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“As Natural as Earth Turning” : An Analysis of the Relationship between Self and Other in Improvised Music

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“As Natural as Earth Turning” : An Analysis of the Relationship between
Self and Other in Improvised Music

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by

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Abbreviations

For Citational Purposes:

PP.....*Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty

TI.....*The Improvisative*, Tracy McMullen

PI.....*Philosophy of Improvisation*, Gary Peters

Introduction

Ornette Coleman, in an interview with Jacques Derrida, said that he would rather have a “human relationship” than a “musical relationship” with the philosopher. But who is to say that these are two different types of relationships?

The musical and the human are intertwined through our understanding and internalization of meaning, relationship to the external, and relationship to the internal. The minor sound of the second movement of Beethoven’s seventh symphony can make someone break down in tears, while the revelry of John Coltrane’s chord changes in “Giant Steps” can twist the listener’s mind in curiosity, no matter how much or how little they know about music. Music, and at its core simply sound, is a very human thing. The melody of your friend’s voice can make you calm, the wail of sirens can make you anxious.

But how can we understand a musical relationship as a human relationship? It is not always in meticulously planned out chords that we find the biggest release — perhaps it is in what a musician does in the spur of the moment to change the course of the piece, to reveal their own self through their interpretation.

We can understand improvisation as the act of creating, spur of the moment, an active engagement with decision making and real-time ‘composition’ that allows for the musician to add their own taste to a piece of music. Purely improvised music can be some of the most exciting artwork to engage with, especially if you are witnessing it in real time, as you, the listener, have no idea what twist the musician will take next. However, improvised music is not a one-sided affair. In fact, it is a great example of the relationship between self and other.

Improvisation offers an understanding of self and other through the analysis of interactions in music between one improviser and their audience, one improviser and the other improviser(s), and one improviser and their own self. Improvisation allows for the self to be fully reflexive and reflective, as well as reactive and acknowledging of the other in the space with them. The self and the other are constituted by the assumption that there is some sort of mutual acknowledgement taking place between the self and other. If there were not, then the improvisation would not work.

Through close reading of the introduction to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, Tracy McMullen's essay "The Improvisative," and Gary Peters's *Philosophy of Improvisation*, I intend to address what formulates the relationship between the Self and the Other in improvisation. Using two case studies, that of "Rejoinder" performed by Ikue Mori and Julianna Barwick, and a live recording of John Coltrane performing "Afro-Blue" at Birdland in 1963, I hope to explore what constitutes the relationship and mutual acknowledgement between self and other in improvised music.

In Section 1, I will explore Maurice Merleau-Ponty's offering in the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty offers an understanding of the self as consciousness that is reliant on a form of self-actualization and realization in order to constitute the self. This understanding is supported by Merleau-Ponty's examples of self-reflection, the interaction between two selves, and a view of the self as fact in order to form an understanding of consciousness as individual, existing for itself. Paul and Pierre are introduced as two distinct consciousnesses who exist in the same space for themselves, and by the fact that they both exist in this space, can acknowledge each other as individual consciousnesses, selves and others. With

a detailed analysis of self-reflection as a means by which the individual consciousness can understand its existence, we begin to shed light on how the solo improviser exists as both self and other.

Tracy McMullen's essay "The Improvisative" offers an understanding of the relationship between self and other as performative and desiring. Though I argue against this notion using Merleau-Ponty's establishment of the self and other as mutually acknowledging, she puts forward the idea of the improvisative, offering a space that exists within itself. The improviser exists within the improvisative, within a specific type of time known as the here and now, and allows for us to understand improvisation as a specific space for the self and other to not just acknowledge each other, but to also interact.

In Section 3, I use the work of John Coltrane, Ikue Mori, and Julianna Barwick as a mode of understanding different improvisative spaces. Using *Philosophy of Improvisation* by Gary Peters, I will build an understanding of the improviser as existing within their own work. This, in tandem with Merleau-Ponty and McMullen, allows for an understanding of the relationship between self and other as existing within itself, deepening the importance of the improvisative space. Barwick and Mori's piece, "Rejoinder," allows for us to view the relationship between improviser and improviser as self and other. This piece, recorded with the two along with an engineer and film maker present, allows for a focused-in look at how two improvisers interact, and offers an understanding and clear view of their acknowledgement of each other. Coltrane and his band, recorded live at Birdland in 1963 offers two understandings of the relationship between self and other - that of the improviser and his band, and that of the improviser and the audience. Both these show mutual support and recognition, pushing the self to perform to the best of their

abilities while still offering some grounding to the other, and the other offering grounding to the self. The knowledge that this band has learned how to play with each other and that their work extends beyond this one moment in time reveals the symbiotic relationship that the self and other form in improvisation. The relationship between performer and audience reveals a new understanding of McMullen's work, expounding upon performativity and pressure (or, as revealed, lack thereof) to be acknowledged. I hope to provide an understanding of the self and other relationship through an exploration of improvisation, instances of finding home in the improvisative, and a musician's existence within their work.

1

A phenomenology, according to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, is a “study of experience, or consciousness...Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced by the subject or first person point of view.”¹ Phenomenological philosophy offers an understanding of how the consciousness experiences the world, specifically the external world, though all the while keeping the consciousness within itself. Phenomenology works inside the space of consciousness, working to reveal how to self experiences the external. Phenomenology is normally comprised by a study of sensory experiences, objects, the self, and others. Maurice Merleau-Ponty uses the introduction of his book, *Phenomenology of Perception*, to establish a definition of what a phenomenology is with relation to self-consciousness, the external world and perception of the external world, and experience of the Other. It is important to note here that Merleau-Ponty did quite a bit of work in the arts. In fact, in the end of the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, he claims

“Phenomenology is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne—through the same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state.”²(*PP*, 22/lxxxv)

Here we can understand that Merleau-Ponty believes art - as the names he mentions all worked in written and visual art - perform similar work to the philosopher through their awareness and the temporality of the work they produce. Interestingly, for the sake of this project, Merleau-

¹ Smith, David Woodruff. “Phenomenology.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 16 Dec. 2013, plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/.

²Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, trans. Donald A. Landes. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge, 2014

Ponty never studied music, philosophically, phenomenologically, or otherwise. I hope in this project to use Merleau-Ponty's Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* as a means to understanding the relationship between self and other, internal and external, in improvised music. Using Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach will not only allow for a first-person (Self, rather) perspective on improvised music, but allow for a greater internal understanding of the act of improvisation.

Phenomenology is the study of essences, placing them "back within existence," an "attempt to provide a direct description of our experience such as it is, and without ...the causal explanations...Phenomenology allows itself to be practiced and recognized as a manner or as a style, or that it exists as a movement," its unity found with "its true sense in ourselves" (*PP*, lxx). However, phenomenology "places essences back within existence and thinks that the only way to understand man and the world is by beginning from their 'facticity'" (*PP*, lxx). Merleau-Ponty claims that we are "not the result or the intertwining of multiple causalities that determine [our] body...or psyche." We are not a "simple object," but a full consciousness and "absolute" source of our own experience (*PP*, 8/lxxi). Improvisation is not one by which the self is fully separated from the world, but rather is the true interaction between the world and one's self. We can be fully cognizant of an understanding of the self as separate from the world.

Phenomenology offers an understanding of the corporeal self that exists for itself, within itself. To understand "man and the world" by beginning from their facticity is to believe that the Other exists in the world by the fact that the Self exists in the world. Facticity is an understanding of truth, a truth that allows for the existence of an other external and separate from the self. Phenomenology places consciousness within the world and in conversation with the

Other. By positing consciousness as both outside and inside the corporeal, and as the sole source of the existence of its own consciousness, we can understand that Phenomenology works to engage one's consciousness with the external, bringing the self outside the self while focusing on what constitutes one's own consciousness.

To understand what is meant by "unifying" we must dig through Merleau-Ponty's claim that first experiencing oneself revealing consciousness is the basis for unifying. Further, consciousness, as unification, posits the world as its spectacle. Consciousness, as I have established, is internal and does not require direct acknowledgement from an()other in order to exist, but requires an internal understanding of its existence in order to exist. If one must acknowledge their own consciousness, no matter how unconscious this acknowledgement is, in order for their consciousness to be existent, then certainly the world must be acknowledged in order to exist. I mean this to say that because acknowledgement of oneself must come from the internal self, acknowledgement of the external must also stem from this same place. Looking back to the Pierre/Paul example, Merleau-Ponty points out that there is no 'conscious' (meaning thought through) acknowledgement of the other. Pierre does not have to think through acknowledging Paul as an individual consciousness — he just does, and this comes from Paul's internalized recognition of his consciousness. However, this acknowledgement only occurs if and by the fact that there is an external world that they both acknowledge. If they both have experience in this external world, perhaps not the *same* experience but have lived in the same world, then they can understand each other's consciousness because of this somewhat shared experience. From here, if these two consciousnesses can acknowledge that there is a shared experience of an external world between them, then the external world must exist and be

acknowledged in the same way that the two acknowledge each other's consciousness — a mutually dependent triangulation. Further, I would like to say that I have established that there is a shared acknowledgement here, plain to see, between how the two are acknowledged — as consciousness, as the world. These acknowledgements come in tandem, and can thus be understood as the same steps taken to acknowledge one as the proposed Other. Finally, unity is found here through this dual acknowledgement of the world and the consciousness, thus providing an understanding of Merleau-Ponty's point that "the unity of consciousness is precisely contemporary with the unity of the word" (*PP*, 12/lxxv).

Reflective analysis, the process by which the self recognizes the self, is a step toward understanding and connecting one's own experiences into a cohesive understanding of their existence. Merleau-Ponty offers reflective analysis as "ceas[ing] to adhere to our experience and substitute[s] a reconstruction for a description" (*PP*, 10/lxxiii). Reflection places itself "within an invulnerable subjectivity," and cannot be "unaware of itself as an event" (*PP*, 10/lxxiii). Merleau-Ponty suggests that reflective analysis "works back toward the subject as if toward a condition of possibility distinct from our experience," presenting "universal synthesis as that without which there would be no world" (*PP*, 10/lxxiii) Looking back at the 'unification' of consciousness and the world, reflective analysis can here be viewed as an understanding of said unification. Because reflective analysis is separate, or distinct, from our experience, it offers an objective way of looking at the relationship between consciousness and the world without a need for over-analysis. Perhaps most importantly, reflective analysis moves in the reverse direction with regard to "a previous constitution and meets up with...a constituting power that it itself has always been" (*PP*, 10/lxxiii) Reflecting upon what Merleau-Ponty has already claimed, I understand this

as a way of understanding our consciousness's own existence, as something we do not readily acknowledge. However, as laid out in the Paul/Pierre example, one consciousness acknowledges another without regard for a conscious acknowledgement of said 'other'. In fact, we acknowledge other consciousnesses, outside of our own, as existing because they exist in the same world as ours does. Further, reflective analysis may not at all be necessary if we are to take Merleau-Ponty's claim that our consciousness exists by the fact that it is the "absolute source" of its own existence. If this is the case, I do not think we need analyze our existence through any means, but accept our existence, as our consciousness seems to have already done so. Accepting subjectivity as a level of self-recognition, we can understand reflection as a way of viewing oneself without outside threat — the invulnerable subjectivity. Looking at oneself in a mirror, we are vastly aware of our own existence. This reflection in the case of the invulnerable subjectivity is a way by which we can acknowledge our existence, our selfhood, as a stand-alone acknowledgement.

However, perhaps there is some necessity for reflective analysis, though it may not be as conscious as Merleau-Ponty sees to imply. Improvising music as a solo musician, in a room with only oneself, is a way by which we can access this invulnerable subjectivity. For the solo musician to improvise, they must be vigilantly aware of their own presence, their own production, and able to react to the self. Reflection, here, is noticed through listening back, listening closely to the self and what the self has produced. Reflective analysis, if understood as connecting one's experiences in order to cohesively understand their experience, is a necessary step in the solo improviser's process. With nothing to respond to but the sounds they have produced, the solo musician is forced into reflective analysis through the act of listening. In this,

they must react to themselves, understanding that what they are producing in a solo environment is a reflection of their own consciousness. If, for example, the solo improviser is using a technique such as looping or a program that replays what they have just played, they have a literal reflection of their sound to respond to. This loop, though a transmutation of a sound they have just played into the digital sphere, is similar to that which we see in a mirror. When we look in a mirror, we are not seeing our *exact* self but a reflection of our self. In the same way, a loop is not exactly what we have just played but a mirrored reproduction of what we have just created. This also serves as a divergence from the mirror. In the case of the improviser, we must react in some way to this reflection of our sound. While reaction to what we see in the mirror may be more passive, reaction to the reflection of our sound is inherently active, as we are reacting in such a way that implies there will be another reaction soon following.

Reflection appears as a “genuine creation,” a change in the structure of consciousness, and yet “involves recognizing, prior to its own operations, the world that is given to the subject because the subject is given to himself” (*PP*, 10/lxxiii) This “giving back” from the world to the self to the self requires acknowledgement for it to take place. The idea of giving back and subsequent acknowledgement and seeing of a genuine creation constitutes selfhood in that the self recognizes that what they are seeing, what they *are*, is their self, their consciousness.

Further understanding of Merleau-Ponty’s means by “reflection through” suggests that because reflection is always part of what it is reflecting, it has a situated and partial perspective. This is to say that although reflection is in part an objective view of the self, reflection’s basis in one’s own self. Their ability to gain understanding through reflection causes this reflection to be biased toward the self. Because “everything [one] knows about [oneself]” is know through “a

perspective that is [one's] own or from an experience of the world," the assumption is thus that an individual's understanding of the world comes from their own observations (*PP*, 9/lxxii). The self here is constituted upon the assumption that an individual has experiences that influence their understanding of the world. These experiences form the self, making them individual and a self-referential self-consciousness. They are able to acknowledge that they have had experiences in the world and that these experiences have made them into the person they are. To say this causes individuality would only be scratching the surface — instead this allows for acknowledgement of the other in a fair and understanding manner. This is not to say that observation and reflection are not helpful for the understanding of the self, but rather that they are, indeed, influenced by a person's experience in the world. This is not to say that this closes off the opportunity of connection from this bias. This bias, as stated above, is that the self's experiences are true and this truth constitutes this reality. Breaking this to understand that the self functions both as a way of understanding the world and existence of the Other constitutes acknowledgement. Merleau-Ponty suggests looking at an example of two individual consciousnesses acknowledgement of one another in order to fully understand how the self and other interact.

Merleau-Ponty brings up the example of Paul and Pierre as an example of a unity and intersection of their individual consciousnesses. Paul and Pierre are introduced as two individual consciousnesses whose mutual acknowledgement of one another is almost unthinking, accepting each other's existence as selves by the fact that they both have experiences in the same world. The Paul/Pierre example offers much for the understanding of self and other, and I will return to this as a point of reference throughout this project.

As we have established, the self understands the world through their own experiences, and recognizes that there is an external world. The “perception of the world ‘by Paul’” is not his own doing, but the work of his consciousness, a “pre-personal consciousness” performing the act of perception, or as I claimed, the work of the self. Bringing in Pierre as the self, we can elucidate the self/other relationship (*PP*, 12/lxxv). Paul’s consciousness is viewed, by Pierre as a pre-personal consciousness that engages with the same shared world as Pierre, thus allowing the two to not only communicate, but acknowledge each other’s individual consciousnesses. By the fact that Pierre acknowledges Paul’s consciousness, Paul, in turn, acknowledges Pierre’s consciousness. Merleau-Ponty here lays out the fact that because the two individual consciousnesses share experience of the same world in which they live, they are able to connect on that fact and communicate with each other. However, Merleau-Ponty claims that insofar as Pierre is conscious and has a sense for himself, there is no need to distinguish himself from “another” consciousness. Sensibility is where past experiences inform present knowledge and experience, as explained by Merleau-Ponty through an analysis of how an individual understands the color red.

“...my sensation of red is *apperceived* as a manifestation of a certain sensed red, which is in turn sensed as a manifestation of a red surface, which is in turn sensed as the manifestation of a red box, which is, in the end, sensed as a manifestation or as a profile of a red thing, namely, this book. Thus, this would be the apprehensive of a certain *hylè* [matter] as signifying a phenomenon of a higher degree, the *Sinn-gebung* [sense-giving], the active signifying operation that might be the definition of consciousness, and the world would be nothing other than the “signification: world.” (*PP*, 11/lxxv)

A sensation is an understanding of what something appears to be, a manifestation of what it is in its entirety. There is a matter that signifies that the definition of a consciousness existing outside of the internal consciousness, the external that is the product of sensation. This sensation, however, is not the basis for what comprises the self, but instead is what makes up the Other, the external world. If we did not have such sensations or *sense-giving*, we would not be aware of the external, and thus not be aware of the Other or the external world. Here Merleau-Ponty offers the idea that the individual will incorporate past experience into their understanding of the world. These past experiences inflect upon present experience and are unique for the individual, because the individual is the only one to have had these *specific* experiences in the world. Because of these unique experiences, the individual consciousness does not need to distinguish itself from other consciousnesses because these sensory experiences make up their own consciousness. I will later explore this in relation to improvisatory practice, but here it is clear that the individual is individual in part by his unique sensory experiences in the world.

Everyone who is conscious is an immediate presence in the world by the fact that the world is a “system of truths,” we share *an* experience of the world and use this as a matter of truth (*PP*, 12/lxxv). If the world is a system of truths, then those who exist in the world are true beings with experiences that are true. Thus, the existence of the other in a world that is a system of truths cannot be denied existence.

Merleau Ponty asserts:

“Reflective analysis is unaware of the problem of others [autrui], just as it is unaware of the problem of the world, because from the first flicker of consciousness it grants me the power to go toward a truth that is universal by

right, and since the other is himself without [thisness], without place, and without a body, the [self and other] are one and the same in the true world, which is the unifier of minds. There is no difficulty in understanding how 'I' can think the Other [l'Autrui] because the 'I' and consequently the Other [l'Autre] are not trapped in the fabric of phenomena and have a value rather than an existence." (PP, 12/lxxv)

Reflective analysis is here understood as purely within the self. Because it is "unaware of the problem of others ... unaware of the problem of the world" and is based purely in consciousness, functioning to draw the individual self closer to truth, we can understand it as existing in each individual but only for the purpose of understanding the individual self's consciousness (PP, 12/lxxv). The outcome of this as we have established is an understanding that each Other has an individual consciousness. The other is not a 'problem' to understand, but rather an undeniable existing consciousness that exists for its own sake, rather than for the sake of the individual self. Reflective analysis, and thus the self, is not concerned with why the other exists, instead simply taking its existence as fact and going forward from there. The Other, here, is presented as equal to the 'I' - the self - because they have the same form of being - a being based in value, a being not trapped by "phenomena." The acknowledgment of the other by the self, and the self by the other, comes through the self's ability to acknowledge similarities between the two.

Merleau-Ponty has established the self/other relationship as self-realization and actualization that places the self and the other on even ground, based in the fact that they both have value or, as I would like to say, something to offer. The self is brought about through one's own acknowledgement of their existence, and the spectacle of the world. The self recognizes that

there is an external world in which they move, and that this is cause for their existence. The self, then, is conscious and has a consciousness that stems from the internal acknowledgement that one does, indeed, exist. This type of acknowledgement is brought about by self-reflection and reflective analysis that not only offers the ability for one to understand their experiences in the world, but also to recognize themselves—a deeper understanding of their selfhood. In tandem with this, Merleau-Ponty brings about the Paul/Pierre example as a means of expressing how the self/other relationship functions. Paul and Pierre acknowledge each other as self and other by the fact that they both, individually, have had experiences in the same world. These experiences constitute the self, and constitute the acknowledgment of the other. Contrary to other understandings of the self/other relationship, Merleau-Ponty places the self and other on a level playing field that understands the differences between the two (individual consciousnesses) while also acknowledging that there is the ability for the two to connect and interact in a fair way. The ‘I’ (self) recognizes the Other as not merely existing within phenomena, but having a value, something to offer the ‘I’, and the Other as its own ‘I’ understands the same the other way around.

Merleau-Ponty suggests that the self is brought into being by and for the self. “I am the one who brings myself into being...I am the absolute source [of] certainty of myself for myself” (*PP*, 9/lxxii) This is not to say that there is no need for the other, but the first acknowledgement of the self must come *from* the self. As suggested in the text, Descartes and Kant “freed the subject or consciousness by establishing that I could not grasp anything as existing if I did not first experience myself as existing in the act of grasping...consciousness [is] the absolute certainty of myself for myself” (*PP*, 9/lxxii). To unpack this, we can understand that

there is a level of grasping that occurs when the self is trying to acknowledge the self as an individual consciousness. The “grasping” here, illuminated by the claim that “I could not grasp anything as existing...” gives light to the idea that there is a level to which there is a perpetual struggle between the consciousness and the external world. Grasping here is not grasping at straws. The consciousness must engage in the act of grasping as a way of staying in touch with one’s own consciousness. To understand this, we must look back to the idea that one must experience grasping in order to have absolute certainty “of myself for myself” (*PP*, 9/lxxii). As explored through the Pierre/Paul example, there is no active or conscious decision to acknowledge another consciousness insofar as the two exist in and have the same experience of the world. Grasping, then, is not an active choice, for grasping here is the active attempt at recognizing consciousness. As stated above, if we do not first grasp, we cannot understand the external. Our first experience of grasping must be from within, grasping at and grappling with our own consciousness and understanding of self. This grasping leaves way for a smoother acknowledgement of the external, an act that requires little effort and allows for the self to simply acknowledge the other. Grasping is the struggle for selfhood that in turn resolves an individual’s conception of their self. Understanding that Paul and Pierre do not have to actively work to acknowledge each other’s selfhood and consciousness give truth to the fact that our own consciousness’s grasping gives way for acknowledgement of consciousness.

Here, we can understand that the act of understanding the self as an individual consciousness is not an active choice, but instead an internalized individual understanding. As previously stated by Merleau-Ponty, “the absolute certainty of myself for myself” allows for an understanding of the external world. However, from here Merleau-Ponty suggests that this

“unifying” is nothing “without the spectacle of the world that it unites”. What does this say about what we have established with regard to the (lack of) need of personal conscious acknowledgement? I propose that this spectacle, put forth by Merleau-Ponty, is an act of performativity. However, from my reading and understanding, what Merleau-Ponty is claiming about the understanding of self is non-performative. I posit that self acknowledgement, as well as acknowledgement of other, is non-performative, but rather passive and not a matter of conscious deliberation.

2

Tracy McMullen claims that “musical improvisation may offer insights into a conception of self and other different from the dominant model found in most cultural theory.”³ In order to unpack this, one must address the self / other relationship and define it in the context of cultural theory. McMullen asks if there is an understanding of the self through “a radical and constitutive relation to alterity”, here alterity being understood as otherness (*TI*, 116). McMullen explains the self/other relationship with respect to Hegel’s “Lordship and Bondage,” claiming we must conceive of self-consciousness as existing “in and for itself when and by the fact that it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” (*TI*, 117). With this Hegel and McMullen claim that the recognized becomes the recognizer, and the acknowledged becomes the acknowledger. This understanding of the relationship between Self and Other is not that established in Section 1; this understanding is more one sided, implying reliance on the other to manifest the self. Self-consciousness is predicated on the fact that there is another *self* (an other) there to acknowledge your own selfhood. Similar to what Merleau-Ponty claimed, the self acknowledges the existence of the self by the mere fact that it is conscious and has experiences in the world, externally.

McMullen uses Butler to explain the concept of selfhood with regard to dependence, as opposed to independence.

³ McMullen, Tracy. “The Improvisative.” *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*, by George Lewis and Benjamin Piekut, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 115-127

“One comes to ‘exist by virtue of [the] fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One ‘exists’ not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense by being recognizable” (*TI*, 117).

This seems in contrast to what we have understood Merleau-Ponty claim to be in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Not only did he establish the self as self-actualizing, but the self and other as recognizing each other through a fluid understanding that they both have experiences in the world, by that fact they both exist as individual selves. McMullen’s offering of understanding the relationship between self and other does not stand with the relationships within improvised music. The self does not depend upon the other in order to exist, but instead is self-reliant. As explained in the previous section, the self’s ability to recognize its own existence through corporeal form and a grasping, a struggle to acknowledge the Self’s consciousness, allows for the existence of the self. Further, self-consciousness *is* the self’s acknowledgement of its existence, notwithstanding acknowledgement from the other. However, this does bring up an interesting point about desire and performativity within the existence of the self.

McMullen uses Butler to introduce the idea of the subject as a desiring thing. There is a level of this suggested self/other relationship that implies desire - desire is for acknowledgement, recognition of the individual self from the other. Here, the desiring self hopes for an acknowledgement from outside, creating a “struggle for recognition” (*TI*, 117). From my own understanding and working through of the text, it comes across that this desire complicates selfhood. This desire does not allow for recognition of the self in its clearest form, but instead requires the recognition of self through the acknowledgement of an other. With the introduction of desire, the self/other relationship is “constituted and delimited” through the need for

recognition (*TI*, 117). The self and other only exist in the ‘larger cultural order’ because of a need for external validation and recognition. The self/other relationship is hereby delineated to a self that exists through the view of an other, external self-consciousness. McMullen explains from here Butler’s claim that there is, in essence, a lack of “freedom” and instead a “concrete determination and expression” through the existence of the self through the lens of a larger cultural order (*TI*, 117).

Though this understanding of the self/other relationship adds a level of externality to the self’s ability to recognize itself as an individual being, I do not uphold that this desire is what necessarily constitutes the existence of the self. As stated above, this desire brings about a level of performativity which neither confirms nor denies the existence of a self. If we take Merleau-Ponty’s claim as true, as I have written before, the self exists by its acknowledgment of its own existence. There are no bells and whistles in this type of acknowledgement, but the performativity of the self/other relationship comes into play when desire is introduced. If we seek external acknowledgement of our existence, we are put into a space in which we can be viewed as an individual. Interaction, then, is deemed performative if the self is seeking this external acknowledgement. If we take this as fact, how does this play into McMullen’s understanding of the relationship with in improvisation?

Musical improvisation is not merely performative, but a deep exploration of the self through musical practice. Tracy McMullen introduces the idea of the “improvisative” in conversation with, not in opposition to, improvisation. The word improvisative offers a different understanding of performativity through her pre-established self/other relationship regarding a desire for acknowledgement from the other. Improvisation can be understood as the actual act of

improvising, playing music in a free way, on the fly. McMullen claims that ‘improvisative’ offers an understanding “not based on recognition or intelligibility...point[ing] toward a space where the separation between observer and thing or actor and action is not meaningful” (*TI*, 118). Here, McMullen offers an understanding of how the self/other relationship is presented through the improvisative in the terms of “observer and thing” and “actor and action”. However, we read that she claims these separations are not meaningful in the space of the improvisative, but this offers an understanding of relationships established in improvisative spaces that present a self/other relationship to be unpacked (*TI*, 118). As I will touch on, I do not believe that the self/other relationship is not meaningful in improvisative practice, but rather an important relationship that levels some sort of hypothetical playing ground between self and other, and clarifies recognition between the two (or singular) entitie(s).

McMullen proposes the improvisative as a challenge to “intelligibility, thinkability, recognition, and desire” (*TI*, 118). As understood in the context of this essay, the intelligibility proposed here is repeatability. As McMullen wrote on Butler, “language needs to be repeated in order to be legible,” but the improvisative challenges this notion (*TI*, 116). McMullen proposes that the improvisative, essentially, need not be repeatable, need not be legible. McMullen instead suggests that the improvisative is not based in what is thinkable, challenging “forms of knowing based on conceptual thought” (*TI*, 118). Perhaps the most applicable takeaway from McMullen’s proposition is that, within the improvisative, there is a “lean toward the subject rather than a prevailing lean toward the object” (*TI*, 118). Her use of the word lean here does not mean that there is one way that the relationship between the subject and object nor self and other — in fact, the two are not separate.

In the improvisative, there is a focus on what the ‘self’ can do in situations of improvisation. However, given the nature of improvisation that I hope to shed light on, there is no difference between the self and other, nor subject and object. Instead, as discussed in my unpacking of Merleau-Ponty, the two are symbiotic in the sense that they coexist in the same world, and sharing in this experience of the world, acknowledge each other. The same is true for McMullen’s proposed understanding of the improvisative.

“The improvisative is not based on recognition or intelligibility. It is not concerned with the realm of what is ‘thinkable’; indeed, it challenges forms of knowing based on conceptual thought. It is not historical, although it offers a relationship to the past, present, and future. What I believe may be the most important in a theorization of the improvisative is its lean toward the subject rather than a prevailing toward the object. As I hope I will make clear, I say ‘lean’ because, while the emphasis with the improvisative may be on what the ‘self’ can do, in the final analysis the self and the other are not separate...the improvisative may best be related to the idea of singularity and a type of knowing that is non-conceptual.” (*TI*, 118)

The improvisative, thus, can be understood as a space in time that exists only for itself, outside of worldly understanding or, as McMullen claimed at the beginning of her essay, outside of cultural theory. The improvisative offers itself as an option, a space, rather than a specific action or decision. The improvisative functions in such a way that allows for the improviser to find reflexivity, self-reflection and a meeting of self and other. In the next section of this project I will explore specific examples of the improvisative, but for now, we must build an understanding of how the self and other function in the improvisative space.

McMullen claims that within the improvisative, there is a lean toward the subject, though in the end, the self and other are not separate. However, McMullen's explanation of this is that there is unity of self and other "because they are equally phantasmagorical" (TI, 118). I do not take this at face value, as I believe the self/other relationship within the improvisative to be based upon a functional relationship of equal recognition as opposed to their hard-to-grasp existence. Using Merleau-Ponty we can understand that the self and other recognize each other without needing to struggle to do so, this in opposition to the proposed idea that the self and other are constantly desiring recognition from the other. The word "lean" is used to signal to the fact that the "focus [is] on what the 'self' can do" (TI, 118). Because the self is the improviser, or specified improviser in a group improvisation setting, the focus is on what they are accomplishing and what decisions they are making in that moment. This "lean" then points toward self-acknowledgement, that which Merleau-Ponty put forth in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Gary Peters offers that in improvisation, the improviser is entirely "inside" their work, without the chance to function as an observer of their work. This serves the improviser because in this case what is created is entirely from the self, the improviser. Their existence in the improvisative space is not completely internal, however, as the improviser offers themselves to the Other in a proposed improvisation. The self here is both inside and outside of their internal consciousness. Focusing in on what they are playing while also being able to respond to and play against what another improviser offers them. An improviser gives melody or rhythm or harmony for the other, and the other provides the same for the self. The self in the improvisative also offers recognition and acknowledgement to the other. The self recognizes that the other is observing them and reacting to them through the improvisative space. This not only forces the

self to reflect upon what they are doing as an improviser, but also reflect upon and react to what the other is doing in this space. Thus, the self is both recognizing themselves and the other in this space, both as valid actors in the improvisative, and actors that can offer up some good to the improviser.

Instead of there being a stark contrast or division between the self and other, the two meet in the space of the improvisative and function, acknowledging the other's presence. This relationship is possible because of the "here and now" (*TI*, 119). McMullen writes that "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" (*TI*, 119). Decision and the here and now come hand in hand, as McMullen explains that brings "both subject and object into being" (*TI*, 119). But how is this possible? It seems that her writing earlier and refutation of 'desire' would imply that 'deciding' would fall more in line with desiring acknowledgement than creating it, as "deciding or anticipating brings both subject and object into being" (*TI*, 119). McMullen puts forth that the "improvisative is abiding without deciding or anticipating", as we have established it is not based in repetition nor iterability (*TI*, 119). It exists in the here and now, one singular moment outside of the "Other of language" (*TI*, 119). However, I understand 'decision' to be the spontaneity of momentary pause, allowing for an individual to make a decision in the foretold "here and now" in order to have an interaction with another consciousness.

Though I do agree with most of McMullen's definition of the improvisative, I believe the relationship between self and other to be somewhat different. Though McMullen claims that "the self and other are not separate (because they are equally phantasmagorical)," I do not believe

their being “phantasmagorical” is the cause of their unity (*TI*, 118). Rather, I propose that the self and other here are not separate because of what Merleau-Ponty establishes in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Rather than their phantasmagoria being the cause of the self/other unity in the improvisative, it is the fact that both self and other have value and exist within the same world that causes their unity. Further, the self and other’s ability to acknowledge and interact with one another is the reason for their unity. In the improvisative, a space outside thinkability and intelligibility, allows for the full connection between the self and other to move beyond regular recognition into a space of trade and acknowledgement. In the improvisative, the “lean toward the subject” that McMullen suggests does suggest an interesting understanding of the self/other relationship. As she suggested (and I refuted) earlier on, the self relies on the other for recognition. However, using Merleau-Ponty I established that the self and other have an equal relationship that allows for their recognition to be equal by the fact that they both exist and have experiences in the world. However, give the state of the improvisative, there is a level to which the lean toward the self comes from the fact that the improvisative allows itself to be a space for self-reflection and reflective analysis. Here, this ‘lean’ is purely predicated upon the self’s own reflexivity, rather than a focus on the self. In the improvisative, as I will explore through a case study in the next section, the individual self reflects upon themselves, and reacts to the other improvisers or observers present.

However, the self’s focus *is* on the self, no matter how involved with the other it is. There is a level to which the self’s involvement with the other is based in their internal relations. As explained by Merleau-Ponty through the Paul/Pierre example, the self and other interact because of their shared experience of the world. The self is predicated on an internal relationship, and the

relationship to other is brought about by an externalization of this relationship. Thus, the lean toward the self is due to the fact that the self's first relationship is internal. A relationship with the other is only made possible by the self's externalization of this relationship. If there is a lean toward the subject in the improvisative, it is not due to unequal acknowledgment or desire, but rather the self's own recognition of the self, their reflection and reflective analysis, rather than a need for validation by the other.

3

With an understanding of what the self/other relationship looks like in, as McMullen called it, standard philosophy, I would like now to establish the self/other relationship within an improvised music setting. For this purpose, I will be using both the term ‘improvisative’ and ‘improvisation’ in order to signify two different understandings of what it means for a musician to improvise. In this case, ‘improvisative’ will signify a specific moment of improvisation in which the self/other relationship is most readily accessible through an understanding of the musician’s existence in a space outside time, within only music, a singular moment in which the improvisation comes to being. ‘Improvisation’ will signify the actual act of improvising in a closed or open setting, meaning for an audience or for oneself. Here, I will look at an example of improvisation, that of Coltrane’s solo in “Afro Blue” on the record *Live at Birdland*, as well as “Rejoinder” performed by Ikue Mori and Julianna Barwick. Using Gary Peters’s writing on the philosophy of improvisation, our established understanding of the self/other relationship, and these examples of improvisation in (recorded) real-time, I will establish an understanding of how this relationship presents itself and how it is navigated by those involved.

In Chapter 3 of *The Philosophy of Improvisation*, Gary Peters asks if there is a “failing” in the nature of improvisation because “the improviser is inside rather than outside the situation”⁴ (*PI*, 112). By claiming the improviser is inside the situation is to say that the improviser, necessarily situated within the improvisative, only exists within that one momentary action of improvisation, rather than also existing outside it, as, say, a composer exists outside their work. Improvisation is by nature involved and not planned out. Composition occurs when a composer

⁴ Peters, Gary. *The Philosophy of Improvisation*. The University of Chicago Press, 2012.

writes out specific notes, levels of volume (dynamics), and articulations. Improvisers, on the other hand, work in such a way that what they ‘write’ happens in real time as they are performing. Improvisation is often used in jazz, the improvisation happening after the main melody and over the chord changes of the piece. Free improvisation is when one or a few improvisers participate in active listening and active creation, essentially composing a piece in real time with each other, and using the strength of those they are performing with to uphold their voice.

This situation allows for the improviser remain continuously *inside* that work as the core creator, though without the option of listening as an outsider unless listening to what another improviser is playing. An improvisers cannot distance themselves from their work, and thus cannot view what they are creating in real time in the same way that a non-improvising art practitioner can. Peters claims, using Niklas Luhmann, that “where self-observation is always already filtered through the observation of the other,” the work “becomes intelligible only when one takes into account that they are produced for the sake of observation” (*PI*, 112) Here, we are presented with a sense that the self is found within the improviser, and the other is only found through the observer. However, thinking back to McMullen’s claim that the improvisative is not intelligible, there is some discord found between these two claims.

Peters asks:

“What reflective insight does [the ability to step outside of work] that is not available to the performer? While the dancer cannot physically be in two places at once and thus may not see the whole performance there is no reason to believe that an improviser cannot enter into what Niklas Luhmann describes as a ‘second order observation’ where self-

observation is always already filtered through the observation of the other, thus embedding in the work what Luhmann called the ‘observational directives to be followed by the observer of that work’ (*PI*, 112)

Self-observation here allows for the improviser to be both inside and outside of their work, inside and outside of their performance. The ability for the self to be able to self-reflect while in the act of creating allows for a self-reflective exploration of their improvisation. Similarly, as I will explain with the two examples, the present Other - in the case of improvisation either a fellow improviser or the audience - allows for the improviser to in a sense get feedback in real time. In this case, the Other will respond through sound to the improviser’s creation, playing back quotations of what they just played, or providing a rhythmic or chordal response to the improviser. As established by Merleau-Ponty, sensory experience plays a part in the development of individual and unique consciousness. In this sense, the improviser has their own understanding of what they are producing, and thus their sound is unique and specific to their past experiences with music. Their interactions with the Other, then, is influenced and predicated upon the understanding that this other improviser has their own experiences and unique, individual consciousness. Like the experience and associations with red mentioned in the first section, the same is applicable to music through the processes and unique training in music.

On the one hand, the observer or audience may find a work to be ‘intelligible’ in the sense that it is consumable. This consumption is present through their viewing of the improvised work and internalizing of the product produced by the ‘self,’ the improviser. Can we take this relationship at face value? Given what Merleau-Ponty suggests in the Pierre/Paul example, I do not think it is that simple. As established, Pierre and Paul acknowledge each other’s

consciousnesses for and by the fact that they both exist in the same world, and because they both have experience in the same world, they do not need to consciously acknowledge one and the other's existence. The self/other relationship here is passive and almost unthinking, with mutual acknowledgement. Instead of being presented as an uneven relationship, Merleau-Ponty suggests with the Pierre/Paul example that there is an equality between self and other. What Peters seems to be suggesting, however, is that the self, the improviser, must produce something for the sake of observation in order for the other, the observer, to understand or consume it. Though inherently art is made to be consumable by the viewer, observer, or listener, I do not think that the self/other relationship in improvised music is predicated upon the consumability or intelligibility of an improvised work.

As McMullen established in her essay "The Improvisative," the improvisative exists in a space outside understanding and legibility, but as I established, this is not entirely true in the translation to the 'other' in the improvisative self/other relationship. Though there is a distinct unknowingness from the improviser's end, the observer or fellow improviser, the *other*, uses the improviser, the *self's*, action as motive for reaction. (I would like to note here that 'observer' can be understood as either viewer, audience, or fellow improviser depending on the situation, but I will return to this issue below.) The constant back and forth between improviser and observer allows for our understanding of the Pierre/Paul example to translate over to the self/other relationship in improvised music. In the same way that Paul and Pierre acknowledge each other for the reasons that they do, the improviser and observer acknowledge each other. The improviser accepts that they exist and are improvising by the fact that they are in the act of improvising and that they have a consciousness (they are the "source" of their own existence). In

the same way, the observer acknowledges that they are hearing the improviser in the improvisative, and reacting to it through processing or, if the other here is another performer, responding to the improviser. Looking back to Peters suggestion that an improviser exists entirely within their own improvisative act, seems to be fitting, but I would like to note that the other draws the self *outside* of the improvisation.

Peters suggests a “self-reflexivity” that exists within improvisation, a constant and incessant need for the self to reflect upon their improvisative act in real time (*PI*, 112). Merleau-Ponty has established that reflective analysis exists as a way for one to look back upon oneself, and pre-reflection a way for one to understand their own relationship to things outside of their own self. Improvisation bridges the two for the improviser, forcing them into a state of reflection and pre-reflection, looking toward their relationship within the decisions they are making in improvisation, and forcing them into a state of pre-reflection to understand their relationship to observer and/or fellow improviser. I say decision because, though McMullen may refute this with her claim that the improvisative exists outside of decision, there is a level to which there is still cognizant decision making happening in the here and now of the improvisative. There is a level of reaction at play within the improvisative — it is not a standalone act within its own existence, but a space of the here and now which allows for the improviser to exist within their consciousness, and within the world. The improvisative act is that of pre-reflection *and* reflection in tandem, offering interiority and exteriority to the self. Thus, the self/other relationship here is based within acknowledgment of the other, as well as interaction with the other through the decision of both parties to hear and react to what the other is doing.

In the piece “Rejoinder” by Ikue Mori and Julianna Barwick, the two find improvisative space within and around the other. Barwick improvises using vocals and a loop pedal, while Mori uses electronics, specifically a program called max/MSP, to react, interact, and meld with each other. Ikue Mori is an electronic musician who has worked with Bill Frisell among others, and primarily works to create her own programs to accomplish the sounds that she wants to create. Julianna Barwick is a trained vocalist who works using her voice as an ethereal tone, rather than reciting lyrics. The piece begins with Mori’s altered, captured, and interactive sounds swirling through the listener’s ear. Barwick enters with a singular rather short note, and the two begin their play. Throughout the piece, both Mori and Barwick actively listen and respond to one another. In footage of the live, improvised recording of “Rejoinder,” you can see the two of them, though not actively looking at each other, reacting to the sound the other is putting out. The two, seated facing each other at a table covered with their gear (a pedal, a computer), meet in the improvisative space allowing for deeper collaboration in the singular moment. The album *FRKWYS Vol. 6* is a collection of their improvisations, immediately cut to four different pieces after the improvisations completed.

“Rejoinder” allows for the real-time, less rehearsed version of the practice of improvisation. I have found that it exemplifies, once again, the Paul/Pierre example from *Phenomenology of Perception*, while also proving the active engagement inside an improvisation that Peters points to in his text. “Rejoinder” was performed and recorded without an audience, with only a cameraman and one can assume an audio engineer. Thus, the other here is specified to the other improviser, and the broader listening audience. However, I believe that the fact they are only improvising with and for each other, there is a level of mediation that further specifies

this instance of the improvisative space. Without the ‘other’ of an audience, Mori and Barwick’s freedom to utilize the otherness of each other in this space is exemplified. It would normally be difficult to find balance between Barwick’s ethereal vocal loops and Mori’s more percussive found sounds, but I argue, because of this specific instance of improvisation, balance is struck by the fact that the two are only improvising with and for each other. Here, Peters and Merleau-Ponty’s ideas about reflection and reflexivity are easily observable as Barwick and Mori engage in reflection, the response, and self-reflexivity, the active decision making of the improvisative space. Though their sounds are at their core deeply different, Mori and Barwick still manage to build reflections of the other through their individual processes. Mori’s sounds soften in the latter half of the piece, a response to Barwick’s floating tones, and Barwick, in the first half of the piece uses shorter more annunciated sounds to mimic Mori. There is a trade occurring throughout the piece that exemplifies their acknowledgement of the other’s process and sound, a decision that translates into a cohesive piece of music that exemplifies both Mori and Barwick’s distinct sounds and voices.

John Coltrane is one of the best-known jazz musicians to have lived, revolutionizing the genre by introducing modes of improvised jazz as well as extraordinarily demanding and complicated chord changes that have challenged musicians since. Three tracks off John Coltrane’s album *Live at Birdland* were recorded live at Birdland and, perhaps, the best example of this performance is found in the track “Afro Blue.” Contrary to “Rejoinder,” “Afro Blue” was recorded in front of an audience at a jazz club in New York City, whereas “Rejoinder” was recorded in private, a conversation purely between two musicians. *Live at Birdland* features Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison, and Elvin Jones, building and disassembling

conversations to the tune of Coltrane himself, and other jazz composers. “Afro Blue,” written by Mongo Santamaria, features what I think is the best and purest example of a cohesive jazz improvisation. Tyner and Coltrane effortlessly trade off melody and solo, rhythm and tune, through the arc of the piece. What is different with “Afro Blue” from “Rejoinder” is not only the fact that the improvisation occurs over a set series of chords, but the fact that it also takes place in a public setting with an audience present, offering the other side of the self/other relationship in improvised music. Here, we will take the self as Coltrane, and the other as both audience and band.

In the instance of “Afro Blue,” Coltrane takes the second solo, following McCoy Tyner, and brilliantly picks up where the pianist left off. The end of Tyner’s solo feels like a vamp, playing chords with the same rhythmic components repeatedly through a crescendo that builds up to Coltrane’s entrance. Coltrane enters with a slide up to a high note, not only directly carrying the energy Tyner had built up through his solo, but translating this energy into his own playing style, landing on the high note and falling into rapid note patterns moving down the range of the saxophone. Coltrane’s self seems to be acknowledging what Tyner has offered him, and carrying that through into his solo. Similar to the self/other relationship found between Mori and Barwick, Coltrane and Tyner, though taking different solos, sound as if they are in a conversation, acknowledging the other’s musicianship.

Given the nature of the function of a band in jazz, and given the full history of Coltrane, we know that he, Tyner, Garrison, and Jones had played together for a long time before this performance at Birdland. Knowing this, we can assume that they not only know each other’s playing styles, but they have learned the nuances and how each individual fits into the band,

making a fully functional and cohesive unit. Assuming as much, there is probably less thought going into fitting together as a group than there had been at the beginning of their collaborations. Thus, during Coltrane's solo, when Elvin Jones, the drummer, catches on to a specific rhythmic moment that Coltrane establishes, the moment wows the audience but more than likely was hardly any thought for the musicians themselves. Because the relationship between Coltrane and his band members has been pre-established, the acknowledgement of the other and the self is less of a stressor, but rather comes naturally for the band as a whole. Similar to what is heard in "Rejoinder," in "Afro Blue" there is constant acknowledgement of the other player's style and space noticeable, listening to how Coltrane plays off the lines, rhythms, and block chords the other three provide him with through his solo.

As Gary Peters points out in his quotation from Luhmann, "the unique meaning of the forms embedded in the work of art...becomes intelligible only when one takes into account that they are produced for the sake of observation" (*PI*, 112). In the case of *Live at Birdland* and "Afro Blue," this was recorded at a live set for an audience, not mediated by a studio or the artists being in a space not accessible to the audience or a space only found through listening back. There were, in fact, observers present for the creation of this album, and the distinct meaning of the album, the decision made by the musicians, and the interpretation of the artist's interpretation, is up for debate by the audience themselves. This presents a distinct self/other relationship not present in "Rejoinder," as I have mentioned before. This relationship instead offers the audience a realtime understanding of the pieces performed, instead of the easy "listen again" option of recorded music. In the same way, there is a specific type of performativity that reveals itself in live recorded improvised music. In the case of Coltrane, in live performance, he

has this one specific opportunity to perform for this one specific audience in this specific space at this specific time. Whereas, perhaps similar to “Rejoinder,” improvisation can be re-recorded, done over, and altered in a recording studio, the performance of improvised music in a live setting allows for the self to reach full expression, or come short of the same, through the decisions made in real time by the performer. The observer, the other, knows this as the excitement of jazz seems to come from the one-time opportunity to see a piece performed live, the one-time opportunity to see this specific performance that will perhaps never be heard again (as is the nature of improvisation). In a similar fashion, this also offers the self, as we have established in this case, Coltrane, the opportunity to be fully self-reflective in his interpretation of the piece, and his decisions made in the here and now.

This Coltrane example also points to a deeper understanding of Merleau-Ponty’s suggestion that the I recognizes other by the fact the two are not bounded by “phenomena,” but rather have a “value.” The audience and other improvisers playing with Coltrane both have something to offer to Coltrane, the self. As Merleau-Ponty says, “nothing is hidden behind these faces or these gestures, and there are no landscapes that remain inaccessible to [oneself]” (*PP*, 12/lxxv). Tyner, Garrison, Jones, and those observers present at the Birdland set have no reason to be disingenuous. Instead, these ‘others’ have something to offer to Coltrane presenting as the self in this example. Tyner, Garrison, and Jones, are fellow improvisers, offering foot-holds of sort for Coltrane to play off of, or responding and reacting in real time to the decisions he is making as the band grooves through the head of the tune and solo sections. They offer value in that they validate Coltrane’s self, and receive equal validation from Coltrane through the form of interaction and trades throughout “Afro-Blue.” The audience, the other example of the Other,

offers themselves as observers for the improvisation as a whole, recipients of the offering from the self. “Rejoinder” also offers this ‘value’ based relationship that Merleau-Ponty has established. Barwick and Mori, in turn, give and offer sounds, created from nothing, to one another. Each individually, as the acting self, acknowledge that they are being offered a starting point - something to grow from and feed off to create their own interpretations. There is crossover, there is trade-off, but what remains is the value-based exchange of the offer. The self/other relationship here is not the “desiring” that McMullen pointed toward but rather an equal trade that establishes the self and other as equal. Improvisation levels the playing field for the musician and musician, observer and performer. It is not a tiered relationship aside from the fact that the other is outside the self, and the first acknowledgement from the self is for the self. In improvisation, this disappears into a giving and receiving, a level playing field for all parties involved or present.

The act of improvisation manifests a self/other relationship that not only makes equal self and other, but allows for the self and other to interact in such a way that the ‘value’, as Merleau-Ponty coined it, is expressed through their interaction. With an understanding of Tracy McMullen’s definition of the ‘improvisative,’ we can understand the interactions between Mori and Barwick, as well as Coltrane and his band and the audience, with more clarity. Their interactions exist in a space that does not require clear comprehension - as McMullen put it, thinkability - nor conception of real time in order to be understood as a clear and definite interaction between self and other. Rather, these interactions exemplify a sort of reflective analysis of the self and other for the viewer, though the viewer, as a self, may not need acknowledge this consciously. Through Barwick and Mori, we can recognize the pure interaction

of an individual self, and an individual other. Both Mori and Barwick listen and respond to one another, each establishing an 'I' through their sounds, while recognizing the value in what the Other has to offer. As Merleau-Ponty put forth, the Other and the I have a value rather than existence, and through the improvisative space, a space where thinkability and intelligibility are not necessary for comprehension, the value is expressed as an offering. This offering is that of sound to play off, respond to, grow from. In the case of Coltrane, his band offer him rhythm and chordal support, while the audience serves as the observer, someone for Coltrane to perform for and push his abilities. The self, here, is established through Coltrane's melodic lines, sweeping solo, and fact that he is the band leader. Anyone else in his band could be considered the self as they, too, have distinctive sounds and are being offered melody and rhythm to respond to. The self is established as separate from the other, but still deeply intertwined with the other. In the improvisative, there is no separation of self and other. The self and other serve the same purpose and offer the same amount to the 'I' or to the Other, but the distinction comes with whose consciousness one is analyzing, or if you are one of the improvisers in the room.

Conclusion

A musical relationship is a human relationship. The self and other constitute humanity, reflecting two consciousnesses with mutual acknowledgement. Their presence in the improvisative space allows for an understanding that improvised music is based in human consciousness, making clear that a musical relationship, at least in this context, is a human relationship.

The relationship between Self and Other in improvised music, viewed through the lens of Merleau-Ponty's established self and other in *Phenomenology of Perception*, allows for our understanding that the self and other exist in an even, equal space of acknowledgement. The Self is able to understand, through reflective analysis, that it exists in an external world and has experiences within this world. Because of this, interacting with the Other is fair by the fact that the Self and Other both have experiences in the world. Consciousness recognizes consciousness, and consciousness can interact through the knowledge that they have a shared experience. Using the example of Paul and Pierre, Merleau-Ponty establishes an interaction between two consciousnesses who do not have to think twice about the fact that they both exist and are real. In fact, this acknowledgement is almost unthinking as they understand, simply, that they are interacting in a world and by that fact they both exist. Merleau-Ponty also asserts that the 'I' (the self) and the Other [Autere] recognize they are not trapped in "phenomena" but rather have a value, something to offer, in their acknowledgement. This is a two way street, making it clear that there is no imbalance or scarcity in their interactions. Reflective analysis offers no concern for the existence of an other, instead taking the Other as existing without question, allowing for the self to focus on achieving a higher truth.

The self and other make themselves present in improvisation through a space Tracy McMullen calls the improvisative. She first establishes an understanding of self and other based through Butlerian and Hegelian ideals, claiming that there is a “desire” that drives the self to find acknowledgement from the other. However, as I argued, the self and other, exist with an equal understanding and equal acknowledgement that creates a space for them to not desire. McMullen then proposes the idea of the improvisative as a space existing outside of thinkability with a ‘lean’ toward the self as opposed to a focus on the other. This allows for us to understand improvisation in a way of offering as opposed to taking, wherein the self offers sound to the other, and vice versa. McMullen claims that the improvisative exists in the here and now, a time different from presence, that requires attention and giving.

Gary Peters suggests that the improviser exists fully inside their work, as opposed to a composer who exists and works with an outside perspective. This “inside,” however, allows for the improviser to be fully within their work, to an extent, within the “here and now” that McMullen suggests. Peters suggestion that there is a second order observation happening sparks the question of who the observer is. The observer is the other improviser, the audience, giving basis for the Self to go off, creating new melodies and more complex systems of engagement for the Self and Other. Similarly, perhaps this internal existence can allow for the improviser to experience a more specified reflective analysis, such that Merleau-Ponty suggest. Through an exploration of the piece “Rejoinder,” improvised by Ikue Mori and Julianna Barwick, we can understand that there is a level to which the self and other experience an equal trade of tonal suggestion, pushing the other improviser toward reaction to the sound one is making. In the Coltrane example, we see the improviser not only engage with the other improvisers, but also

engage with the audience. Through this, Coltrane is offered rhythm and chordal support, but also pressure from the audience to perform to his fullest extent. These two examples show the relationship between self and other by expounding upon the internal aspects of improvisation, and relation to the 'other' in the space with them. By this, we are able to see how the self acknowledges other, and other acknowledges self.

The relationship between the Self and Other in improvised music is mutual, ongoing, and requests presence in the improvisative space. Consciousness is present through the acknowledgement of self through what is revealed in an improvised piece of music, and acknowledgement of other through interaction and trades of tonality and rhythm.

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