Revisiting Symbolic Interaction in Music Studies and New Interpretive Works

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REVISITING SYMBOLIC INTERACTION IN MUSIC STUDIES AND NEW INTERPRETIVE WORKS

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COOPERATIVE ACTIVITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF AUDIENCES

David T. Bastien and Jeremy Rose

ABSTRACT

This study of performances by three groups of musicians (of different genre) takes audiences into account and employs Couch’s (1986) formulation of cooperation as the analytical framework. Couch and others using his formulation restricted their focus to the core cooperating group without attending to their audiences. Data for this study, however, showed that a lot of the musicians’ behavior had no particular musical value but was directed toward the audiences instead. The authors examine these data and integrate audiences into Couch’s formulation for cooperation. The authors will discuss the issues surrounding our core question: “How do cooperating groups of musicians integrate audiences into their thinking about cooperation and group performance?”

Keywords: Audience; carl couch; classical music; cooperation; jazz music; reggae music; stimulated recall; videotape research

The fabled schism between the “Chicago School” and the “Iowa School” in Symbolic Interaction Theory in some large measure was a function of what kinds of data were admissible. Both schools were grounded in...
the work of George Herbert Mead. As such, both readily accepted the prosessual nature of human action and interaction, both accepted that observable behavior was important, and both accepted that mental processes were also important. They differed in where to focus and what constituted valid methods and data, with the Iowa school arguing for “empirical” data, laboratory methods, and quantitative analysis while Chicago School scholars were attracted to deep analysis of “thick” case studies. To some degree, this difference happened because the ability to actually record social interaction was limited (Bastien & Hostager, 1996).

In the 1970s and 1980s Carl Couch, founder of the New Iowa School, pioneered using videotape to record social interaction. He did this in a laboratory setting. In analyzing these new kinds of video data, he argued for a different way of understanding social events. He developed a theory of archetypal forms of social interaction, each of which was marked by a particular set of “elements of sociation” (Couch, 1986). Bastien and Hostager (1988, 1992) further developed this framework by studying professional jazz musicians in a laboratory-like setting, where the group was zero history and the entire event of a concert was videotaped. They then conducted detailed focused interviews, eliciting stimulated recall, with the musicians. This gave them not only a detailed record of a natural social event in its entirety, but through stimulated recall gave them access to the meaning-making and communication processes of the musicians as they improvised their way through this jazz concert. Among their observations was that the musicians tried to keep their communication with each other from being noticed by their audience (Bastien & Hostager, 1988, 1992, 1996; Seddon & Biasutti, 2009a, 2009b).

Rose (1994) employed videotape and stimulated recall interviews with musicians also, but concentrated on commercial reggae bands playing in bars. These bands were working bands and employed rehearsals and recurring “gigs.” As such, they were not zero history, but had considerable focused history. His study, then, moved the site of research from the laboratory (Couch, 1986) and laboratory like (Bastien & Hostager, 1988, 1992, 1994) to naturally occurring work events. Among other things, he observed that the processes of judgment occurred both in rehearsals and in front of audiences. He further noted that during rehearsals the judgments were all made by the musicians among themselves, but that when they were actually performing the judgments were made by audiences and that the musicians behaved explicitly for the audiences in ways that had no particular musical value but were directed toward their audience (Rose, 1994).

Cooperative Activity: The Importance of Audiences

The reality of most cooperation in the real world involves trained long-standing groups that are judged by audiences of one sort or another. In Couch’s (1986) laboratory sample, for instance, Couch was in fact, an audience. In Bastien and Hostager’s studies, there were obvious audiences. They played in front of people who bought tickets, they played in front of professional newspaper critics, and they played in front of video cameras. In Rose’s (1994) sample, nightclub patrons came having certain expectations and made judgments as did the managers of the nightclubs. After all, a commercial band survives by return engagements. In fact, all organizational activity in business and government is accomplished for audiences of various sorts (customers, upper-level management, shareholders, etc.) (Bastien & Hostager, 1996).

Neither Couch (1986) nor Bastien and Hostager (1988, 1992, 1994) paid much attention to the issue of audiences and critical judgment, and Rose (1994) only did to a limited extent. In this study, the authors will explore the issue of audiences and critical judgment using data from music and other cooperative professional activity. We will examine the question of the various audiences and how they are addressed, and will offer ways to further extend Couch’s (1986) theory of coordinated action to include audiences.

THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

Couch’s Theory of Coordinated Social Action

After a number of years of studying videotape records of social action, especially the initiation of social action, Couch et al. observed that social action is first marked by “copresence,” the mutual awareness of the others in a social field (Miller, Hintz, & Couch, 1975). They argued that “... whenever ... persons are attentive to each other, sociality is created” (Couch, 1986, p. 115). Once the initial condition of copresence is established, other “elements of sociation” must also be established: (a) attentiveness; (b) responsiveness; (c) functional identities; (d) focus; and, (e) the objective. Couch (1986) then identified eight archetypal forms of social interaction, each marked by a particular constellation of elements of sociation. These are given in Table 1.

For Couch (1986), Bastien and Hostager (1992, 1994), and most recently for Williams and Kirschner (2012), cooperation is of core concern. These
researchers, though, do not address much attention at all to audiences, despite the reality that cooperation in most situations is done not simply in front of audiences but for audiences. Even in business organizations, customers, shareholders, regulators, and upper-level managers all represent audiences for cooperative activity and its products.

Audience directed behavior

Goffman (1959) developed the concept of impression management with an analysis of the implications of the Shakespeare's concept that "... all the world is a stage." Goffman argued that nearly all our social behavioral is dramaturgical in that we see others as audiences and actively seek to manage their understanding of us as actors attempt to manage audience's impressions of them. In other words, we act out roles for audiences. Although this led to a large body of research on self-presentation, the concept of audience is part of the implied framework and remains underexplored.

Even within the realm of scholarly research on music and other performing arts, the focus is usually entirely on the performers, and the authors often have little or nothing to say about the audience. They may address the audience dimension, often treating the audience as a unified group separate from the cooperating performers (Sawyer, 2006); not acknowledging that the people who see or hear a performance have multiple functions, statuses, and reasons for attending. For example, Sawyer notes that improvisational comedy groups "... assume that the audience will catch the references they make to popular TV shows or movies; bits and pieces of dialogue, familiar characters, or events from a famous sitcom episode or movie scene" (Sawyer, 2006, p. 156). Sawyer does not acknowledge the challenge faced by the fact that in most audience situations, some but not all audience members have that level of background knowledge.

In other areas of research, the concept of diverse audiences (Gallicano & Stansberry, 2011), audience segmentation (Barnett, 2011), a composite audience (Duncan, 2011), or multiple target audiences (Fleming, Darley, Hilton, & Kojetin, 1990; Sweetser & Brown, 2010; Van Boven, Kruger, Savitski, & Gilovich, 2006) has been explored. Most of these studies focus on mass media contexts, or stress the importance of sending tailored messages to particular audience segments (Barnett, 2011; Gallicano & Stansberry, 2011). These studies focus on situations in which various audience segments are physically separated and the media allow the sender the luxury of sending distinct messages to each audience segment without fear of appearing contradictory.

A number of researchers and scholars have observed (as have theater scholars) that costumes are important. For instance, Stone (1962) discussed the importance of appearance, especially dress, to managing meaning for audiences. Bastien (1992) noted that dress conventions in a corporate acquisition were major determinants of whether employees were retained. Those who adopted the dress conventions of the acquiring company were not only retained but several were promoted to the acquiring company while those who only adopted the speech patterns of the acquiring company without adopting their dress conventions were not.

In the remainder of this chapter, the authors will outline a study intended to focus on the function of audiences and on how audiences must be treated in light of the theoretical construct specified by Couch (1986), Bastien and Hostager (1992, 1994), and Williams and Kirschen (2012). Following the specification of research methods, we will present and analyze findings. Finally, we will explore the implications of this study of audiences in terms of both their functions and in terms of Couch's (1986) theory of social acts and elements of sociations and Bastien and Hostager's (1992, 1994) extension of this theory.
METHODS

In this exploratory study, we will present and analyze data regarding musicians and how they relate to audiences using the videotape/stimulated recall methods used by Bastien and Hostager (1988, 1992) and by Rose (1994). Three data sets will be employed: (a) data from reggae rehearsals and performances by a commercial nightclub reggae band; (b) data from a jazz concert by a zero history group of seasoned jazz players; and, (c) data from a classical music youth competition. Videotape data was not collected for data set 3, but interviews immediately following the performances were conducted. Following presentation of the data sets, the authors will discuss the issues surrounding our core question: “How do cooperating groups of musicians integrate audiences into their thinking about cooperation and group performance?”

DATA

Data Set 1

This data set is comprised of videos and stimulated recall interviews with three commercial reggae bands. For all three bands, the music was worked out in rehearsals away from the “prying eyes” of audiences. During the rehearsals, the bands were able to concentrate primarily on the musical elements of their future performances. In all three cases, the musicians faced each other and dressed in whatever street clothes they chose.

For the actual performances, one general principle to which all bands adhered was that bands faced their audiences rather than each other. A second general principle was a relatively high level of movement or energy expenditure on the part of the band is necessary in order to be entertaining. This movement had no particular musical value, but was deemed to be more entertaining to the audience. This is especially true of the lead vocalist or “front person” who carries most of the burden of entertaining the audience. One band leader put it succinctly: “The lead person should always be moving around, doing something. People like to see somebody active.”

One of the most common complaints registered by band members about each other is their insufficient level of movement onstage. When asked what problems tend to arise during performance, the leader of one band was not hesitant to reply that the band’s greatest problem was with stage presence and the general energy level of the performers. He reported that he is “constantly getting on those guys” about being more active onstage.

Regardless of their role in the band, many members commented on the insufficient activity of other members. One lead singer — and most active member onstage — said, while watching himself in a stimulated recall session, “Boy, I’m having fun! If these guys want to stand up there and just look like zombies, I say that’s fine, but I’m gonna have fun!” Another lead singer complained of a bass player who, although usually quite active, occasionally reacts to unresponsive audiences by becoming unacceptably inactive.

[Member A] ... all of a sudden will just be standing there, looking into the air. And I’m like, I’m dancing around and I’m trying to go over to [Member A], and I’m smiling or making goo-goo eyes. Whatever. Trying to get him to snap out of it! He just won’t move. I can go over there and pinch him, or whatever. He just won’t move, period.

That the singer in this case devoted so much attention to “reviving” Member A is evidence of the importance of movement in the performer’s context.

For a performer to sit down is also a violation of the requirement to expend energy, apart from drummers who have no choice. However, two of the musicians in this study did so anyway. One was a keyboardist who sat on a stool when playing, in spite of the fact that another band member complained to him about it, saying “I would like everyone to stand up; it gives a better vibe.” The other performer who occasionally sat on a stool was a bassist who had recently undergone foot surgery. This performer still stood for much of the performance, despite the pain it caused, because of the image of laziness and lethargy that sitting down conveyed.

Another performance norm that all bands adhered to was to avoid the sin of “dead air,” which often took the form of making announcements or conversing with the audience while music was not being played. One band’s lead singer describes her philosophy:

As soon as [a] song is done I can say, “This next one we call blah-blah-blah-blah-blah,” whatever it is. And maybe say something about it. And then move on from there. Instead of having that dead air time.

In the case of technical delays, gaps between songs can be covered by two means. One is by making the kind of announcements described earlier; another is to begin a song without one of the band members. One lead
singer discussed a keyboardist who is sometimes delayed when they change the song list:

**Researcher:** Do you ever start without him?

**Lead singer:** Yeah. The show's gotta go on. Period. It's either come on with it, or keep your ass behind. (laughs). So, yeah! It's like, we've gotta start. And I'll say a few words [to the audience], but, you know, I don't have much to say. I mean, I guess I could think of some things to say. But, you know, it's like, if the drum and bass are ready, we can start off with drum and bass.

Members of each of the three subject groups discussed the need for the band to stand out from the audience in terms of dress. One said, "We should always look a little bit different from the ordinary. I think you should always look more, I don't know, glamorous. Or just something to set yourself aside, where people say, 'Wow! Look at those shoes!'"

In reference to behavior, members of all bands cited band rules regarding onstage demeanor: no smoking on the stage, no excessive drinking of alcohol, no excessive sweating. In some cases, these rules applied off stage as well. For instance, one band had a policy of, "No smoking marijuana in the dressing room." This could have been an issue for both the reggae bands in data set 1 and the jazz players in data set 2. Another musician described a previous band in which it was forbidden to get drunk in public even when not performing.

In the case of disputes, the restrictions imposed by presentational goals are even more evident. Because the show is usually held up until the conflict is resolved, onstage arguments violate two goals of performance: maintaining an appearance of unity, and keeping the flow of the performance going. One leader described a technique for ending onstage disputes as soon as possible:

**Researcher:** Do you ever have arguments onstage, during the performance?

**Leader:** They come up, there's no question about it. They do come up, but I keep them to a minimum. As soon as they start, I try to put a stop to them. Usually what happens, if they start, I start a song. And usually when I start a song, you know, I'm playing loud, and they can't ignore it. Because the audience is out there, and they can hear it, and so everybody has got to go ahead and do the song. And that usually kills that argument! And then after we're done with the set, we can get off the stage and go and do all the arguing we need to do.

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**Data Set 2**

This was a zero history group of four seasoned jazz musicians. The individual musicians had never played as a group together, but they did have some idea of how the others sounded and played. Fifteen minutes or so prior to the concert the musicians met for the first time. The nominal leader, the musician with top billing, laid out a "game plan" that governed much of the action by the group. He declared that he would call the songs, call the keys, and count the beat. He then explained that they would run through the song once, then he would take a two chorus solo. After his two chorus solo was done, the piano would take two more choruses, then the bass and drums would do "fours and eights." He also said he would only call "standards," songs that were well-known to jazz musicians.

When the musicians went onstage, the audience applauded as the musicians took their places with their instruments. The nominal leader announced the first song to the audience. The musicians went through the song following the "game plan" exactly. The initial challenge for the musicians was to see that the game plan would be followed, and the nominal leader did follow it. After the first song, the nominal leader spent a few minutes telling the audience a story about the first song, then he called the second song. The musicians were more confident of the "game plan" this time and only went heads up when the time for change of soloist approached. Again, after the song was done the nominal leader told the audience stories about the song before he called the third song.

In this concert, the musicians communicated with each other with a great deal of subtlety. They watched each other as they prepared for the change of soloist, and occasionally nodded quickly if there were any questioning glances directed toward them. The only behavior that was expressly directed to the audience was the banter with the audience between songs. When asked about this lack of much visible behavior, the two respondents both said that they wanted the audience to believe they were a long-established group that was very comfortable with the whole concert. They didn't want the audience to think they were a zero history group or that there was anything challenging happening in the group. After all, the nominal leader pointed out, "They (the audience) paid for tickets to the ... Quartet, and they expected to see a real group."

The sidemen also didn't want to do anything to take away from the nominal leader's relationship with the audience. The bass player noted that, "It is our job to make him (the nominal leader) look and sound good." They engaged in no extraneous movements, no bouncing up and
down with the beat, or any other behavior that would take attention away
from the soloist (especially the nominal leader).

This is not to suggest that the musicians were not paying attention to
the audience, they wanted the audience to really enjoy the concert. As the
bassist said, “When they really like the music they let us know. And, when
they let us know it makes us play better.”

Data Set 3

The third data set was a classical music youth competition. The author
only saw the final performances of the two-day competition. Only one of
these final performances (a winner of the competition) will be discussed. It
should also be noted that the audience for this performance was the most
obviously bifurcated of all three data sets. The audience was rather small,
with the bulk of it comprised of relatives and friends of the performers, and
a smaller proportion being the designated judges who would make the final
decisions on winners for each of the several awards of the competition.

When the previous competitor left the stage, our competitor and his
accompanist walked on. The competitor carried his instrument and was
dressed in dark, “formalish” clothes. The accompanist was also dressed
“formalish.” The accompanist sat at the piano and the competitor took the
chair in front of the piano. After mild applause, the two looked at each
other and competitor nodded to the accompanist. They then started into
their piece, a virtuoso piece intended to show the competitor’s command of
both music and the instrument. The accompanist mostly watched her score
and occasionally looked over at the competitor. The competitor did not
look at the accompanist again until the piece was completed.

It should be noted that the competitor was active during the perfor-
mance. In some measure, this is because playing a string instrument with a
bow is inherently more active than any of the instruments played by the
players in the jazz data set. At the end of the piece, the competitor signed
depth then looked up at the audience then looked at the accompanist.
While the audience started applauding, both stood and bowed. After the
applause died down, both turned to stage left and walked off.

Following the performance, the accompanist, who had changed back
into street clothes of blue jeans and a sweater, was interviewed in the green
room. When asked about how the audience was taken into consideration
the accompanist said, “We train them not to pay any attention to the
audience.”

Cooperative Activity: The Importance of Audiences

ANALYSIS

Audiences are obviously of concern to musicians, and this showed through
our data. All of the respondents in all three data sets commented on audi-
ences and their reactions and relationship to the musicians. The American
Heritage Dictionary defines audiences as, “. . . spectators or listeners
assembled at a performance.” Audiences for working musicians represent
paying customers. In the jazz data, the audience consisted of both jazz af-
cionados and jazz critics. In fact, a critic wrote a full review for the local
daily newspaper the very next day. Thus, a segment of their audience were
there specifically to make public judgments about the performance. In the
reggae sample, the audiences consisted of dancers, listeners, and nightclub
managers responsible writing the check for the night’s performance and for
hiring bands in the future. For the classical musicians in the competition,
the audience was mostly friends and relatives of the competitors and for-
manually designated judges of the competition who would decide on winners
of the various stipends and scholarships awarded the winners.

This leads to the first critical observation from our data: Audiences (as
judges) determine if the cooperating group will be allowed to cooperate
again in the future. In other words, success in the cooperative activity is
determined not by the cooperating group but by the judging audience.
Bastien (1994) and others who follow mergers, acquisitions, and other basic
strategic change in business have frequently observed that they generally
perform very poorly because customers do not support the changes
involved, despite the strong and enthusiastic support of the organizational
managers who determined the strategic change. In fact, Bastien, Hostager,
and Miles (1996) observed that competitive rivals of merging companies
usually pick up customers in these situations. Again, audiences as custo-
mers make the determination of the success of the cooperative activity of
organizations.

The ways of relating to the audiences were quite different in each of the
three data sets, but the constant was that the musicians related to the audi-
ences and tried to meet or exceed what they perceived as audience expecta-
tions. In the Reggae data set, the musicians understood the biggest part of
the audiences to be there to dance. The players, then, behaved in ways that
had no real musical value but were explicitly intended to get the audience
up and dancing. They tried to excite the audience in the belief that this
would impress the managers (who hire bands) with how much the audience
wanted to dance. For the jazz data set, the musicians behaved in ways
intended to communicate confidence and tenure to the audience. They
wanted the audience to believe they were extremely competent and comfortable playing and that they were an established group used to playing with each other (when they were actually a zero history group). They kept their visible (to the audience) communicative behavior to a minimum. They believed the audience expected to see a group of long tenure. They were also conscious of the need to please the producer by putting out a "reviewable" concert. In the classical competition data set, the musicians communicated with each other in ways intended to convince both the friends and relatives and the judges of propriety, formality, confidence, and (especially for the judges) extreme technical competence. At the end of each performance, the musicians stood and bowed to the applauding audience, waited for the applause to die down, then deliberately walked off the stage as the next competitors walked on.

In all three data sets, the musicians dressed for their audiences. The reggae players dressed in very stylish, modern, and "flashy" clothes. After all, their nightclub audiences would be dressed like that, and the band needed to dress even more so. The jazz players wore shirts, ties, leather shoes, and sport coats. Their audience, mostly middle aged and older jazz fans, would be dressed similarly but a bit more casually. The classical competitors dressed mostly in black or gray outfits, although not formal. The competition was held during the afternoon and formal wear would have been inappropriate, but dark, subdued, "formalish" attire was.

This leads to another important observation: cooperating groups dress for their audiences; not because the dress is inherently important for cooperation, but because how the cooperators dress is communication to their audiences and customers. Obviously, this was true in our three data sets, but it is equally true in many if not most other instances of cooperation. For instance, when ministers and priests conduct religious rituals they dress very differently than they would when they were not enacting the ritual. When a banker is hanging out at home, he/she dresses pretty much like everyone in the neighborhood, but when meeting with customers and other bankers, he/she dresses in a dark "power suit."

Audiences and their expectations exerted a powerful influence on the cooperating musicians in each data set. Pleasing their audiences, both the listening/dancing audiences and the judging audiences, was of paramount importance to the cooperating players. If audience expectations were not met, the cooperative performance would be deemed a failure by the audiences and the cooperation would not be repeated. Audiences in all three cases represented "paying customers." In addition, the audiences as judges had a great deal of influence over the future of the cooperating groups.

Cooperative Activity: The Importance of Audiences

Of course, all three sets of musicians chose repertoire and musical approach intended to deliver on the specific audience expectations. The reggae audiences, including both paying customers and judging audiences, expected to hear Jamaican songs played in the reggae style. The jazz musicians played a kind of traditional jazz that was also expected by both elements of the audience. For the classical music audiences, the question of which element of the audience needed to be most pleased was particularly interesting. The bulk of the audience was, again, friends and relatives of the performers, but the judges were high-level professional classical musicians. Choosing appropriate repertoire meant both choosing music that was manageable by the performers and also to the tastes of the judges. If the judges, for instance, strongly preferred a genuinely classical repertoire to a more modern virtuoso repertoire, that would affect the outcome of judging. This means that those choosing the best repertoire for the particular judges would affect the winners of the awards and scholarships.

Audiences, especially the aspect of audiences as judges, then, have a major impact on the future of the cooperating musicians and the musicians know this. They know they must "play to their audiences." Success of cooperation is determined by the ability to cooperate again in the future, and the judges make this determination.

IMPLICATIONS

This raises important conceptual questions regarding Couch's (1986) formulation. His formulation does not take audiences/customers/judges into account despite its obvious power in explaining the internal elements of a cooperating system. The reality is that much cooperative action takes place within the context of intergroup competition or conflict. Winners in intergroup competition and conflict are, in turn, determined by audiences/customers/judges outside of the cooperating group. Thus, Couch's formulation of cooperation must be expanded to include necessary reference to audiences/customers/judges.

In returning to Couch's formulation (given in Table 1), audiences/customers/judges do fit the elements of sociation for cooperation despite the lack of focus by Couch (1986), Bastien and Hostager (1992, 1994), and Williams and Kirschner (2012). First, audiences and cooperators in our data were copresent. They were attending to the same event and aware of
each other. Furthermore, all five elements of sociation for cooperation were also met in our data: (a) the cooperating groups and their audiences were in reciprocally acknowledged attentiveness to each other; (b) they were mutually responsive to each other; (c) they had congruent functional identities; (d) they displayed a shared focus, and, (e) pursued a common social objective.

What is missing from the formulation is the explicit recognition and specification of audiences/customers/judges to the overall cooperative activity. Future research on Couch’s New Iowa School formulation, then, must not rely on a specific set of methods but must also specify audiences and their relationship and expectations of the central cooperating groups. Furthermore, those behaviors exhibited by the cooperating group that have in no particular value in accomplishing the cooperative task must also be specified. This, of course, includes such things as dress conventions and other audience directed behavior.

On a personal note by the authors, we miss Carl Couch tremendously. His personal and active involvement in this research project, we believe, would have enriched it considerably. In addition, we believe he would have been pleased and enthusiastic about this extension of his groundbreaking work.

NOTES

1. While the word “empirical” when applied to data means that the data must be sensorily tangible and shareable. For many years, this was taken to mean that data that were recorded on paper and subjected to quantitative analysis. This distortion of meaning was a function of limitations in generating tangible records. The development of audiotape recording in the 1950s and videotape in the 1970s has allowed for generating empirical data that is not paper bound and may not be open to quantitative analysis, but is both tangible and shareable.

2. The entire concert was videotaped using high quality commercial equipment, but was fixed mixed, meaning that only one image was recorded at a time. This videotape was then shown back to the musicians and the interviews were focused on the immediate meaningful and meaning-making behavior of the musicians.

3. By this, the nominal leader meant that the bass and drums would alternate on four or eight bar solos for two choruses.

4. This is somewhat reminiscent of Miles Davis’ well-known practice of deliberately turning his back on the audience when he soloed. This was, even by his own admission, communication with his audience. He wanted them to understand that he was not playing for their approval but for the “art” of his solos.

REFERENCES


Scenes, Personae and Meaning: Symbolic Interactionist Semiotics of Jazz Improvisation

Scott Currie

Abstract

From the pioneering work of Howard Becker (1982) on jazz scenes as art worlds, to the influence of Erving Goffman (1967) on Ingrid Monson’s (1996) foundational framework for jazz ethnography, symbolic interactionists premises have already had a powerful impact on the study of jazz and popular music. Nonetheless, they still have much to contribute toward a richer and more nuanced understanding of how jazz musicians jointly improvise meaningful musical discourses. Building upon these earlier precedents, I propose that further critical elaboration of symbolic interactionist notions — including social worlds, generalized others, and facework — could hold the key to a hermeneutics of musical meaning premised upon improvisational interplay. Specifically, I propose that the internal structure of local jazz worlds or scenes, arising from distinctive modes of meaning production, gives rise to particular types of generalized other, which in turn structures the development of artists’ professional selves or personae through the dialogic internalization of