inseparable from his participation in the wider currents of the everyday" (Sheringham 2009, 271).

In these accounts, Perec includes metanarratives of his own state of mind, his own limitations and interests. But most important, as his list of observations grows, the reader becomes attuned to the presence of repetition, of motifs or refrains, and the difference that placing such motifs in relation reveals. As Perec's list of observations proceeds, certain recurring figures (people with bags, the color "apple-green," but above all busses) draw attention, through contrast, to the differences present in each repetition. Seeing these details repeat with a difference highlights our immersion in the everyday and the degree to which we do or do not observe this immersion. What normally passes by becomes significant through the kind of care and attention that Perec models. Thus, Sheringham writes that "observing the everyday brings about a transmutation of attention, making visible something that was, according to Perec, disguised by the narrowness of our habitual modes of seeing" (2009, 268).

As this above quote indicates, it is repetition itself that—far from rendering actions meaningless—simply eclipses the everyday from view. But at the same time, it is the repetition in Perec's account that also grants access to the uniqueness of each iteration; by placing so many similar

microevents in the same context or by rubbing them together, their differences are illuminated in relief. As Sheringham puts it, "To 'take in' what we read here, we have to *attune* ourselves to the rhythm of things, to the way sameness is actually ever-changing, and we ourselves are a part of this constant process" (266, my emphasis). Again, it isn't just that Perec is paying attention, is apprehending the minute details that the less observant would miss. Instead, Perec is participating in this process, introducing his own productive change. Perec is practicing a kind of musical awareness in Saint-Sulpice, which is nothing other than a form of attending to the contingencies of a moment through embodied engagement. It consists in noticing that which is normally invisible, contingencies and singularities not in their entirety (as if they could be exhausted) but as experience. While de Certeau articulates the generative uniqueness of everyday practices, it is Perec who foregrounds the act of *noticing* the difference in repetition. This leads Sheringham, in the end, to write that "one should associate the *quotidien*, above all, perhaps, with the act and process of attention. Inherently performative, the everyday comes into view . . . when it receives attention" (2009, 398).

Sheringham's interpretation of everyday life is critical for thinking "musical improvisation" as I mean to describe it—but some further specifications are necessary. It is essential, first of all, that this form of awareness not be considered as a kind of consciousness. To improvise "musically" we have to return to the notion of affect that insists that experience overflows our capacities, to the ways in which perception has been shown in this chapter to be indeterminate, incomplete, and affected. If we take Sheringham's notion of attention and add to it the caveat of affect's inexhaustibility, we come into the realm of what Daniel Stern calls *affective attunement*, a term that already resonates with Sheringham's formulation. Building on Stern, Brian Massumi describes affective attunement as a body's capacity to become aligned with the forces of a situation, even if that situation is only partially perceptible; the indeterminacy of the situation combined with the plurality inherent to each person involved is what allows different people to react or attune to the same situation in different ways, where the "same situation" might also appear to be different. That is, to attune to a situation is not to apprehend it but to orient toward what seems available to us, in the ways that we are able. In this way, affect helps to underscore the excess in every situation that prevents intersubjectivity from being reduced to linear modes of intention and response, and for the plurality that it foregrounds in terms of how many different responses are possible. This is as relevant in music

as it is in everyday life, where "ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences" (Stewart 2007, 1–2).

There is, in the end, no state of consciousness that could totally "know" a situation in its event-ness, in its unfolding in and through various bodies, nor is there any form of intention that can translate—in linear fashion—into a given outcome. To attune to a situation's unfolding is not to capture that situation as a form of mastery; it is rather to resonate precisely with the impossibility of mastery, or "the ways in which a reeling present is composed out of heterogeneous and noncoherent singularities" (Stewart 2007, 4). Certainly, then, attunement is not an experience of enlightenment, where the contingencies of reality are revealed and become available. Further, such an attunement may or may not just happen; even if we try, we may fail to achieve the experience or the outcome we imagined. While "musical improvisation" can be activated in any moment, it isn't necessarily something that can simply be switched on, because we might try and fail, or be interrupted. Equally, we may become attuned to a situation without meaning to or noticing or having time to think, as when a car backfires or the tornado siren invades your living room.

"Musical improvisation" is therefore both partial and is not guaranteed to happen, to happen the way we wanted, or when. But specifying further, when we consider events in their coemergence, I would argue that there is still something *willful* about the improvising musician's responses that differs from other possible reactions, something irreducible to mere intention. To improvise musically is to willfully try to pay attention, to focus on activating awareness and self-reflexivity in an improvisatory moment that is occurring regardless, to attempt to attune oneself to what is going on even if that attunement is temporary or doesn't lead to what we thought it might. Attunement to a situation may happen reflexively, without our awareness or intention, as when someone's frustration becomes our own. But equally, attunement can be actively pursued.

Here, Tracy McMullen's notion of "the improvisative" is also critical. Similarly to "musical improvisation," the improvisative names a willful openness toward the contingencies present in a moment, which McMullen develops through the notion of generosity: "The practice of the improvisative, therefore, is a practice of continual generosity . . . This generosity is the giving of one's total attention to the moment—the 'here and now'" (McMullen 2016b, 122). At the same time, the improvisative also clarifies and confirms that this openness is not about a con-

scious knowing; rather, the improvisative fosters "musical knowledge" that becomes embodied through repeated practice.

The improvisative thus strongly resonates and connects with what I mean by "musical improvisation." Though I read some differences between the terms,[7] what matters here is that both place an emphasis on an increased sensitivity toward the contingencies of the present, as well as the kind of willful practice that is required to cultivate both that sensitivity and an embodied ability to respond. In other words, the improvisative helpfully formulates what it is that we practice in order to strengthen our capacity to remain self-reflexively open when the world is shifting around us. As I read it, part of why McMullen formulates the improvisative around musical scenes is because the orientation of improvising musicians toward the music that they are making in a moment well illustrates a willful attempt at attunement, an attempt to be present with the unfolding process, no matter what happens.

If one is always in some sense oriented (and improvising), a willful orientation is a deliberate turn or insistence on direction—in the case of both the improvisative and "musical improvisation," this is a turn toward the openness, contingency, and relationality in which we are nevertheless situated. "To turn toward something in willing is to move something from the back to the front; to bring about is to bring forth" (Ahmed 2014, 34–35). To be willful as an improviser is to cultivate openness to the fact that a contingent situation is currently occurring all around you, and that you are responding to it in real-time. Such an openness is not "consciousness" with its implications of capture, nor even Sheringham's "attention" with its implications of focus; again, this awareness, foreknowledge, or willfulness is first only ever partial, and second indeterminate, in that all kinds of things can happen.[8]

"Musical improvisation" may certainly occur on its own; but in order to be willfully activated it requires an *orientation* in Ahmed's sense, an orientation that is open to the possibilities that can occur when something slips out of place. "Musical improvisation" is a form of affective attunement that seeks to become aware of and present with the contingencies of a situation in its unfolding. This attunement deeply depends on a willful orientation, "a preexisting openness" which only "preexists" the situation to the extent that it informs how we act in that situation. As anyone who has meditated knows, such openness, a desire to be present, must be continuously reengaged *in the process*—distractions and other forces intervene in our attention, or we are pulled down a hole of memory, or in a different direction by anything unforeseen; we have to constantly re-up our posture, reorient toward attention and attunement. This is why

the will is relevant to the concept of "musical improvisation": though we can't will a state of "perfect" attunement 100 percent of the time, it is only in continuously trying that we sometimes find what we count as success. An attunement or a turning-to is never complete, does not ever fully grasp what is happening, and does not guarantee anything more than an effort; but its existence, presence, or activation in a situation also affects that situation and what can result. How we face things changes those things insofar as effort creates a trace of itself. Even in observation, we are still improvising. Whatever form this attention takes, attention itself can change the world around us.

To summarize: *Affective attunement* involves the coherence of different bodies around the same affect or force, even though those bodies react to it in different ways. Affective attunement might be how a body is grabbed by whatever is happening, and however it responds, as equally as it might be how we reach out to grab something that we can name and desire in a situation. *Orientation* is likewise linked up with situations, but in this case concerns more how we approach them, as well as how repeatedly moving in a certain direction, with its own attendant blockages or pathways, affects us over time. *Musical improvisation* names both: an attunement with the contingencies that emerge in a real-time situation, as well as an orientation toward those situations, a preexisting openness or desire from which we willfully pursue said awareness in order to increase our improvisational capacities, and how we apprehend the experience.

In concluding, "Perec suggests that 'the decision to look itself introduces difference. . . . Indeed, Perec's enterprise makes attention an extraordinarily variegated and multiple medium'" (Sheringham 2009, 265). From this perspective, even brushing one's teeth becomes an unrepeatable act—a singularity—because the context will be different tomorrow, with different thoughts on your mind, in a different light, perhaps smelling the bread you plan to bake in the morning, where today there is none. Moreover, the tooth-brusher may at any point start to listen to the vibrations of the bristles on their teeth, to reflect on their mood, to focus on the task at hand, doing the very best job that they can to clean their teeth, or to otherwise attend to their situatedness in the moment. Repetition, as we have seen throughout, is both strictly speaking impossible and also beside the point, since any repetitive action is only what is imagined as such inside a shifting present; the point is rather about our modes of engagement. Through awareness and attunement, it is possible for improvisation to remain both the contingent medium of existence as well as a practice that, in all its banality, still makes a difference.

Outro

All Times Are Uncertain

Uncertain or deeply known, improvisation is omnipresent regardless. This is true first because what we imagine is certain is only partially so (I know I'm meeting a friend tonight, but I don't know how they are feeling; I know what happens in this movie I'm rewatching, but I don't know that while I'm watching it, some terrible news is breaking). Second, it is true because even what I do know for certain contains multitudes, elements I do not cognize but which I respond to haptically, in perception, which is to say through improvisation. We improvise in response to a situation that solicits action. It is that simple and that ubiquitous. We don't often take that simplicity seriously; I believe that we should, if we want to better understand this mode of behavior that composes our lives, and the role it plays in aesthetic and political activities.

At the same time, while I would argue that no moment is more or less contingent than any other, there are some moments in which contingency is so present on the surface of things that is impossible to ignore. In such moments, improvisation's invisibility gets flipped on its head; suddenly, improvisation is all we see. It could be that the everyday is nothing but what we construct to ward off the feeling, rather than the facticity, of contingency, where "construct" references any repeated behavior intended to stabilize or sediment something, like a feeling. We spend most of our time actively suppressing the terror of contingency, denying it by building stable structures and rationalizations. At most, we are prepared to process an event, but sometimes not even that. Widespread and sustained acknowledgment of contingency is rare and deeply stressful. During such moments, the compositional force of improvisation in our lives becomes suddenly obvious.

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Depending on where one draws the line, I began working on this book in 2012. In 2020, as I sit here completing it, my present is permeated by uncertainty. This uncertainty is not evenly distributed; my place within it is precise, contingent, shaped by political and social circumstances which are different from those of many of my friends and colleagues, sometimes in ways that afford me more stability, comparatively, and sometimes the opposite. What is true of all of us, seemingly, is that the pandemic has, gradually or all at once, altered whatever trajectory we imagined for ourselves. I don't know what will happen in more areas of my life than ever. Planning is nearly impossible. The situation changes every day. Perhaps from the vantage of "these uncertain times," it is easier to recognize how we are all improvisers, and have been.

EIGHT | Conclusion

On Aesthetics and Politics

In this chapter I zoom out to reflect on the broader aesthetic, political, and theoretical implications raised by thinking improvisation as contingency. If improvisation is simply another word for experience, how does that change the politics of improvisation, and conversely, the improvisation of politics? How does music fit into such a framework? What about everyday life? Before addressing these questions it is also necessary to discuss the political questions involved in my choice to define improvisation in the first place.

The Politics of Naming

From the beginning of this book, I have been invested in illustrating the extent to which improvisation can be considered coextensive with contingency, arguing that this framework is the most productive for understanding the connection between improvised music and improvised life. One of the necessary consequences of pursuing this argument has been the fact that I am offering a definition of improvisation. By contrast, scholars in critical improvisation studies have largely avoided defining improvisation itself in favor of highlighting the work that it can do, a stance that I take as (perhaps ironically) reflective of a definitional understanding of improvisation as an active process, rather than a static relation. In this way, improvisation has been fruitfully mobilized toward all kinds of scholarly, creative, and applied ends. Indeed, the most exciting work generated by scholars of improvisation is often work that questions the boundaries of improvisation itself, reformulating what it means

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and what it can do, or using it to rethink practices beyond its ostensible purview. For this reason, bounding improvisation's multivalent magic within the confines of a definition has been seen by many as tantamount to foreclosing its radical possibilities.

Such definitional issues are not new but are rather persistent. The two-volume *Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies* nicely captures the stance that most scholars take with regard to defining and using improvisation as a concept. In a section called "Definitions and Issues," George Lewis and Benjamin Piekut write:

> this *Handbook* makes no explicit attempt to negotiate a single overarching definition of improvisation. Rather, as we see it, the critical study of improvisation seeks to examine improvisation's effects, interrogate its discourses, interpret narratives and histories related to it, discover implications of those narratives and histories and uncover its ideologies. (2016, 3)

Such a position is obviously necessary in a handbook like this, which itself is engaged in a kind of survey across critical improvisation studies. However, it also accurately mirrors the position that scholars most often take with regard to defining the term itself. Likewise, Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble write in the introduction to *The Other Side of Nowhere* (2004): "We have studiously avoided defining either improvisation or community in any one way throughout this introduction because to do so would be to limit the very kinds of potential that both invite" (31). Finally, consider the following exchange from a team meeting for the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI), which aired on the Sound It Out podcast in 2018. At this meeting, Jason Stanyek, who has been involved with IICSI for a decade or more, delivered remarks that summarized several points of both enthusiasm and concern that the meeting had generated in him. None of these concerns had to do with defining improvisation as such, but the first "source of uneasiness" he noted did bear on questions of terminology. Specifically, he raised a concern about what he perceived as a tendency to conflate improvisation with a host of surrogate terms, including, "collaboration, cooperation, dialogue, exchange, flipping the script, innovation, friction, risk, creativity" or in negative terms, "improvisation as the thing that is not structure." Finally, there is the "acutely problematic" term, "listening." Stanyek's point here is particularly interesting in light of two recent critiques voiced by ethnomusicologists Ingrid Monson and Scott Currie,

which I discuss below. For the moment, I want to bring attention to two responses that followed Stanyek's remarks. Cecil Foster, who spoke first, was concerned that

> [Stanyek] seem[s] to be aiming for a very modernist notion of improvisation, one that gives us a nice definition of what improvisation is, and I keep wondering . . . because I don't know how I can ever think of improvisation without thinking at the heart of it that there's a subversive element in it. (Foster in Elliott 2018, 24:56)

Foster's response in particular apparently ties the emancipatory or "subversive" element of improvisation precisely to its inability to be defined, an implication I take up below. After Foster's comments, Stanyek then defended his position, but, seemingly in agreement with Foster's critique, did clarify that he is "not after definitions, that was not something [he] was trying to say" (27:56). Even in his critique, Stanyek seems at pains to clarify that he is not attempting to define improvisation, implying that such a move lies somehow beyond the pale of what is appropriate or called for. Nevertheless, Rebecca Caines subsequently responded in part as follows:

> What you're saying is something that we hear and have heard across the project from the beginning: that we're trying to do too much, and there's too many different ideas of what it is, and how on earth could we do anything together? . . . But to me, isn't that the challenge? If we start saying "you can't say that but you can say that," then we've broken the project. . . . I think the differences are what makes this work. . . . I want us to keep pushing because I think we can do better . . . *but I don't think we want to coalesce on one idea . . . surely.* (28:15, my emphasis)

Both of these responses as well as Stanyek's defense reflect a deep anxiety about defining improvisation and help to illuminate the stakes raised by the possibility of doing so. Indeed, I don't believe that the risks raised by Caines and Foster should be ignored. Yet I would also argue that there are corresponding risks involved in refusing to define improvisation, and that these risks have not received a similar amount of attention or concern in improvisation studies writ large.

Some of these risks have been notably underscored by both Monson (2017) and Currie (2017), who have each argued that invoking improvi-

sation without clarifying what it means—and to whom (and why)—casts improvisation as an unmarked term, where its use typically involves a distinct set of assumptions. For Currie and Monson, such assumptions tend to derive from a very precise social location: what Currie calls "transatlantic improvised music," which is to say Western jazz and avant-garde improvised music. In addition to these cautions, Georgina Born has argued that political readings of improvisation often draw from an immediate microsocial scene of improvising musicians *within* this Western context (2017). For Monson and Currie, improvisation means different things to different people in different times, places, and situations; for Born, musical interaction among peers is far from the only relevant social space in play during a musical performance, given for instance that such performances always take place within larger power structures and identity positions.[1] At first, it may seem that the plurality that Born, Monson, and Currie point to would require maintaining improvisation's definitional ambiguity. But I argue that by not defining improvisation based on its specific context *each time* it is invoked, particular readings may be privileged and universalized at the expense of others. Indeed, I believe that there are additional dangers in leaving improvisation as an unmarked term. Not only might it discount differences emerging from other cultural contexts, but, as I have shown in the first part of this book, even within similar contexts, this universalizing view smooths over the relevant differences that exist between iterations. As I outlined in the introduction, declining to define improvisation also opens the possibility that assumptions about its boundaries or meanings enter the discussion unnoticed, as with Stanyek's concern over "surrogate terms" that consistently appear whenever improvisation is invoked. The broad tendency to focus (a) on transatlantic improvised contexts, and (b) on the microsocial scenes inside these contexts, together provides a specific definition of improvisation without identifying it as such. Thus, even though Fischlin and Heble decline to define improvisation in *The Other Side of Nowhere*, they nevertheless insist that

> These diverse examples of theorizing improvisation from within very different cultural contexts all point to a dominant trope at work in thinking improvisation; namely, its association with transgressive, critical, radical, and aesthetic practices in relation to the communities it engages. (2004, 13)

It may well be that the essays collected in *The Other Side of Nowhere* do each engage with transgressive practices. But in that case, what of the

instances of improvisation that have nothing whatever to do with critical or radical acts? The implication made by virtue of their exclusion (in a given book, in the field) is that such acts cannot exist—that is, that such acts are not *really* what we mean when referring to improvisation. Hence, a definition is implied negatively and without acknowledgment.

The same is the case with the position elaborated in *The Fierce Urgency of Now* (Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz 2013). Although the authors here take care to disclaim that "We do not adhere to the formalism that would dictate that any form of improvisation is automatically democratic, egalitarian, and emancipatory" (xxiii). Fischlin, Heble, and George Lipsitz also make the bold claim that "As a marker of the cogenerative power of the public commons . . . improvisation is inherently antineoliberal" (138). Here we are back to Foster's notion that there is something "subversive" inherent to improvisation, or indeed, back to the argument—implicit in the conflation of terms—that improvisation is analogous with or always involves "collaboration," "listening," or "creativity." As I hope to have shown in chapters 5 and 6, this is not a defensible position. If we accept that improvisation and contingency are coextensive, that they give rise to one another necessarily, then improvisation cannot be anything "necessarily" *beyond* contingent. In other words, improvisation either *always* depends, or it doesn't.

The claim that improvisation is inherently antineoliberal, in my view, demonstrates clearly the risk in not delineating what kinds of improvisations we are discussing at a given point in time. To decline to do so automatically brushes aside inconvenient or alternative notions of improvisation in service of a larger argument. In this case specifically, rather than existing in opposition to improvisation, is not neoliberalism chiefly responsible for the increasingly obligatory recourse to improvisation in social life? As I argued in chapter 6, when our basic structures of social support are systematically privatized, precarious subjects are *compelled* to improvise, to piece together carpools, side-hustles, and community healthcare in the face of disappearing dependable support. Improvisation in this sense is a "coping mechanism, providing at least a limited space for self-expression within a repressive environment, but it is also the soundtrack for violence, for repetitive cycles of hatred passed along generations" (Siddall and Waterman 2016, 4).

Beyond such compulsory flailing, improvisation, flexibility, and creativity have long since been adopted into neoliberal business parlance, to say nothing of the ways in which these desirable traits are used to restructure work itself around precarious positions, or the ways

in which certain forms of jazz improvisation have resonated with and even facilitated neoliberal business praxis.[2] Finally, neoliberal capitalism is itself, as many others have noted, a paragon of improvisational adaptability and dynamism insofar as it circumvents crises and spreads into new physical and virtual spaces; in other words, improvisation—when read as capital's ability to transcend barriers and maneuver new ways of perpetuating itself—is a *constitutive feature of capitalism*. To pretend that these understandings of improvisation are somehow less real or less ideal instances than say a jazz improvisation merely polices the boundaries of improvisation while claiming to do the opposite.[3] I understand that the authors I referenced above are not writing here about "that kind" of improvisation, which they would doubtless agree exists; but that is exactly my point. Taking "that kind" of improvisation into consideration might complicate their arguments given that—far from antineoliberal—such improvisations are a constitutive function and/or central feature of neoliberalism.

The arguments I present here are in no way intended to critique or to dismiss the historical cases in which improvisation and the politics of freedom have coincided. Specifically, and as readers will know, the association of improvisation with egalitarian politics emerges from the Black radical tradition, where the formal musical elements of jazz and the discursive rhetoric of the Black Arts and Black Power movements forcefully aligned. In arguing that improvisation is necessarily contingent, I intend to point to the fact that the association of Black radical politics and improvisatory musical practices is a *contingent* one—that is, historically specific, and emerging from an intertwining of social circumstances, musical characteristics, and the specific people who made such conjunctures possible. The mistake here would be to take improvisation as a practice that invokes a progressive politics on its own, outside of the contributions of specific people in specific situations.

In *Freedom Sounds*, Ingrid Monson exhaustively theorizes this relation, or the ways in which civil rights and Black Power discourses were entangled with and expressed through jazz in the late 1960s. However, Monson also argues that there is no necessary link between improvisation and freedom. In her words, "To argue that improvisation itself . . . does not guarantee ethical virtue, however, is not to say that jazz improvisers did not play an active role in articulating a social and political vision, but that vision is located in *people* and what they do rather than in the formal properties of improvisation itself" (2007, 317). In *The Fierce Urgency of Now*, Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz respond to Monson by writ-

ing that her view "should be modified" because while "no improvisation, or music generally, for that matter, is ever intrinsically, in and of itself, a guarantor of ethical positioning, visionary comportment, or resistant politics . . . music is never anything *in and of itself*" (2013, 94).

Note here the slippage from "improvisation" to "music" generally that allows the authors to make their point. Staying limited to the question of *improvisation*—a practice or way of doing not limited to the realm of music—alters the argument. In my view, improvisation (if not music) *is* something "in and of itself": improvisation is necessarily and always contingent, which in turn prohibits improvisation from being inherently anything else at all, including democratic. Furthermore, in positing *music* as "never anything in and of itself," the authors seem (regardless of their intent) to also position music as a fundamentally contingent phenomenon, interdependent and relational. Thus, if music is never anything in and of itself, that fact does not prevent (but rather necessitates) music's attachment to discourses, affects, and cultural signifying practices in a specific time, place, and iteration, each of which is specific, and which prohibits a timeless conflation between improvised practices and benevolent outcomes. To theorize from one articulation (in this case, the jazz/freedom connection) might indeed produce compelling theoretical perspectives; but those perspectives, in my view, come at the expense of properly situating the relationship between music, improvisation, and sociopolitical life. Put another way, improvisation certainly can be a force for good; but not only is this not a default feature of improvisation, attributing characteristics to this concept that are not proper to it also conceals, rather than illuminating, the actual ways in which improvisation and the social are entangled.

We have much evidence that improvisation may at any time (and certainly has) produced progressive, empathetic, and transformative work. But the wonder of that outcome is precisely what must be explained, rather than assumed. This is a point, I believe, that is too often overlooked. Although recent studies have considerably nuanced the traditional conflation between improvisation and freedom, there remains a persistent attachment to reading improvisation as—if not inherently then at least ideally—subversive, adaptive, and creative, while also being predicated on and producing such laudable ethical notions as communication, trust, and empathy. In order to prevent such particulars from masquerading as universals, I advocate defining improvisation and how it is being deployed in a given study or practice. Certainly, not all scholars have declined to define improvisation, and there are a number of defi-

nitions that would be not only functional but generative. In this study, I emphasize contingency because of the way that it centers the variable, "it depends" quality of improvisation, rather than presenting it as merely a feature of improvisation. Put another way, there is a tremendous difference between claiming that "improvisation involves contingency" and "improvisation is inherently and only contingent": only the latter prevents assumptions about one case from carrying over into another. Concretely defining improvisation through contingency therefore (a) guarantees that improvisation is *always* understood in and through the singular contexts of its emergence and (b) also guards against definitional assumptions without restraining or limiting the potential of improvisation as it manifests in each case.

Fixing a definition of improvisation with contingency at the center suspends our assumptions about what improvisation is in a given instance and forces a rigorous recontextualization in each case. If improvisation is an empty frame filled in by the particulars of time, place, and situation, it must be understood anew each time it is invoked. Conversely, for improvisation to retain its singularity in every single case, improvisation must be understood as consistently contingent. That is, if improvisation is *always* a singularity, then it must have a paradoxical structure that *guarantees* contingency, the essential commonality of utter difference. Defining improvisation in such a way makes only one claim regarding the ontology of improvisation, namely that it is always, inherently, and *only* contingent.

The Politics of Improvisation

We are improvising whenever we are navigating contingencies. As people on this planet, navigating contingencies is equivalent to being alive. Improvisation is therefore the constitutive mode of life itself, the process by which we engage the world. If this argument holds, then it is clear that there can be no politics of improvisation, per se; it is impossible to identify what this could mean, apart from its singular instantiations in discourses, practices, genres, moments, material circumstances, and so on. The politics of improvisation, like everything else about it, utterly depends on its contexts, which means that the politics of improvisation *as such* simply do not exist. Therefore, given its inseparability from singular circumstances, improvisation—as an idea, as a refrain that repeats with a difference, as a virtuality that becomes actualized—must always be thought as radically neutral.

As I argued in chapter 5, this neutrality is one of the many character-istics that improvisation shares with everyday practices, because, in my view, they are synonymous. As Ben Highmore writes, everyday practices must be understood as "flagrantly ambivalent" because "the same *mode* of operating can be both expansively inclusive and oppressively exclu-sive. This is why de Certeau insists on the *singularity* of operations within the everyday" (2006, 114). In this sense we might also describe improvi-sation's politics according to the politics of affect, characterized by an "intense and thoroughly immanent neutrality" (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 10). And while it may indeed be that this neutrality is transformed when improvisation manifests in specific, material circumstances, the politics that result must then be thought as consequences of the situa-tion itself, and not of any immanent feature of improvisation.

The radically neutral politics of improvisation are perhaps most clearly seen in discussions of everyday life, which almost categorically beg questions of further specification: whose life, and in what circum-stances? Before we can understand anything about how politics appears, we have to clarify what's going on. This need for clarification is an implicit acknowledgment of the "it depends" nature of improvisation. But although it may be easier to recognize improvisation's ambivalence in the space of everyday life, it is equally so in music. Already, this book has been concerned with an extremely narrow, Western tradition of Improvised Music, a limited focus that I hoped would help to illustrate the singularity of improvisation even within such a restricted purview. Even staying limited to this one genre, practice, or tradition, the case studies in Part One illustrate that the political resonances, stakes, and effects of each example can't be grouped together into a single political reading that would stand for the politics of improvised music.

Another difficulty here is that, even if we stay limited to *one artist*, the politics of improvised music are difficult to pin down because of what Georgina Born calls music's multiple mediations: "music's multiple simultaneous forms of existence—as sound, score, discourse, site, per-formance, social relations, technological media—indicate the necessity of conceiving of the musical object as a constellation" (2017, 44). Given such complexities, Born proposes that musical "objects" can be analyzed according to four "planes of social mediation" which are "irreducible to one another" at the same time that they are "articulated in contingent and nonlinear ways through relations of conditioning, affordance, or causality" (43). These are exactly the levels of interaction that the musi-cal analyses in this book have constantly tried to put into conversation:

the intragroup dynamics; the interaction between produced sound and listening audience; the wider discourses of power and identity that affect how we perceive ourselves and each other; as well as the material, economic conditions of production and circulation of music as commodity. Part of the purpose behind analyzing only individual tracks in the first part of this book has been to allow for the kind of complexity that Born is calling for in her formulation. There is no politics of music, improvised music, or even an individual artist or song; rather, we can trace certain political dynamics across certain spaces, and ask questions about the cumulative effect. These effects remain singular, a fact that comes into relief through comparison.

The Improvisation of Politics

Given improvisation's "immanent neutrality" or "flagrant ambivalence," what can it tell us about the performance of the political, which is itself improvised? This is where we return to the notion of "musical improvisation" outlined in the previous chapter. If improvisation is the contingent encounter that is always already engendering experience, "musical improvisation" as I have described it signals a willingness to acknowledge or orient toward the contingencies of that encounter according to our necessarily incomplete experience of its parameters, a willingness that can be activated at any time. And: if the former is radically neutral, the latter at least carries the potential to become political.

   In this section I describe the improvisation of politics as a specific type of action that aims for something beyond its ability to realize. The improvisation of politics is the cultivation of tendencies, orientations, and habits that reach for a new sensible. Its relation to "musical improvisation" lies in the ways that becoming present in a moment can serve as a precondition to political improvisation, moving our will in certain directions based on whatever situation is at hand. In other words, "musical improvisation," considered as an orientation toward the present awareness of one's everyday contingencies, does not have a necessary political trajectory; but it does open up the potential for political improvisation insofar as it facilitates an awareness of our position in a scene, and by extension, the possibility of moving in new directions.

   To begin, consider the ways in which Ahmed's *orientation* and Massumi's *attunement* engage the question of politics. Each way of approaching something privileges certain ways of experiencing while devaluing others. Consequently, there is first of all a politics in how we

engage any situation, and second, to orient differently can be to change the world around us. For Ahmed, queer politics "does involve a commitment to a certain way of inhabiting the world" (2006, 175). However, there is a crucial caveat attached to her argument:

> Despite this, queer is not available as a line that we can follow, and if we took such a line we would perform a certain injustice to those queers whose lives are lived for different points. For me, the question is not so much finding a queer line but rather asking what our orientation toward queer moments of deviation will be. (2006, 179)

This is a formulation with contingency at the center. It describes a certain approach to the world that remains open in the form of a question. The question queer phenomenology asks is, "What will you do if?" And while it is true that some answers are more oppressive or liberating than others, there is also no definite path that we can follow in perpetuity. Queer phenomenology is a practice of orienting, opening-to, or feeling out the ways that present themselves and the ways that we can make, not as a prescription but as continuous exploration of our circumstances.

Likewise, Massumi's use of affective attunement is not about a certain political practice but about the cultivation of certain tendencies. In *Politics of Affect* (2015), Massumi focuses on the possibility of perceiving and modulating the forces present in a given event. This is significant for my purposes because Massumi describes such movements in explicitly improvisatory terms. He specifies that improvising in a political scene requires practice, or the cultivation of tendencies that align with our will. He writes, "You can only effectively improvise on the basis of elaborate forms of enactive knowing that operate with all the automaticity of a 'second nature,'" (2015, 96)—so the cultivation of certain tendencies helps us to become ready when the moment counts. This is also exactly what McMullen argues regarding the improvisative: that it has to be "recognized as valuable and it has to be practiced" before it can be deployed in a moment (McMullen 2016b, 123). Thus, neither the improvisative nor orientations nor attunements result in any prescribed behaviors or outcomes; for example, Massumi writes that "tendencies are oriented, but open-ended" (97, my emphasis). Like Ahmed's desire lines, tendencies require repeated movement, the repetition of footsteps along this path, even if the experience is different from yesterday, which I know it is. It is not a certain action or outcome that is at issue here, but the cultivation of tendencies or habits, a practiced receptivity that orients us and

prepares us to continue turning—to move, to adjust, to realign ourselves with what feels right in light of a new situation, or in response to the movements of another.[4]

In this way, orientation, attunement, and the improvisative also finally link up with "habit," understood not as a mindless or automatic repetition of behavior, but rather as that which affects our bodily capacities (Pedwell 2021). "The point is simple: what we 'do do' affects what we 'can do'" (Ahmed 2006, 59). Habit thus names whatever practices leave a mark. As much as the actions we perform as a function of who we are, habit is also a means of changing who we are as a function of the actions we perform. What we implicitly hope by practicing is that something will take hold, that our practice will become a habit, which really means that it will become a part of who we are by affecting what we can do. Habits orient us in some ways rather than others, affecting how we show up in a given situation.

The improvisation of politics shares this emphasis on incompleteness, indeterminacy, and continual adjustment, at the same time that it highlights what capacities and experiences we bring to such open situations. In any "musical improvisation," we interact with others, with objects, and with environments, conditioned as we are, but still straining toward something new. This straining or attunement is only ever partial, because we can't fully apprehend the affective resonances of a situation. Moreover, improvisational responses to contingent situations are never fully within our control or even perception; as with sound itself, there is always an excess in the situation beyond what is knowable by the performer. If "musical improvisation" is a form of attending to the improvisation that is always already happening, this attention does not guarantee anything; it is perhaps more likely to fail than not, or to become refracted through the encounter, because intentionality and agency are hopelessly compromised by (even as they are engendered through) the field of the situation. Moreover, some subjects are better positioned to navigate contingency than others.[5] And yet, my argument here is that this attempt, this straining, this attunement, is at one and the same time the only way that politics gets done. To finish making this case, I turn again to Rancière, whose famous interventions into the notion of politics challenge us to consider the efficacy of actions that take place as a function of an already established or given way of doing.

Rancière's politics is opposed to the police, where the latter refers to any preexisting order of doing and being, to any logic of "appropriate" and "inappropriate," to any "common sense" that governs who belongs in

which place doing what.[6] In a given police order, people are organized into their "proper" places according to the "logic" of the system, and as such, actions that take place as a function of that system do not constitute politics so much as they remain paths of dissent that are "appropriate" to those dissenting. In their appropriateness, such methods can always be managed, mitigated, or redirected. Thus, politics exists instead in the moments that "rupture the sensible," redistributing not only the sense of what is and is not appropriate, but also the presupposition of the existence of appropriate positions in the first place (1999; 2010). For Rancière, far from a horizon in the distance, equality is rather a presupposition, one that is lost when society proceeds to "count" its citizens, and (following Plato) to assign them their proper places. Thus, "Politics arises from a count of community 'parts,' which is always a false count, a double count, or a miscount. . . . There is politics—and not just domination—because there is a wrong count of the parts of the whole" (1999, 10).

Not only is the count itself wrong insofar as it divides up a community of equals, but there is also always a *sans-part* by virtue of the count, an excluded part that completes the falsity of the count Rancière calls "police." The police here is not an instrument of blunt power, not the power "over" to which subjects submit. Rather, the police consists in a total sensory logic of what is and is not appropriate in a given formation. It is the very given-ness of the common sense by which one or another order is maintained. Like Michel Foucault's discursive regimes, a police order is such through the existence of common assumptions that govern meaning and perception.

Rancière will later develop the police into a more nuanced concept known as the *partage du sensible*, a distribution of sense which coexists and competes with other active sense-regimes. Among these, there can be more or less progressive ways of organizing, more or less progressive logics that compete with others. Indeed, "There is a worse and a better police. . . . The police can procure all sorts of good, and one kind of police may be infinitely preferable to another" (1999, 31). But at the same time, Rancière challenges us to consider that, insofar as there is always a part of the whole that is excluded by the police order, the logic by which the police operates is always appropriate to itself, and as such is always a separate question from that of politics. Politics, rather than shuffling around or redistributing good according to the rules by which the police already allows such redistributions, radically breaks with the police by showing the arbitrary contingency of its own laws. In opposition to the police, Rancière

reserve[s] the term *politics* for an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration—that of the part who has no part . . . political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination. (1999, 29–30)

How does this notion of politics relate to improvisation? It has to do with the senses. More than simply delimiting who does or does not belong in a given distribution, the partition of sense also determines the criteria used to evaluate belonging, or how we are capable of recognizing such distinctions in the first place. In describing such criteria, Rancière has invoked the "visible and the invisible" as well as sounds that are recognizable as speech instead of noise. In addition to vision and hearing, he has also spoken of perception in general, as well as what is "possible or impossible," "thinkable or unthinkable" in a given sense formation. These broader appeals, as Brigitte Bargetz argues, open space for thinking the distribution of sense as a formation in which affect is central.

Although Rancière does not use the language of affect theory, his invocation of bodily senses and perceptibility moves beyond the realm of Foucault's discursive regimes, while retaining the sense in which a regime structures what counts as knowledge. In the distribution of the sensible, knowledge can be unconscious as well as conscious, comprising the haptic, thinkable—and yes, emotional—common-sense practices that allow us to navigate the world. Building on Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed, and others, Bargetz argues that thinking Rancière's philosophy through affect can help us to identify "how capitalism, sexism, and/or racism are inscribed in the affective bodily practices of the everyday, or how affects become a site of community formation" (2015, 589). Following this view, understanding the police as an affective space of common sense, everyday situations helps to more fully explicate what it means to think the improvisation of politics.

As a self-aware and reflexive navigation of contingency, "musical improvisation" might name the ways in which we attempt to apprehend—among other things—the distribution of the sensible and the contingency on which it rests. To improvise musically in this situation would mean to bring awareness to our perceptions, *which opens the possibility of improvising differently*. To improvise "differently" could mean, for example, to "inscribe" anticapitalism, antisexism, and antiracism into "affective bodily practices of the everyday," to perform in a way that is antago-

nistic to the police order in which we live. Such improvisations do not necessarily depend on distinct types of actions, per se, but exist in the cultivation of tendencies that aspire to build new sensory logics out of the gaps in the old. In this way, Carolyn Pedwell's theorization of habit again becomes resonant and helpful because for her habit functions as a hinge between individuals and power structures, the primary means by which affects, feelings, and ideologies become anchored in (im)material practices of lived reality.[7] Resonating with Bargetz's description of how power becomes inscribed in daily practices, Pedwell writes: "Affect, argu- ably, cannot participate in enduring processes of materialization without some degree of habituation that emerges through the co-constitution of bodies and environments" (2021, 46). On this view, changing our habits becomes central to changing both our politics and our identities.

In improvising "musically," I suggest that we can become aware of what resonates with our desires by attuning to ourselves as we are entangled; in turn, we can endeavor to ground those resonances in the real world through habit or practice, through tendencies that affect our orientations. This inscription becomes a mutually reinforcing feedback loop between experience and practice, where experience shapes what we want to ground, and what we want to ground shapes future experi- ence. The possibility raised by "musical improvisation" to act differently can foster the repetition that reinforces tendencies, or upholds an ori- entation toward the world, even if we turn in certain directions because of a desire we can't fully name or imagine or create. It is *in the turning* that our will is activated, not in the outcome, which we can only partially affect in any case, or which is not guaranteed to change anything. In this sense, the improvisation of politics points to a specific formation between the known and the unknown, the determined and the as-yet indeterminate, or in other words, between what we can feel as given and what we reach for beyond it. The improvisation of politics names what- ever we do in search of that politics, in search of an "outside" that rup- tures our current configuration, even though and especially because we can't will that outside into existence; the improvisation of politics is what we do *anyway*, knowing that.

There are two aspects of Rancière's thinking that help to further clar- ify this idea. First, and like the political efficacy of art, politics cannot be willed into being. This accounts for one of the more contentious aspects of Rancière's work, which is his claim that politics is rare. As I wrote above, improvisation is predicated on a sensitivity to the conditions in which one is engaged; this among other factors makes it impossible to

perceive or anticipate what possibilities might lie outside this formation. Even imagining what an "outside" might be is a process that employs the terms of sense on which our perceptions rely, such that any vision of an outside is formed in the language of the inside. So again, one cannot simply will an otherwise into being.

Second, however, and in keeping with Rancière's well-known affinity for paradoxes, neither does politics simply erupt ex nihilo. Although it may be rare, politics also emerges from the police itself, which is to say from *everyday life*. While politics can't be conjured by a given intention or set of actions, it is nevertheless our actions in everyday life that bring it about. In this way, Rancière's politics resonate with the politics of orientation, attunement, and "musical improvisation": for all of these processes, there can be no direct cause/effect relationship, yet equally for all, willfulness makes a difference by moving us in some directions rather than others. Even though we can't simply manifest an otherwise, an orientation or preexisting openness toward that possibility influences how we act in the world.

Following this, the improvisation of politics as developed here resembles neither the indiscriminately reactionary behavior that politicians perform when they are making things up as they go along, nor the obligatory adaptations that precarious subjects perform without recourse to stable social structures, nor does it have to do with the performative aspect of all political *appearance*, in the sense of Arendt. Rather, the improvisation of politics refers to the continuous orientation toward and alignment with what—as a result of our musical improvising—our senses can name as our desires for a world beyond this police, an active cultivation of the unknown inside the known, where "unknown" is the name for the world we imagine we want. In the same way that "musical improvisation" requires continuously reengaging a mode of attention, the improvisation of politics involves constantly orienting toward the pull of our desires, because we might have been moving in the wrong direction earlier, because something has changed, or because there is never any clean way to disentangle ourselves from the systems that structure our lives.

I want to stress here that the political orientations I am describing and the actions they produce are not neutral; they don't pursue "the unknown" or "the otherwise" as an abstract category. Our political orientations, our intentions or tendencies are cultivated through repeated practice, and as such are particular. When we act against the foundations of our police order—the foundations of colonialism, capital, misogyny,

and racism—we are pursuing concrete goals in spite of the impossibility of knowing how those goals could or would appear in this contingent reality. When we fight to dismantle white supremacy and patriarchy and to build a multiracial, decolonial, socialist democracy, we are not pursuing contingency for contingency's sake; rather, we are orienting toward the contingencies of our moment in order to feel out and attune to what is necessary in order to change that moment, based on a preexisting orientation. We are searching for what currently lies outside the distribution of the sensible, which we cannot know or consciously activate but which we can continuously pursue, understanding the partiality of our actions in a web of complexities, which is to say the necessity of continuing to tread that path, feeling out possibilities for an opening to an otherwise.

Particularly given the temptation to read Rancière as a thinker of the event, the essential point that I am trying to make by thinking politics as improvisational is that our actions are *small* and that they matter *anyway*. While politics may be rare in Rancière's thought, he (with de Certeau) also reminds us that politics does not simply happen; politics can't occur without the order on which it depends, the police itself, from everyday life in a string of moments. In this limited sense, then, I want to suggest that the improvisation of politics resonates with Arendt's notion of *action*, in which "processes are started whose outcome is unpredictable" (1958, 232). Although Arendt's notion remains too fixated on the sovereign acting subject, rather than on the subject's contingent interactions, her argument shows something crucial by directly linking contingent human acts to the contingency of a social formation like Rancière's police; the outcomes of everyday behaviors are so unpredictable that, in sum, every order is built on unstable ground.[8] Considered in this way, even if the actions we perform fail, or don't obviously rupture the sensible, if they ramify in ways invisible, are corrupted or have unintended consequences, if they take place in private rather than in the "properly political" realm, the improvisation of politics shows us that to *reach* for the political *is in itself political*. The trying matters. It leaves a mark.

The police consists in knowing—indeed, in knowing all too well—what will happen, what this means, who this is for and not for, where we belong and do not, what we should do and not do. By contrast, "musical improvisation" seeks to undermine this pre-given certitude by willfully and continuously orienting toward the contingencies of a moment. To do so is to question what passes for common sense through a cultivation of the unknown inside the known, where the known is taken for

granted and assumed to be interminable. In contrast to any given, "musical improvisation" embodies how "turning answers into questions is a political act."[9] And this, in the end, is how Rancière's politics happens: through improvisatory actions in everyday life, which, while they may not qualify as properly political, and whether or not they achieve anything recognizable, nevertheless try. It is through this trying that we leave a trace, and through this trace that "the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of [the same] boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation" (Arendt 1958, 190).

Coda

Improvisation, Cultural Analysis, and Collective Action

In this book, I have used improvisation as a word to draw attention to moments within a process that stand out as being somehow contingent. Across varied circumstances, I have tried to show that such moments are in fact the only kinds of moments that exist in our experience of the world, and therefore that improvisation is so ubiquitous that we should consider it the means by which we engage that world, develop our subjectivities, and live. More so than *habitus* or even practice, improvisation describes our engagement with a situation: what we bring to it, how it affects us, how we affect it and those involved. Improvisation, no matter where it appears, reveals itself as our mode of being human.

Much of the concluding chapter has dealt with the political implications of taking this claim seriously. In the end, doing so means that we can't look to improvisation for any progressive politics, either in terms of process or in terms of outcome. Rather, we have to trace improvisation anew in each situation in order to more accurately understand its structuring role in tying together the people, situations, influential factors, and how all of these come together in a moment. Thinking improvisation more rigorously therefore moves us further away from improvisation itself and toward the participants, their actions and particularities, what they bring to the table and how they are moved once they arrive. By attending to the radically neutral nature of improvisation as a practice which deeply depends, we bring awareness to the contingency of our contexts. This mode of analysis does not center improvisation as a practice but contingency as fact, and therefore brings us into conversation

with Stuart Hall's notion of conjuncture. If "musical improvisation" is about orienting toward a situation differently, how does it bear on questions of collective movement?

For Hall, conjunctural analysis is a way of mapping the contingent, shifting, and contradictory forces, beneath the surface of mainstream political observation, that contribute to the formation of a hegemonic framework, the formation of a particular arrangement that is closed (existing) without being fixed in perpetuity.[1] This analysis was always built in order to best formulate a leftist political response, not as a solution but as an ongoing negotiation of shifting circumstances, as a way of creating a political articulation with the power to change things. Such a conjunctural analysis is beyond the purview of this book, and moreover, I am skeptical that it could as yet be written; our current moment is one best characterized by indeterminacy, by shocks to the system whose consequences have not yet cohered into recognizable effects. Still, it is important to address here because it helps to move the political discussion of improvisation in the conclusion from an implicitly individualized practice into the realm of collectivity; in other words, Hall helps us to think about whether or not it is possible to improvise together, and if so, what it might mean to do so.

In August 2021, we seem caught in a moment of suspension, before forces settle, or else *interregnum*, where the dominant modes of political power are being eroded and reconfigured.[2] Political articulations (in Hall's sense) are still being made all the time.[3] But those same articulations have not managed to fully dominate the shifting politics of our present; we are utterly imbricated in several moving currents, the contingencies of which will remain indecipherable until some openings have coalesced into provisional closures. The neoliberal consensus that Hall theorized through Thatcherism[4] is still with us in many ways, but it is also being seriously challenged, if not shredded, in places, by the rise in right-wing populism, whose logic manifests in anti-immigrant parties in the EU, in Brexit, in the annihilation of ostensibly cherished norms of governance by the Trump administration, some with lasting consequences. Meanwhile, other cherished norms—namely, the filibuster— prevent us from halting the assault on voting rights across red states. We still don't know how successful those assaults will prove in the 2022 midterms, which may in turn solidify or rescramble the political articulations that have been with us since 2016, when white supremacism, neofascist cronyism, and post-truthism attached themselves to already-existing Republican structures in the US context. As I write, Trumpism is

alive and well in figures like Marjorie Taylor Greene, and Trump himself continues to forge nihilistic identity politics in the furnace of grievance, recently admitting to a Conservative Political Action Committee audience that he calls whatever news he doesn't like "fake," and thus continuing to coalesce a public around the sentiment that it is stupid to care one way or the other.

To this conjuncture, the pandemic has spread massive uncertainties and exacerbated inequalities into almost every corner of the world, like a solution that polarizes and suspends the forces we thought we were tracking. As Robin D. G. Kelley has expressed, there are at least three possible outcomes (the return to neoliberal consensus, the acceleration of neofascism, or the reconfiguration of social structures to actually fit people's needs) that are in the process of competing in the space opened up by COVID-19.[5] The Black Lives Matter protests that reemerged after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many more represent the progressive strain of pluralistic activism that seeks to articulate a new leftist perspective, one that understands police brutality as interconnected with the structural racism that displaces disproportionate risk (of getting sick, of going bankrupt) onto poor and minority groups (always, and especially during COVID); as interconnected with transphobia, homophobia, xenophobia, misogyny, colonialism, and the rampant capitalist exploitation that has produced not only the current state of global income inequality but also the climate crisis, already with us. At the same time, the Biden/Harris administration is struggling with its own contradictions, on the one hand attempting to condense establishment Democratic politics as a return to "sanity" and moral clarity and on the other hand incorporating commitments to progressive activists into their policy platforms. Does the massive government response demanded by the pandemic, when combined with such progressive pressures, mark the end of the neoliberal era and a return to big government programs? Or will the "build back better" plan disintegrate in Democratic hands? Meanwhile, what Wendy Brown identifies as a politics of nihilism and ressentiment, the cancerous outgrowth of neoliberalism's blind spots, rage on, resulting in mass death, hate crimes, and poisoned discourse (Brown 2019). Relatedly, the consequences of the January 6 Capitol riots have not been fully felt or understood or processed.

These forces are not uniform, per se, or even coherent; they arise in conflictual response to unfolding events, with divergent tactics and aims, each attempting to harness such events for their benefit by articulating

an understanding of them. While we can point to each of these strains of political action and identify both victories and failures, it is still too early in this pivotal year to understand anything about how hegemony might be rearranged, or how these forces might settle in a post-COVID, postelection world. In the face of such forces, what does improvisation have to tell us?

Throughout this book I have consistently downplayed improvisation's political potential, and even "musical improvisation" has been presented as a precondition to political action, a small kind of opening, a mindful agency that can be activated inside any normal moment, and which can at least potentially sensitize us to feel our way toward an otherwise. I have presented the improvisation of politics in this way in order to emphasize its very smallness—in order to show how politics, even if it is rare, is grounded in our everyday experiences. A politics of the everyday is a politics of improvisation; quotidian experience is its home and purview, even more so than music. The everyday is the level where improvisation's political efficacy grows, and I believe that attending to this smallness, this ordinary quality of improvisational politics, is one of the contributions that improvisation theory can make to cultural studies. Put another way, one of my goals in developing this perspective has been to redirect attention away from the seemingly extraordinary potential of improvised artistic practices, back toward the very ordinary moments that make improvisation what it is in the first place: the messy in-between that structure/ agency binaries confuse for inconsequential or invisible.

But while I want to emphasize the smallness that I believe is proper to improvised politics, there are ways in which such small actions feel inadequate or even trite in the face of the compounding crises outlined above. Mindful of recent, important critiques of entanglement (Giraud 2019), affective connection (Yao 2021), and repair (Stuelke 2021) as scholarly approaches that might feel good, but which both elide necessary exclusions and inadvertently reinforce the very neoliberal relations they seek to resist, I remain deeply ambivalent about improvisation's promise as a model of social progress. It may well be that improvisation, even "musical improvisation" as I have described it, is simply of no help here. That would be an outcome of this study that I am perfectly willing to accept, particularly if it helps us to more accurately understand the way that improvisation connects the musical and the social.

On the other hand, if there is something that improvisation *can* tell us about collective action, it is as surely to be found in the actions of people in specific circumstances—to be found, for instance, in the Black

Lives Matter protests and the unprecedented number of people, world-wide, who turned out onto the streets during a pandemic to stand up for justice. I think here about the ways that a small politics, a politics of the everyday, which fosters certain tendencies and grows connections between people, suddenly spills out, for example, in response to something that can't be ignored. As Ahmed writes,

> A social experience might be how we are thrown by contingency. The experience of willing together might depend upon a preexist-ing openness to others; a capacity to be affected and directed by an encounter. . . . Perhaps then we can think of willingness in terms of being open to being influenced or receiving the will of others. In becoming attuned to others, it is not that we lose our boundaries. Rather we refuse to secure those boundaries by closing ourselves off from the worlds we inhabit. (2014, 49)

What we see here is an orientation that stays open to contingency, and allows that openness to condition a response that is not necessarily con-scious, a response that is cultivated by years of habituation, attunement, and orientation toward what we can name as what we want, particularly when those desires are socially grounded and shaped in community. This repeated orientation toward our political desires might prepare us to be moved by an event, and in being moved to also become linked up with others whose desires are proximate to our own. If "musical impro-visation" can't necessarily be scaled up, it nevertheless might link us together—in certain contexts—where the contingency of an unfolding crisis is shared affectively among people with similar orientations. No action can necessarily achieve a rupture of the sensible just by trying—but it is also not possible without that same trying, the cultivation of ten-dencies that ready us to move, a thousand little repetitions in everyday life that become activated in a moment.

Here again I think of Pauline Oliveros, who reminds us that there is no such thing as listening without also always responding with our bodies, for listening is a practice that focuses our attention on how we are already linked to the outside world, affecting and affected. Echoing Ahmed, she writes,

> The body, so far inexplicably, knows how to compose and improvise and release [this] information through words and physical gestures if one is open to receive the constant vigilance and output of neuronal

activity that is not consciously willed. Paradoxically, it takes will to be open and trust the body to deliver and integrate that which is needed in the moment of performance and yet unknown to the verbal mind. (2016, 89)

The body moves. We cannot automatically assume or understand or know how it will move, or toward what ends; but in our contingent encounters with the world, that we *will* respond, that we are already responding, is the necessary fact of our being. At its best, thinking critically with improvisation can help us to foreground this fact and then to orient in response, continuously, toward "that which is needed in the moment."

Notes

1. Introduction

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2. See Stewart 2007.
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7. See https://www.medicalimprov.org/.
8. *The Making Box* 2020, "How to Improvise Your Way through COVID-19 (Part 1)," The Making Box, March 25, https://www.themakingbox.ca/blog/how-we-are-improvising-our-way-through-covid-19.
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10. Jonathan Swan and Mike Allen 2018, "Trump's Highest-Stakes Improvisation," *Axios*, March 9, https://www.axios.com/trumps-highest-stakes-improvisation-1520594714-85044c20-1881-4612-bfc9-9235e57e9c03.html.
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12. See for example Peter Baker 2017, "The Emerging Trump Doctrine: Don't Follow Doctrine," *New York Times*, April 8, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/08/us/politics/trump-doctrine-foreign-policy.html.
13. See "Starting a Business Means Thinking on Your Toes," YouTube, October 14, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHxdBLlkaic.

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14. For theorizations, see Laver 2013 and Chapman 2018. For examples, see: Karl E. Weick 1998, "Introductory Essay: Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis," *Organization Science* 9, no. 5: 543–55; Kathy Klotz-Guest 2016, *Stop Boring Me! How to Create Kick-Ass Marketing Content, Products and Ideas through the Power of Improv*, San Francisco: Substantium; Fred Cook 2014, *Improvise: Unconventional Career Advice from an Unlikely CEO*, Agate Publishing; Robert Poynton 2014, *Do Improvise–Less Push, More Pause: Better Results; A New Approach to Work (and Life)*, Do Book Company; Mark Tutton 2010, "Why Using Improvisation to Teach Business Skills Is No Joke," *CNN*, February 18, https://www.cnn.com/2010/BUSINESS/02/18/improvisation.business.skills/index.html; Stephanie Vozza 2014, "5 Ways to Improvise Your Way to Success," *Fast Company*, April 23, https://www.fastcompany.com/3029365/5-ways-to-improvise-your-way-to-success; Forbes Leadership Forum 2014, "Why Improv Training Is Great Business Training," *Forbes*, June 27, https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesleadershipforum/2014/06/27/why-improv-training-is-great-business-training; Edivandro Carlos Conforto, Eric Rebentisch, and Daniel Amaral 2016, "Learning the Art of Business Improvisation," *MIT Sloan Management Review*, March 15, https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/learning-the-art-of-business-improvisation/; Lolly Daskal 2018, "8 Ways Improvisation Can Make You into a Better Leader," *Inc.*, January 3, https://www.inc.com/lolly-daskal/how-improv-can-make-you-a-better-leader.html; António Abrantes 2019, "If Our Plan Fails, Can We Improvise?," *The Conversation*, December 2, https://theconversation.com/if-our-plan-fails-can-we-improvise-127965; Pier Vittorio Mannucci, Davide C. Orazi, and Kristine de Valck 2021, "Improvisation Takes Practice," *Harvard Business Review*, March 11, https://hbr.org/2021/03/improvisation-takes-practice; or https://businessimprov.com/ .

15. For this see DeNora 2000.

16. To say that improvisation is othered in Western aesthetics is not to say that it had not been practiced or valued at any point in music history; improvisation clearly figured heavily in pre-Romantic musical practices, but did so in such a way that its separation from other musical activities—composition and performance—was not necessarily clear-cut. It is with the rise of Romantic conceptions of genius and the composition as a work of art that such distinctions take over, paving the way for the racialization of an artform—in this case, jazz—whose most hypervisible characteristics included both improvisation and blackness. For an introduction to the sometimes contradictory characterizations of improvisation over time, see Solis 2009. For more on Western aesthetics, music, and the "work" concept, see Goehr 2007.

17. See for instance Burnim and Maultsby 2006.

18. See Denning 2015 (particularly chapter 6); Wallace 2016; Ben Kettlewell, 2018, "Growing Pains: Reflecting on the Social Climate during the Early Days of Jazz," Alternate Music Press, http://www.alternatemusicpress.com/features/features1.html.

19. The two-volume *Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies* provides a thorough example of the increasing disciplinary capaciousness in CIS.

20. See Siddall and Waterman 2016, and Born, Lewis, and Straw 2017a, for particularly sustained and recent examples.

21. For a comprehensive overview of the field, see Lewis and Piekut 2016b.

22. In this way, this progressive approach to improvisation ironically mimics the thinking behind many of the corporate-oriented perspectives outlined in the first pages of this book, albeit for different purposes. The similarity in language is particularly strong where concerns so-called applied improvisation. See for example the note below and the Applied Improvisation Network, https://www.appliedimprovisationnetwork.org/about.

23. As the series description reads, "Books in this series advocate musical improvisation as a crucial model for political, cultural, and ethical dialogue and action—for imagining and creating alternative ways of knowing and being in the world." See "Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice," Duke University Press, https://www.dukeupress.edu/books/browse/by-series/series-detail?IdNumber=2880420. In scholarship, then, as in business consulting, improvisation has become compelling as an almost mythical resource from which to draw for the purpose of enhancing people's capacities in a variety of contexts, a means by which we might transform both ourselves and our (social, political, economic) relations. Hence, as one CEO puts it, "Improvisation . . . is suddenly all the rage" (Daskal 2018).

24. Notably, three recent collections by Daniel Fischlin and Eric Porter (2016; 2020; 2021) attempt to address this insufficiency.

25. Although scholars are by and large reluctant to define improvisation, assertions about what it is or does nevertheless creep into much work in the field. For example: "Improvisation . . . is, at its most abstract, a liberatory social practice" (Nicholls 2012, 79); "Improvisation is at its heart a democratic, humane, and emancipatory practice" (Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz 2013, xi), or "In musical terms, improvisation challenges conformity—it teaches humility and contingency, but it also allows for dissonance and unresolved tension" (Fischlin and Porter 2020, 12).

26. For a compelling example of this case, see Daniel Fischlin and Eric Porter, "Sound Changes: The Future Is Dialogue," in Fischlin and Porter 2021, 233–60.

27. I take the task of defining improvisation seriously not only because I believe that it is necessary in order to guard against unspoken assumptions, but also because of George Lewis's 2007 call for/formulation of a "new definition" that resonates strongly with my project. Lewis writes, "Our new definition would explore the relation of improvisation to local agency, history, contingency, memory, identity and embodiment, usefully reconnecting supposed purely musical questions with their analogues in similar issues surrounding *the practice of everyday life itself*" (2007, 116, my emphasis).

28. See "Big Ideas in Improvisation 2021: Fred Moten and Vijay Iyer in Conversation," International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation, http://improvisationinstitute.ca/document/big-ideas-in-improvisation-2021-fred-moten-and-vijay-iyer-in-conversation/.

29. Rather than referencing any music that is improvised, my capitalization of "Improvised Music" is meant to identify the approach described by George Lewis (2004b), however loosely defined. Although many deploy this term, deploy it in different ways, or deploy (near) synonyms, the basic sense that concerns me here is that in which Improvised Music signals practices of collective improvisation

that incorporate wide varieties of sounds, including/especially sounds that are not necessarily associated with "traditional" or "American" approaches to "jazz" in public consciousness.

30. I borrow the term *contingentist* from Kriti Sharma, whose book *Interdependence* (2015) informs my reading of musical interactivity (see "Contingency as Method: Interdependence").

31. As many music scholars have shown, so-called extramusical factors are often extra in name only. That is, just because music scholars in traditional musicological disciplines may have neglected social factors in their analyses does not actually mean that these factors are in fact extramusical; rather, as Susan McClary has proved (and as we will see throughout this book), factors such as gender are not external to a given musical question, but are fundamental aspects of how music is conceived, composed, performed, and received at a given historical juncture. "In other words, these issues are not 'extramusical'; they are inextricably bound up with musical procedures, procedures that have no value outside the social systems that produce and embrace them as somehow meaningful" (McClary 1994, 71). Thus, when I name the extramusical in a given improvisational process, I do not do so in order to argue for their distinctiveness, but simply to identify a certain category, always understood, in line with my main thesis, to be bound with and contributing to the improvisation in question.

32. Again, and thinking about Wadada Leo Smith's comment above: to reduce improvisation into oblivion doesn't erase his genius (or anyone else's) but simply prevents us from talking about it in a certain kind of (for him, very loaded) way. From his perspective, we might say that removing improvisation from our vocabularies is the *start* of the conversation about what he's trying to do, the precondition that makes conversation possible to begin with. As we'll see, this perspective very much accords with, for one, Eric Dolphy, as well as other musicians who have long understood improvisation as constitutive of simply being alive, with, as Dolphy puts it, walking down the street.

33. A recent, superlative example of the kind of scholarship that does this is Anthony Reed's *Soundworks* (2021).

34. For an alternative genealogy of contingency see Liane Carlson 2019, *Contingency and the Limits of History: How Touch Shapes Experience and Meaning*, Columbia University Press.

35. See Alain Badiou 1998/2005, *Being and Event*, Continuum.

36. R. Keith Sawyer, drawing on Bruno Nettl, exemplifies this view when he writes, "In fact, there is no sharp line between 'improvisation' and 'not improvisation'; rather, there is a continuum, from more improvised to less improvised" (Sawyer 2000, 182). As I argue below, we may be able to point to relative zones of determination and indetermination in a given situation; but first of all, the "pointing to" is influenced by where in the process we prioritize looking (i.e., our perspectives), and second, as Deleuze writes, "the fact that one can pass by degrees from one thing to another does not prevent their being different in kind" (Deleuze 1995, 2).

37. Many scholars have similarly noted the presence of restrictions as neces-

sary to improvisation, but improvisation is nevertheless identified as the *opposite* of those same restrictions.

38. In other words, my use of the terms "open" and "closed" is not about identifying types of artwork that appear more or less open to interpretation, because such evaluations are contingent on medium, vantage point, intention, and so on. What we consider to be open (and how) is a shifting, evaluative criteria, not something inherent to the work itself. In this way, my use of open/closed terminology both differs from and points to the limitations of Umberto Eco's use (1989).

39. For an extreme theorization of contingency, visual art, and closure, see Reza Negarestani, "Contingency and Complicity," in Mackay 2011, 11–18.

40. This is why attending to our social positioning is, or should be, of particular importance for improvisation studies. "What we seem to be doing, instead of precisely identifying improvisation according to some intrinsic attribute, is allowing cultural and contextual factors to regulate its presence or absence. That is, we 'perceive' improvisation through systems of difference" (Iyer 2019, 3).

41. In this sense, although it doesn't discuss improvisation per se, Benjamin Piekut's formulation of Actor Network Theory as a musicological perspective is also relevant (see Piekut 2014a).

42. "Since music is always materially and relationally contingent, it is never the same external force that both restores and destroys. Rather, since music is vibration, there are multitudes of material circumstances that contribute to each of its particular articulations, each unrepeatable and hence unique, and each with a potential to affect us that can be revealed only in the particular articulation that takes place within and among each material situation and unique listener" (Eidsheim 2015, 155).

43. The Afrological and Eurological are George Lewis's well-known terms for "musical belief systems and behavior that, in [his] view, exemplify particular kinds of musical 'logic'" and which "historicize the particularity of perspective characteristics of two systems that have evolved in [such] divergent cultural environments" (Lewis 2004b, 133). Building on arguments by Anthony Braxton, Georgina Born, and work on the cultural construct of whiteness, Lewis goes on to argue that the Eurological avant-garde produced and maintained barriers between itself and improvised music from a situated investment in whiteness, an investment that was both consciously and unconsciously practiced not only by musicians, but by the entire discursive apparatus of Western art music. In this case, though not reducible to a Eurological framework, Thompson's white aurality "can be understood as co-constitutive with, amongst other things, Eurological histories, practices, ontologies, epistemologies, and technologies of sound, music, and audition" (2017b, 274).

44. I am referring here to Mihály Csikszentmihályi's notion of "flow" as a kind of optimal, quasi-trance state of performance in which musicians are so absorbed in what they are doing that afterward they have no real memory of what happened. For more on sound as a form of affect, see *Sound, Music, Affect* (Thompson and Biddle 2013) and the following note.

45. In his contribution to *Sound, Music, Affect*, Will Scrimshaw proposes that

sound is structurally analogous to affect, in that both contain a perceptible aspect (the captured emotion of affect, the captured sound of vibrations) and a physical aspect that is beyond conscious perception (see Scrimshaw 2013). Importantly, it should be noted that the *autonomy* of affect (and in this case, of sound), does not contradict claims in this book about the social positionality of sound. In other words, if there is a "sound itself" that escapes the sound we perceive, it is not a return to the traditional notion that viewed sound as a neutral object. Rather, affect insists that sound is not exhausted by what we perceive as our experience of it (2013, 32).

46. Cobussen (2017) and Landgraf (2018)have both argued the same, but both employ a perspective more focused on emergence and dynamic systems theory. While I clearly agree with them regarding improvisation's singularity, I am choosing to focus on contingency for, among other reasons, its inseparable link with affect.

47. In fact, quite the opposite. I am taking for granted here, following Bruno Nettl, that improvisation is a true musical universal (see Nettl 1974). Further, I also follow Lewis in his assertion that improvisation—when understood along the lines I have tried to outline here—becomes radically omnipresent, not just in music but also in everyday life. In his words, improvisation viewed in this way is "as close to universal as contemporary critical method could possibly entertain" (Lewis 2007, 108). For more on how I view the nature of this "universality," see chapter 5.

48. "In *The Visible and Invisible* [Merleau-Ponty] offers us a reflection on touch and on forms of contact between bodies as well as between bodies and the world. As he states: 'My hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches'" (Ahmed 2006, 106).

49. I do not intend to equate the potential seriousness of the described street encounter (on the one hand) with a musical improvisation (on the other); rather, I make a limited connection in order to emphasize the vast difference that one's own body can make in any improvisation, for example, when one feels out of place, which can happen both in a musical performance and in a suburban development inside a racist society. Going forward, I make several additional claims using this formulation, "in the same way (but differently)." In each case I intend not to gloss over the differences that matter but to make the comparison so that a limited parallel emerges more clearly.

2. Out to Lunch

1. There is an incredible moment, for instance, in "Straight Up and Down," right in the beginning of the solo section (0:56), where Williams metrically modulates to a swing tempo based on the dotted-eighth note of the original tempo. Davis, however, had already and virtually simultaneously begun a repetitive groove in the original tempo. The tension between the two clashing grooves in two related meters doesn't last long, resolving when Williams quickly reverts back to Davis's center of gravity. The way I hear it, Williams wasn't expecting Davis's

groove, but rather expected him to keep walking (which would have provided a more stable ground for Williams to continue developing his metric modulation). As it is, Williams abandons his course—but not before five seconds of beautiful, swinging tension destabilize the listener as Dolphy takes off.

2. Besides every moment that Dolphy enters, my favorite example is Hutcherson's intense and jumbled interjections at 6:24 and 6:28.

3. For example, see 4:47–4:56. The original hemiola is floated by Hutcherson just prior. (A hemiola is when a rhythm repeats in such a way as to imply a new meter or pulse from within the space of the original.)

4. No other interval carries an equivalent ambivalence or affect. The major seventh simultaneously belongs to its root scale and nevertheless sounds a world apart. The major seventh thus uses dissonance to achieve transcendence. Or: the major seventh is beautiful by and through its very dissonance, through its long distance from tonic that is also (in reverse) the shortest distance possible.

5. This is the colloquial phrase that refers to "accompaniment" roles in the rhythm section. Different from background figures (for example, that horns would play in a big-band arrangement), comping is improvised. Chordal instruments interject the harmonies from the chord progressions in the tune, but only when they want to. Sometimes, they will "pedal" one note, one chord, or one rhythmic figure over a series of bars to build tension. It is relatively rare for chordal instruments to play single note lines as comping parts, since this typically draws attention away from or conflicts with what the soloist is doing. Hutcherson's comping in this respect is unusual, and I hear it as a move in search of something of what we might call "Dolphy's aesthetic" (which after all would not be self-explanatory). Dolphy once remarked that "Pianos seem to control you, Bobby's vibes seem to open you up" (in Simosko and Tepperman 1971, 19). This is surely in part because of the timbre of the vibraphone, with its bouquet of overtones. But no matter the extent to which this timbre contributed to Hutcherson's approach or to what extent his approach is a capitalization on that timbre, Hutcherson is no small part of what makes this recording sound so uncanny.

6. Other experimental albums either released or recorded in 1964 alone include Andrew Hill's *Point of Departure* (on which Dolphy also played); Albert Ayler's *New York Eye and Ear Control* and *Spiritual Unity*; Sun Ra's *Other Planes of There*; John Coltrane's *Crescent*; and Wayne Shorter's *Speak No Evil* and *JuJu*, among others.

7. Synthetic scales are those that do not correspond to standard modes (e.g., "Dorian" or "Ionian," "major" or "minor") but introduce different, imposed alterations into the interval relationships for a specific feeling or affect.

8. I mean to invoke here Jacques Rancière's use of the term "sensible," which I discuss further below. In *The Politics of Aesthetics* he details his meaning as follows: "I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts" (2013, 12).

9. For more on bebop's innovations see Lott 1995; DeVeaux 1997; Belgrad 2015.

10. If we ever needed evidence that music is irreducible to a score, surely the jazz lead sheet as a cultural artifact provides it. Not only does a typical lead sheet represent only the melody and chord symbols, but even then, what is written is a purposefully anemic version of what any live interpretation would sound like—purposefully because of the presupposition that a jazz musician will embellish, phrase, and otherwise interpret the melody as they see fit. In reality, this is an exaggerated version of what all musicians do when they read any piece of music anywhere, which is to say that they improvise.

11. I mean "signify" here in the dual sense of both carrying semiotic content (connotations, social meanings, and so on) and also in the sense of Henry Louis Gates Jr., where some of these conventions signify *on* past conventions. For more on jazz as a signifying practice, see Gates 1989 and Monson 1997.

12. To summarize: while the "role" of the jazz drummer has in some respects always consisted of a dual function (to support the others with a timekeeping rhythm and to juxtapose the steadiness of said rhythm by responding to the improvisations of the other band members), it has also undergone stylistic shifts that have more or less coincided with shifts in the genre itself. It is generally accepted that the transition of the timekeeping function from the bass drum (which typically kept steady beats, one per quarter-note) to the ride cymbal allowed for increased fluidity, both in terms of rhythm (because the hand is more dexterous) and in terms of texture (this was particularly true when drummers transitioned from small, sound-effect type cymbals to the larger, more legato ride cymbals characteristic of contemporary jazz). The bebop era in particular is known for introducing much more rhythmic activity into the drummer's timekeeping, rather than just in soloistic situations. The syncopated ride cymbal pattern, adapted from the early parade music patterns played on woodblocks and snare drums, remained consistent while also allowing for personal styles of execution (Jimmy Cobb, for instance, is famous for playing many more quarter notes than his contemporaries, relative to the dotted-eighth, sixteenth rhythm). Meanwhile, the transition from keeping time on the bass drum to the ride cymbal freed up the bass to join the snare drum in accenting, accentuating, and responding to the improvisations of other musicians while they were soloing. This new potential for the bass drum gave rise to the practice (and the colloquialism) of "dropping bombs." To support a soloist with improvised, irregular rhythmic activity became known as comping, and all instruments in the rhythm section can participate, sometimes leading to significant, collective responses while a soloist is playing. To detail the innovations that Williams brought to the drumset at this point would take too much space. Where my argument is concerned, specifically, he is noted in these early performances for the ways in which he moved in and out of timekeeping in the course of tune; in part because of his explorations, to support a soloist no longer just means dropping bombs or playing time, but includes a whole palette of textural and rhythmic possibilities, including metric modulations (timekeeping in a related meter), hemiolas (repeated polyrhythms), breaking up the timekeeping among various voices (not just the ride cymbal), or simply not playing at all.

13. Here I part emphatically with John Litweiler's assertion that "There should be no doubt that with the Alan Douglas sessions and *Out to Lunch* Eric

Dolphy has finally and fully broken his last remaining links to bop and hard bop" (1984, 75). It should be clear by this point why I believe that this album instead straddles two worlds. Further, I believe Litweiler's inability to hear the bebop that persists in *Out to Lunch!* stems from his situatedness in a discourse that conflates certain musical practices with notions of freedom, in this case the "advances" in jazz—as if teleological—and moves toward ever increasing musical complexity.

14. Eric Dolphy is, among the great practitioners of jazz, comparatively absent in literature. But where he is present, he is almost exclusively discussed through his soloing style, and the question of whether or not (and to what extent and how) his improvisations related to tonal harmony. While his music was hotly debated at the time (see below), today Dolphy is more or less accepted into jazz litera- ture and mainstream journalism (see contemporary NPR coverage, for instance) as an unconventional and virtuoso soloist. The justification for this acceptance usually takes recourse to Dolphy's own description of his playing as related in some way to the chord progressions of the tune. In other words, it may sound weird, but Dolphy really is playing jazz the "correct" way (and by implication, that's what makes it good). Martin Williams's view is indicative here: "Contrary to some misguided talk at the time, Eric Dolphy knew chords and chord changes and could improvise brilliantly according to their 'rules' and conventions. . . . If Eric sounds 'out' compared with most of the other players, he wasn't out of the chord changes. He just knew things to do with the extensions—correct things, if you will—that the others weren't likely to use, but that all the young players use today" (Williams 1992, 224). In my view, this kind of assessment is a way of tam- ing Dolphy, of bringing him back within the bounds of acceptability, and using his presence within those bounds as the very basis to extol his innovations. This taming acknowledges Dolphy as a genius not because of his interrelated, various experimentations, but because his solo sound still engaged jazz improvisation in the "proper" manner. In contrast to such views, I have been arguing here that Dolphy's project was both more comprehensive and more radical than standard accounts portray. For a notable exception, see Allen 1983, plus, of course, Moten and Baraka.

15. "Dolphy's syntax, yes, but also that even in his outness he insisted upon some reference to the chord, that in his mind there was an insistence of the chord, that it had been there and remained in its irruption" (Moten 2003, 81).

16. Recall for instance how Coltrane tapped Dolphy to orchestrate *Africa/ Brass* in lieu of Gil Evans, how he always knew things about Dolphy that the pub- lic was slow to understand.

17. "One need not be politically committed to question the integrity of the world. Blackness is a mode of existence in which the disjuncture between the reality of one's everyday living and the ways one is understood by society at large is so pronounced that the former must be considered an impossibility or a lie in order to preserve the latter. . . . I propose that jazz is also capable of reflecting critically on the contradictions from which it arises—indeed, that it is compelled to do so" (Okiji 2018, 5).

18. The full, infamous quote reads as follows: "Go ahead, call me reactionary. I happen to object to the musical nonsense currently peddled in the name of jazz by John Coltrane and his acolyte, Eric Dolphy. At Hollywood's Renaissance Club

recently, I listened to a horrifying demonstration of what appears to be a growing anti-jazz trend exemplified by these foremost proponents of what is termed avant garde music" (Tynan 1961, 40).

19. As I discuss below, one difference is that Eric Dolphy's type of eccentricity put him at odds with notions of "cool" in the popular cultural discourses of his time, whereas for Royster's post-soul examples, eccentricity can enable and augment coolness as well as squareness.

20. With thanks to my second anonymous reviewer for this reference.

21. See for instance Richard Davis in *Stop Smiling Magazine*, 2008, "Richard Davis on Eric Dolphy: Highlights from Issue 34," http://www.stopsmilingonline .com/story_detail.php?id=1048.

22. Perhaps something of this dynamic informs Davis's critique of Dolphy as a "sad motherfucker."

23. Consider for instance how many of his albums included the word "out," for instance, or invoked a distant spatial relation: *Outward Bound*, *Out There*, *Far Cry*, and *Out to Lunch!*, to say nothing of other albums to which he contributed.

24. There is a sense in which Dolphy's music feels urgent, as if animated by the simultaneity of the enormity of the contribution he wanted to give us and the almost correlative severity of his professional frustrations. There is something in his sound that testifies to a sense, however vague, that opportunities to free himself of his desire to express it might (continue to) be limited. Dolphy broke open what could happen in the music, anticipating the future of the genre. But more than that, the urgency of his sound also prophesizes the limited time he had and would have to share it with us, a grim fulfillment of an anxiety informing every performance, into which Dolphy give his whole being. Not only musically but personally, this is truly improvisation "as a kind of foreshadowing, if not prophetic, description" (Moten 2003, 63).

25. Note the clock-face on the album cover and its multiple hands: we are always already both "out" and "in"; we have already returned because we never left; we are never returning because we have never been here.

3. Waves, Linens, and White Light

1. In her account of jazz as critique—that is, as Black music—Fumi Okiji puts the well-theorized intermusicality of Black performance in terms of Walter Benjamin's "storyteller," in which each retelling of a story is a "plural event" that will always remain both partial and multiple. She writes, "New versions of the story repeat what has already been given but do so in a way that retains each teller's own perspectival and material quirks. Walter Benjamin refers to each retelling as a 'transparent layer.' This transparency is crucial. It suggests that past efforts have not been covered over or surpassed by the new but have been retained and are, in fact, reawakened by and reworked in their play with the more recent and that these invigorating renditions are enabled by the versions their contributions help resuscitate" (Okiji 2018, 68–69). Although Okiji is making a specific argument about the cyclicality and referentiality of Black music, Benjamin's transparent layers seem to me also relevant in the context of

our repeated exposure to the same recordings. Insofar as recordings must be listened to by a subject-body, insofar as they must be improvised, recordings too are "plural events," unfixed or perhaps differently fixed than their traditional status as object would lead us to believe.

2. In addition to the fact that all ostensibly "closed" objects are "open" by virtue of their unpredictable effects, it is also true that understanding recordings as "closed" objects is, in the first place, a relatively recent interpretation. As David Grubbs shows, recordings had previously been understood in the very opposite way—that is, as *embodying* chance itself (see 2014, 92–93). For more on improvisation and recorded media, see also Froger 2017, 233–54.

3. "The early years of Trondheim's jazz department . . . are seared in the memory of many. . . . Trondheim became a magical place, the ideal breeding ground for musicians of all kinds . . . in the evening there would be music everywhere: in the characteristic red round building of the Studentersamfundet, in Albert's café. . . . It was an extremely lively atmosphere that got even better when the jazz department moved to the center of town in 1995 . . . jazz became the heart of the city's life" (Vitali 2015, 63).

4. "Imperative" might sound a bit extreme, but consider this quote from Mercer's report: "A lot of people say that you can forget about getting funding if you're not doing something crazy. . . . You know, if you do something experimental and you live up north, you're sort of home free for life, because you're so 'correct.' Whereas standard repertoire played in the traditional way—the sort of thing you can see all over America all the time—if we try to do that in Norway, it's like, 'Why should we do that? There's enough of that'" (Kristin Danielsen in Mercer 2013).

5. For an in-depth discussion of the incorporation of various "European" sounds into improvised forms across Europe—and the complex politics raised by doing so—see Hurley 2011.

6. In this pursuit of diversified sounds, European musicians were in some ways approaching the avant-garde on a parallel track with groups in the US like the AACM. However, at the same time that it is important to link these two avant-gardes (as Lewis calls them), it is also important to be specific about the limitations of that connection, as the politics and aesthetics on these two tracks maintain some essential differences. Chiefly, while the AACM drew from an enormous variety of sounds in order to inhibit easy stereotyping and interpretation of their Black original music, European musicians drew a variety of sounds so that there would be *no question* about their identities. In order to prove that Europe had something to say, their contributions had to be audible as European from the beginning. What musical materials were selected, as well as the ways in which such selections were placed into conversation, differed from location to location, and musician to musician; what remained the same throughout the European context was an investment in "putting-together" in service of new (obviously European) sounds.

7. For Lewis (2004a), any such musical differences are separate from and (in my reading) secondary to the discourses informing them: if initially European practitioners easily acknowledged the influence of African American music on their own, Lewis observes an emerging disavowal, following an oft-seen pattern

concerning Black culture, which threatens to cut off and erase African American experimentalism as the root of European Improvised Music. Such a move would reinscribe the same kind of racialized policing that separated the Afrological and Eurological avant-gardes in the context of the United States.

8. "Like the musicians, the festivals also worked hard to establish their own identity. . . . Molde has the reputation for being the most 'international,' Kongsberg is known for its free jazz and avant-garde, Vossajazz for its folk and traditional music heritage, and Nattjazz for its nurturing of young talent and young audiences. But even more than that, each festival became a sort of laboratory, going out of its way to come up with formulas (endowments, competitions, artist residencies and more) that would give the more talented musicians an opportunity to grow and develop" (Vitali 2015, 45).

9. I make this claim notwithstanding important exceptions: first of all, obviously not everyone teaches or learns improvised music in higher education (although universities are increasingly the location of jazz pedagogy, a fact that reflects and perpetuates its increasing association with white, middle-class identity). Second, certainly not all institutions approach improvisation pedagogy in the conservative manner I describe here (see below). Finally, there are movements within higher education to reform and expand the kinds of curricula of which I am critical in this section. However, the continued discussion around reform points to the very hegemony of the paradigm I aim to outline, which is vastly more widespread and better funded than the exceptions that exist. As to those exceptions, Ajay Heble and Rob Wallace list the following musicians, who bring alternative approaches to their institutions: "Anthony Braxton at Wesleyan; Wadada Leo Smith, Charlie Haden and Vinny Golia, at CalArts; Roscoe Mitchell and Fred Frith, at Mills; George Lewis, at Columbia; Andrew Cyrille, at the New School; Anthony Davis and Mark Dresser, at UCSD; Gerry Hemingway, at the Hochschule Luzern; Pauline Oliveros, at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; Myra Melford, at Berkeley; and Bobby Bradford, at Pomona" (Heble and Wallace 2013, 20). Although this is surely not a comprehensive list, we can see from its relative brevity how institutional examples are difficult to come by and are often centered on individual musicians, rather than robust programs or departments. To this list, I would also add Ralph Alessi's School for Improvisational Music and any class that Art Lande happens to be teaching (although these latter two are often only taught in concentrated two- or three-week workshops hosted in various institutions) as well as the program at the New England Conservatory, discussed in Heble and Laver 2016. Very sadly, both Charlie Haden and Pauline Oliveros have passed away since the time of Heble and Wallace's writing, and it is as yet unclear what will happen to Mills.

10. In a subsequent chapter (2012), Ake praises the diversity of approaches being practiced in jazz programs, but does so more from a broader cultural perspective than one directly addressing pedagogy. Again, my point here is not to theorize the culture of jazz education in the US per se but to outline some of its dominant historical forms and how these reflect particular rather than universal investments.

11. It is critical to acknowledge that the acceptance of jazz into "high art" institutions was a validation of Black artistic practices for which Black musicians

themselves have long struggled. That said, a clear consequence of this acceptance—as practiced—has been the loss of the history of "creative music" from the official narrative, so that we hear little of Black musicians' original music on its own terms, including the histories of independent infrastructures that Black musicians created to support that music, particularly during the Black Arts and Black Power eras. As Iyer notes, echoing McMullen's above concerns, "If you go to jazz school . . . you don't learn about any of this because it defies the logic of jazz education. Jazz education as we know it today was an entrepreneurial venture by white men in the '60s and '70s" (Iyer in Enos 2021).

12. Note the decisiveness with which Vitali claims Norway's scene to be "freed" from American influence. Besides being helpful for understanding Trondheim's influence on Norwegian music education programs writ large, this quote is also useful for demonstrating the sustained insistence on both innovation and distinctiveness in Norwegian jazz discourse, particularly when contrasted with the United States.

13. "Chord-scale" theory is a method geared toward matching certain chord qualities with a series of scales that are understood to be "appropriate" for improvising in the tonality of those given chords. See also Ake 2002 and Wilf 2014.

14. "I also have some exercises of my own where I often emphasize listening to sound rather than harmony, but the approach is more or less the same. . . . I would for instance play a single note on the bass and the students are to listen and copy that note: I play a bowed low E on the bass. Each student listens for all the sounds present. Eventually each student joins me playing a part of what they hear, but exactly as they hear it. For instance, they might [copy] the sound of the hair on the bow on the string, some of the partials sounding, the sound of the bow shifting, etc. Each [student] should play his or her own sound, so if the someone already has played the air sound of the bow the next [student] should find something else. It is like a real time spectral analysis of the sound I'm playing and at some point I'll stop playing and the sound of the ensemble should be as close as possible to what I was playing. . . . I once heard a student ensemble of roughly 15 musicians sound like a bowed cymbal . . . (!)" (Duch 2018).

15. St. Vincent 2009, "Just the Same but Brand New," *Actor* (4AD).

4. Gunweep | Elephant in the Room

1. A "sus" chord is one in which the third chord tone (the key "telltale" note, which gives a chord its quality) is replaced by the fourth. This takes away the "drive" or "narrative" feeling of the chord, producing a more ambiguous, suspended sound that could "go" many different ways, and which can signify many different affects depending on its context. Here, Davis adds extensions—the major 7, 9, and 13—to further color this dense and ambivalent sound.

2. I first began thinking with "feminist affect" thanks to Christine Capetola, who uses it in her own work to describe what she calls *hyperaurality* in the music of Janet Jackson (Capetola 2020).

3. See Heble 2000; Tucker 2004; Hannaford 2017.

4. For this source, I have copied the English translation that is provided on

the CitizenJazz website. I have made slight editorial changes in brackets where necessary.

5. For a sociological and intersectional analysis of identity positions in the contemporary jazz industry, see Yoko Suzuki 2013, "Two Strikes and the Double Negative: The Intersections of Gender and Race in the Cases of Female Jazz Saxophonists," *Black Music Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (Fall): 207–26.

6. "A way of life can be shared among individuals of different age, status, and social activity. It can yield intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalized. It seems to me that a way of life can yield a culture and an ethics" (Foucault 1997, 138).

7. There can be a distinction here, politically, and in fact Adrienne Rich's 1980 essay instigated a sizable controversy and debate around the very question of whether or not and to what extent queer politics and feminism could be considered along the same axis. Without losing track of this debate, I want to focus on the tactic of a deliberate ambiguity. Often, in discourses on friendship, the question of whether or not a relationship between women (for instance) can or cannot be read as queer is often not viewed as a question that needs to be definitively answered (hence my use of the slash). Like Bikini Kill's anthem "Rebel Girl," the vulnerable disclosure (lyrical or sonic) of admiration and friendship on *Blood Moon* opens the possibility of a queer reading; but more important (at least here) than answering this powerful ambiguity is recognizing the distance that both deep platonic connection and same-sex intimacy share from dominant masculine discourses, whether in rock or jazz.

8. An intimate public is Lauren Berlant's term for a public experience or sphere where its members are in many ways *assumed*—assumed to exist, to belong, and to do so via a shared worldview assumed to be in common (2008).

9. With thanks to Christine Capetola for recommending Musser's work.

Part 2. Intro: On the Nature of this Comparison

1. Quoting Michael Sheringham, "Everydayness is more or less exclusively associated with what is boring, habitual, mundane, uneventful, trivial, humdrum, repetitive, inauthentic, and unrewarding. At the everyday level, life is at its least interesting, in opposition to the ideal, the imaginary, the momentous" (Sheringham 2009, 23).

2. See Darren Wershler 2017, "Kenneth Goldsmith and Uncreative Improvisation," in Born, Lewis, and Straw 2017a. Marcel Swiboda has also written on "unskilled" improvisations, and although I don't necessarily take the distinction to be central to his overall thesis, it is interesting to note the apparent need for a qualifier when discussing everyday improvisations.

5. The Structure of Everyday Life

1. "To put it more clearly or more abstractly, *ambiguity* is a category of everyday life, and perhaps an essential category. It never exhausts its reality; from the

ambiguity of consciousnesses and situations spring forth actions, events, results, without warning" (Lefebvre 2014, 18). "Whatever its other aspects, the everyday has this essential trait: it allows no hold. It escapes" (Blanchot 1987, 14).

2. In *Willful Subjects*, Sara Ahmed "extends over a century of feminist challenges to universalism" by critiquing the notion of an empty universal in the work of Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, a universal that for Ahmed is "only empty insofar as it extends from some particulars and not others" (Ahmed 2014, 246n45). Indeed, I subscribe to the position that "We have to keep up the challenge as the critiques of universalism do not seem to get through." Attempts in this chapter to discuss "generic" behaviors or "contingent universals" are not meant to resurrect the kinds of "theoretical brick walls" that Ahmed raises but to trace certain forms across quite different contexts, always mindful of the provisional quality of this tracing.

3. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin makes a case for thinking the *flâneur* as a quintessentially historical and material figure, rather than as a kind of mythical and literary one. The historical *flâneur* is in Benjamin a kind of horizon of the past or future, a fiction or an impossibility insofar as the *flâneur* in capitalist nineteenth-century Paris is (despite appearances) *actually working*. For this see Benjamin 2002 and Buck-Morss 1986.

4. For more on the *flâneuse*, see Bruno 1993; Friedberg 1993; Parsons 2000; D'Souza and McDonough 2006. For more on Black *flânerie*, see below and Brown 2008; Mózes 2020; Sobande et al. 2021. In addition to work directly addressing Black *flânerie* as a concept, much attention has been paid in a variety of academic and nonacademic contexts to the dangers of (among other everyday practices) "walking while Black." This conversation, while it focuses on the specific ways in which racialized people are policed and subjected to violence in public spaces (about which more below), resonates with the notion of the *flâneur* insofar as it invokes Lefebvre's (1996) provocation, Who has the "right to the city"? See for instance: Topher Sanders, Kate Rabinowitz, and Benjamin Conarck 2017, "Walking While Black: Jacksonville's Enforcement of Pedestrian Violations Raises Concerns That It's Another Example of Racial Profiling," *ProPublica*, November 16, https://features.propublica.org/walking-while-black /jacksonville-pedestrian-violations-racial-profiling/; and Baratunde Thurston's work on "#LivingWhileBlack," https://www.baratunde.com/livingwhileblack.

5. In a heavily circulated Facebook post made after the 2018 arrests of Rashon Nelson and Donte Robinson in a Philadelphia Starbucks, author Teju Cole writes: "We are not safe even in the most banal place. We are not equal even in the most common circumstances. We are always five minutes away from having our lives upended. . . . Racism is not about actively doing stuff to you all the time—it's also about passively keeping you on tenterhooks. We are always one sour white away from having the cops arrive. And the cops! The cops are like a machine that can't stop once set in motion, what Fela called 'zombie.' When the cops arrive, the human aspect of the encounter is over. This is why I always say that you can't be a black *flâneur*. *Flânerie* is for whites. For blacks in white terrain, all spaces are charged. Cafés, restaurants, museums, shops. Your own front door. This is why we are compelled, instead, to practice psychogeography. We wander alert, and pay a heavy psychic toll for that vigilance. Can't relax, black."

The full post also includes this relevant observation: "Keen-eared Prof Vijay Iyer notes that playing overhead during the arrest was Dizzy Gillespie's Salt Peanuts. A compact contemporary history of public space could be written with the title 'Black Music, Yes! Black People, No!'" Teju Cole 2018, "The Starbucks Thing Hit Me Harder Than I Expected," Facebook, April 18, https://www.facebook.com /200401352198/posts/the-starbucks-thing-hit-me-harder-than-i-expected-ive-be en-brooding-for-days-on-/10155943676667199/.

6. "No matter how well trained a Negro may be, or how fitted for work of any kind, he cannot in the ordinary course of competition hope to be much more than a menial servant. . . . A Negro woman has but three careers open to her in this city: domestic service, sewing, or married life" (Du Bois 1995, 324).

7. "His children are discriminated against, often in public schools. . . . He must pay more house-rent for worse houses than most white people pay" (Du Bois 1995, 324).

8. "If he meet a lifelong white friend on the street, he is in a dilemma; if he does not greet the friend he is put down as boorish and impolite; if he does greet the friend he is liable to be flatly snubbed" (Du Bois 1995, 325).

9. It is because of this focus on a kind of musicality in de Certeau that I foreground practices in this section, rather than associated concepts such as Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus* or Erving Goffman's performance of self. I discuss Bourdieu briefly in the conclusion. Where Goffman is concerned, although there are a great many resonances between our understandings of everyday life, I want to avoid discussions of performativity for the questions they raise about staging and audience, or the theatrical and public-facing nature of Goffman's formulation. While improvisation is surely involved in our everyday performances, improvisation is also not limited to those instances where we perform. Improvisation in this way transcends performance: it navigates contingent circumstances regardless of where or how those circumstances manifest. This is also why I mostly defer engaging with Tracy McMullen's compelling formulation of "the improvisative," about which more below.

10. Further, "The 'resistance' of the everyday . . . is a resistance born of difference, of otherness: bodies that are at variance to the machines that they operate; traditions that are unlike those being promoted; imaginings that are different from the rationale governing the present" (Highmore 2002a, 148). The notion of "bodies that are at variance" resonates fruitfully with Ahmed's work, and will grow louder in this section of the book.

11. Think too of the violent ways in which city spaces are reorganized when they stand in the way of the desires of subjects Kern identifies as belonging: from Bob Moses's infamous freeway expansions to contemporary examples like the $300 million per mile "opportunity corridor" in Cleveland, time and again poor and minority communities, which are so by design in the first place, become not just divested of funding but literally broken in order to make room for roads that will more easily allow Kern's white, bread-winning men to zoom to work efficiently, and with scenery that is pleasant for them. See Dan Diamond 2017, "How the Cleveland Clinic Grows Healthier While Its Neighbors Stay Sick," *Politico*, July 17, https://www.politico.com/interactives/2017/obamacare-clevel and-clinic-non-profit-hospital-taxes/.

12. Merriam-Webster online, "Singularity" (quoted in Sharpe 2016, 106).

13. Brandon Griggs 2018, "Living While Black: Here Are All the Routine Activities for Which Police Were Called on African-Americans This Year," *CNN*, December 28, https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/20/us/living-while-black-police-calls-trnd/index.html.

14. See Antonia Noori Farzan 2018, "BBQ Becky, Permit Patty and Cornerstone Caroline: Too 'Cutesy' for Those White Women Calling Police on Black People?," *Washington Post*, October 19, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/10/19/bbq-becky-permit-patty-and-cornerstone-caroline-too-cutesy-for-those-white-women-calling-cops-on-blacks/; Amir Vera and Laura Ly 2020 "White Woman Who Called Police on a Black Man Bird-Watching in Central Park Has Been Fired," *CNN*, May 26, https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/26/us/central-park-video-dog-video-african-american-trnd/index.html. The case of Amy Cooper is particularly glaring, given that she self-consciously weaponizes her race and/through the police. Additionally, this event took place shortly before/in tandem with the Black Lives Matter uprisings around the killing of George Floyd, becoming a flashpoint example of how simply living can become deadly for Black Americans.

15. To speak of the wake or the weather as parameter is not to solidify them, or to equate them with other structures such as an economic system, or highway overpass, or a corporate boardroom; it is merely to acknowledge that they shape behaviors, and what is possible. The way that I understand it, neither the wake nor the weather are structures, though they do structure; rather, they are, respectively, singularity and environment. The former produces effects that ramify into the now, while the latter is, as I wrote above, a kind of ur-condition. One powerful question implicit in Sharpe's work, then, is whether or not either of these can be affected by our practices. A structure, even a power structure or a system of control, even these larger more abstract assemblages can be affected as they affect; but thinking of slavery as a singularity might mark it as too far beyond us to reach. The question becomes what can be done about its wake, everywhere and nowhere.

16. Monica Heisey 2020, "'The Promises of Pleasure, Freedom, Excitement, Opportunity, and Encounter': An Interview with Leslie Kern," *Hazlitt*, July 9, https://hazlitt.net/feature/promises-pleasure-freedom-excitement-opportunity-and-encounter-interview-leslie-kern.

17. As I discuss below, paychecks are ideal only when predictable.

18. "We must, however, clarify the nature of these operations from another angle, not on the basis of the relation they entertain with a system or an order, but insofar as *power relationships* define the networks in which they are inscribed and delimit the circumstances from which they can profit" (de Certeau 1984, 34).

19. Think too of the ableist positioning of this ostensibly normative claim: for those without the use of their legs, in fact, the opposite will be true.

6. Everyday Practices

1. James Taylor 1970, *Sweet Baby James*, Warner Brothers.
2. In this essay too musical analogies abound. Earlier, Giard remarks that

when she first set about to learn how to cook, she was surprised to discover how much she already knew. She writes, "*I already knew all the sounds*: the gentile hiss of simmering water, the sputtering of melting meat drippings, and the dull thud of the kneading hand" (1998, 153, my emphasis).

3. "If everything is in time, everything changes inwardly, and the same concrete reality never recurs. Repetition is therefore possible only in the abstract: what is repeated is some aspect that our senses, and especially our intellect, have singled out from reality. . . . Thus, concentrated on that which repeats, solely preoccupied in welding the same to the same, intellect turns away from the vision of time" (Bergson 1911, 46). See also Pedwell 2021 and the conclusion for more on the mutability of habit.

4. Commonly referred to in the US as "sourdough," any bread that is raised without commercial yeast but instead with a natural culture is leavened bread. Different bakers will use different flours and ratios to feed their starters, contributing to the unique characteristics of each culture and in turn of each loaf. All such recipes are dependent on local grain economies. Pain de Campagne, for instance, has a bit of rye flour in the recipe, which, according to lore, results from the fact that rye was so ubiquitous at one point in French history that it was put into almost everything.

5. For a summary and discussion of this work, see Nicola Twilley and Cynthia Graber 2017, "Secrets of Sourdough," *Gastropod*, podcast, December 19, https://gastropod.com/secrets-sourdough-transcript; and Rob Dunn Lab, "Sourdough Project," http://robdunnlab.com/projects/sourdough/.

6. For differences between Cage and Schaeffer see chapter 2 in Grubbs 2014.

7. See Sara Ahmed 2019, "Nodding as a Non-Performative," *feministkilljoys*, April 29, https://feministkilljoys.com/2019/04/29/nodding-as-a-non-performative/. In this source Ahmed writes, "One student makes a complaint about harassment from other students. She describes what happened when she talked to her head of department: 'He seemed to take it on board, he was listening; he was nodding. Ten days later I still had not heard anything. A space of limbo opened up.' . . . nodding is how the head of department is communicating that he is listening; nodding as taking (or seeming to take) something *on board*. If she feels heard she does not then hear anything. She has to do what many who make complaints have to do: follow it up; send reminders; prompts. When you don't hear anything you have more work to do."

8. ". . . when the 'normal' perception of noise is already suffused with unexamined race, class, and gender ideologies, the production and use of noise-canceling technologies can never be neutral" (Hagood 2019 196). For more on noise and noisy neighbors, see Thompson 2017a.

9. Simon Torracinta 2020, "Extinction Event: Given What Is to Come, Schools of Every Kind Are Now at Risk," *n+1*, July 8, https://www.nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/extinction-event/.

10. Around $1.6 trillion at time of writing. See Zack Friedman 2020, "Student Loan Debt Statistics in 2020: A Record $1.6 Trillion," *Forbes*, February 3, https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackfriedman/2020/02/03/student-loan-debt-statistics/#639d8a3d281f.

11. "One area in which nonprofit education management has been freely

spending is on themselves. Over three decades, the number of administrators has skyrocketed, in close correspondence to the ever-growing population of the undercompensated. Especially at the upper levels, administrative pay has soared as well, also in close relation to the shrinking compensation of other campus workers. In a couple of decades, administrative work has morphed from an occasional service component in a professorial life to a 'desirable career path' in its own right" (Bousquet 2008, 6).

12. "State universities have come under increasing criticism for excessive executive pay, soaring student debt, and low-wage faculty labor. In the public debate, these issues are often treated separately. Our study examines what happened to student debt and faculty labor at the 25 public universities with the highest executive pay (hereafter 'the top 25') from fall 2005 to summer 2012 (FY 2006– FY 2012). Our findings suggest these issues are closely related and should be addressed together in the future" (Erwin and Wood 2014, 3).

13. "In thirty years of managed higher education, the typical faculty member has become a female nontenurable part-timer earning a few thousand dollars a year without health benefits. The typical administrator is male, enjoys tenure, a six-figure income, little or no teaching, generous vacations, and great health care. Nontenurable faculty are moderately more likely, and nonteaching staff substantially more likely, to identify themselves as belonging to an ethnic or racial minority than the tenure-stream faculty. Administrators are less likely to identify themselves with minority status the farther they are up the food chain" (Bousquet 2008, 6). See also Young 2010 and Navarro 2017.

14. See Colleen Flaherty 2018, "A Non-Tenure-Track Profession?," *Inside Higher Ed*, October 12, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/10/12/about-three-quarters-all-faculty-positions-are-tenure-track-according-new-aaup.

15. American Association of University Professors 2021, "The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2020–21," *AAUP*, July, https://www.aaup.org/file/AAUP_ARES_2020-21.pdf.

16. For more on these two myths see Zheng 2018.

17. See François Furstenberg 2020, "University Leaders Are Failing," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 19, https://www.chronicle.com/article/University-Leaders-Are-Failing/248809.

18. Colleen Flaherty 2020, "Canaries in a 'Toxic Mine,'" *Inside Higher Ed*, May 5, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/05/05/professors-ohio-u-say-faculty-cuts-cant-just-be-blamed-covid-19.

19. Max Londberg 2020, "Most of Miami's Contingent Teachers Told Contracts Won't Be Renewed, Group Says," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 18, https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2020/04/18/most-miamis-contingent-faculty-lose-jobs-faculty-group-says/5147440002/; Ashlea Jones 2021, "Miami University on Track to Welcome Largest, Most Academically Accomplished Incoming Class in History," *Miami University*, May 13, https://www.miamioh.edu/news/top-stories/2021/05/incoming-class-of-2025-largest-most-accomplished.html; Heather Johnston 2020, "Extramural Funding at Miami University Sets New Record in Fiscal Year 2020," *Miami University*, October 14, https://www.miamioh.edu/news/top-stories/2020/10/new-record-for-external-funding-fy2020.html.

20. Danielle McLean 2020, "With Latest Layoffs, U. of Akron Has Lost Almost

a Quarter of Its Faculty Since Pandemic Began," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 15, https://www.chronicle.com/article/with-latest-layoffs-u-of-akron-has-lo st-almost-a-quarter-of-its-faculty-since-pandemic-began.

21. Marjorie Valbrun 2020, "CUNY Layoffs Prompt Union Lawsuit," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 6, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/07/06/econo mic-fallout-pandemic-leads-layoffs-cuny-and-union-lawsuit.

22. The Executive Committee of Tenure for the Common Good 2020, "A Very Stable and Secure Position?," *Inside Higher Ed*, April 30, https://www.insidehig hered.com/views/2020/04/30/covid-19-shows-how-precarious-positions-contin gent-faculty-actually-are-opinion.

23. "The link between flexibility and nonstandard employment now means that nonstandard employment can occur in any industry or in any type of firm that seeks greater flexibility or greater control over labor costs. Moreover, stan-dard and nonstandard employment relationships increasingly occur in the same industry or even in the same workplace. A significant development is that workers in standard and nonstandard employment often have similar education, train-ing, experience, and labor force attachment" (Champlin and Knoedler 2017, 235).

24. See for instance Lyft's ad campaigns for California Proposition 22, which essentially reversed a court ruling requiring app-based driver services to employ their drivers: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7QJLgdQaf4.

25. "This superfluousness now becomes clear as governments, by omission or commission amid the pandemic, put members of society deemed surplus, as well as workers, particularly people of color, at grave risk of contracting or even dying from the virus (a recent UCSF study conducted in San Francisco's Mission District showed that 95 percent of positive cases were Latinx). Of course, it could be argued that human labor has never appeared more 'essential' than in this historical moment. Yet, states are also showing themselves quite willing to put essential workers at such an extreme risk as to even die en masse for want of PPE, for example. MTA conductor and writer Sujatha Gidla reports her co-workers as saying 'we are not essential, we are sacrificial'" (Gandesha 2020).

26. "Latino and African-American residents of the United States have been three times as likely to become infected as their white neighbors, according to the new data, which provides detailed characteristics of 640,000 infections detected in nearly 1,000 U.S. counties. And Black and Latino people have been nearly twice as likely to die from the virus as white people, the data shows" (Oppel et al. 2020).

27. Sara Matthiesen 2020, "How to Stop the Cuts," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 19, https://www.chronicle.com/article/faculty-must-learn-how-to-fight.

28. Claire Bond Potter 2020, "The Only Way to Save Higher Education Is to Make It Free," *New York Times*, June 5, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/05 /opinion/sunday/free-college-tuition-coronavirus.html; Christopher Newfield 2020, "Only Free College Can Save Us from This Crisis," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 9, https://www.chronicle.com/article/Only-Free-College-Can -Save-Us/248468.

7. Perception, Situation, Orientation

1. Indeed, turning to questions of perception also raises the issue of subjectivity itself, and while I don't directly take up "being" in this chapter, it is worth noting that before we even get to the question of perception, our very existence is formulated by many scholars as being built on the very paradoxically empty or contingent foundations that this book is trying to explore. I am thinking here of work on both the contingency of hegemonic social power (through Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laulau, and Jacques Rancière) as well as the contingency of subject formation in relation to that power (Althusser 2014; Butler 2007; Muñoz 1999). While there are differences in the ways that scholars formulate the contingency of subjectivity—particularly in terms of the nature of its response to interpellation (see also Winnubst 2015; and McMullen 2016b)—my point here is that in many ways the idea that contingency is the fundamental core of human existence is well-established in contemporary critical theory. If this book has successfully argued that improvisation ignites whenever/wherever/however there is contingency, then the claim that life is inherently improvisatory should not strike us as particularly novel. The challenge is to think through the full implications of this claim, particularly in improvisation studies.

2. "The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element,' in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatiotemporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an 'element' of Being. Not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to *location* and to the *now*" (Merleau-Ponty 2007b, 400). Whether or not affect theorists understand affect to be an "element" that both binds and particularizes, the resonances here between flesh and affect corroborate, in my view, the link I try to establish between *orientation* and *attunement*, about which more below.

3. "Rather than seeing thought as a process separate from sensation or action, we understand the faculties of perception, thought, and action as codependent, having developed together both ontologically . . . and phylogenetically . . . meanwhile, is the meaning of a speech act simply a question of processing—of decoding sounds and hearing their meaning? A speech act comes into being in the void, in a sense; it not only conveys a meaning, but it also fills up an experiential space where there might just as easily not have been such an act. And once it is done, it cannot be undone. So the very fact of it having been *decided* in those moments under those constraints—decided often not even as a complete thought but *word by word*—marks it undeniably as improvisation. In other words, to speak is necessarily to improvise" (Iyer 2016, 85).

4. Merleau-Ponty quoted (for the translation) in Eco 1989, 17.

5. Writing of the mirror neurons that allow us to perceive music by, in effect, mimicking participation in that performance, Iyer writes: "Again, scientists have a way of glossing over difference, but we now know that when individual armed state actors somehow 'mis-track' a Black person's intentional actions—Philando

Castile, Tamir Rice, and on down the ghastly list—the gruesome consequences are, in the vast majority of cases, tolerated and sanctioned by the state" (Iyer 2019, 11).

6. I have long been fascinated by my own ability to improvise while not attending to the fact of my improvising. How many choruses of someone else's solo have I spent comping, improvising, playing along, supporting, and also thinking about things totally beyond the music? Surely, this is not ideal; my goal is always to be as present as possible in the listening moment. But as in meditation, distraction does happen. As a musician, I want to return from that distraction as quickly as I can. But from a theoretical perspective, what's interesting about the distraction is that it doesn't stop me from improvising at all. While distracted, I have certainly changed *something* about how I am improvising—but I am still doing it. That something is what I attempt to explore in distinguishing "musical improvisation" as a concept unto itself.

7. For example, while for McMullen the improvisative "may offer insights into a conception of self and other different from the dominant model found in most cultural theory" (2016b, 115), my understanding of "musical improvisation" is not necessarily concerned with such conceptions. Additionally, I read in the improvisative a prioritization of openness that is not necessarily shared by "musical improvisation." Rather, "musical improvisation" engages and insists on contingency's double-meaning, which has been developed throughout this book as both opening and closure at once. Where the improvisative "can be understood as a singular moment, a moment in the 'here and now' that remains open and in which one does not cohere into the decision" (119), my understanding of contingency suggests that openness and closedness are continually collapsing into one another, at the same time that "musical improvisation" takes a slightly more political slant: it may be that cohering in to a decision is precisely what is required while navigating a situation in which one's values are on the line. "Musical improvisation" does not necessarily privilege openness, then, but *contingency*, whatever that involves.

8. For more on consciousness and improvisation, see Gary Peters, "Improvisation and Time Consciousness," in Lewis and Piekut 2016b. For more on attention and improvisation, see Garry L. Hagberg, "Ensemble Improvisation, Collective Intention, and Group Attention," in the same collection.

8. Conclusion: On Aesthetics and Politics

1. Moreover, as I remarked in the introduction, the reading of any microsocial scene of improvisation in the Western tradition as one producing a politically progressive force is itself, I would suggest, misguided. A Rancièrean perspective (discussed further below) undermines such claims by reminding us that even in freely improvised music there are police orders in operation, both within the microsocial scene and in the larger structures in which that scene sits. In terms of the microsocial, the musicians in a given group are playing a game according to rules they have established in common. These rules include not only such factors as musical proficiency, stylistic familiarity, depth of experience, and com-

mon vocabulary, but also unspoken agreements about style and approach. From a Rancièrean perspective, then, the utopian microcosm of musical interaction is such because it contains not a radical politics but *no politics at all*; it is the place of consensus or parapolitics, an isolated community of equals operating "freely" within a police order. In other words, those playing together in this order are already those equals who recognize or are in a position to recognize the sounds of the others as speech, rather than noise. It is certainly possible for dissensus to emerge here, as a constitutive element of any political count, for Rancière, is the double wrong that produces a *sans-part*. But dissensus is not guaranteed simply by the appearance of ostensibly egalitarian musical dialogue; to the contrary, dissensus would disrupt this dialogue itself.

2. Indeed, as Dale Chapman has written, neoliberalism and certain jazz discourses (genres, practices) have at this point a long-established relationship, one in which jazz is often marshalled as a cultural resource or else a metaphor in service of financial goals. This logic selects and amplifies a very specific version of jazz where the individual is foregrounded over the collective, and where risk management is framed as a "neutral abstraction" rather than a condition unevenly distributed (Chapman 2018, 34–35).

3. Even this opposition—between "jazz improvisation," posited as somehow different than a "bad" or exploitative instance of improvisation—is a false one for any number of reasons. As I have tried to illustrate throughout, each instance of improvising is informed by and generates its own particular e/affects, any of which could be what different people understand as beneficial or harmful. But more than this, if we take "jazz improvisation" as a kind of paradigm of Black performance, a praxis with something "subversive" at its heart, we *still* don't avoid the problem. As Fred Moten writes, "Some may want to invoke the notion of the traumatic event [of slavery] and its repetition in order to preserve the appeal to the very idea of redress even after it is shown to be impossible. This is the aporia that some might think I seek to fill and forget by invoking black art. Jazz does not disappear the problem; it *is* the problem, and will not disappear. It is, moreover, the problem's diffusion, which is to say that what it thereby brings into relief is the very idea of the problem" (2017, xii).

4. This is similar to what McMullen suggests when describing how the improvisative "lean[s] toward the subject rather than the prevailing lean toward the object," a lean in service of the recognition of an ultimate indistinction between terms—that the other and self are not separate but "equally phantasmagorical" in the context of our contingent lives (McMullen 2016b, 118).

5. "Why do some people have the chops for improvising the state of being unknowing while others run out of breath, not humming but hoarding?" (Berlant 2011, 37).

6. The opposition between politics and the police is not a rigid binary, nor are the concepts themselves a priori forms; rather, they are tools aimed at diagnosing complex and entangled situations. See Rancière 2009.

7. For me, habit is roughly synonymous with practice or tendency insofar as all of these terms reference actions that leave a mark when performed, affecting what we are capable of doing. In particular, my conflation of habit with tendency is meant to signal my embrace of habit's repetitive connotations (though not

the kind of mindless or automatic repetition of its normative understanding). While for John Dewey (who figures heavily in Pedwell's theorization) habit need not be repetitive per se, I lean into that association to emphasize the fact that habit mobilizes *will* (or even, as Dewey would agree, becomes synonymous with it). Like the turning-to in orientation, habit says something about our desires, even if our imagining becomes reconfigured by the very exercise of moving toward them. This is also why I follow Pedwell in avoiding an overt consideration of Bourdieu's *habitus*: not only are there many extant and thorough studies of his work, but those very studies also raise a host of questions regarding the question of will in *habitus* that would distract from my arguments. Though George Lewis favorably compares *habitus* and improvisation (2007), in my view, it is de Certeau's notion of an everyday practice that more richly resonates with improvisation. Considered as "learned, embodied mechanisms underlying and enabling everyday conduct which, through their responsivity, continually shape our modes of inhabiting the world" (Pedwell 2021, 41), habit might name those practices/improvisations to which we return.

8. For more on indeterminacy in Arendt, see Plot 2014.

9. Lauren Berlant, in a talk delivered at the "New Universalisms: Aesthetics, Media, Politics," Graduate Student Conference, University of Minnesota, October 7–8, 2016.

Coda: Improvisation, Cultural Analysis, and Collective Action

1. Listen to the way that Hall, in a conversation about contingency, describes first the closed (historical) and then open (indeterminate) senses of the word: "History is not infinitely open, without structure or pattern. The social forces at work in any particular conjuncture are not random. They are formed up out of history. They are quite particular and specific, and you have to understand what they are, how they work, what their limits and possibilities are, what they can and cannot accomplish. . . . But the outcome of the struggle between those different contending relations or forces is not 'given,' known, predictable" (Hall 2019c, 313).

2. See George Shulman 2021, "Interregnum not Impasse," boundary 2 online, June 16, https://www.boundary2.org/2021/06/george-shulman-interre gnum-not-impasse/.

3. Hall's notion implicates two English meanings, both "to utter, to speak forth" and in the sense of an "articulated lorry [truck] where the front [cab] and back [trailer] can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. . . . Thus, a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects" (2019b, 234–35).

4. I reference here the neoliberal paradigm generally, also called "late capitalism" and including its "cultural logics" as described by Jameson (1992; 1998) and Fisher (2009). Although Hall wrote of Thatcherism as a specific phenomenon (see Hall 2019a), and did not see things precisely in terms of the post-

modern (see Hall 2019b), for my purposes we can also link Thatcherism and its consequences with Regan-era deregulation, disinvestments in infrastructure and public services, the ascendancy of supply-side economics, including austerity regimes, the associated rise of the individual over the collective, the gutting of the welfare state, and generally speaking the dominance of a discursive and material reduction of every corner of life into market terms.

5. Robin D. G. Kelley 2020, "Midnight on the Clock of the World: An Interview with Robin D. G. Kelley," Millennials Are Killing Capitalism, podcast, April 25, https://millennialsarekillingcapitalism.libsyn.com/midnight-on-the-clock-of-the-world-an-interview-with-robin-dg-kelley.

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