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Capitalism and the Production of Realtime: Improvised Music in Post-unification Berlin

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Philip Emmanuel Skaller

Committee in Charge:

Professor Jann Pasler, Chair
Professor Anthony Burr
Professor Anthony Davis

2009

The Thesis of Philip Emmanuel Skaller is approved and it is acceptable in
quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2009

DEDICATION

I would like to thank my chair Jann Pasler for all her caring and knowledgeable feedback, for all the personal and emotional support that she has given me over the past year, and for being a constant source of positive inspiration and critical thinking! Jann, you are truly the best chair and mentor that a student could ever hope for. Thank you!

I would also like to thank a sordid collection of cohorts in my program. Jeff Kaiser, who partook in countless discussions and gave me consistent insight into improvised music. Matt McGarvey, who told me what theoretical works I should read (or gave me many a contrite synopsis of books that I was thinking of reading). And Ben Power, who gave me readings and perspectives from the field of ethnomusicology and (tried) to make sure that I used my terminology clearly and consciously and also (tried) to help me avoid overstating or overgeneralizing my thesis.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this work to my partner Linda Williams, who quite literally convinced me not to abandon the project, and whose understanding of the contemporary zeitgeist, patient discussions, critical feedback, and related areas of research are what made this thesis ultimately realizable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
Preface.....	vii
Abstract.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Discourses of Jazz, Free Jazz, and Improvised Music	
1.0 What is Improvised Music and why is it Important?.....	4
1.1 Story #1: Would you call this 'Free Jazz'?.....	16
1.2 Free Jazz versus Improvised Music.....	19
1.3 Story #2: East German Jazz: From the Town of Pietz to Ku'damm.....	25
1.4 Changing Cultural Fields: From East German Free Jazz to West German Improvised Music.....	30
Chapter 2: A Ritual and Spectacle of Contemporary Power? Realtime, the Avant- Garde and Processes of Capitalism and Cultural Dominance	
2.0 Story #3: Meeting a Girl on the Train.....	44
2.1 Social versus Cultural Capital.....	46
2.2 A Brief History of Cultural Capital.....	49
2.3 Story #4: Emergent Structures of Control and the Ideology of Realtime Resistance.....	55
2.4 Use Value and Exchange Value under Capitalism.....	60
2.5 The Sites of Authenticity in the Production of Realtime.....	67

**Chapter Three: Post-Unification Berlin: the Spatial Practices of Improvisers and
the Reconstruction of the Capital**

3.0 Story #5: Temporary and Movable: Emergent Transient Structures in Contemporary Architecture and Music.....	86
3.1 Signifying Power: Form and Content in Modern Art and Modern Architecture.....	95
3.2 Story #6: Public Funding for the Arts in Berlin.....	101
3.3 Rebuilding and Rebranding Berlin in Realtime (or, as fast a possible).....	107
Appendix.....	119
References.....	121

PREFACE

Given the almost obsessively critical trajectory of this paper, I need at the very outset to qualify my remarks quite strongly. I should point out to the reader that I am an improviser and that I have participated and continue to participate in the same kinds of improvised music making that come in for direct criticism here. Obviously, since I play the music, I like how much of it sounds (or at least, one would hope!). But it is important to distinguish between liking the music and ascribing any particularly liberatory or radical tendencies, let alone foundations, to that same music. If anything, with regards improvised music, ascribing the opposite political effects is to my mind more reasonable. This differs markedly from the discourse surrounding the music, though no doubt if one were to press most improvisers hard enough on the broader socio-political impact of their artistic practices, most would concede that their art was not particularly effective (grant applications and interviews not withstanding). I will be arguing that when improvised music is effective, it is largely in ways contrary to how improvisers would like to think about their music.

But what makes improvised music sound so *good* to me is often precisely the resonance that the music has with my particular experience of the world. It is a site and practice of privilege that articulates, is a spectacle representing, and affirms a certain culturally dominant and politically and economically powerful relationship to time and space.

Music that sounds great to my ears and yet resonates with a particularly politically and socially problematic world view is nothing new. Gangsta rap and Wagnerian opera are two obvious examples of such problematic musical formats that I enjoy. And yet I wouldn't even presume to make a judgment, without dedicating an essay

of similar depth and scope to the topic, as to what and when musics – if any or ever - have more liberatory potential than others. Improvised music is certainly capable of fostering boundary crossing dialogic and subversive relationships, as is most music in varying and unique ways when one puts an effort into it and when the surrounding societal conditions offer up resistance to the music. On the other hand, what I am very concerned with is that there is a discourse developing around improvised music that has shifted our perception of this music so far towards the socially and politically ideal that improvisers are continually flirting with, and sometimes embracing, the maxim 'my art is my activism.' More often than not, the exact opposite is true. Inseparable from this misperception, over the last two decades improvised music has within the academy and cultural field at large started to gain a significant presence alongside other Western art musics. With the cultural stock of improvised music at an all time high, one could say that I have become obsessed with reversing, or at least neutralizing what appears to be a dishonest and self valorizing trend amongst improvisers. And it is for this reason that I necessarily turn a blind eye towards the many positive realities of the music.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Capitalism and the Production of Realtime: Improvised Music in Post-unification Berlin

by

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Master of Arts in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2009

Professor Jann Pasler, Chair

After the fall of the Berlin wall in '89, and the subsequent implosion of the East German economy, the Berlin improvised music community flourished with venues springing up almost overnight in the East's abandoned industrial and residential areas. Artists from around the world, inspired by West Berlin's reputation as a counter-culture Mecca, moved in, taking advantage of cheap living costs and a depressed rental market. Berlin supported much of the (often illegal) activity as the artists generated cultural capital, refurbished derelict buildings, and gentrified neighborhoods. Twenty years later, Berlin has transformed into a 'Global City', while improvised music continues to flourish. What role are improvisers, and the broader subcultural arts scene, playing in this economic and political production?

In this thesis I consider the possibility that improvised music functions in important ways as a formalist 'avant-garde' for the dominating and hegemonic forces of

global capitalism and representative democracy. In this sense, Berlin provides a unique and liminal cultural field in which to study and shed light upon 'state-of-the-art' social, political and economic processes. Improvised music, referred to in Berlin as 'Realtime music' (Echtzeitmusik), is structurally aligned with a contemporary organization of society in which commodity value lies in process instead of fixed objects, authenticity resides in the realtime spectacle of becoming and change, and power is a direct measure of speed and maneuverability.

Introduction

This master's thesis is structurally a bit different from (I assume) most. It springs forth from ethnographic and personal reflections, but in terms of overarching goals and trajectory it is theoretical and philosophical in intent. I am here inspired by *The War of Desire and Technology at the end of the Mechanical Age*, a book written by communications professor and former Grateful Dead collaborator Sandy Stone. In this work Stone makes use of ethnographic research and provocative journalistic story telling devices to build up her theoretical speculations. She approaches her subject matter in a non-narrative (and hence less-reductive) manner, constantly circling around the subject matter and approaching it from different perspectives. Additionally, it would be fair to say that much of my thinking about improvisation, and music generally, was inspired by extensions of Stone's discussions on identity and personality within (then) emergent communication networks..

I am also deeply indebted to David Borgo's recent book *Sync Or Swarm: Improvising Music in a Complex Age*, which marks a theoretical breakthrough in analyzing improvised music through emergent disciplines of systems theory and cognitive science. These two books serve the role of orientating and focusing my work. However, they do not provide the foundations or motivations for my analyses of improvisation, which is critically positioned in relation to both of these works.

This paper is concerned with an analysis of society as a whole. Economics, arts, physical places, mental states and politics. Therefore, if one is expecting definitive conclusions and clearly delineated subject matter, I can do little better than sigh at my own inadequacies in providing that. At the same time this work is opinionated, repetitive,

and neither inter-disciplinary in an academic sense or pleasantly subjective (in the post-modernist sense). This paper draws its theoretical point of departure from the Marxist methodologies laid out by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, Walter Benjamin's seemingly always prescient essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production* and the more recent studies of speed and time by Paul Virilio which I think can be quite nicely used to bring Lefebvre's work more in line with the present. In addition, any discussion of the socio-economic impacts of art is almost by default indebted to the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

I aim in this paper to explore the extreme, and seemingly paradoxically fragmented, compression and commodification of space and identity through the domination, increase and control of speed (and by such definition, time itself) that is being undertaken by the productive forces of present day capitalism, and its related institutions: representative democracy, the academy, and the arts. This dizzying spectacle of movement and change and the compression and re-organization of the structures of society stands in popular discourses in direct contrast to an equally pervasive and popularly expressed collective sense of the unchanging same: Massive and ever growing gaps between rich and poor people and nations, environmental devastation, endless wars, and the personal trauma, alienation and hopelessness of modern¹ life and the ubiquitous dictatorship of the 'silent majority'. In this sense, one could say I am sympathetic to Terry Eagleton's contention that intellectual efforts have recently become too (I would say 'suspiciously) vested in the uncovering of difference and change. So here at the outset I would like to imply that there is a relationship between difference and undifference,

¹ In general, I will try to avoid the term "post-modern", which I consider to be a variation of modernity, and not an inherently different system. Hyper-modern might be a better term in that implies merely an augmenting of the original processes of modernism, as opposed to a distinct break.

between new social dynamics, new art forms, new technologies, new forms or models of knowledge and yet the seeming intractability and intactness of power and control. But I will be taking a very round-a-bout way to make these connections. This is in part because this project became gradually more and more clear to me throughout the course of my ethnographic work in Berlin, and also partly because it is always very difficult to see the structures of power while at the same time inhabiting and being constituted by those same structures.

Chapter 1: The Discourses of Jazz, Free Jazz, and Improvised Music

What is Improvised Music and why is it Important?

Berlin as a city has constantly teetered on the edge of systematic breakdown, of destruction, chaos and political foment. As such, it is a very active site of contestation that showcases capitalism and representative democracy at the limits of adaptability. I will be arguing that it is for this reason that the arts, and in particular improvised music, are positioned to play important roles in speedily re-branding, controlling reconstruction and commodifying post-unification Berlin.

Improvised music in Berlin seems perhaps a rather obscure topic, and perfect for ethnographers in search of difference. On the other hand, I am an improviser, have myself lived in Berlin for a number of years, speak the language, and my family has a long, storied, and tragic history tied to the city. Instead, what makes this subject important to me are not the differences that might through careful study be unlocked. Rather, I am motivated by an effort to understand what is hegemonic, what is dominant, where power is invested and where sameness resides within sub-cultural fields, and improvised music more specifically. And what place could be a better fit, a better site for reflecting upon all this then in the very city where so many of the power struggles of the last century have played out. Berlin as geographical and temporal site of heterotopia, that island of difference and perversion (both left and right): It is no coincidence that improvised music, and the arts in general, have flourished post-unification with an absolutely incomparable intensity here as compared to any other 'world city.'

And yet, 'incomparable intensity' can be a rather subjective description, since across virtually all cross sections of society, including among academics and musicians,

'improvised music' quite literally does not exist as a known musical practice – even in Berlin. As Marta Blažanović, a musicologist working as an intern at Universal Music in Berlin notes, her colleagues² had never even heard of the existence of such music. The obscurity of the musical genre thus requires a bit of an introduction.

I should first explain the significance of the term 'realtime' in conjunction with improvised music. Realtime among improvisers in Berlin is another name for what is commonly called 'improvised music.' Realtime music is a translation of the German word 'Echtzeitmusik'. The word is typical of German in the ease and utility of its construction: real(echt)time(zeit) music. The was a term coined in the early 90s by a number of (West) Berlin improvisers. Through their organization of a variety of concert series and venues and most importantly the early establishment of a (semi)open concert calendar titled 'echtzeitmusik.de' the term caught on as a local sort of label for this community of improvisers. Like all musical styles – even those that proclaim to be less idiomatic – there are many important subcategories that connect to other musical practices: Performances of contemporary Western European Art music, sound art, noise, electronic music, post-punk, etc...interface at many different levels with realtime music (not even all the concerts listed on echtzeitmusik.de could, even under the broadest definition, be called improvised music). However the emphasis tends to be on realtime music that traces a common point of origin back to free jazz.

While the term 'improvised music' is essentially the normative name for realtime referred to by musicians around the world. I will continue on occasion to refer to improvised music in Berlin as 'realtime' music for both poetic and for conceptual

² The location of Universal (on the Spree river in Friedrichschain) is within one of Berlin's subcultural hotspots which features a cluster of venues for improvised music.

purposes. This is because the term realtime (in both German and English) is a word with broader social implications that was already used in the 90s to describe certain kinds of computer games (i.e. non-turn based war strategy games) and even earlier in computing systems that responded to realtime time constraints (i.e. anti-lock breaks). What this proliferation of the term might mean I hope will become intuitively obvious by the end of this paper, but for now we can agree that this sort of 'in the moment' presentism is indicative of certain trends in contemporary society that are not nearly as marginal as the genre of music itself. The concept it seems is pretty clear to the musicians: 'music that is composed live, and in the moment' I was informed on many occasions. This description is however lacking of an important distinction: that between recorded improvisation and improvisation in front of an audience. The site of (rhetorical) difference that the musicians tend to emphasize when describing the process is improvised music for a live audience, and hence not primarily for purposes of recording.

In this case, the common definition of realtime music is *music that is improvised live for a live audience*. In the theoretical language that this paper will develop, this can be once more translated as inferring: *music that is produced at the same time it is consumed*. However, realtime musicians also make recordings, record live concerts, play in rock and jazz cover bands, compose scores, make sound installations (of both the interactive and non-interactive sort) etc. This lends a certain shifting instability to the discourse that prevents a direct encounter with the pure logic of realtime. A certain (post-modern) school of thought would celebrate this as flexible, pragmatic and interdisciplinary. In this paper I consider the possibility that this is also an act of strategic

dissociation³ by the musician, facilitated (and required)⁴ by emergent technologically and historically augmented (altered) spaces and sites of exchange.

This concept of realtime may at first not sound different from most other forms of music making – after all, aren't all live performances...live? Not so according to many proponents of improvised music. According to their understanding, most music is passed down with some sort of pre-composed structural elements. In the case of classical music this means highly elaborate scores, in the case of pop music this would mean trying to reproduce the sound of an album in concert, and in so called Folk musics there are all sorts of elaborate aural traditions.

With this in mind, it is argued that most music is *reproduced* as opposed to produced. No one is really talking in absolute terms however: reproduced music also incorporates degrees of realtime-ness/ production through spontaneous embellishments, improvised introductions, codas, and solos. And realtime musicians would be the first to admit that at times they also reproduce – consciously and unconsciously, structurally and idiomatically. But the success of a realtime concert is based foremost on the perception that new, irreproducible, situationally interactive material is being produced, while the success of other kinds of music is said to be measured more in terms of how convincing a reproduction it is.

Drummer Eddie Prévost makes some representative remarks in a politically charged essay on improvisation:

3 Musicians using different theoretical language to talk about their music making is nothing new, at least since the emergence of the free market. At its very inception, western art music was conceptually formulated in differing ways and marketed/targeted towards a dizzying array of consumers: the aristocracy, bourgeoisie, lower classes, middle class, capitalists, dilettantes, the academy, national citizenry, etc...

4 In the sense of the identity crises that contemporary classification systems manufacture.

Making music is not enough...Improvisation in music makes specific demands upon musicians: theirs is a “music-making in the moment” aesthetic that commands their attention to materials and responses to other musicians as well as to the sense of moment that is sharper in practice than most other forms of music making. (334)

And:

In Western classical music, the musical decisions are substantially performed before the performance. Anything improvised must allow the musical development to be dictated by the situation. Musical problems are therefore set and solved within the context of the performance.

How far this process is allowed free rein is a measure of the confidence and trust the musician have in each other...Trust and generosity (if sometimes fragile) become necessary as the measures of equity.. This is *not* a popular working economic principle in our present culture. (359)

There are a number of consequent claims that arise from this dynamic understanding of improvisation. David Borgo restates many of the typical premises in the conclusion to his book *Sync or Swarm*:

fostering improvising music has the potential to overcome the inherent problems of a slow-moving moving traditional hierarchy, providing an effective way to handle unstructured problems, to share knowledge outside of traditional structures, and to inject local knowledge into the system....Perhaps in a similar way to democracy, which has been another powerful symbol of liberation and resistance to oppression, improvising music teaches us to value not only cooperation, but also compromise and change. (194)

As an improviser in Berlin recently expressed to me, “realtime music is unique to every moment, so it's harder for it to be trapped and commodified.” This is not an unusual argument made by improvisers (see quote below). It could potentially be inferred that improvising music is more authentic, more *real*, than other kinds of music. Authenticity is also inferred by the pervasive belief that it is harder to conceal, to be deceptive in an improvisation – structural and representational artifice is hampered by time constraints that oppose conspiratorial planning – a Freudian slip of the tongue,

hidden truth revealed through free association, mistakes, moments of uncertainty – none of these instances can be erased and re-written. The music is hence said to be more reactive, transparent and honest.

David Borgo writes: “its inherent transience and expressive immediacy even challenge the dominant modes of consumption that have arisen in modern, mass-market economies and socio-political and spiritual efficacy of art” (35). Yet, it would seem here that Borgo is turning away from his own methods of analyzing improvisation, in which he often draws comparisons to contemporary economic theory. It is perhaps the most critical argument of this paper, and will be stated throughout: *comparing improvised music to Fordist economies of mass-(re)production is precisely the wrong sort of comparison to be making.*

A few other important characteristics of the discourse around improvised music immediately jump out: Firstly, that valorizing comparisons about the qualities of the music are usually made either implicitly or explicitly with Western art music, as opposed to other musics – despite the fact that Western art music is also presented in the same literature as an atypical representation of music with regards to questions of improvisation, social dialog, audience participation, etc... Secondly, the language that improvisers use tends to be quite powerful. I don't think that Eddie Prévost is wrong to point out a certain kind of in-the-moment aesthetic or certain kind of trust at the core of improvised music – but the key words to be included here should have been *certain kind* – a kind of modernist in the moment where signifiers are kept to a minimum, productive origins disguised and dialogs with the past under-acknowledged. Any investigation of

realtime music that wants to avoid charges of phenomenological Orientalism⁵ needs to start from the understanding that all musics interact with the moment to moment present: Irish musicians need to be able to recall hundreds of tunes instantly as they play, and a string quartet has to pay constant attention to intonation. Trust, it should be obvious, is vested in many different stages of musical production, and in some ways the in the moment aesthetic of realtime devalues other temporal relationships of trust⁶. Thirdly, just as all music has interactions with the present, all music interacts intensively with the past – yet the terminology used around improvised music suggests that little emphasis is critically placed on understanding these longer, slower (and labor intensive) temporal processes that lead up to the in-the-moment music making. Fourth, the terminology itself sounds similar to that of Western Art music in that it displays a certain hubristic proclivity towards bland, abstracted language that has universalist, modernist implications: democracy, time, the present, freedom, realness etc...In fact, improvised music is sometimes more specifically (and blandly, if that's possible) referred to as '*non-idiomatic*'⁷ improvisation.

Lastly, to return to the economic comparison - there is also a certain and ironic neo-liberal ring to some of the rhetoric: all the buzzwords are here: transparency, democracy, responsiveness, flexibility, integration, an opposition to “slow-moving” hierarchies, etc. Just where the audience actually fits into this equation – who they are

5 I am referring here to the Orientalist stereotype that other cultures do not inhabit the present – that they exist in Western consciousness primarily in reference to the archaeological, historical and mythical past. By phenomenological, I am referring here to the idea of the present distilled to the very moment of perception.

6 My cellphone stopped functioning the other day, and I had to pick a friend up at the airport. Unable to maintain realtime communication, there was worry that somehow we might miss each other. We reminded each other that before cellphones people got picked up at the airport without much trouble.

7 Derek Bailey coined this term in his influential book *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice* (1992).

and how aligned or interactive their experience is with that of the improvisers - is as poorly defined and overlooked as the blandly conceived role of 'the people' in the neo-liberal system⁸. The same specific, content and qualitatively contingent questions could be asked with regards to historical dialog, spatial practices, institutional forces, etc...

To permit myself a moment of rhetorical flourish: The history of the various movements in the Western avant-garde tradition could be presented as one long search for the most authentic, pure, and non-commidifiable aesthetic. Why then should we believe improvised music is any more effective in this respect? The answer, in one word it seems, is 'jazz'. As Jason Stanyek proclaims: “there is an intimate link between the social and cultural experiences of Africans in the Americas and the development of a heterogeneous intercultural space within which dialogic forms of musical interaction, such as improvisation, can take place.” (118)

Though this is a subtle statement showing an awareness of cultural specificity, I think there is a danger to infer from Stanyek's position that there is some sort of particularly effective transcendent force within afrologically based systems of improvisation. However, improvisation must be seen in the context of the continuously shifting position of the music within the cultural field, and not *abstracted* into a discrete discipline and practice. Jazz itself, 'improvised music' aside, is not one, continuous musical expression that can be smoothly traced back to the antebellum experience, or even further back to Africa (see Ronald Radano's *Lying Up a Nation*, 2003). Most artists practicing improvised music do not even refer to themselves as jazz musicians, actively distancing themselves from the word in many cases, except when rhetorically locating

⁸ A critical review of *Sync or Swarm* asks just this question in frustration at the special claims made for improvisation: “How, specifically, do listeners influence the emerging qualities of an improvisation?” (Harley) And further, how might such specific answers tend to conflict with the idealized model?

their music's historical roots perhaps in an attempt to differentiate and inoculate themselves from the Western arts tradition⁹. Situating improvised music, and more importantly different forms of jazz (something Lewis unfortunately only addresses with regards to 'whiter' forms of improvisation), in the proper cultural fields is of great importance, and it is a question I will take up shortly. It is my contention that much of jazz, and almost all of improvised music has its practice and discourse situated well within the dominating cultural field of western artistic practices – that it is a cultural practice of the center, not the margins. And as such is subject to the same dialectical and historical problems associated with the avant-garde arts in the almost ritualistic cat and mouse games played out against the hegemonic forces of capitalism, representative democracy, and the academy.

Improvisers are implicitly aware of this positioning themselves, when they situate their practices within the discourses of authenticity, commodification, production and reproduction. Thus I hope to show that improvised music exists as a commodity as much as other musics. It has use and exchange value and is reproducible, that it is fully representational, and as challenged by issues of authenticity and relations to power as any other avant-garde arts movement. To make this case we have to situate improvisation not within the previous economy of mass reproduction and articulated divisions of society (public/private, clearly bounded academic fields, etc.) but within the new economic and societal structures that developed alongside with improvised music. Neo-liberal governance that shifts and blurs boundaries between public spheres and private, interdisciplinary methods and new scientific models of the academy, new ways of

⁹ See George Lewis' *Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives* for a discussion of the cultural and racial semantics of improvisation.

thinking about and expressing identity, and most importantly a networked, etherized economy to which commodity objects like a recording or a score have little or no use and exchange value, and variation and difference pose little challenge to capitalist production.

What has use and exchange value here instead of the object is the process – the methods (delivery, speed, networks, connectors, interfaces, displays etc...), what has authenticity tends to constitute itself in fiduciary identities and personalities (in the broadest possible sense: from racial and sexual identities down to the personal narratives and eccentricities assembled for viewing on personal websites, youtube, and myspace profiles, etc), and commodity production is not achieved by linear, additive, assembly lines but instead is produced through complex, non-linear and dynamic systems requiring tremendous computing power crunching massive quantities of (often realtime) data. In a networked and high speed economy capital, people, information, political power - and material objects as well – all enter into orbit, speed up and become dispersed and difficult to locate, coming together or fracturing instantaneously at the invisible call of power to create the illusion of an integrated whole or a discrete part. In high-frequency trading of billions of shares in stocks in milliseconds. (Duhigg) In media spectacles of live polling, live news feeds, embedded reporters giving breaking news updates, etc... In constant expansion of and movement through virtual and real transit hubs and pathways (sites of information storage and exchange, wireless communication towers and satellites, airport and high speed rail nodes and networks). In constant movement across borders (from migrant workers to free trade agreements). In surveillance technologies that track real time movement via satellites, security cameras, etc.

The strategies and sites of power are located increasingly within the kinds of

processes listed above, and decreasingly in more traditional sites of mechanical production (assembly lines/disciplinary models, property ownership) and distribution networks (from the producer and production site to the middlemen and the warehouse to various retailer outlets and finally to the consumer). The arts, situated front and center in post-Fordist plans by cities to build so called 'creative economic sectors', have become very closely tied into this high speed, network economy.¹⁰

The financial and material impacts of the arts are often indirect and ancillary – and not just because artists eschew profit in efforts to keep their work safe from commodification (and thereby accumulating cultural capital – an important point of our discussion later). The ever struggling airline business model offers an excellent example of the need for indirect and dispersed revenue generating systems in which profit is derived less and less through the cost of the actual product (i.e. by purchasing a ticket from point 'a-to-b') but rather by ancillary means: this includes the obvious ones – selling drinks and charging fees for all sorts of extra services. Capital is also generated by exploiting both the airlines' positioning within a high speed network and the flexibility (liquidity) of the airplane space itself which is highly customizable. Such methods include partnerships with hotels and car rental agencies, flying to lesser known destinations (regional governments will offer business incentives to encourage airlines to contract with local airports), using airplanes to ship freight, selling advertisement space, and offering increased leg room and faster boarding/de-boarding speeds for those in business class. Ticket prices themselves are directly correlated to times and days of the week. Note that capital is generated often in almost complete opposition to the freedom

¹⁰ See, for example: *City of Quarters: Urban Villages in the Contemporary City* (Ashgate Publishing, 2004), *Decline, Renewal And the City in Popular Music Culture: Beyond the Beatles* (Ashgate Publishing, 2007), *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City* (Routledge 2005).

of movement for the individual passengers: the airplane is an especially lucrative site for the generation of ancillary capital because unless passengers grow wings they are essentially prisoners with extremely fixed lines of movement (or quite literally, flying eliminates 'lines of flight'). Ever notice the glossy add campaigns for multinational finance entities plastered on the walls of the jetway? Airplanes are of course simply a method of fast travel, and thus in a sense belong also to the earliest periods of capitalism, showing that in essence this 'new' economic system is contained within the old one (like in *Flatland* where a single dimension necessarily incorporates all the other ones). We are talking more about a shifting focus (both real and imagined) – changes in scale, quantity, and speed – not absolute differences. Crucially, as with the airplane, these differences are reproduced at every level of the process: from the actual leg room within the plane, to the discounted 2:00a.m. red eye.

But even if venues support themselves more through selling drinks and finance their publicity costs by attaching the names of local businesses to their print material, the financial capital generated is quite modest – more a reminder of Gramscian hegemony in which the practices of the elite are reproduced by all classes of society. Notable amounts of capital, at least in the usual sense of the word, are still difficult to locate. This is where Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' becomes very useful. It's important to understand how artists make use of this capital, but in order to do this, and appreciate the magnitude of these forces, there needs to be a foundational understanding of how such a form of 'capital' has arisen. And, as I mentioned earlier, this concept itself is of little use unless we can situate improvisers within the same cultural field as those with financial capital.

1.1: Story #1: Would you call this 'free jazz'?

On Saturday, August 8th 2009, I attended a concert of improvised music at the *Froschkönig*¹¹ Piano and Literature Bar. The bar is located in Schillerkiez, a neighborhood in Neukölln that is starting to gain a reputation as 'hip' and cultured. The neighborhood has long been listed as a 'problem' area and intervention zone by the Berlin government (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 110). The bartender/owner informed me that this was the first concert of improvised music to occur since their opening one year ago, in 2008. Typically, the venue had (mostly German) literature readings, and showed silent films, all with piano accompaniment. I paid him the 5 Euro for the musicians, ordered a beer and took a seat at a wooden table at the front of the room.

The inside of the bar was somewhat dark, musty and *gemütlich* – which in English could be translated at once into cozy, comfortable and homelike. The 20 or so audience members were comprised of young people as well as working class middle aged and older Germans – both former Easterners and Westerners, many of them women. Most of them were regulars. The Literature emphasis favored an audience fluent in German and German cultural and historical narratives. The resident pianist, Michael Betzner Brandt, would typically play stride piano renditions of old standards. These older styles of jazz have with some occasion in East German discourse been positively linked to the working class. (Poiger, 160) The mixed age demographic and working class dialects combined with the *gemütlich* *ambiance*, giving the place a distinctly non-avant-garde feel – as the owner of a more 'avant-garde' venue just down the street attempted to

¹¹ Translation: Frog Prince.

quite snobbishly imply during a later conversation.

The group playing that night was a quartet featuring Clayton Thomas (bass), and Chris Heenen (tenor saxophone, contrabass clarinet), Magda Mayas (piano), and Morten J. Olsen (drums). Together, they represented four nationalities: Australia, USA, Germany, and Denmark, respectively. The music they played was dense, texturally slow to change, mostly without a distinct pulse, with occasional grooves emerging out of the textures. The musicians listened intently to one another: as in most jazz ensembles, the drummer and bassist worked closely together and played almost constantly, whereas the pianist and wind instruments moved more freely in and out of the texture, distributing their attentions more equally.

I found it instructive of the different physical relationships that musicians have with their instruments watching Chris Heenan blow into his clarinet and sax: when one improvises there occur many points when the improviser is ready to play something, but suddenly the music changes and the moment that the improviser was waiting for passes. It seemed Heenan would often dissipate the built up energy of an idea he deemed no longer relevant into passages of quiet breathing into his instrument. As a pianist, I am not able to easily realize a commensurate effect. And this made me think of a certain stratum of idiomatic engagement that tends to become foregrounded in improvised music. Heenan was idiomatically 'phrasing silence' through an unconscious relationship between the geometrical space of instrument and body. This sort of signification of structure and form itself – which often masquerades under the aesthetic banner referred to as 'non-idiomatic' - is what tends to be articulated in modernist spatial practices. I will return to this topic in greater depth in Chapter 3.

The backgrounds of the musicians show a common, though by no means universal, African-American-Euro/Euro-American binary typical of improvisers, in which the African American influence tends to be predominant. Clayton Thomas' myspace page is indicative of this binary, where he lists all of his major musical influences. Because it's easier to write, and somewhat humorous, I have input either 'black' or white' after each musician to emphasize this pattern:

Public Enemy [black], Schlippenbach Trio [white], Albert Ayler [black].
 Roscoe Mitchell [black], Peter Brotzmann [white], Anthony Braxton [black], Cecil Taylor [black], William Parker [white], F.Hecker [white], Jim Denley [white], BDP [black], Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians [black], BAG [black – literally stands for *Black Artists Group*], Julius Hemphill,[black] Henry Threagill [black], Thelonius Monk [black], Oscar Pettiford [black], Wilber Ware [black], James Brown [black], Axel Dorner [white], Andrea Neumann [white], Cor Fuhler, [white] Amanda Stewart [white], MIMEO [white], Matt Earle [white], Xanakis,[white] Nono [white], John Coltrane [black], Ghostface Killah. [black]. (Thomas)

I realize that this reductionism might be infuriating – but the immensity of diversity of the musical forms represented above is nothing compared to what it excludes. If we stylistically analyze we can further delimit the sphere of influences: Older African-American musicians more closely link to the jazz tradition, Older European composers from the European tradition, younger European musicians from the *improvised music* tradition, younger African-American musicians from the rap tradition.

After the show, I had a nice talk with Chris Heenan, an improviser originally from the LA scene who has played with the likes of noted U.S. improvisers Vinny Golia and Wadada Leo Smith, and had recently moved to Neukölln (the hottest site of gentrification in Berlin). A man approached Heenan with an article about Clayton Thomas he had cut out of the Berliner Zeitung, a major Berlin newspaper. He had enjoyed the performance

and wanted to know if the music he had heard played tonight was free jazz. Heenan replied that no, it was not free jazz, it was 'improvised music.' The man seemed rather confused, and the conversation went on a few minutes more with Chris insisting that, although he might on occasion play free jazz, this was not free jazz.

This distinction from the jazz idiom is important to many improvisers, as a reviewer of one of Heenan's albums observes:

Integrating reeds into contemporary electro-acoustic improvisation has been an ongoing challenge, one that is rarely met with much success as the musicians are generally unable to cast aside the “baggage” accrued (in all likelihood) from years of jazz or jazz-influenced playing, something that ill fits the current format. Heenan deals with this conundrum in pretty convincing fashion, especially on the lower clarinets that allow him to dwell more often in the purely sonic aspects of the winds as opposed to the history that, despite all best intentions, tends to percolate up on the alto. (Olewnick)

At 11pm the concert ended, rather early for Berlin, but necessary because of stricter noise controls determined by the residential surroundings. Though, as the owner of nearby Staalplaat records notes, if there's one thing that experimental musicians have in common with the Turkish (the main immigrant population in the neighborhood), it's that they make, and therefore tolerate, a lot more noise than the Germans. (The past present and future of staalplaat)

No one asked the performers to stop – they ended of their own accord as it was almost exactly at the cut off time when they reached a 'natural' cadence point.

1.2: Free Jazz versus Improvised Music

It is now 50 years since the release of Ornette Coleman's seminal free jazz recording *'The Shape of Jazz to Come.'* Free jazz does not really exist as an active

musical genre today – but if improvised music is taken into consideration than, at least in terms of artistic movements, the music is decidedly middle aged. In fact, given the intensely generational nature of artistic movements, it is a good bet that the age of a movement corresponds to similar developmental expectations of human beings. As a movement ages it gradually acquires a discourse, a methodology, institutions and a canon of personalities – no different from how individuals acquire knowledge, resources, identities, a sense of place, etc...With age though it is also common to identify a shrinking of the realm of possibilities and revolutionary potential. (Hage) Sometimes it becomes difficult to track such aging processes because within the Western European avant-garde a fear of capitalist co-optation leads to deliberate efforts of historical and developmental obfuscation; methodologies are often 'anti-methodologies', individual artists are subject to revision and rescue from the dustbins of history (or vice versa), and venerated institutions are rebelled against. As we saw, improvisers are very resistant to the term free jazz. The fact that jazz or African American music in general is referenced further complicates the position of improvisers within the cultural field – think about how Clayton Thomas lists the revolution preaching rap group *Public Enemy* first among his influences.

But let's put aside for now the questions of whether improvised music is free jazz by another name, or whether improvised music is afrological, etc...We can accept that improvised music certainly has well articulated roots in the jazz tradition, to say the least. So the first question needs to be what is the cultural field of jazz, where does jazz stand in relationship to the institutions, practices and belief systems of the dominating power structures of society?

But the Jazz tradition itself has a much more complex social history with regards to questions of center and margins, co-optation and institutionalization than most would like to admit. Jazz, and African American musical traditions do have a history arising from a position outside of society – outside the established order and structures of power and society's accepted social relations.

Societies are inscribed by rules, signs, languages, conventional wisdom and cultural beliefs that are based as much upon exclusion as inclusion. What lies outside the sphere of inclusion is noise – that which is unintelligible, irreconcilable, and potentially disruptive to the systems and beliefs, and what is often in the history of the West marked as not (quite) human. As Gilroy states with regards to the development of African American music:

The power and significance of music within the black Atlantic have grown in inverse proportion to the limited expressive power of language. It is important to remember that the slaves' access to literacy was often denied on pain of death and only a few cultural opportunities were offered as a surrogate for the other forms of individual autonomy denied by life on the plantations and in the barracoons. (74)

Slaves were denied the right even to language and were deliberately isolated from working together with other slaves that might share language or culture (a lesson learned from the slave rebellions in the Caribbean). What Gilroy is suggesting here is that music in the African American tradition arises out of a pre-discursive state. It was, quite literally noise.

The absence of meaning...is nonsense; but it is also the possibility of any and all meanings. If an excess of life is death, then noise is life, and the destruction of the old codes in the commodity is perhaps the necessary condition for real creativity. No longer having to say anything in a specific language is a necessary condition for slavery, but also of the emergence of cultural subversion.

Today, the repetitive machine has produced silence, the centralized

political control of speech, and more generally, noise. Everywhere, power reduces the noise made by others and adds sound prevention to its arsenal. Listening becomes an essential means of surveillance and social control. Today, every noise evokes an image of subversion. It is repressed, monitored. Thus, the prohibition against noise in apartment buildings after a certain hour leads to the surveillance of young people, to a denunciation of the political nature of the commotion they cause. It is possible to judge the strength of political power by its legislation on noise and the effectiveness of its control over it. In addition, the history of noise control and its channelization says much about the political order that is being established today. (Attali, 122)

The historical developments and implications of this observation for African American musical practices are, aside from one key point, beyond the scope of this paper. The key point here is that Gilroy is describing noise arising from outside the margins of society. As Jacques Attali points out in his influential book *Noise*, what we hear as noise is what demarcates the inter-subjective *boundaries* of and within society. However, this complete outsider position is fundamentally a different starting point from where movements within the European art tradition begin. In the case of the former, there is a cry of noise from outside the margins, while in the case of the latter the cry is directed from the very heart of society outwards.

Improvised music today is often easily characterized as a sort of conjunction of what have typically been described as outwardly striving artistic practices (practices of escape and exclusivity) typified by the European avant-garde, and African American practices which have traditionally been parallel (separate and isolated) or inwardly striving (practices seeking integration and inclusion). While the analysis is somewhat justified with regards the case of certain avant-garde movements (Dada springs to mind here of course), it seems clear to me that these commonly held perspectives have less and less bearing with regards jazz – certainly at least since the swing and bebop eras. While

Gilroy's observations about the origins of African American music are no doubt profound and stimulating, we need to be careful when constructing narratives across the centuries. Points of origin eventually become so far removed from current situations as to have little actual relevance to the subject at hand.

From the point of bebop onwards it is possible to identify within jazz strong outward and exclusionary oriented processes like in the European avant-garde. Bebop was just as much a rebellion against the commodified economy of Swing as a non-linguistic noise, famously characterized by Langston Hughes as “...police beating Negroes' heads...Every time a cop hits a Negro with his billy club, that old club says. 'BOP! 'BOP!...BEBOP” (quoted in Deveaux, 7). The subsequent 'bourgeoisification' of Bebop (and militant free jazz response) further underscores this transition of jazz into a dialectical dynamic that can be said to generally haunt the European arts movements of the past two hundred or so years. With the entrance of jazz into the conservatory systems as western art music's little brother, nostalgia tinged resonances are most of what remains of the pre-discursive, revolutionary noise. This does not mark the end of jazz as a site for experimentation or liberation, but it does signal a profound changing of position – and thus of possibilities – within the cultural field of jazz.

While the actual positioning in the cultural field within which jazz is practiced has changed, the discourse surrounding the music has unfortunately not quite caught up. The practice of jazz still reaps the cultural capital of an outsider status it no longer carries. And by a trick familiar to followers of art movements in Europe, improvised music has split off and declared itself the new site of resistance. Perhaps it is not only out

of an implicit racism¹², but also out of a need to rid themselves of the codified and sanitized trappings of jazz, that improvisers have rejected the label. (seemingly aware of jazz' more recent positioning with regards to the mainstream). Thus what is interesting to me is not simply the racial dynamics at work in this split (which are well documented elsewhere) but the feeling of being locked down and held back by a tradition that has been strongly marked in the past by inter-generational collaboration and stylistic dialog. After all, African American musicians and organizations ranging from Yusef Lateef, Ornette Coleman himself, and the AACM also felt a need to create a new name for their musical practices (respectively: Auto-Physio-Psychic Response music, Harmelodics, Creative Music).

We are thus confronted with a strategic splitting of the improviser's tradition that I will return to over and over again. On the one hand, the tradition of jazz can be called upon when needed to support claims of difference (both in terms of race and class) and phenomenal political achievements in contrast with the rest of the artistic avant-garde. But at the same time, the term improvised music is used both to shield musicians from the institutionalized, codefied and/or comodified images that the term jazz can imply, as well as to justify a closer relationship with the avant-garde (for reasons of cultural capital, later discussed). In the right socio-political setting, improvisers are poised to have the best of a number of worlds. How does this advantage play out then in the larger cultural field?

In the case of improvisers and jazz musicians in Germany, and more specifically in Berlin, this complex and contradictory discourse has had profound implications for

¹² The renaming, sanitizing and re-branding of Rhythm and Blues as Rock n' Roll springs to mind here as a classic example.

how the music has stylistically developed and how East, West and unified Germany have made political use of the music. The positioning of improvised music has afforded the musicians opportunities to participate in the diverse cultural and rebuilding processes of Berlin.

1.3: Story #2: East German Jazz: From the Town of Pietz to Ku'damm

On the evening of September 2nd, 2009 I walked down the fabulously wealthy and historic Ku'damm in Charlottenburg, an avenue that was the very heart of the former West. I had decided that night to attend a concert listed on echtzeitmusik.de featuring Johannes Bauer (trombone), Tony Buck (drums), and Clayton Thomas¹³ (bass). I wanted to see this concert for two reasons. First, Johannes Bauer is – alongside his two brothers Matthais (bass) and Conrad (also Trombone) – among the most documented and longest active improvisers to come out of the East German music tradition. Secondly, because the venue, *Jazzwerkstatt*, was located in a rather odd part of the city for music that is typically listed on echtzeitmusik.de (festivals excepted).

It is of course not entirely out of the ordinary to hear modern, or experimental jazz at a well-to-do Jazz club in a wealthy neighborhood. On the other hand, *Jazzwerkstatt* appeared to be dedicated primarily to improvised music. We can infer some of the possibilities for how *Jazzwerkstatt* is positioned just by observing the words *jazz* and *werkstatt* (workshop) in the title. But before drawing conclusions about the question of location (both spatially and discursively), there is a lot more to unearth about the history of the venue.

¹³ It's a bit of a (friendly) running gag among improvisers, but Clayton plays more concerts in Berlin than just about anyone in the scene (the data sheets at the end of the paper reflect this as well).

As I approached the street number listed for *Jazzwerkstatt*, on echtzeitmusik.de, I hesitatingly looked around, wondering if I was on the correct side of the street. Directly in front of me, where the venue was supposed to be, well dressed diners sat by candlelit tables outside, in front of what looked like a restaurant. This was *Jazzwerkstatt*, and upon entering it was clear to me that there were a number of uses for the space: restaurant and bar, record shop for their very own label, and of course a concert venue. Instead of being a mysterious, heterotopic hideout amidst opulent surroundings that I had half expected, the venue fit the neighborhood's aesthetic like a glove.

Cleanly and sparsely displayed on various walls were *Jazzwerkstatt* CDs, DVDs, and other branded merchandise – box sets, new releases, old classics, t-shirts, etc...The label had just won two design awards, and was nominated for the *German Design Award*, one Germany's most prestigious product prize. All this, despite the venue being only one year old, and the label about ten years. (Henken)

As I looked at the list of musicians that had recorded for the label, it struck me that this was not the first time I had heard the name *Jazzwerkstatt*. Recordings ranged from international improv 'stars' like Phil Minton, to West German giants such as Peter Brötzmann, but what stood out was a disproportionate number of former East German musicians. Although at the time I didn't place my memory precisely, *Jazzwerkstatt* was also the name of one of the largest international music festivals that highlighted improvised music – though free jazz was the term used then. The festival was held from 1973-82 in Pietz, a small East German town about 140kms southeast of Berlin. The festival was shut down after 1982 in a sudden political move by the German Democratic Republic (GDR) authorities, which culminated in the founder and organizer, Ulli Blobel,

fleeing to West Germany.

I paid the 8 Euro for a student discounted ticket, and the 4.5 or so Euro for a Hefeweizen (wheat beer) and sat down in a huff. It borders on a conspiracy, but 5 Euro entrance and 2 Euro beers are the rule for normal improv concerts in Berlin. The first set was quite enjoyable – although Clayton Thomas' use of a (vanity) license plate jammed between his bass strings did not provide the same amusing novelty as when I saw him do the same thing at the *Froschkönig*.

Between sets, I talked to Tony Buck (from Australia – like Clayton Thomas) and his partner Magda Mayas (West Germany) about the place and told them I was sure there was a GDR connection. Tony Buck, who has lived in Berlin for more than ten years, agreed that there was some sort of connection. Magda thought there probably was as well - but despite them both having performed and recorded for the label, I didn't learn anything much. Or, I should better say that I learned a lot about what the musicians might *not* know.

As historian Hayden White points out, historical narrative is formed more from what is left out or forgotten, than what is included (14). But while that perspective seems to reveal itself as almost axiomatic in the 'information age', it would also seem that despite the documentation and accumulation of data¹⁴ on nigh on everything (speaking of the industrialized world) people still don't really know history that much better. Instead, in a city as complex as Berlin, there are parallel structures of experience that share the same time and space. Instead of the world 'coming together' in the integrated, pro-

14 Though now one can argue that the massive quantities of inaccurate and manipulated data serve the same purpose of obfuscation as forgetting. For example, companies and wealthy individuals can hire firms to artificially bump certain Google search results up or down in an effort to hide potentially damaging information. And of course creating and manipulating Wikipedia entries for political and personal gain is rampant.

globalization sense, we have the illusion, often nothing more than some post-modern aura, of a shared experience. Meanwhile, sharing the stage with Clayton and Tony was Johannes Bauer, one of the leading East German improvisers who himself performed many times at Peitz.

The bartender, who also did not know the history of the venue, pointed me to the owner, none other than Ulli Blobel himself, who was enjoying a conversation with what appeared to be old friends at one of the candlelit tables outside. And, not surprisingly, Johannes was outside as well talking to some old friends. In fact, now that I thought about it, there were a set of familiar faces at this concert – a distinctly older generation of people, some of whose presence I could remember at straight-ahead jam sessions as far back as 2002, the first time I lived in Berlin.

After talking to Johannes about his time in the GDR and the history of the *Jazzwerkstatt*, I inquired if he believed there to be some political significance to the location of the venue (GDR dissidents were often rewarded in the West). Johannes answered that no, he didn't think so – “Ulli was just a good businessman.” No pun intended. And Ulli Blobel confirmed that he was not very political – despite his experiences with the East German authorities, and in an article titled 'Wie Peitz zur Hauptstadt des Free Jazz in der DDR wurde'¹⁵, writes about his memories:

Ich denke mit Freude, ohne jeglichen Groll, an die *Jazzwerkstatt Peitz* und an meine Arbeit in der DDR zurück. In meiner Erinnerung ganz vorn: Es war ein grosser Spass! (Blobel, 176)

[I think back on the *Jazzwerkstatt Peitz* with great happiness, and without any reason for resentment. What stands out in my memories most is that it was great fun!]

¹⁵ Translation: 'How Peitz became the capital of GDR free jazz'

This is a common sentiment expressed by many East German artists – a response that is a somewhat historically relativized perspective brought about by difficulties of life after unification and should not be read as any kind of endorsement of direct authoritarian interventions in cultural affairs as practiced in the GDR. As Hannes Zerbe writes:

Es gibt heute beispielsweise in Berlin eine grosse Anzahl von Bands, die bei den Jazzclubbesitzern Schlange stehen, um ab und zu einmal zu unwürdigen Bedingungen spielen zu dürfen. Die Folgen der für uns neuen Verhältnisse waren, dass viele Jazzmusiker der ehemaligen DDR von Konzertauftritten auch aufgrund der drastisch gestiegenen Lebenshaltungskosten nicht mehr leben konnten. Ein Teil dieser Musiker muss Geld auf völlig artfremde Weise verdienen, andere verdingen sich mit viel Glück als Lehrer an Musikschulen, was ursprünglich aber nicht ihr Berufswunsch war. (211)

[There is, for example, today a great number of bands in Berlin that stand in the jazz club owner's line just to be allowed to play for unfair terms. It stands to reason then, that because of the drastically increased living costs following unification, many jazz musicians from the former GDR can't make a living anymore. One portion of these musicians must earn money in completely foreign ways, while others with great fortune hire themselves out as teachers in music schools – something that was not originally their desired career.]

But ironically, as Ulli Blobel himself states, there is something inherently political about being a 'good businessman' in a proclaimed Communist state. Certain types of businesses – flexible small service sector type establishments such as restaurants and the arts, have always presented the greatest challenge to organize on a mass, socialized scale. The tremendous success of *Jazzwerkstatt Peitz* was based very much on this deregulatory model, exacerbated by the need to work with international musicians (and even tourists) from the capitalist west - even foreign (Western) embassies were kicking in money to fund concerts (Hielscher). Whenever the GDR took deregulatory steps for such small scale businesses ventures, there were always certain ideological risks being taken.

More generally speaking, the preoccupation with issues of class and ways of organizing the arts did have a profound impact upon the development of jazz, leading to important current questions about the post-unification integration (or swallowing up) of GDR artists and art movements into those of the FRG and more generally speaking, the capitalist west. In the case of the *Jazzwerkstatt*, and a number of other ventures in Berlin today that have ties with the former East, it is also possible to show how the positioning of these arts movements within a new cultural field both creates new difficulties and opportunities and provides a reflective surface upon which to consider how and why naturalized and normative categories and styles in the West might be constructed.

After the show a member of the audience suggested I attend a concert at another venue with a strong East German presence, *Aufsturz*. There was a tribute concert next week organized in honor of the recently deceased GDR jazz musician Manfred Schulze.

1.4: Changing Cultural Fields: From East German Free Jazz to West German Improvised Music

In the immediate postwar period, both East and West Germany were faced with a cultural and spiritual crises that matched the physical devastation more easily captured in print and media. In many ways, the East had an easier time constructing their historico-cultural narrative (and in the process absolving themselves of responsibility for Nazism) than the West. Most of the internal resistance to Hitler came from the far left – communists, socialists, labor organizers – many of whom had fled to the Soviet Union and now returned eager to rhetorically re-build East Germany as an '*anti-fascist*' nation as much as a communist one. The West on the other hand had a much trickier balancing

act to negotiate in constructing an identity.

The capitalist industrial leaders, the scattered and insignificant aristocracy, and the Church were quickly established as the foundation of the new West German political establishment – but between all these groups there were only a handful of notable resisters to point to. As has been generally acknowledged, seeking truth, reconciliation and responsibility for the legacy of Nazism was not an activity either East or West willingly engaged with – preferring instead to ex-nominate and vilify individuals and particular ideologies. The conservatives located the roots of German fascism in the lax morality, cosmopolitanism (code word for 'Jewish'), and unstable left wing climate of the Weimar Republic. But of course going back to the Kaiser and World War One was not exactly an attractive option. It was thus not surprising that, given the limited options available, West German discourses on nation and society retreated to the 'apolitical' realm of the traditional family¹⁶:

...initial policymakers in the Federal Republic...tried to strengthen traditional patriarchal-bourgeois marital roles by appealing to the naturalness of gender roles, and they denied any historical evolution in the development of the family...Many observers were convinced the German family had broken down and was collapsing.” (Borneman, 84)

Similarly, historian Uta Poiger notes that:

Believing that the West German family had survived National Socialism unscathed, the mainstream parties agreed that families of male breadwinners/protectors and female caretakers were central to postwar West German stability. Healthy families with traditional gender roles distinguished West Germany from its Cold War enemies to the East and from the dangers of American-style consumer culture arriving from the West. (47)

16 This retreat to the fictive basic unit of the family is a pathology common to the abstracted state of living under capitalism in which links to nature are constantly obscured via the dialectics of use value and exchange value. Child bearing is supposed to be one of the last links remaining to the natural world (think of society's relationship to 'meat products' by contrast)...

In a practical sense, this meant that from the outset, East German culture was in a much stronger position – as evidenced by the theater and music of Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler. But East Germany had its own difficulties in constructing a stable cultural narrative. As I discuss in more detail later, *Bildung* and *Kultur* are concepts directly tied to the rise of the bourgeoisie and capitalism in Germany. Yet unlike in other communist countries, it was hard to really appeal exclusively to German folk music traditions because in Germany western art music had for all practical purposes become *the* folk music. And in fact the Bavarian folk music that we associate with Oktoberfest and German rural *volk* identities is a modern, invented tradition in the classic Hobsbawmian sense. (Sackett, 132)

At first, a more distanced relationship to so called 'art music' allowed for a more flexible engagement with other forms of music making (again, as evidenced by the embrace of Brecht and Eisler). As Poiger notes about the East German state recording label *Amiga*:

...between 1946 and 1948, Amiga made more jazz recordings than all West German companies combined. And the activities of the East German state youth organization Free German Youth (FDJ), founded under communist leadership and with participation of confessional and bourgeois groups in 1946, included dancing to the music of Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman as well as to "American boogie-woogie.." (42)

Of course, anyone reading this history from the present is likely awaiting the other shoe to drop – the ascendancy of the United States to world power, the proliferation of consumerist pop music, and the cold war culture wars. As relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union took turns for the worst, 'Radio Free America' broadcasts, Hollywood glamor, and touring 'jazz ambassadors' funded by the State Department turned jazz from a symbol of African American resistance and working class

entertainment into a symbol of American consumer freedoms. As an international tour featuring Louis Armstrong and his orchestra and co-sponsored by Pepsi and the State Department advertised: “You like Satchmo. Pepsi brings you Satchmo. Therefore you like Pepsi.” (Eschen, 67)

Both West and East German authorities began to view jazz and the U.S. entertainment industry as synonymous (as in the prewar years, when even the radical critical theorist Theodore Adorno espoused this view). The conservative West German cultural establishment, with its emphasis on the traditional family mediated by longstanding German views on race and sexuality, faced just as strong a challenge as the GDR with regards to the proliferation of American culture. However, because of the relative decentralization of the cultural apparatus of the FRG, the West German government had limited means to engage in direct cultural resistance. Only bourgeois art music, or *Ernste Musik*, was institutionalized. Entertainment music, or *Unterhaltungs Musik*, which was literally every other kind of music, was for the most part relegated to the sphere of the free market – privately imported, produced and funded.

In a move typical of the tit for tat dynamic between the East and West, the GDR scored many cheap political points early on by reversing its initial embrace of jazz, quite suddenly deciding to censor most U.S. cultural exports in the 1950s and 60s. Many 'pro-family' conservatives in West Germany were faced with the conundrum of looking on at 'well behaved' East German youth, while the GDR actively enacted measures to weaken the autonomy of the family unit (training and promoting women in the workplace, establishing favorable divorce laws, and taking on greater responsibilities in early childhood education and peer socialization).

However, as rock and roll replaced jazz as America's chief cultural export, the threat of jazz began to be seen as much less serious to West Germany – all the more so in light of the post-swing bebop and cool jazz styles. These newer jazz styles conformed much more to bourgeois ideals of concert music, and not just by reason of an absence of dancing. The militant radical and legendary jazz bassist Charlie Mingus immortalized the syncretic potential of post-swing jazz on many of his live recordings, which featured introductions to pieces, including his admonishments of the public not to applaud till the end of the music nor to rattle the ice in their glasses.

Jazz musicians – despite the notorious drug addictions of many of the leading practitioners, were it seems better role models for mainstream youth, and West Germany took measures to fund and promote jazz to young men at risk from the influences of rock and roll. Even the West German army promoted listening to jazz. (Poiger, 1) Certainly in terms of sexually appropriate and gendered behavior, as bell hooks has noted, African American radical movements have proved in many ways syncretic with the most conservative elements of society. And so what ironically for African American jazz musicians was a hard won liberation from the racist expectations and practical economic requirement to engage in acts of minstrelsy and entertainment also resulted in an alignment of the cultural field of jazz with that of more bourgeois art forms.

Indeed, for many African American jazz musicians it soon became a topic of discussion among the artists that those most interested in their music were young, white, middle and upper class men, often from Europe. Jazz had always been bifurcated into a black and a white economy, but as institutional resources for jazz musicians increased, and inner city tensions, 'white flight' and subsequent urban renewal programs created

new forms of segregation, new musics of protest, and new sites of music making, *jazz musicians increasingly struggled to meaningfully connect their politics and music to a sense of place*. The militant revolutionary and saxophonist Archie Shepp struggled with his appointment as music professor at UMASS in Amherst, Massachusetts - a predominantly white, upper middle class and rural community. As Eric Porter writes:

How could one use the university as a space for perpetuating the development of black music if that music was dependent upon the support of the African American communities for its very existence? Still, positions at colleges or universities often gave musicians institutional support for their creative projects and could provide a respite from the hardships of trying to generate an income from nightclubs and recording work. In addition, they put musicians in contact with other intellectuals, many of whom were interested in African American music...(235)

Meanwhile, in the GDR a hardline Stalinist regime gave way in the reform minded thaw of the early 70s to an official cultural policy that recognized jazz as a legitimate musical expression. This shift, perhaps unavoidable given that the GDR (especially via West Berlin) was more exposed to the influence of Western Europe and the U.S. than any other communist nation, resulted in a fascinating musical development within East Germany.

While elsewhere jazz was in steep popular decline, within the borders of the GDR jazz enjoyed many levels of institutional support and perhaps most important, an institutionally strengthened position as an entertainment music. The age, gender and professional status of jazz fans¹⁷ in the GDR was relatively more diverse than any place in the West (Brattfisch, 230). In 1964 the Dresden Conservatory became the first European academy to found a jazz and popular musics program (Bauer, 212). But more importantly, in the socialist GDR it was doubly difficult to justify supporting orchestra

¹⁷ The performers however remained almost exclusively men.

musicians with state funds, but not other kinds of music. Jazz musicians could look forward to government support both outside and inside of the academy and 'high art' world. Of further help, jazz proved to be very popular not only because it was preferred by the regime to rock music, but because the instrumental nature of the music allowed it to avoid much of the bureaucratic difficulties that rock bands, with potentially subversive messages articulated more overtly through lyrics, faced.

Yet perhaps the most unique and important difference for the development of jazz in the East was in the types of jazz that were taught and supported. While post-swing styles were highly syncretic with bourgeois values in the West, this was not so much the case under Communist rule. The consumerist Swing style was also not exactly befitting of the State's political ideology. Instead, early forms of jazz that emphasized collective improvisation (New Orleans and Dixieland) were more emphasized, as were attempts at Kurt Weil inspired *Volk Jazz* (jazz that incorporated Germanic music styles), and efforts to connect with East German literary movements (this in the end did generate predictable tensions with the authorities).

Johannes Bauer, the trombonist mentioned in the previous section, described the scene to me gleefully over a beer one night. "It was the best time of my life. There was us [the circle of GDR musicians associated with free jazz] and a couple of Dixieland bands. Otherwise there was nothing else going on. Absolutely nothing – not even discos in the beginning! We would play dance music at a youth club, or some such place, in front of hundreds, and after the crowd tired of dancing they would all sit down and listen to us try out experimental, free stuff. And they loved it!" Watching footage of Sun Ra playing live in East Berlin and reading descriptions of the Art Ensemble of Chicago on

tour in East Germany would seem to corroborate Johannes' story. The audiences went wild...and the musicians called it the 'wilden Osten' (the wild East). (Linzer, 100), (Sun Ra).

Johannes also described playing with Hannes Zerbe in fusion style bands before the actual genre was established by Miles Davis in the late 60s. As the former East Berlin punk rocker Ronald Lippok explained to me; “of course it was difficult to collaborate with musicians in the west, but what isn't so well known is that it was also difficult to travel between Eastern bloc countries as well – one needed to go through a lengthy visa application process just to travel to Moscow.” The GDR was a small country competing with West Germany and, by proxy, the U.S. on every front – including that of culture and music - and the relatively flexible boundaries between classical, jazz and popular music meant that musicians looking to experiment were both able to and had few alternatives but to collaborate with different kinds of artists. In many ways, being an experimenting musician in the 70s and 80s was idyllic in East Germany – a reasonable stipend from the government, lack of strong ideological resistance to the aesthetic, and even necessity to collaborate without respect to high art/ low art boundaries, a large and enthusiastic audience, possibilities for higher education, and last but not least an eventual greater freedom to travel (as the East's own cultural ambassadors to the West). The Free jazz clarinetist, and committed Marxist, Ernst Petrowski even walked away with the culture ministry's prestigious National Prize (admittedly, the regime gave out awards for almost everything).

So it would seem that in at least one area of the GDR, real, existing socialist ideals were approached. What does it mean that not just jazz, but *free* jazz could flourish

under a repressive Communist regime, while elsewhere jazz was in the decline? Many of these musicians were active in helping to bring down the regime in '89, but it would be a mistake to conclude that somehow the spread of jazz had any bearing on the political events that unfolded, or that the musicians were against communism. As guitarist Uwe Kropinski writes about the demise of the DDR:

Für mich hat sich seit damals eigentlich nichts veraendert, ich übe immer noch nach dem Fruehstuck bis zum Mittag und versuche den Rest des Tages den Geheimnissen von Musik und Kunst irgendwie auf die Spur zu kommen. Die gesellschaftlichen Zustaende haben sich veraendert seit damals. Hat das meine Musik veraendert? Ich glaube nicht! Hat meine Musik die Gesellschat veraendert? Wohl kaum...(Kropinski, 15)

[Since then [1989] actually nothing has changed for me. I still always practice after breakfast until midday, and then spend the rest of the day trying to discover the secrets of music and art. The conditions of society have changed since then. Has my music changed? I don't think so! Has my music changed society? Not likely...]

That Kropinski's material existence has not changed has much to do with his position as a jazz legend in Germany – a status that was achieved well before the wall came down (otherwise, his situation might be significantly worse). On the other hand, this rather neutral assessment that there is change and yet not change, is a perspective one hears over and over again from former GDR musicians. I don't think this is exactly the situation to which I was referring to in the opening section to this paper¹⁸. The events of '89 were a spectacular demonstration of popular revolt and resulted in real change. Rather, I think the sentiment comes from the realization that the freedoms offered by the capitalist west did not translate into a more empowered community of musicians. In this case, I think it is very important to both pay attention to how cultural fields are structured and also to take aspects of the GDR seriously (as a political project) – regardless of a

¹⁸ Though it does point to the structural similarities between consumer oriented economies in both the East and West.

politically correct felt need to repudiate at every opportunity the reality of corruption, political posturing, and the very real horrors of the infamous state police (STASI).

West Germany's identity was primarily expressed in what they were 'not' (Communists, Americans and Nazis) and through the apolitical private sphere; family, material wealth, consumption and choice, and personal freedom. On the other hand, East German citizens were educated to believe in socialist ideals and encouraged (or even forced) to take part in collective activity. The utopian discourse on personal freedoms that the U.S. symbolized to many in the GDR is certainly important, but tends to be overemphasized. While at the same time the social structures and discourse of the GDR itself tends to be overlooked..And in the unstable world of art where meanings are subjective, layered and shifting, it is not hard to imagine both opposition to the GDR regime and structural similarities with socialist discourse and policy to comfortably cohabit the same space. And when music is shared between people that also occupy and share in a certain, larger experience of the world I tend to agree with both musicologists Christopher Small and Lydia Goehr¹⁹: the music – even when it seems critically positioned with regards the discourse – tends to function in the final analysis as a ritual enactment of affirmation and showcases that society working at its best.²⁰ The affirmative abilities of the arts is why the representation of the clockwork beliefs of the Enlightenment through the conducted symphonic spectacle is so utterly convincing and affective, even if the actual society was considerably less successful. In similar ways, the

19 In Lydia Goehr's case this is built upon Adorno's problematic that listening to and adapting to avant garde music “does not require the listener to listen with the devoted musical attention this particular music demands. Rather, so to adapt demands this music be brought into the sphere of what listeners already know and like.” (Goehr, page 231)

20 And, as mentioned earlier, the jazz public of the GDR was by most accounts a good deal more educated in the music than in the West.

free jazz movement in the GDR affirmed many of the ideals of both East and West – ideals that more often than not amounted to little more than political propaganda.

Remembering that this same state banned jazz for more than a decade emphatically underscores the problem that when artists become aligned with structures of power, the music becomes critically silent. Perhaps the most philosophically charged question with regards to improvised music is then to wonder how music that identifies so strongly with the idea of free expression acts when suddenly integrated into a 'free speech' society. What happened in 1989 (or any revolution by definition) was a tremendous acceleration of political change – where jazz musicians from the GDR wound up one year later is in some ways very similar to where African American jazz musicians like Archie Shepp found themselves after decades of incremental change. GDR jazz musicians were now ostensibly free to make any kind of musical and political statement that they wanted, but as Hannes Zerbe and others observed, the results were anything but inspiring. Do expressions of musical freedom become a legal sublimation of 'real, existing freedom'? In a free speech society, what is silence, what is noise?

The ways in which artists participate within the broader cultural field underscores Bourdieu's nominating of academic and cultural workers as the 'dominated dominating' class. Jazz musicians were only free to do what they wanted when the political situation was favorable – but as long as the artists were in a favorable political environment, they led the fulfilling lives and lifestyles that only power can systematically enable. The *dominated* position (and of course the *dominating*) is in a free speech society much harder to place since power and control tend to be much more subtly exercised. I tend to believe that the more power divests from content, the more privilege and control can be

seen with reference to place – structure, location and aesthetics (aka form). In the case of liberal democracy, the greater the freedom of speech, the less important it becomes what is said and the more important it becomes where, how much and how quickly things are said. This in turn leads to a military-like escalation in that it becomes more and more critical to locate and intervene in the site of speech – pre-emptive speech like pre-emptive war (visualize panel 'discussions' on the news networks). An escalation that renders speech as nothing more than a site of speed, action, and intensity.

It is interesting to note that the experimental/avant-garde musicians in the GDR seemed much more comfortable with jazz (and other genre specific) roots. Although these musicians now are featured playing 'improvised music' on echtzeitmusik.de, there is less evidence of a tactical break from jazz (again, commodified swing and bourgeois friendly post-swing styles were not major artistic concerns). This position stands in contrast to an active interest that these musicians have in *combining* popular and folk styles and traditional jazz with free jazz, literature, theater, dance, etc...Improvisers are by contrast more interested in so called non-idiomatic combinations of visuals, abstract dance, etc...Where improvisers do play idiomatically, it is more contextualized (I play this music in this venue, this music with these people, I am undertaking this genre specific project, etc...). These breaks allow improvisers to avoid commitment and categorization, and maintain distances from jazz and free jazz and between free jazz and improvised music. As per my later discussion (Chapter 2.4) of the importance of a certain kind of categorization processes under capitalism, these breaks and categorizations may have also existed in the GDR, but because of the specific alignment of social and economic relations within the cultural field these categories were not as important or

problematic (or better, there was just a different set of problematics).

And so, we finally arrive at a pretty satisfactory explanation as to why today's *Jazzwerkstatt* is more like a bourgeois jazz club than an underground venue for improvised music: the East German free jazz scene always situated itself solidly within the jazz tradition and secondly, but very strongly within popular music *and* western art music. Unfortunately, within the capitalist west, there are no appropriate venues for jazz, aside perhaps from mainstream, bourgeois, upper-class clubs (or the odd concert hall Christmas show, or festival gig). And, as Zerbe explains, even if the club owners were interested in more experimental musics, there is already a long line of musicians waiting to play at bargain prices. Ulli Blobel, as a good businessman, could not really have situated his music differently, *unless* his discourse on the music depended on the avant-garde, anti-establishment premises of improvised music.

To illustrate the point further, Hannes Zerbe has directed a part amateur, part professional twenty-piece experimental, ruckus/party-music band for the past 12yrs – but there are no places for the band to regularly perform and little infrastructure to support such an anomaly. A big band cannot survive on gigs at jazz clubs, nor are there many jazz clubs interested in experimental music. Likewise, the band does not fit well into the 'improvised music' scene – the music is often not 'free' enough, the pay is completely unworkable with such a large ensemble, the 'party' atmosphere is missing from the more passive audience, and the popular music influences far too 'idiomatic'. Hannes cannot even keep any but a small core of musicians (from the GDR days mostly) around for a meaningful amount of time – the financial pressures and international flow of business

and people through Berlin precludes this²¹ Not to mention the fact that it is difficult to get apply for grants as the music does not fit the *ernste/unterhaltungsmusik* (serious/entertainment) categories.

In the final analysis, most of what remains of GDR jazz is the cultural capital of musicians and promoters, who can cash in on ostalgia (nostalgia for the east) and the same kind of ossifying (no pun intended) cultural money reserved for disaffected minorities. Both Hannes Zerbe and Ulli Blobel cash in on this cultural funding (Jazzwerkstatt is subsidized, as is Hannes' position as band director) and ostalgia (box sets extolling and publications reminiscing on the (good?) old days), but the reality is that the change in political and economic structures has spelled the eventual end of what was once a vibrant and 'living' artistic movement.

As you can see, it is very difficult to assign names to the music we are discussing: where does free jazz end? GDR jazz begin? GDR jazz end? And Improvised music take over? I think that the answers clearly relate to economic, racial and nationalist discourses and posturing, but the boundaries are blurred and musicians can even occupy a certain musical field without being aware of it. That said, I now wish to turn our focus to 'improvised music', or *Echtzeitmusik*, and I think our discussions of traditional and experimental jazz, as well as jazz in the GDR, permit us to understand better where improvised music is located – that is to say within the discourses of the avant-garde and Western concert music.

21 I am a good example of this, having played piano for the band for less than a year before being forced to leave Berlin for financial reasons. But an even better example is of an amateur saxophonist, who lost her job at the pharmaceutical company Schering when it was purchased by Bayer and had to seek work outside of Berlin, despite having lived there most of her life.

**Chapter Two: A Ritual and Spectacle of Contemporary Power? Realtime, the
Avant-Garde and Processes of Capitalism and Cultural Dominance**

Story #3: Meeting a Girl on the Train

One warm September day in Berlin, while on my way to a conference titled *Structures Node 2 – Blind Capture*, I noticed a pretty girl sitting across from me on the Subway. Now, I have to admit that I notice pretty girls in the Subway all the time, but this time she was also looking at me. We exchanged a few glances and smiled. She was petite, with dark hair and an unconventionally beautiful face. In short, the kind of girl that experience has led me to believe is more likely to return my gaze. I am recounting this not merely to gratuitously broadcast to the world a sexist, objectification and stereotyping of women, but rather to show how political, academic and artistic theory tends to manifest itself (and breakdown) in the real world.

As we were sitting across from each other, I casually took a book out of my bag to have something to read and thereby literally hide behind my theory from the increasing awkward glances that were flirting back and forth between us. The book I pulled out was Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* – one of the key texts underpinning this very paper.

The train pulled in to Rosenthaler Platz, and I got up to leave. I wasn't sure if I should walk over and talk to her, and she smiled and almost said something as I hesitatingly exited the train. Just before the doors closed, I jumped back on and inquired if she would like to talk to me.

“Yes!”, she said, and we quickly sat down next to one another. I said that it was interesting that she was looking at me so much, and that I thought she was quite

attractive. She replied in a breathy voice: “Du liest Lefebvre!” (You're reading Lefebvre!).

In astonishment, I replied:

“Du kennst Lefebvre?!” (You know Lefebvre?!). To which she replied:

“Also, nicht direkt. Aber ein Freund von mir in der Universitaet hat mir viel erzaehlt davon. Studierst du Geschichte?” (Not directly, but a friend at the university told me a lot about him. Do you study history?).

I replied that I did not study history, but maybe we had a lot in common since she was interested in Lefebvre. Apparently we had forgotten that we were staring at one another long before the fetish object (aka 'the book') came between us. She was on her way to an exhibit on Latin American art in Wedding, a very large working class district of Berlin that is infamously called “Red Wedding” because it was once a hotbed of radicals and opposition to both the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. Wedding more recently has attracted a large, relatively poor first generation immigrant population. In the last couple of years it has also started to attract more and more artists. It shares a border with Prenzlauerberg, a district that is traditionally working class and more recently served as the hot bed of artists and political dissidents in the GDR. Today it is often referred to as Prenzlberg by its new, hip, young, childbearing West German inhabitants. My conference location was in Prenzlauerberg.

We exited at Pank Strasse, a stop in Wedding, and exchanged contact information. I politely declined to attend the exhibition on Latin American art, I was very late for the conference and had already missed the keynote speaker. Upon arriving at the conference, I asked an acquaintance what I had missed. She showed me her notes, and I talked with

the presenter Geoff Stahl, a professor of Media Studies originally from Canada but now in Wellington, New Zealand. We 'networked', and I mentioned that I was interested in some of the theorists he had cited (Agamban, for example). I did admit that I had missed the lecture – I am not (usually) so underhanded! I also shared with him that I too was from Canada.

The entire event was conducted in English.

Bourdieu maintains that our interactions with the world – regardless of who we are or what we study - are primarily made up of such sorts of daily and 'casual' interactions as described above. Thus, our reality is primarily constructed out of partial knowledge, stereotypes, and locations, situations, and manipulations of chance and convenience. But the specificity of and possibilities for interaction are determined by our positioning within a field/distribution of real and symbolic power relations. These incidental interactions are all cases in which the flows of social and cultural capital are exchanged and/or experienced, continually and almost unthinkingly in very small quantities. (Hage) Just like the transfers of money when one purchases a cup of coffee and a newspaper on the way to work in the morning.

2.1: Social versus Cultural Capital

'Cultural capital' is not the same as 'social capital', although they operate in similar ways. Social capital is exchanged within and between peer groups: talking with a Berlin working class (Berlinerisch) dialect gives an individual both credibility and access among the same group as well as the potential for inter-cultural 'syncretic' practices with other groups that share similar social and economic positioning (i.e. Turkish German).

Social capital is primarily characterized by lateral movements. However, it also often allows artists, public intellectuals and political and business leaders to exploit shared narratives of class, race, religion, sexuality, etc. But this use of social capital is not defacto translated into bottom up access to the halls of power. Even in more progressive social democratic systems that place great emphasis on affirmative action, and multi-cultural initiatives, questions of inclusion and exclusion are based off of complex processes that when carried out to their logical ends reinforce systems of exclusion, and in cases of large scale success wind up impeding lateral movement and set up new and exploitive networks of *cultural* capital. I will touch on this later with regards to Jewish-American saxophonist John Zorn's relationship with Germany and the case of Palestinian singer Ranya Orfaly, who has lived in Berlin since early childhood.²²

Cultural capital differs from social capital on the other hand in that it is a *universal* system of exchange (like money), that can be translated into virtually whatever a situation requires. Its hegemonic presence allows it access to all kinds of places in all sorts of geographies – from community centers and churches, to abandoned factories, opera halls, and train stations. Cultural capital facilitates vertical movement, but it can also facilitate horizontal movement. Horizontal movement tends however to be structurally and economically dominated by those with greater cultural capital: In Berlin one can hear Turkish opera, Turkish rap, and Oriental jazz for example²³. Musicians that accumulate cultural capital are in essence accumulating a universal form of prestige. This accumulation of prestige is, for reasons I will go into momentarily, quite often opposed to

22 Already note the difference between how 'Jewish American saxophonist' and 'Palestinian singer' sounds: the former more like a specific and arbitrary descriptor, the latter like a far more naturalized part of the musician's essential character.

23 Opera, rap and jazz providing the base structure.

the accumulation of financial capital. But when an artist 'cashes' out, financial rewards are often staggering.

From an economic perspective, cultural capital arises in capitalist society out of the concept of the market and is the bourgeoisie response to both the strategically manufactured and systematically inherent contradictions of exchange value. Exchange value is the abstraction and liquidation of the world into a monetary system of universal valuation. Nonetheless, we tend to still believe that it is true that there are some things money can't buy ('...for everything else, there's Mastercard'). 'Kultur', culture in the Western European sense of the word, is an integral part of this 'everything' that Mastercard cannot buy. From this vantage point, Kultur could be said to mimic or reproduce the system of the market as the site of cultural abstraction and liquidation, where the cultural artifacts and practices arising from lived beliefs, ideology, and subjective perception are transferred into a universal system and hierarchy of exchange more commonly referred to as the 'world of art.'

Since the birth of capitalism and its necessary productive technologies, the artist has occupied a unique role within society as part laborer, part capitalist. As Jacques Attali points out, and David Grammit probes with specific regards to Germany, since the decline of the Church and Aristocracy in the mid 18th century, artists increasingly aligned themselves with the rising bourgeoisie/merchant class. Starting with Bach and crystallizing in the careers of Mozart and Beethoven, artists have generated much of their income in ways similar to capitalists: namely, owning the rights of reproduction (copyright). A composer is not paid for the work she puts into the composition (how would one assign an hourly wage to this activity in the first place?), but for a percentage

of sales from publishing, concerts, radio broadcasts, recordings, etc...

At the same time, artists have only within the past 50 years or so started to take actual ownership of the means of production and distribution (however, if one takes into account sites like Myspace and iTunes it could be argued that distribution and marketing platforms offer the illusion of artist control, when in fact corporate control is now increasing). Both this struggle to take control of the means of production (the venues and publishing houses, the record labels) and the romantic stereotype of the artist who dies in obscurity and poverty fuels a political identification with those (i.e. the proletariat) who are opposed to the very system that artists are structurally aligned with. Or, to use Bourdieu's classification once more, culture workers are the dominated dominating.

2.2: A Brief History of Cultural Capital

While it is difficult to generalize, the main difference in approach to the market between the avant-garde musical movements, including improvised music, and most other forms of music making is that the avant-garde tends to have a more strong allergic reaction to the marketplace. That leads the practitioners to attempt to fortify a strong border between their practices and those of more popular styles. Whereas popular styles such as rap and country music have less-commercialized sub-genres that are separated by only a very porous membrane from fully commodified, popular musical styles. The reason for this difference is I think inherited from a history that links avant-garde music much more closely (and somewhat retroactively in the case of jazz²⁴ and improvised music) with the discourse of Enlightenment reason and the rise of the universal system of

²⁴ Though, as Ronald Radano points out, African American musical practices trace their origins back to this historical juncture as well.

capitalism, nation, and representative democracy.

This may at first sound paradoxical: wouldn't one expect the most popular music to also be most closely linked to the forces of capitalism, nation and democratic representation? Furthermore, other musical practices which are rooted in social practices not originating from this historical juncture tend to be more visible in their subjective differences and thus are linked (by themselves and/or by others) to explicitly nominated and specific cultural narratives. But it is not directly through the market, or notions of popularity that we can show the close relationship of the avant-garde to the dominant structures and processes of modernity. Rather, it is by exploring more deeply the emergence of subtle and elusive systems of valuation and exchange that function as a sort of negative image of the marketplace. Bourdieu nominates this 'negative' currency as *Cultural Capital*. (29-74)

The beginnings of 'high art' show how western culture's own subjective belief systems became a universalist discourse through attempts to re-articulate class and social distinctions within Europe in response to shifts in social hierarchies brought on by the Enlightenment and concomitant displacement of the aristocracy and the church by the bourgeoisie. This process was at the same time mirrored by colonial expansion and the need to establish a universalist rationale of European racial superiority. (Pasler, 24-76)

The political and economic tools through which the bourgeoisie came to power carried certain risks. The very universalist logic of enlightenment did not just undermine the aristocracy, but threatened to erase all the class and cultural hierarchies in society. This was not at all in the interest of the newly emergent capitalist class which sought by all sorts of means to maintain its distinction and right to power (culminating in the

frightening logic of social Darwinism). One of the great contradictions of capitalism and democracy, to state it bluntly, is that it seems that people get rich and accrue power for the same reason as the aristocracy – inheritance. In 2005, the Wall Street Journal published an article on the 'stunning' lack of social mobility in the United States.

A substantial body of research finds that at least 45% of parents' advantage in income is passed along to their children, and perhaps as much as 60%. With the higher estimate, it's not only how much money your parents have that matters - even your great-great grandfather's wealth might give you a noticeable edge today. (Wessel)

For a system based on the universal ideals of the Enlightenment, denying the exploitive and unequal reality of capitalism is paramount to legitimizing the social order and preventing social turmoil. If you follow the logic commonly espoused by the capitalist right, one tends to arrive at nature as the answer for social stratifications (i.e. genetic dispositions), if you follow the logic of the capitalist left you arrive at the question of nurture (affirmative action, education, the arts). And if you follow the more current inter-disciplinary practices of today's academy, one arrives at some kind of third-way compromise ('it's both.!).

Art, and particularly music, was used, starting in Germany in the 18th century, to re-establish differences (or, to use Bourdieu's terminology, 'distinction') based on principles of cultivation known as Bildung. Bildung was a particular understanding of education that emphasized a study of the arts and literature alongside mathematics and science. An institutional structure gradually emerged that established a rational hierarchy of cultural practices. The knowledge of this natural hierarchy was achieved through different levels of education and proper upbringing. The bourgeoisie showed their superior understanding of culture through appreciation and consumption of art. But the artists also

catered to this demand for art by emphasizing values that were aligned with the enlightenment project. Concert halls, museums, conservatories, instruction in the arts – all became sites for the exchange of cultural capital and affirmation of privilege. However, if art was to be objective and universal, and at the same time elite and privileged, then it could neither be directly exposed to the market (which would link art simply to the production of inequality through capitalist exploitation and commodity exchange) or become too popular. Linking art to the forces of capitalist production would undermine the image of a universal and natural order that the bourgeoisie strove to maintain.

Of course, the Enlightenment and the bourgeoisie (in the traditional sense) are part of history – new belief systems have arisen and previously stigmatized segments of the population have gained access to power. Yet to this day, one can accuse artists that seek wealth of 'selling out'. This is because artistic practices in liberal democracies that come into close contact and/or closely interface with the beliefs and structures of power always need to negotiate the same problem: namely, to be of use to power they must hide their relations to power. Power is by definition not at a loss for material resources, but as long as we believe in democracy, an open market, nationality – or any such universal, naturalized conventional wisdom - those in power will always need forms of cultural legitimation that appear uncorrupted and un-perverted by power (hence the structural similarities between art and advertising as processes of obscuring, which I will discuss in short order). This is why art so often appears to stand for itself and against capital (or 'l'art pour 'l'art). This somewhat cynical posturing is not something that is always consciously sought out or acted upon by artists, but is rather manifested in the choices

and opportunities that are offered to, or actively cultivated by artists working within the cultural field.

An artistic practice that reflects and affirms society's deepest held beliefs about the natural order of the world must seem independent and untainted by the powers and interests of that same society in order to maintain the appearance of objectivity. This is one reason for the need among artists for developing pure, (anti)rational styles that constantly refute preceding styles and/or accuse the earlier styles of failure and selling out. As long as financial capital is a universal system of power, art will constantly need to re-establish its distance from power when the market re-positions itself, methods of production and reproduction change, and ultimately new social dynamics emerge. The anti-capitalist sounding manifestos of artists are too numerous and clichéd to list, but this is why it is so important to investigate improvisation – or any artistic movement - within a framework that is up to date and accurate in its understanding of the organizational principles of those in power, and more specifically of the current market. What David Grammit cautions against with regards to 19th Century German music is just as relevant for understanding art today:

Ultimately, the status of German musical culture rested on a precariously double-edged claim: serious (and most often German) music was held to be universally valid, even though, at the same time, maintaining its prestige demanded limiting access to it along the lines of existing social divisions, prominent among them class, gender, education and nationality. To ignore the significance of the claim to universality would not only obscure the ways in which the equally significant exclusions operated, but it would also distort the motivations of the advocates of serious music. To overlook these exclusions, however, as musicology all too frequently has, is to mistake the ideals of a culture for its admittedly less flattering but considerably more complex social dynamics. (21)

It is for these highly specific cultural and historical reasons that Christopher

Small opposes even the concept of art, arguing against the post Enlightenment emergence of art from ritual. Small actually states this only with regards to so called western concert music, but the basic premise of his argument is that art music is itself an elaborate ritual of affirming the established order. The classic academic world's reading of art arises from the Weberian idea that, through science and reason, over the last few hundred years humankind has become increasingly separated from the natural and spiritual world. Adorno, in *Aesthetic Theory* imagines art as a result, a response and a possible solution to this disenchantment²⁵. Shorn from the Church, the various parts that make up the ritual are at the same time emancipated into the various autonomous art forms of drama, music, poetry, painting, etc...Later theorists including Henri Lefebvre, Jacques Attali and Jacques Ranciere, have also followed this narrative, speculating that artistic practices can overcome and re-animate our relationship to the objectified, rational world.

What Christopher Small offers is an alternative to this rather eurocentric and art valorizing narrative. In essence, Small believes that ritual never disappeared from western cultural practices (perhaps in part because the foundations of the modern world were never 'rational' to begin with). For Small, the work of art in the European tradition is part of an elaborate ritual that tends to hide behind the fetish of the object, in the same way that work and social relations are hidden by the commodity. The ritual of sitting quietly in a room full of strangers in dim lighting is hidden by a symbolic abstraction and projection of use value that leads us to focus all our attention on the 'object sonore.' (Small, 1-18)

²⁵ Disenchantment could be literally translated as 'un-singing'.

The question for improvised music then becomes not just how it fits into universalist discourses and structures of cultural dominance or how and where it accumulates capital, but also what sort of ritual is going on behind the 'object sonore'. And as I have been hinting at all along, the 'object sonore' in improvised music is not a representational object at all in the classic sense, but rather a representational process which corresponds to a new economic system of use and exchange value. But it is still fundamentally the same relationship of fetish object and hidden constitutive forces. In fact, what better way to hide productive relations, history and ritual than being 'in the moment'?

2.3 Story #4: Emergent Structures of Control and the Ideology of Realtime Resistance

In February of 2001 the World Economic Forum (WEF) convened to meet in New York City. Together with my friend Lex, I organized and trained a small militia of protesters in 'direct action' tactics in preparation for a large demonstration planned for the WEF meeting. Direct action is a tactical strategy for protest that is an alternative to the two most standard forms of protest: the permitted march and civil disobedience. The distinction between civil disobedience and direct action is what is important here. Civil disobedience has a symbolic reference point that Direct Action proponents are opposed to – namely, the site of arrest, more specifically of non-violent, non-resisting arrest. The goal of civil disobedience *is* in getting arrested. Those engaging in civil disobedience know that they will be arrested. Typically, either by letting their bodies go limp so that the police have to struggle while they drag the protesters off, or by crossing a symbolic

police line, getting handcuffed and, in the classic image made for propaganda posters, walking shackled but with dignity intact into the awaiting paddy wagons. Civil disobedience is fully part of the complex of 'free speech' rights in modern democratic society.

This is a classic case of symbolic action (the arrest) representing resistance and opposition, the abstraction standing in for the real, the drama of theater (what the Situationists called 'spectacle') standing in for life. This is what in the case of art and ritual we would treat as an act of sublimation. Thus, direct action proponents consider the drama of civil disobedience in liberal democracies²⁶ as being primarily an escape valve for the effective management of resistance. The police and the state determine the rules of the game and the whole event is carefully staged so that no one gets too hurt or inconvenienced (resisting arrest is, not coincidentally, always a felony charge, whereas civil disobedience is a misdemeanor). In the end it is the order and rules of society, the rights and symbolic expressions of the members of society which are upheld.²⁷ We tend not to see this because our attention is aesthetically focused on the drama and not the stage itself.

Direct action proponents thus seek avoiding arrest and containment by any means necessary, including the right to violent self defense. In the industrialized world, violent self defense is seldom realized because the ultimate risks are perceived as being too great for such actions by the individual. This contradiction of the direct actionist's critique of civil disobedience is not only manifested in violence, but more generally in

26 How civil disobedience and non-violence function within more overtly repressive systems of governance is a different topic of discussion.

27 This is what Lefebvre refers to as abstract space: rules and rights are coded into space and our actions occur within this structured space as opposed to through it. Hence the stage/drama example.

risk taking activity and suggests an alignment between many of the activists and those in power, similar to artists who identify with the downtrodden but are in reality are also aligned with power.

To continue my story, we were a group of activists whose goal was to literally stop the meeting of the World Economic Forum: to avoid confrontation with the police, escape them when possible, stand a fighting chance in the event of direct conflict and in the end focus on creating effective disturbances. To this end, we purchased \$1,500 worth of bullet proof plastic and molded it into twenty five of our own riot shields, decked ourselves out with shoulder pads, shin guards and helmets, ran drills and protest simulations on a field, and rented a set of \$2,000 walkie talkies.

The day before the protest. ABC Nightline showed up to film our activities (yes, we agreed to allow them to film a feature)²⁸. Because this was to be a protest in New York City immediately following the events of Sept. 11th we thought having the media present might send a strong statement to both other protesters and the American public that in our mind little had changed as far as the goals and tactics of the anti-globalization movement were concerned – there was no need for college kids to head for cover as a result of the what liberals decried as draconian anti-terror laws being put into place by the right wing. There was an undeniable thrill and intensity to the moment, because we believed that we were prepared for direct action in ways few groups in the U.S. had shown since the (in)famous battle of Seattle in '99.

That night was a meeting for protester organizers and out of town affinity groups. Affinity groups are groups of people that have agreed to take care of each other and abide

28 For more, see '*Protester Non Grata*' in the Village Voice:
www.villagevoice.com/2002-02-12/news/protester-non-grata

by their own rules of engagement. A typical affinity group might consist of five people, four of which were agreed to commit either direct action or civil disobedience and a fourth to serve as a medic and legal point person in case of arrest. We sat in a large circle of a few hundred people and delegates from the affinity groups discussed plans for the protest the next day. I was a bit taken aback when it became clear that little planning had gone into the nature of tomorrow's events, aside from the permitted march itself. It was explained to us that it was better to keep planning to a minimum for fear of police monitoring. And we were further informed that the organizers were certain that there were undercover officers sitting in the circle with us at that moment.

If we were being watched, then how could we plan ahead? If we could not plan ahead, how would we be able to organize the partially differentiated mass of protesters and affinity groups into effective civil disobedience and direct action? Here 'Raven', an anarchist and seasoned protester offered up her advise: we need to plan and organize in the moment (aka realtime). We will convene a spontaneous meeting at the end of the march and even if that doesn't work out, we need to have faith in the organic self-organizing capacities of a crowd. And she cited past experienced at protests in support of her position, which resonated with my experiences taking part in snake marches during protests against the the Republican National Convention the previous year.

Snake marches are part of the tactical repertoire of the militant and anarchist black bloc affinity groups and involve a spontaneous breaking away from the main group of protesters. A small group wearing black bandannas spots a break in police lines and pushes through. And all the other black bloc participants immediately follow suite. Suddenly, hundreds of protesters are running through the streets and making spontaneous

decisions – generally people who know the city well gravitate towards the front of the line and help in determining the direction of the march. It is fast and unpredictable and heavily armored riot police are not able to respond quick enough or communicate fluidly enough through their authoritative chain of command. This is the type of scenario that David Borgo might metaphorically envision improvised music expertly negotiating.

Although I had very strong misgivings, I did not want to appear 'authoritarian', despite our group's high level of preparedness. Instead, I spent the night at my skinny, vegan, nihilist, goth-punk, anarcho-individualist friend's house annoyed with the protest organizers and with little idea of what the morning would hold. The next morning we gathered at Columbus Circle, the site of the permitted march and distributed our shields. We had extra shields, which we gave to some gleeful anarchists, who quickly and without prompting formed a line of defense (against what?). Tens of thousands of people were in the process of showing up. Our walkie-talkies picked up the police communication frequency and we heard them give the order to preemptively arrest our group. Some of us escaped with the advance warning, but many of the anarchist shield militia were apprehended.

'Well, this is off to a good start,' I thought.

The peaceful protest went as planned, but at the end of the march – when we were somehow supposed to figure out our next actions – the police showed us that they had a marvelous trick up their sleeves. They boxed us in, in typical police fashion. But in atypical police fashion, whenever the boxed in crowd would get a bit too antsy, the police would step aside and let a small number of individuals leave. The police used their own judgment to react in realtime to the situation on the ground, effectively diffusing tension.

There was little we could do, since by osmosis protesters were gradually released into the flow of midtown pedestrians, never to return. Within an hour a critical mass of several thousand militant protesters was reduced to a few dozen.

The lesson learned from the protest: the anarchists committed to the spontaneous organization of resistance formed a 'police style' line as soon as they had their shield-prop. And the police reacted in the way that the protesters were supposed to – in flexible realtime. The only tactical success we had was when our walkie talkies picked up the police communication, allowing some of us to preempt a preemptive attack. And all the hard work we had put into organizing was tossed away by a preference for spontaneous action.

2.4 Use Value and Exchange Value under Capitalism

Under capitalism, exchange value retroactively gives rise to *use value* and universalist discourses of meaning and authenticity. Commodities are the material abstractions of labor that is then reconstituted into materials of life. What allows this labor to easily be obscured since the industrial revolution are technologies and social structures (disciplines) of *reproduction* -which either erases or disguises the signs of the laborer(s). A mold can have a unique blemish or creative details, but since the hundreds of reproductions all bare the same markings irrespective of the labor invested in the reproduction, the productive meaning of those very markings is lost. In this sense, the idea of the original tends to manifest itself as a forensic process that only has meaning in contradistinction to a reproduction.

This process is generally understood by critical theorists to influence our

perception of artworks. But to illustrate more generally how this relationship of reproduction and the original works I like to think about even normal commodities – products that would not normally come in for extensive commodification critiques by traditional Marxism. Take for example the different grades of olive oil. I spent some time living on a Greek Island, where I harvested olives and sent them to the press. The oil that came back was amazing, but I asked my friend if we had the second and third pressing to use for cooking oil. He replied that the first two pressings are mixed and there was no third pressing – in local practices there was no such thing as extra virgin (of course, the locals are aware of the different products, but it's not a traditionally important distinction).

Extra virgin olive oil is, as the name indicates, more pure – it is closer to the original olive than subsequent pressings, and thus arises our discourse upon it. Reproduction takes us farther away from the ideal state of the olive. Each pressing takes us farther away from the original source. Thus the categories, uses, prices, and aura of taste of various olive oils are retroactively constructed in relation to a fixed original by the forces of reproduction. According to the USDA, olive oil is graded as follows:

U.S. Grade A ...possesses a free fatty acid content of not more than 1.4%;
is free from defects...

U.S. Grade B...possesses a free fatty acid content of not more than 2.5%;
is reasonably free from defects...

U.S. Grade C...possesses a free fatty acid content of not more than 3.0% ;
is fairly free from defects...

U.S. Grade D or U.S. Substandard...possesses a free fatty acid content
greater than 3.0% and fails to meet the requirements of U.S. Grade C.

(United States Department of Agriculture, emphasis added)

Use value becomes *absolute* and *fixed* in relation to the various abstractions of

capitalist production. This is not, of course, to say that extra virgin olive oil does not taste different from subsequent pressings, but it is to say that these various kinds of distinctions, and ways of talking about olives are not necessarily either the same or even of fundamental interest or fixed importance when seen in relation to pre-modern productive practices. As the olive shows, we can't forget that non-capitalist society utilized reproductive methods and had absolute values as well. The olive tree was once considered so important to the economy in Greece that it was a severely punishable offense to cut a tree down.

The way in which the olive is perceived within contemporary society is profoundly effected by the universal system of capitalist exchange and monetary valuation to which by definition all commodities are subject to. We typically think of the world made up of discrete parts that add up to larger wholes. But in fact the opposite happens as well. As Walter Benjamin first observed, the superstructure (how we think about the world) fundamentally impacts and even can precede the base (how we produce the world). This creates a feedback loop in which one could then subsequently say that the base *re*-constitutes the superstructure.

What I like particularly in the 'olive' example is that we are not discussing a literal reproduction – the perfect olive oil is *not* a bottle full of olives – it is rather best imagined as a curve that infinitely approaches, without ever touching, the essence of 'oliveness'. To my mind, this essential 'oliveness' is always hinting at the metaphysical layers of feeling inherent in modern conceptions of origin.

To get back to the axiom of Mastercard: we all have a sense that the most expensive product is not always best and that its use value goes deeper than consumption

- or as Mastercard continually reminds us in its add campaigns – that we can't 'buy' happiness. There is a (pre)history to the olive as a commodity – "the olive, in Jewish symbolism, stood for peace and well-being, for happiness and the joy of living, and for wisdom. It was an image of fertility..." (Goor, 224).

What is absolute has a historically "relative aspect." (Lefebvre, 233) Exchange value does not correspond to our historically and culturally informed valuations of life, and advertisement intervenes at this level to add value and meaning (i.e. touting the ancient spiritual and healing benefits of the olive). As Raymond Williams observes:

The fundamental choice that emerges, in the problems set to us by modern industrial production, is between man as consumer and man as user. The system of organized magic which is modern advertising is primarily important as a functional obscuring of this choice. (186).

On the other hand, since use value is so heavily informed by exchange value, than is it any wonder that use value also tends to manifest itself in lifeless, positivist reductionism also in need of reconstitution? It is into this gap and crises of meaning that Western art intervenes as a value additive force akin to advertisement.

The structural similarity between much advertising and much modern art is not simply copying by the advertisers. It is the result of comparable responses to the contemporary human condition. (Williams, 190).

The link between advertisement and art is an important and practical connection in terms of improvisation and Berlin (the city's slogan is *poor, but sexy*) that should become more clear in later, more practical/ethnographic discussion, but from a theoretical perspective it seems that advertisement tends to be tasked with enriching the sites of exchange, while art is tasked with enriching the sites of use. At its most fundamental, art's purpose in capitalism could be said to enrich our experience of time and space – the most absolute of all values, whereas advertisement enriches our

experience of the abstraction – symbols and commodities.

It is this potential for enriching use value that Jacques Ranciere takes up in his influential essay *The Politics of Aesthetics*. For Ranciere bourgeois art was problematic because the productive forces behind the work remained hidden by the finished product in the same way that the commodity hid its productive ontology. But even as far back as romanticism, Ranciere sees a force within western art that attempts to show the process of becoming:

Schiller's 'aesthetic' state, by suspending the opposition between active understanding and passive sensibility, aims at breaking down – with an idea of art – an idea of society based on the opposition between those who think and decide and those who are doomed to material tasks. In the nineteenth century, this *suspension* of work's negative value became the assertion of its positive value as the very form of the shared effectivity of thought and community. This mutation occurred via the transformation of the suspension inherent in the 'aesthetic state' into the positive assertion of the aesthetic *will*. Romanticism declared that the becoming-sensible of all thought and the becoming-thought of all sensible materiality was the very goal of the activity of thought in general. In this way, art once again became a symbol of work. It anticipates the end – the elimination of oppositions – that work is not yet in a position to attain by and for itself. However, it does this insofar as it is a *production*, the identification of a process of material execution with a community's self-presentation of its meaning. Production asserts itself as the principle behind a new distribution of the sensible insofar as it unites, in one and the same concept, terms that are traditionally opposed: the activity of manufacturing and visibility. Manufacturing meant inhabiting the private and lowly space-time of labor for sustenance. Producing unites the act of manufacturing with the act of bringing to light, the act of defining a new relationship between *making* and *seeing*. (44)

It's easy to see where Ranciere is going with this. Modern and 'post-modern' art is littered with textbook examples of works that show sites of production and forms signifying function. Artists find unconventional uses for conventional objects like toilets, spoons or vinegar, voyeuristically reveal their work's processes of becoming, and collapse disciplines democratically into one another. Artists seem to be re-proletariatizing

the arts. But before we get too excited by the prospect of our 'art being our activism', we need to look a bit further back into Ranciere's narrative.

As I mentioned earlier, Ranciere is typical of Western thinkers in that he locates a historical juncture at which ritual practices become bourgeois artistic practices, and then a second juncture where radical, avant-garde art practices are seen as becoming partially (increasingly?) effective attempts to overcome and heal the divisions of the modern world. It is clever of course to observe that in contrast to western art a rain dance, a baptism, or pagan sacrifice are all elaborate rituals where the actions of the performers are perceived to be directly connected with productive outcomes. But it's also not so hard to play Christopher Small's game, and point to the ritualistic elements in modern art.

In fact, it's also easy to make the argument that the conventional objects and spaces of artists are iPhones, trendy cafes, and Google Earth, not the boiler rooms in abandoned industrial parks where nostalgic works of 'rusted bicycle spokes' are inevitably displayed. And that the made 'visible' productive processes of realtime creation, interactive interfaces, and functionally transparent/readable forms are more a spectacle, a *re*-presentation, of a new, more penetrating and reactive distribution of power (not a new 'distribution of the sensible') – a spectacle of sublimation little different than watching a camera zoom in and out following cables and wires in a high-tech action movie. Believing in Ranciere's theory is no different than believing in the efficacy of ancient rituals: there is of course an effect from ritual, but the effect has more to do with affirming cultural beliefs, socializing participants and sublimating potentially dangerous thoughts than causing it to rain.

Ranciere's beliefs are predicated upon the great Achilles heel of Marxism: the

teleological and utopian belief that society is going through evolutionary (in the very unscientific 'getting better' sense of the word) stages of organization, and that it is possible to identify the new, emergent socialist human within the shell of the old, capitalist system – just as one could (with 20/20 hindsight) observe the emergence of the bourgeoisie from within the world of aristocracy. In order to do this, Ranciere is partly drawing upon a particular reading of Benjamin's *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production*. One of Benjamin's ideas is that technological advances in reproduction have erased the aura of the original artwork and rendered increasingly obsolete the discourse on authenticity, and the division that this split implies. Is it possible that by erasing the original object, we have begun the process of freeing ourselves from the commodity categories of use and exchange value? By creating a new work from the composite mechanical reproductions of film, are the productive forces of society freeing themselves from the restrictive meanings and social relations inherent to the 'original-to-reproduction', use value-to-exchange value assembly line of life?

...the majority of city dwellers, throughout the workday in offices and factories, have to relinquish their humanity in the face of an apparatus. In the evening these same masses fill the cinemas, to witness the film actor taking revenge on their behalf not only by asserting his humanity...against the apparatus, but by placing that apparatus in the service of his triumph. (Benjamin, 31)

Benjamin goes on to warn (to my ears, cryptically) against the cult of personality, but Ranciere is not alone in focusing on the liberatory possibility inherent to modern technological and artistic practices. Both David Borgo and Jacques Attali arrive at these conclusions by similar combinatorial thinking, yet from very different starting points as well. Attali called the emergent utopian social order 'composition' in 1985, while Borgo twenty years later uses the sped up term. 'improvisation.'

I think the place has finally come to more specifically deal with contemporary sites of production and reproduction, and to insert realtime music making, as well as by proxy most of today's arts subculture, into the capitalist machine. To do this I will retrace Walter Benjamin's ideas about reproduction, and try to show that our new economy still rests on the same, but sped up and increasingly fractured ideas of use and exchange value, original and reproduction, absolute and abstraction.

2.5 The Sites of Authenticity in the Production of Realtime

Abstraction is the organizing principle of modern thought. In *The Production of Space* Lefebvre shows that the most fundamental form of abstraction is space – space abstracted into geometric patterns and containers and given meaning (re-constituted) by its contents. Lefebvre then shows how this process of abstraction can be seen at every level of capitalist existence – from money as the abstracted materials for life, to the interrelated rise of representative democracy (the vote as abstraction of power and re-constituted in legislation and law), the academic disciplines (data as abstraction of nature and reconstituted into knowledge²⁹), the citizen (as abstraction of geography and history reconstituted by the state), and right down to subcategories which recapitulate the logics of these larger systems (the abstracted space of the brain which transforms the perceived world into thoughts, identities, actions, etc.). When we talk of improvised music we are in fact talking about an abstraction of the concept of improvisation ripped out of jazz (and with little respect for other improvising traditions), and more generally speaking an

29 “By her own admission, Susan Atkins held the *eight-months*-pregnant Tate down as she pleaded for mercy, stabbing the 26-year-old actress 16 times.” (Emphasis added) (*Polanski arrested in connection with 1970s sex charge*, cnn.com, September 27th, 2009). Just a typical excerpt from the media, showing how *facts frame the issues*. (I took a break to check the news after writing that last paragraph....).

abstraction of time itself.

Alienation is a structure of feeling that arises from the gap between absolute and abstract, or use and exchange. Alienation is implicated in attempts to suture, recombine and reconstitute the abstracted part (the commodity) into the whole, into the lived experience of the world. This part-to-whole relationship is from whence many of the disciplines, dichotomies and dialectics arise that are so characteristic of the West's philosophical and everyday beliefs and methodologies. Contemporary art forms, especially improvisation, appear, as Jacques Ranciere shows, to bypass these (false) dichotomies.

We now recognize this absolute distinction between authentic original and reproduction as a form of false consciousness. What is being articulated here is essentially the relationship between use value and exchange value under capitalism as per our earlier discussion of the olive. Reproduction was shown by Walter Benjamin to retroactively create the category of 'original artwork,' and thus the desire to get as close as possible to the original (hence museums). But both these sorts of artworks (paintings, sculptures, scores etc...) and their market (sites of exchange) belong to older forms of capitalism. In contrast to claims that modern art is now bypassing use and exchange value, I believe that consumers engage more and more literally in transactions of time – objects original or otherwise are of little interest and in the arts this manifests itself as a spectacle of production/becoming. The world is no less capitalist than before. But it is different (or, to quote Amiri Baraka on African American musical practices, it is “the changing same”).

That time is what is consumed is not at all a new concept to a Marxist – indeed

the first, most basic step towards critically understanding capitalism is the realization that commodities are constituted of the productive time that the laborer has exchanged with the capitalist. But reproduction of commodity-objects has ceased to be the source of profit in many areas of the economy – particularly in the case of music (the collapse of Tower Records being a particularly emblematic moment). Realtime offers perhaps the most prescient encounter yet with the authentic musical work and collapses the site of consumption into the site of production, thereby offering up the ultimate spectacle of *natural* harmony - the overcoming of alienation of object from production. *In a dystopic elision of the Marxist theory that the world of commodities hides its productive ontology, process itself now hides productive becoming. Process hides process³⁰. The site of consumption is conjoined in realtime with a spectacle of becoming (production).*

How this search for authenticity has unfolded can be traced back to our evolving relationship with the shared foundational illusions of artistic, scientific, democratic and capitalist processes: the emergence of something from nothing. Money by alchemical magic generates more money (to say nothing of the proverbial 'invisible hand of the market!'), the universe emerges from the void of space, the will of the people emerges out of electoral sublimation, and artists are of course 'inspired' and possessive of some sort of inner genius. In art, the closer we can get to this point of emergence, be it in attending a live concert or owning the original LP - the closer we feel we are to the site of conception and hence the more real and authentic the work seems. Realtime music begins its ritual with the spectacle of a silent, primal void between improvisers and audience – a re-enactment of the big bang, if you will:

³⁰ I like to think here about free range chickens, organic milk, Whole Foods inc., etc.

...on hearing the initial sound in a free improvisation, neither the performer nor the audience know exactly what direction the music will take...The fact that both performer and audience perspectives begin at the same point offers, according to Tom Nunn 'a level of excitement, involvement and challenge to audience listeners that is unique, at least in degree, to free improvisation.'" (quoted in Borgo, 26)

The charge of magic, of something out of nothing, implies that there is something underhanded going on here, there's a sleight of hand that we need to catch in the act! The sleight of hand is of course nothing more than the obfuscation of productive forces – from third world maquiladoras, to the military industrial complex, to trendy cafes, and the hours logged by musicians rehearsing in practice rooms and audience members listening over and over to recordings by their favorite musicians. But Western culture's obsession with uncovering the true and inherent meanings of the original arises from a manipulated and misdirected implicit awareness that there is no such thing as magic – hence the intensity of this dynamic could only be possible in a society that implicitly believes in reason above all else – that somewhere there *must* be illusion and conspiracy and that somehow this is a supremely important question.

In the age of mechanical production, our relationship to the original was complicated in two ways. First, technologies were able to reveal artworks in greater and more resplendent detail than the original (in the case of music we can turn up the volume, put the song on repeat, put on headphones in complete privacy, etc.). Thus, the original work holds less and less of its aura of authenticity because it can be experienced more intimately through the reproduction. Second, these same technologies produce their own forms of art: motion pictures and studio recordings. A recording can be spliced together from dozens of takes and subject to intensive post-processing, rendering the concept of an original *work* absolutely absurd.

But as Benjamin also hints at, technology did not in the end render the site of authenticity obsolete. Instead, the site of authenticity was dispersed and transfigured as the cult of personality. The discourse of authenticity now centered on the pop and movie star.

One of the very first films ever made, *Démolition d'un Mur* (1896), was typically shown by the producers, the Lumière brothers, in reverse. The film in its original sequence depicted a boss giving orders to workers, who then push down and smash a brick wall to pieces. Viewers reacted to the reversed film in utter amazement. The passage of time was no longer necessarily uni-directional and time ceased to being a simulacrum of death! In fact, viewers at the turn of the 20th century reacted in all sorts of ways that would seem astonishing to us – pushing and poking the screen in wonderment, dodging out of the way in terror of images that appeared to be about to run off the screen, and so on. Most films depicted simple daily and workplace scenes instead of foregrounding people or narrative. It did not, however, take very long for the perceptual novelties of the film to recede and this McLuhanesque fascination with the medium itself gave way to the ubiquitous forms of cinematic storytelling we are used to today. But beneath this surface, cinema still is a spectacle of speed and control of time (and by proxy, space). This can be viewed as a strategic split, where attention is focused upon the symbolic conventional cultural tropes or superstructure separate from the symbolic³¹ base structure which is where filmmakers and editors quite consciously produce a spectacle of time and movement.

That all artistic mediums contemporary with one another and tied to capital and

31 I use preface with the words symbolic because the actual labor and system of production differs from what the artwork represents.

Western cultural traditions tend to produce similar forms of aesthetic knowledge is seen today in interactive installation art, live video feeds, realtime and interactive computer programs, which valorize speed, reactivity and the everyday³². We see this with academic disciplines as well, where inter-disciplinary projects don't necessarily question conventional wisdom or generate new knowledge, but tend to act merely as spectacles of difference, while at the same time offering up ideologically powerful, positivist affirmations of the status quo. This all seems to suggest that Ranciere's theory of the combinatorial, equalizing and democratic tendencies of contemporary art could also be indicative of sameness, of a hegemonic system of thought.

To get back to our discussion of film, Virilio points out that it becomes a spectacle of movement, action...above all else: speed. The camera is capable of being everywhere and seeing everything at once. Instead of death being correlated simply with the passage of time, death is now represented by slowness. This is not just a metaphor. Ever since the speeding bullet, which is much too fast and penetrating for the human to avoid, warfare has invested increasingly in technologies of speed (and the related subcategory of *obfuscation* – knowing where something is or is not) up until our present moment of pre-emptive warfare – war quite literally before there is war. The quintessential movie on this topic is *Speed* (1994) where a bus cannot go slower than 50mph or a bomb will explode, killing all those on board. Movies become a ritual affirming humanity's belief in the power of speed.

If we accept the Marxist axiom that society reproduces in its social structures its very methods and means of production, what sorts of implications does film have for the

³² I mean everyday in a dystopic sense of lifestyle and identity politics. Everyday as a site in which the radical practices advocated by the Situationists and French intellectuals from the 60's have become penetrated by the instruments of power and control.

social structuring of society? This is of course much too broad a topic to delve into here, but what has specific relevance to our discussions of aura, authenticity, and personality is the star system that emerges.

As Benjamin has demonstrated, it is not the work of art that is captured and dissected in the production of a movie (since there is no original), but the film star herself who is cut into thousands of fragments and then reassembled, copied and viewed by millions simultaneously across the globe. This new site of authenticity does not seem like such a far fetched theory if we remember from our olive discussion that it was never the actual olive, but the essence of oliveness, that was implicated in the discourses of authenticity and use value. Benjamin, as I mentioned before, alludes to the emergence of the cult of personality himself, but does not position it as central to his discourse on aura.

(33)

If there is some authentic truth behind the smoke and mirrors of the film, it must reside in the actor herself, and so too their real lives are dissected, surveyed and reassembled in various formats for the public in search of authenticity. The same is of course true of the pop star. The discourse on authenticity and aura remains as relevant to this stage of production as to earlier stages. The major changes brought about by this stage of technological reproduction did not change the foundations of commodity fetishism, alienation from production and a longing for return to authenticity. Instead, the major changes were simply increased technological mastery of space and time: degrees of speed, division and dynamic intensity.

In the 1930s a new form of authenticity in acting, called *method acting*, was developed by Lee Strassberg. Made famous by Marlon Brando in the late 40s and 50s,

method acting marked a shift in how artists thought about representation. At its most intense, actors live their roles even when not on stage or in front of the camera – in between sets, over dinner, etc...But in a most basic sense, actors sought to embody and feel the emotions of the characters they were representing. Instead of simply having a repertoire of facial expressions, vocals sounds, and gestures, actors had a repertoire of memories and feeling, and even physical appearance. We hardly even think twice when a movie star goes on TV to tout her latest movie, explaining how she worked out for three months with a martial arts instructor, lived in Fiji, and put on an extra 20 pounds of muscle just as a matter of character development.

In a similar way to actors roleplaying, during the age of mechanical reproduction, civil rights movements and identity politics rose to prominence as effective means to a political end. But identity politics quickly became a slippery slope. As Sandy Stone writes:

Retaining the same name throughout life is part of an evolving strategy of producing particular kinds of subjects. In order to stabilize a name in such a way that it becomes a permanent descriptor, its function must either be split off from the self, or else the self must acquire a species of obduracy and permanence to match that of the name. In this manner a permanent name facilitates control; enhances interchangeability....if you can't have a *symbolic* identity (name) that coincides with your actual state at the time, then your institutionally maintained or *fiduciary* identity speaks you; you become the generic identity that the institutional descriptors allow... (46-7)

The problem with categorical identities is that they are all reproductions of essentialist 'Uridentities' - blueprints that have even less of a real existence than our essential oneness. Even the most basic identity, '*the individual*', is a blueprint for the reproduction of individuality (itself a fiduciary category), that can then be further reduced to multiple personalities. Just like everything else in the market, identity has a a

fictitious yet originary mold connected to a complex of essentialist use values and an exchange value tied to the reproduction of the identity.

Of course, if the question is name yourself, or be named by society, then it's pretty easy to see why naming oneself is often the better solution. But I call this a slippery slope, because it is only a temporary solution. As soon as society's conceptual capacities latch on, then the productive technologies of capitalism catch up, and the new identity becomes generic and acquires an exchange value.

In this sense, strategies of resistance through identity politics have become a double edged sword: one can continue to divide, split and fracture oneself – to the smallest possible point where a *personality* is an aspect of an identity, and a subject may then employ multiple-personalities as a strategy of empowerment³³. But the evidence seems to indicate that there is no reason anymore to believe that the forces of power – industry and financial market, representative democracy, or the sciences - are somehow unable to incorporate or produce these differences. In fact, in the new economy one could almost say that it is difference – or pure change – that is produced. Just think of people constantly tweaking their different profiles and updating their status on youtube, facebook, myspace, twitter. The illusion of authenticity is projected back upon the commodified person herself. In this sense, all of us in the industrialized world are movie stars (but that fact is to some extent hidden from us by the seemingly paradoxical ubiquity of this proletarian sized mass of 'stars'³⁴).

Just think of the recent episode of realtime suspense when former reality TV show

33 Or a pathologically transient state of structurally facilitated dishonesty and (dis)placement.

34 And by extension, all of us that have access to these means of representation are to highly varying degrees part of the dominating dominated class that musicians – and actors, and sports athletes – belong to.

participant Richard Heene pretended that his son was trapped in a homemade giant helium balloon thousands of feet above the ground, as the nation watched live in suspense and the forces of speed mobilized to save the day. Richard Heene was correct in his understanding of the zeitgeist – of how to manipulate the media and generate a massive spectacle and thereby generate interest for a reality TV show featuring his family that he was pitching to the major networks. (Sadly) he was exposed in the end. As CNN observed in an article titled in typically pseudo-scientific terms:

How the 'fame motive' make you want to be a star

As a large silver balloon floated its way over Colorado, millions of Americans spent hours glued to their televisions wondering if 6-year-old Falcon Heene, assumed to be inside the contraption, was alive. That night the boy, who had actually been hiding in his family's house, was asked on CNN's "Larry King Live" why he'd stayed hidden. "You guys said we did it for the show," the boy told his father, Richard Heene. In the era of reality TV, YouTube, and social media "friends" and followers," it seems that everyone wants to be a star... (Landau)

What we are approaching here is a socio-economic production of the moment of decision, the moment of action - the moment of coming into being, a military like intervention, invasion and domination and a cultural spectacle of Viktor Frankl's proverbial 'space between stimulus and response.' Something can only be proven authentic if there is a realtime accounting of it (like those slide shows with unintelligible satellite images depicting terrorist training camps or weapons of mass destruction facilities that the U.S. army constantly releases to the media). With regards realtime music, if we follow this dystopian trajectory to the extreme, and abstract improvisation to its scientific absolute – this is what realtime celebrates: the gap between stimulus and response. Realtime then is not actually realtime, but the closest approach to it (or better, realtime is our society's most convincing spectacle of the event). Think of Twitter as a

particularly slow approximation of this, Facebook as a historical document of realtime³⁵, and reality TV as a particularly striking representation.³⁶

When improvisers form groups, they often do so in a modular fashion at the smallest possible units of division. Improvisers will build groups around individual *personalities* (as opposed to the more clumsy identities) and sympathetic (or contrasting) personalities that have very little to do with musical sounds, with the idea that these interacting personalities will form a larger and unique musical whole. This process could not predominate³⁷ without the deeply ingrained belief among improvisers that their music making approach taps more deeply into the *individual's* psyches, like in method acting where the performer reaches deeply inwards and conjures up realtime feelings based on an embodied sense of experience.

There may, in fact, be a cruel contradiction in our discovery of the improvised character: as we perform ourselves into a sense of authenticity – of authoring ourselves in our own voices – our performance erases the traces of our individuality within the ensemble of humanity. (Soules, 294).

The informal site of myspace is now where artists flexibly present themselves to the public. The astute browser can easily sort through and quantify the artist's friends, see when the profile was last updated, and read the various 'friendly' posts on the artist's message board and blog. And the astute artist can manipulate those variables as well. In fact, I compiled almost all of my data on improvisers in Berlin from their myspace accounts, often playing a cat and mouse game with artists who did not list their legal

35 I'm reminded here of recent stories about college 'party' photos that can become a (damaging) part of a person's public records.

36 It is relevant here to note that Twitter, the fastest of the three main social networking platforms (Myspace and Facebook being the other two) is used by a much more affluent cross section of society.

37 Based on a large sampling over the years from *echtzeitmusik.de* there is ample evidence to suggest that long term collaborations (aka 'bands') are in the extreme minority. It is common practice instead to see a concert listed without a group name (or only a temporary name), while in parenthesis the instrument(s) and country or city of origin is placed next to each musician.

names on the sites but usually left enough coincidental details that I could sniff out their other identities with...Google.

Now contrast this approach of 'acting' human, with another extreme that “Artaud applauded in his essay on the Balinese shadow-puppet theater, where everything is 'in effect calculated with an adorable and mathematical precision. Nothing in it is left to chance or personal initiative. It is a superior form of dance in which every dancer aims first and foremost to be a dancer.’” (Antonin Artaud, quoted in Carter, 48) This is a perspective that is best viewed as an Orientalist perspective which reveals more about the observer than the observed: what is it about reality and representations of reality that concerns and haunts western artists and philosophers so much?

This is a good point to take a step backwards and look at jazz discourse and it's relationship with Western capitalist ideology. To quote Yusef Lateef: “The sound of the improvisation seems to tell us what kind of person is improvising. We feel that we can hear character or personality in the way the musician improvises.” (Lewis, quoting Yusef Lateef, 241)

When Yusef makes his (well known) statement about hearing Jazz performers' personality in their playing, we are encountering a culturally syncretic juncture in the music. What Yusef is advocating is not some kind of musico-personality cult, where through improvisation the (real) character of the performer is best revealed or represented. It is important to see these comments in a historical and racial sense: He is not discussing an isolated kind of personality, he is discussing a personality in relation to shared history and tradition: he is implying that the jazz musician has a tradition, and that tradition and in particular the African American part of that tradition, is bound together to

larger historical and cultural codes marked by oppression, appropriation³⁸ and resistance. The tradition and history can be articulated in as many diverse ways as there are individual musicians who share and have a stake in this story: this is what Henry Lewis Gates means with the subversively inflected term 'signifyin'.' Signifyin' is a third order of meaning, one that recognizes and engages the symbolic realm, not the absolute or 'real', as its primary substratum.

This flexible and individually inflected play of signifiers easily slips over into the changed cultural field of improvised music, where it fits in well with romantic, postmodern and generally fetishistic notions of individualist authenticity and the production of difference. It loses its precise original meaning, and becomes some sort of bland valorization of absolute personal expression and difference: 'he really has a strong personality, doesn't he?' 'What a weirdo he is, you can really hear that in the music'....or conversely – 'I wouldn't have expected such a performance from someone who looks like that...'

And so we have reached the point of fragmentation and penetration that I mentioned in the opening section. Realtime improvisation is part ritual and celebration of people ground down by increasingly more accurate and penetrating reproduction apparatus into historico-culturally devoid, invented³⁹ or arbitrary identities and personalities that are launched into the orbit of representation and exchange by means of (near) realtime communication. Representation has become in many cases instantaneous and indiscernible from the simplest, most direct acts of living.

38 Appropriation is here meant more in reference to African American appropriations of others, as opposed to the more commonly discussed inverse dynamic.

39 See Eric Hobsbawm's *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) for discussions of various traditions invented in the context of emergent capitalist and bourgeois society.

The social implications of speed was observed in military terms more than thirty years ago by Paul Virilio. What is more, Virilio, quite coincidentally to our topic of discussion here, identifies the role of music in ritualizing and affirming the action by driving the army forward in its 'march to war':

'The new army,' writes Carnot, 'is a mass army *crushing the adversary under its weight* in a *permanent offensive*, to the tune of the *Marseillaise*.' The national anthem is only a road song, regulating the mechanics of the march. In his memoirs, Poumies de la Siboutie notes, 'Never had we sung so much....*songs were a powerful revolutionary means, the 'Marseillaise' electrified the populace....'*

The mathematician Carnot and the doctor Poumies were not mistaken: the revolutionary song is a kinetic energy that pushes the masses towards the battlefield, toward the kind of Assault that Shakespeare had already described as 'Death killing Death.' And that is in fact what it is all about, since one had to charge the enemy artillery, and the only way was for the infantryman to rush toward the cannons, to kill its servants on the spot. But to reach them, he had an extremely limited amount of time: the time it took the enemy artillery to reload. As soon as the shot had been fired, therefore, the infantryman had to rush toward the enemy cannons. His life then depended on his running speed: if he was too slow, he died literally disintegrated point blank by the firing end....

Everything in this new warfare becomes a question of time won by man over the fatal projectiles toward which his path throws him. Speed is Time saved in the most absolute sense of the word, since it becomes human Time directly torn from Death – whence those macabre emblems of decimation worn down through history by the assault troops, in other words the *rapid troops* (black uniforms and flags, death's heads, by the Uhlan, the SS, etc...).

But beyond this, what should we think of this revolution that will soon be entirely reduced to a permanent Assault on Time? The perpetual offensive of Carnot's mass armies is the reversal of the old 'run before you' Salvation is no longer in flight: safety is in the 'running towards your own Death' in 'killing your Death.' *Safety is in Assault* simply because the new ballistic vehicles make flight useless: they go faster and farther than the soldier, they catch up with him and pass him. The man on the battlefield has no safety, it seems, other than in a suicidal entrance into the very trajectory of the speed of the engines.” (46-47)

Improvisers belong, as Jeff Kaiser puts it, to the 'special ops' military category – both within the academy and society at large. The avant-garde of the avant-garde. As we

continue to slip and slide down the glaxis of speed, improvisers are well positioned in their temporary and transient fortresses for the coming age of pre-emption. Indeed, few things are more crucial to making successful realtime music than being able to predict and intuit the ostensibly unpredictable, chaotic actions and reactions of the other musicians.

'Special Ops' is a great analogy for improvisers, because it gives us an angle in analyzing the impact of the music that does not require it's effects to be massive for it to be important. Instead, improvised music intervenes only under special circumstances and places, and is gone almost before the impact can be assessed. However, in terms of assessing impact on society, those in authority are increasingly well aware that it does not matter at all that interventions are small and localized – indeed, for an overdetermined set of reasons small and local is often the only way to control a public that has become both isolated and allergic to large displays of authority.

Our current economic systems are modeled as highly complex and non-linear, where small disturbances can be manufactured in order to produce massive reaction chains. It follows then that very small interventions produce tangible effects – a logic replicated by free improvisation itself, as David Borgo writes: “...the slightest flapping of a butterfly's wings – can potentially lead to surprising and divergent performance outcomes. Unpredictable sonic combinations, unintended 'noise,' and the intentional process of interpolation and dissociation all introduce additional complexities into the evolving system.” (73)

As Borgo implicitly is showing, power and control do not become arbitrary and ineffective. Rather, they shift locations to the less concrete spaces and processes

surrounding the object: “nonlinear dynamical systems theory often seeks...to predict the possible general shapes of processes, rather than actual numerical values of parameters that may be associated to them.”(63) And as Borgo's book aptly demonstrates, these advanced mathematical models show that improvisations have at one and the same incredibly complex and varying yet predictable and representable forms and shapes.

In other words, if one knows how the process generally works, one does not have to worry about the actual realtime events that occur within the system. What matters in the end is knowing average outcomes over time, and predicting and making use of the extremes within the system. This is of course not a new idea to businessmen- the irony of economic downturns is that they produce great opportunities for those that have calculated and are wealthy enough to plan ahead for 'unpredictable' turmoil – demonstrating once more that the absolute measure of power is control over temporal flows.

There are many parallels between larger societal trends and how improvisers make music (for those that know it, think of the rules and the role of the facilitator in Walter Thompson's *Soundpainting*), but this is only interesting to me in as much as observing the law of the part reproducing the whole. In a 'to each her own' free speech society, the actual music that improvisers make is becoming increasingly irrelevant. The dynamic, open ended processes are not. These processes we can see reproduced at the infrastructural and symbolic/discursive levels of contemporary art subcultures. It is more often at these levels that artists produce and affect society in meaningful ways.

I would like to suggest four stages in production now: the first, pre-capitalist stage in which places, objects, ideas were not categorically divided into originals and

reproductions – a period categorized by lived, shared and less fragmented production processes. The second, early capitalist stage, where reproduction retroactively affects a fascination with and desire for the original. The third stage, where advanced reproductive processes produce enhanced reproductions and displaced or new originals (films, first printings, etc.). And the current stage, where instant, dynamic and complex processes compress and fracture sites of production into dispersed yet aggregate and manageable sites of variable *instantaneous reproductions* that can inhabit the site of origin.

In each of these stages of capitalist production, it is important to note that the giddy excitement over the new technological means obscured their capitalist potentials. We saw this with how viewers first reacted to film, and in the potential Benjamin saw in the emergent art form. Later, when communication technologies radically augmented the possibilities of dialog, self-expression and identity, Sandy Stone captures this inevitable 'capitalist' awakening when she describes in lurid detail the events at Atari labs in the early 80s:

...Atari's stock dropped through the floor, and it was still dropping. On top of the sinking game market, news of how Atari had been looted from within had badly shaken investors, who were now operating in dump mode. Living only in the present, Time Warner was frantically searching for someone to take this losing prospect off their hands. They found their angel in the person of Jack Tramiel, who had piloted a nearby computer company in the valley until a stockholder's rebellion had ousted him. Tramiel had the reputation of being the baddest, meanest manager in the computer business; those who had worked under him were fond of referring to him as Jabba the Hutt. 'The mildest thing anybody said about him,' Dunion related, 'was that he was a viscious, bloodthirsty shark.' Tramiel had survived prison camps during World War II and wasn't going to let Silicon Valley slow him up one bit. He bought Atari from Warner for what amounted to salvage costs. Once he had hold of Atari, word came down that he was preparing to clear everybody out and move his team in. Normally this process takes a while, but not when you are hungry, in a hurry to cut costs to nothing and utterly ruthless.

The scene at the Silicon Valley complex was reminiscent of the last hours

of the U.S. embassy in Saigon. At 8 a.m. Word had arrived that Tramiel had taken over and that his goons were coming to clear the building. *Everybody* was fired. Hooper communicated it to the remaining lab people by announcing, 'Jabba the Hutt is on the way.'...The mood shifted to full scale panic. People who had just discovered what was happening were frantically trying to collect their personal belongings. Others in the upper floors opened their windows and began dropping things out –into bushes if they were lucky, onto pavement if they weren't...Guards were herding secretaries and lower-echelon workers into the street like farm animals, some bewildered, some in tears. (153)

More than twenty years after the scene at Atari labs, and 80 years after the emergence of method acting, the ritual of speed and the related communication networks and methods that facilitate performance of personality remain largely uncontested by contemporary artists. In fact, improvisers have shown a greater affinity for and more structural/core engagement with new technologies than most other kinds of music. Is this a conscious ideological stance on the part of the artists, or more a reflection of how avant-garde artists are invisibly tied to and naturalize contemporary economic and political power? Probably a bit of both, but given how resistant improvisers are to having their ideology pinned down, the latter dominates.

As I've said before, I don't think the value of improvisation lies so much in the actual music. One of course never knows what will happen in the future, and as realtime technology becomes increasingly pervasive, it is not so far fetched to imagine today's improvised musics as the precursor to emergent telematic forms of realtime/live cultural production⁴⁰. On the other hand, within a free speech society, as I've said before, it does not really matter quite so much what is sonically expressed (in other words, as avant-

40 The noted improvisers Mark Dresser and Pauline Oliveros have been at the forefront of telematic performance at the University of California at San Diego and Rensselaer Polytech. Both of these institutions are noted for research and resource intensive, high tech black box theaters (reconfigurable performance spaces) in which the telematic experiments are conducted. The techno-utopian spectacle of bringing people from all over the world 'together' instantaneously for live performances fits our zeitgeist like a glove.

garde composer Milton Babbitt once said, but for entirely different reasons, “who cares if you listen?”).

However, if we think in terms of all the ancillary activities and capital generating mechanisms surrounding the music, we can begin see how the highly specialized effects of Jeff Kaiser's 'special ops improvisers' provide key services to capital and political authority, and perhaps even predict, articulate and help speed into existence (in a dystopic reference to Jacques Atali) the future trends of social organization. It has become almost conventional wisdom in urban studies now, but as Sharon Zukin noted in the mid nineties, and Sarah Cohen corroborates in her quite recent study of the music industry in Liverpool, the arts subculture as a whole is often utilized in “...!a worst-case scenario of economic development' that suggests 'the utter absence of new industrial strategies for growth.” (Zukin, quoted in Cohen, 209) It is my additional claim for improvised music that in many ways this form of cultural production occupies a special positioning even among the art subcultures as particularly suited to the most difficult social, political and economic circumstances.

Chapter Three: Post-Unification Berlin: the Spatial Practices of Improvisers and the Reconstruction of the Capital

Story #5: Temporary and Movable: Emergent Transient Structures in Contemporary Architecture and Music

My friend, and fellow pianist Jürg Bariletti has just invented a new instrument in his workshop/apartment in Friedrichshain, Berlin. The *Klangkoffer* (sound-trunk) is a fantastic looking device – a small, old wooden trunk measuring about 3x2x1 (in feet) attached to a small, portable amp and mounted onto an old bicycle. Inside the trunk is a small mixing board, lots of transducers and all sorts of strange looking 'sonorous' objects, from rubber bands, plastic tubes and metal wires to a giant home made music box that plays perforated plastic rolls.

Jürg is from a remote corner of the Swiss Alps, bordering on Italy. But he has lived and worked as a jazz pianist and improviser in Berlin now for more than ten years, and spent the last five or so complaining about the city. Although Jürg loves the piano (and is even a hobby piano and organ technician), like many other improvisers he has increasingly engaged with alternative instruments that are more transportable and cost effective. He used to run a venue for improvised music in Berlin, Stralau68, that was the only regular performance space with a grand piano. But Stralau68 was closed two years ago due to financial difficulties. For his *Klangkoffer* project he has received a large grant of 20,000 Swiss francs (although the *Klangkoffer* has existed in a more primitive and not quite so mobile format for many years.) The hook line that Jürg used to apply for

the money was the idea of 'experimental street music'. In a very moving story, Jürg tells me how the project brought him closer to his father, with whom as an adopted child he had always had a very difficult relationship with. His father was an electrical engineer, and never understood or took much interest in improvised music. But they got together in Switzerland and designed the electronic components of the trunk, engaging in the heartwarming and long overdue activity of father-son bonding.

Later that week I performed with Jürg on *Klangkoffer* together with Jeff Kaiser (trumpets and electronics) and Harald Thiemann (percussion). There was a catch however – the venue did not have a piano, so Jürg lent me his 'flexible piano'⁴¹, an outrageous toy keyboard with hundreds of cheap synth sounds that rolls up into a one pound, fanny-pack sized ball that was manufactured in China. As I entered the venue (*Club der Polnischen Versager* / Club of the Polish Liars), Harald looked at my Flexible piano and laughed. “Now that is the ultimate neo-liberal instrument.” That made me instantaneously like Harald a lot, because at that point I had not discussed any of the ideas for my paper with him.

On his way to the concert, Jürg's bicycle with the attached *Klangkoffer* hit the curb rather hard and broke down. It started to rain really hard and he had to take a Taxi to the club. The 50 or so Euro we made from the gig ended up all going to his Taxi.

A few weeks after talking to, and performing with Jürg, I attended a concert right smack in the middle of Berlin's brand new, 700 million Euro central train station, *Berlin Hauptbahnhof*. The train station is a textbook example of the modern spectacle of power

41 There is a certain satisfying irony for me here in that the piano – once a symbol of bourgeois comfortability – can take on a certain ornery and resistant position within the contemporary cultural field.

– unmarked steel, concrete and glass giving way to clean and dramatic openings and lines of movement and sight that extend not just horizontally, but vertically. One can gaze hundreds of feet off the balconies or from one of the many escalators from the top floor where the local trains run, all the way down four levels to the long distance trains (I imagine a dramatic, tabloid photograph sequence of a suicide whenever I look down)

The concert was put on by a new organization in the avant-garde music scene in Berlin – *Ohrenstrand*.⁴² *Ohrenstrand* is funded by both the Berlin senate and the Germany wide culture fund (*Kulturstiftung des Bundes*) and consists of a network of eight well known Berlin based music establishments, including *ausland*, a collectively run, flexibly structured, direct democratic venue that is perhaps the City's most established and consistently active site for improvised music. Looking at the members of the network (including the Technical and Humboldt Universities, and the Konzerthaus) *ausland* is probably the smallest and least well known and the only one that engages specifically with improvisation. And so, one would expect the emphasis to be on composed music. This is not the case – improvisation predominates⁴³, and the reason for this is that *Ohrenstrand* has a specific mission – to bring avant-garde music directly to the people. It is a propagandizing organization, and the branch of the organization that I saw on display at the Hauptbahnhof is known as *Ohrenstrand Mobil*. (*Ohrenstrand*)

Ohrenstrand Mobil is far more extravagant than, and no where near as mobile, as Jürg's little *Klangkoffer*. But the concepts are similar: making avant-garde music transportable. To this end, *Ohrenstrand Mobil* sponsors a yearly competition for temporary architecture (the project has literally just begun, so there has only been one

⁴² This is a strange word to translate: 'Beach-ears.'

⁴³ At least when one, accepting George Lewis' critique, includes the same practices by a different name (in Berlin 'instant composition' is a popular term).

competition). The 2008 winner's design was utilized for the performances at the *Hauptbahnhof* and consisted of portable, lightweight, sound absorbent building blocks that could be stacked to form an enclosure of the desired shape, along with an integrated sound system. The train station itself is, as just mentioned, an exceedingly open space, and the structure was completely visible from floors above and easily accessible from many different directions.

The performance I saw featured my friend and composer of contemporary music Sidney Corbett on electric guitar with the singer-songwriter Cora Frost. This was not a one time event; there were a whole series of these concerts, each featuring different musicians (and occasional dancers) taking place in the train station between the 7th -18th of September, 2009. The mastermind behind the project, Andreas Rochholl, was the former director of the Vienna State Opera who eventually tired of the institutional bureaucracy and set off on his 'own'. The concert was a rather strange affair – Sidney and Cora had never played together before, they both played very different styles of music, and on top of this had only gotten together the day before to rehearse. As Sidney explained to me later, Andreas Rochholl is very fond of bringing together musical *personalities* that one would not expect to see together. And if the interaction creates an awkward and uncomfortable space, so much the better. In such situations where participants are struggling to find common ground, as Jason Stanyek explains in a more positive way, improvisation is well positioned to function as the default method of dialog. (116)

While Sidney and Cora are both highly regarded musicians in their own rights, there was little musically redeeming or inspiring about their performance together, which

consisted mostly of abstracted, empty bluesy licks and constantly repeating, rather uninspired texts (i.e. “Fahrkarten, bitte” - 'tickets please'). Also, the music did not – to be blunt - sound particularly avant-garde. Two musicians that regularly engage in improvised music would likely have done better in this format, but this only points to the absurdity of thinking of improvised music as non-idiomatic. But then again, I have to keep reminding myself – it does not matter what the music sounds like. In fact, there were performances of blues and tango as part of the *Ohrenstrand Mobil* series which have little, if anything to do with the avant-garde in Berlin. What really matters most here is that avant-garde discourse is consecrating and asserting its right to Berlin's newest, most prized site of and monument to movement. The presence of improvisation, tango or blues does not imply a heterogeneous equality to the music, as Stephen Greenblatt strongly reminds us:

'...improvisation on the part of either Europeans or natives should not be construed as the equivalent of sympathetic understanding; it is rather what we can call appropriative mimesis, imitation in the interest of acquisition...A process of mimetic doubling and projection...does not lead to the identification with the other but to a ruthless will to dominate.'
(Greenblatt, quoted in Carter, 50)

The performance was organized in the format of a picnic, with the musicians and audience members invited to bring food and sit on a blanket on the floor. Rather than simply an act of communitarianism, this suggested to me the classic Western art ritual showing modernization and alienation, with art intervening to re-connect humanity to a more organic and spiritual use value. Other performances in the series had a similar theme, with one, called *Instant Composition*, involving a (male) bass clarinetist lying next to, and improvising and flirting (pretentiously) with a (female) dancer.

Instant Composition: Ton und Körper begegnen sich im ungeahnt offenen

und begrenzten Raum am Berliner Hauptbahnhof. Sie kommunizieren und flirten - hinein in die Ruhe, hinein in ein Bett, auf eine Insel, in ein anderes Land - weit weg vom Sturm des Alltags, inmitten des Alltags. Die beiden Künstler verschmelzen ihre Tools und Seelen im Spiel - im Zentrum der bewegten Ton- und Körperlandschaft des Berliner Hauptbahnhofs. Während der Aufführung verändert die Komposition ihre Festschreibung. Das Künstlerduo dankt dem Bahnhof und den gewollt und ungewollt Beteiligten für die Mitgestaltung im urbanen Umfeld! (Ohrenstrand)

[Instant Composition: sound and bodies encounter one another in unimagined open and closed space at the Berlin central station. They communicate and flirt – within the quietude, in a bed, on an Island, in another Land – far from the rush of the everyday, in the middle of the everyday. The two artists fuse their tools and souls in the game – in the center of the moving sounds and bodies of the Berlin central station. During the performance the composition changes its original, fixed form. The artist duo would like to thank the train station and the willing and unwilling participants within the urban environment for the collective building of the form.]

There were a decent number of people gathered around to watch the performance by Sidney Corbett and Cora Frost. Most had planned to attend the concert in advance, but others were spontaneously generated 'realtime' audiences made up of passing travelers with little or no knowledge about avant-garde music. The performance was also extensively documented, with video cameras and boom mics in addition to studio mics. There was a large wall of flyers and programs publicizing various upcoming avant-garde musical activities. And a large sign near the performance gave onlookers a fuller context for the performance:

Vom 7.-18. September 2009 wird im Herzen des modernsten Bahnhofs Europas zeitgenössische Musik erklingen. Dort, wo sich die Gleise der transkontinentalen Ostwest- mit der Nordsüd-Verbindung kreuzen und hunderttausende Menschen täglich in Bewegung sind, bezieht die Neue Musik ein temporäres Zuhause und lädt zum spontanen Verweilen ein. Vor urbaner Geräuschkulisse erklingen ungewohnte musikalische Strukturen. Ein Angebot zum Hören und Staunen an Durchreisende, Flaneure und Musikneugierige. (Ohrenstrand)

[From September 7th – 18th, Contemporary music will sound forth in the heart of Europe's most modern train station. Here where the East-West transcontinental tracks cross with the North-South connection, and daily hundreds of thousands of people are in movement, new music moves into a temporary home and invites you to spontaneously linger. In front of this urban soundscape, unusual musical structures sound forth. An offer to listen and be astonished for passersby, flaneures, and music enthusiasts.]

At the concert I talked to Andreas Rochholl, who gave me a bit more background to the significance of the above statement that to a German might seem rather obvious, but certainly not to a foreigner. The new Hauptbahnhof stands on the same site as Lehrter Bahnhof, which before World War Two was Europe's busiest transit hub, a central axis linking the east, west, south and north of Europe. As Rochholl put it, this project brought contemporary music to the heart of re-constructed Europe. I let out a bit of a gasp, and said something to the effect of 'isn't that a bit egotistical?', and of course, the conversation ended right about there.

At 10pm *Ohrenstrand Mobil* began to pack up, fearful that they might overstay there welcome at the station (the performance was done with the explicit consent of Deutsche Bahn). It turned out that they were allowed to go until 11pm, but by that point it was too late and the set was broken down.

Between the day that I met with Jürg and the concert at the Hauptbahnhof, I was 'confronted' a number of times by Roma street musicians on the subway. They have their children follow them, asking for money in a manner too direct for comfort. European governments and NGOs expend a good deal of effort and money on campaigns to inform the public that giving money to these homeless and nomadic children is a very, very bad idea because the money just goes to their parents and fuels an exploitive, transient life

cycle.

In 2007, the EU expanded to include Romania and Bulgaria, while nonetheless making citizens from those countries wait until 2011 until granting them the right to work in other member states. At the same time, the EU by its very legal status as a free, democratic union is quite literally unable to recognize systematic oppression within its own member states. As the Berlin Senate Office for Integration states, “The oppression of the Roma community in Romania is not considered to be an official xenophobic policy in a dictatorship.” (Knight)

It is quite striking to note the article in which the above quote is cited is actually about a German alternative culture caravan/trailer park squat in Berlin that attempted to help a group of Roma in a desperate situation: “...their initial intervention...was clearly vital and humanitarian. It began when the police threatened to take away the children from a small camp of around 20 Roma in Görlitzer Park unless they could name a fixed address where they lived. The nearby inhabitants of the counter-culture trailer park then tried to intervene on behalf of the Roma. (Knight)

Thus, a group of nomadic squatters tried to help another group of nomadic squatters. However, in Europe, from my own experiences, it does not take much digging to find anti-Roma sentiments among even a very liberal general public. Helping the Roma ultimately ended in failure and backlash. A typical expression of this anti-Roma sentiment is easy enough to find in commentaries beneath the article I site here about the Roma, such as:

The Roma people are simply causing a huge problem in Europe. Whoever complains about Turks "not assimilating for two generations" should take a closer look at Roma people. They have been in Europe at least since 1500.

They often hardly speak the language of the majority. They claim they won't assimilate because their culture is superior, yet wherever they appear in large numbers, stores report higher losses. (Compare 1.5% in Czech Republic versus 1.0% in Poland - the latter is poorer, so it should have a higher theft, but the former has a higher percentage of the said minority. Same goes for Slovakia and Hungary).

Their kids are a problem to local administration, because they drop out before 16, and girls often "marry" before that age (those marriages are not recognized, of course). The poverty they sometimes live in in Slovakia or Romania is striking. Third world. No running water, no toilets. (Knight)

Interestingly, while the Roma are in legal limbo, just last year the Berlin senate gave the German squatters a legal lease on the land. This is a classic example of homologic structures: the German alternative squatters inhabit the same physical space and have a similarly antagonist relationship with the authorities as the Roma, but belong to an entirely different part of the cultural field.

In the case of music, this makes one wonder why one kind of nomadic expression is celebrated and funded while another kind is attacked and hidden from view by every possible means. What are the relationships between these two images of nomadism? Instead of some abstract space of flexibility and movement, is there instead a familiar discourse hidden away: that of a civilized culture? More specifically, a civilized culture of speed and movement? What cultural practices are appropriated? What are the real relationships to power embodied by the *Klangkoffer* and *Ohrenstrand Mobil*?

It seems to me that while we do (like it or not) live in Appadurai's nomadic, globalized world of flows, as Paul Virilio poignantly calls our attention to these flows are highly controlled and manipulated by the nation, market forces, and cultural ideology. Thinking about how power is manifest through these increasingly 'invisible architectures' of control is central to understanding the roles of improvisation and improvisers within contemporary society.

3.1 Signifying Power: Form and Content in Modern Art and Modern Architecture

Instead of asking “What is art?” or “Is this art successful?” a good geographer might ask questions along the lines of “How is this space called 'art' produced?” In other words, what are the specific historical, economic, cultural and discursive conjunctions that come together to form something called “art” and, moreover, to produce a space that we colloquially know as an “art world?” The geographic question is not “What is art?” but “How is art?” From a critical geographic perspective the notion of a free-standing work of art would be seen as the fetishistic effect of a production process. Instead of approaching art from the vantage point of a consumer, a critical geographer might reframe the question of arts in terms of spatial practice. (Paglen, 30)

Post-colonial and feminist theory takes on the task of showing us that hegemonic processes seldom go uncontested. People tend to make the best of the situation that they are in, exchange information and build solidarity and social networks even in the most controlled and ascetic environs of office parks and prisons. However, this theory is, in my mind at least, more useful in opposite circumstances: looking at liberatory movements and identifying the counter-revolutionary and conservative sites within them. I say 'more useful' not just for the purposes of this paper, but because we are dealing with an asymmetrical field: the effects of liberatory resistance within a massive system of domination are necessarily small. However, within liberatory movements conservative forces are of far greater impact – especially if the movement comes to power or is 'co-opted'. This is because these conservative elements connect to the broader forces of hegemony within society at large. That is why it is always easy to divide political movements and split off and marginalize the radical fringe. It is why radical movements so easily become the latest fad (think of Punk fashion) or are reduced to weak compromises. It is why the legacy of these movements are usually much more complex than history would have us believe. And it is why we should always, as David Grammit

reminds us, attempt to separate the discourse and political intentions of the actors from the real results.

bell hooks has long and persuasively argued that both the feminist and civil rights movements have consistently disempowered and furthered negative stereotypes of African American women by appealing, respectively, to bourgeois morals and misogynist stereotypes⁴⁴. Most recently, the election of Barak Obama resulted in significant setbacks for gay marriage. The movement for gay marriage in turn is marked by a conservative turn towards the depoliticized private sphere of the bourgeois family unit that representative democracy is in turn able to so effectively control, leading one to wonder about the social marginalization and standardizations that the (seemingly inevitable) recognition of gay marriage will bring about. There is however one specific example of a movement's unintended political results that is particularly analogous to the formalist aesthetics of improvised music and discussions of post-unification Berlin's reconstruction: the Bauhaus movement.

The Bauhaus movement is a classic example of revolutionary rhetoric and capitalist results. The goals of the Bauhaus were ostensibly admirable – to make art a part of functional living. The problem is that the Bauhaus ideology was limited by the vision offered by the systems of mass production that were revolutionizing industry at that time (1919-1933). Instead of asking questions about what living meant, what systematic reproduction implies, and what kinds of absolute values arise from the dialectic of form and function, the Bauhaus accepted the framework and values of society at face value and sought to develop products that catered to those needs, under the auspices of socialist

⁴⁴ See *Ain't I a Woman?: Black women and feminism* (1981, South End Press)

idealism. *Mistaking use value in a mechanized society for objective truth*, the designs of the Bauhaus showcased the modernist aesthetic of abstract power: functionality, clean, stripped down lines and shapes that were devoid of productive signs, the absolute minimum of signification...quite literally Ikea.⁴⁵

The Bauhaus did more than locate space in its real context or supply a new perspective on it: it developed a new conception, a global concept, of space. At that time, around 1920...a link was discovered in the advanced countries...a link which had already been dealt with on the practical plane but which had not yet been rationally articulated: that between industrialization and urbanization, between workplaces and dwelling-places. No sooner had this link been incorporated into theoretical thought than it turned into a project, even into a program. The curious thing is that this 'programmatic' stance was looked upon at the time as both rational and revolutionary, although in reality it was tailor-made for the state - whether state-capitalist or the state-socialist variety...For Gropius or for Le Corbusier, the program boiled down to the production of space. As Paul Klee put it, artists - painters, sculptors or architects - do not show space, they create it. The Bauhaus people understood that things could not be created independently of each other in space, whether moveable (furniture) or fixed (buildings), without taking into account their interrelationships and their relationship to the whole. It was impossible simply to accumulate them, as a mass, aggregate or collection of items. In the context of the productive forces, the technological means and the specific problems of the modern world, things and objects could now be produced in their relationships, along with their relationships. Formerly, artistic ensembles - monuments, towns, furnishings, - had been created by a variety of artists according to subjective criteria: the tastes of princes, the intelligence of rich patrons or the genius of the artists themselves. Architects had thus built palaces designed to house specific objects ('furniture') associated with an aristocratic mode of life, and, alongside them, squares for the people and monuments for social institutions. The resulting whole might constitute a space with a particular style, often even a dazzling style - but it was still a space never rationally defined which came into being and disappeared for no clear reason. As he considered the past and viewed it in the light of the present, Gropius sensed that henceforth social practice was destined to change. The production of spatial ensembles as such corresponded to the capacity of the productive forces, and hence to a specific rationality. It was thus no longer a question of introducing forms, functions or structures in isolation,, but rather one of mastering global space by bringing forms, functions and structures

⁴⁵ Perhaps it is symbolic to remember that democratic, directly Bauhaus inspired rhetoric aside, Ikea's founder, Ingvar Kamprad, also flirted with Fascism and Nazism in the aftermath of WWII.

together in accordance with a unitary conception. (Lefebvre, 124-125)

As Lefebvre points out, this mode of standardized mass production, and associated spaces, are found under State Socialism, and fascism⁴⁶ as well. To Lefebvre this is an important observation, because it suggests that if the systems of production remain the same, the political ideology is not realized in any meaningful way – a society without its own ways of producing space does not consistently exist. “What would remain of the Church if there were no churches?” (Lefebvre, 44, and 54). It is perhaps indicative of the hegemony of capitalist productive processes that architects have struggled so much over the past century in developing new forms, being forced when attempting to find alternatives to the modernist aesthetic to weakly retreat to playful historical postmodern references or neoclassicism.

In many ways the Bauhaus ideal is more similar to the *fixed scores* of many high modernist and minimalist, process music composers of the 20th century, where the underlying, 'rational', structural form of the composition was supposed to signify and be the content. There is a remarkable similarity between modernist music where the use value (value in listening to the music) is said to arise from the logical system of rules and relations that build a composition (and thus an *analyzable* and *readable* score which signifies the use value), and how Lefebvre describes modern space:

Over the centuries the idea contained in the term 'express' [expressing content] here has come to mean merely 'readable.' The architect is supposed to construct a signifying space wherein form is to function as signifier is to signified; the form, in other words, is supposed to enunciate or proclaim the function [use value]. According to this principle, which is espoused by most 'designers', the environment can be furnished with or animated by signs in such a way as to appropriate space, in such a way

⁴⁶ Though obviously opposed to the politics of the Bauhaus, the stripped down neo-classical architecture style favored by the Third Reich was highly compatible to Bauhaus aesthetics.

that space becomes readable (i.e. 'plausibly' linked) to society as a whole. The inherence of function to form, or in other words the application of the criterion of readability, makes for an instantaneousness of reading, act and gesture – hence the tedium which accompanies this quest for a formal-functional transparency. We are deprived of both internal and external distance: there is nothing to code and decode in an 'environment without environs'. What is more, the significant contrasts in a code of space designed specifically to signify and to 'be' are extremely commonplace and simple. They boil down to the contrast between horizontal and vertical line – a contrast which among other things masks the vertical's implication of hauteur. Versions of this contrast are offered in visual terms which are supposed to express it with great Intensity but which, to any detached observer, any ideal 'walker in the city', have no more than the appearance of intensity. Once again, the impression of intelligibility conceals far more than it reveals. It conceals precisely, what the visible/readable 'is'. And what traps it holds...Nothing can be taken for granted in space, because what are involved are real or possible acts, and not mental states or more or less well told stories. In produced space, acts reproduce 'meanings' even if no one' gives an account of them. Repressive space wreaks repression and terror even though it may be strewn with ostensible signs of the contrary [art and entertainment]...the notions of 'design', of reading/writing as practice, and of the 'signifier-signified' relationship projected onto things in the shape of the 'form-function' one are all directed, whether consciously or no, towards the dissolving of conflicts into a general transparency, into a one-dimensional present – and onto an as it were 'pure' *surface*.” (144-45)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, modernist and postmodern Western Art music never caught on with the larger public, in the same way styles of contemporary architecture have never achieved lasting popularity or lived up to their utopian rhetoric. Objectively speaking, the ear does not hear music the same way the eye reads a score. Many complain that because of this, it all sounds bland and the same – sheets of sounds, contrasting textures, loud and soft, vertical and horizontal. And subjectively, many of those that actually do enjoy the music enjoy it from the position of a listener that is free to generate their own use value from material that otherwise signifies very little. An entirely defensible position that composers can retreat in recourse (or anticipation) to any time their composition is poorly received, not 'understood' (or misunderstood). This is an

analogous process to the way that modern power hides and abdicates responsibility under the guise of private property (you do what you like with it, it's yours!).

However, as we enter Virilio's 'age of speed', space itself becomes highly variable, transportable and re-configurable (from black box theaters and telematic presentations to MUDs, iPods and GPS systems). And even spaces that belong to different ideologies and cultures become penetrated by technology and capital and made readable as abstracted, compressed and cataloged signifiers (think of tourist attractions and postmodern facades). Fixed score music no longer offers the appropriate comparison. Instead, music that is highly variable, transportable, transient and re-configurable best engages and mirrors this new kind of space.

Sound has always had an important, yet under appreciated relationship (in the West) to space and place. Music carries the memory of place with it, the reverberations of sound allow us to literally touch the spaces around us and allows us to 'see' past the readability (facades) of architecture, and noises escape into and out of adjoining environments in ways that other sensory phenomena only achieve to a much lesser extent. Sound physically articulates our sense of space and place.

The relationship of the score to the blueprint, and the performed structures of sound to a building, is what led Goethe to famously pronounce 'architecture is frozen music.' A pronouncement that is not at all true in the sense of Lefebvre's dynamic and constantly (re)produced understanding of space. But while architecture was never 'frozen', it is now also no longer as *slow* as it once was, and the temporal contrasts between the disciplines of architecture and music have begun to collapse.

The movement for improvised music in many ways brings the same ideas of

modernist composers up to date with our contemporary relationship to *form and content*, which is to say a relationship between *process and content*. Improvisers bring forth elaborate designs out of sets of unwritten performative processes. And these processes signify the music's content in similar ways to modernist composition. At improvisations most rhetorically stripped down state, the abstract actions of *contrast, compliment, imitate* constitute in realtime a similar musical aesthetic as the fixed, abstract musical building materials of *pitch, timbre, and duration*. All of these elements tend to refer back upon themselves and reveal little else to the listener.

In this way, the movement for improvised music celebrates the organizing principles of modern, sped up space and spatial practices by instantaneously realizing musical structures that can interact and reinforce the abstract architectural space of vertical and horizontal lines and the absolute spectacle of form signifying function (again, thinking of postmodern architecture as a variant of the modern). In the final analysis of modern architecture, one can at first glance seldom observe any productive and signifying marking of power other than the self referencing ones of high and transparent spaciousness – the absolute values of abstract and empty space. To this analysis we can now add the self referencing form and function of malleability and movement– spectacles of change and speed. In the same way as improvised music produces a self-referencing ritual spectacle of malleability and reaction speed. In this sense, the aesthetic of improvised music can be said to be *formalist*.

3.2 Story #6: Public Funding for the Arts in Berlin

While living in Berlin in 2006 I applied to the city's cultural fund, as well as

Quartiers management – semi-autonomous funds for rehabilitating specific social hot spots - for a concert series. The initial grant proposal to the senate proved successful, and the application to Quartiers management was positively received until we had at the last minute to change the location of the concert series. It is instructive however to consider how manipulative the grant application process was. And given the criticism that the improvised music community comes under in this paper, its only fair to implicate myself in the mess. Here is a translated excerpt from the project outline:

Ballhaus Ost Concert and Workshop Series:

Contemporary and Improvised Music Recontextualized

Location: Ballhaus-Ost, Pappelallee 15 (Subway U2, Eberswalder Str.)

Project Goals:

- To offer a program of improvised art music of the highest quality, with musicians from different cultural traditions (for example, African American music or participants of Radical Jewish Culture such as John Zorn) as well as electronic music and multimedia projects.
- Creating a unique music-audience relationship, based on public interaction, music education and diversity.
- To offer opportunities for Berliner musicians to work with international artists.

Curated Events:

- One Monday evening concert per month featuring international artists (see attached list of artist names and short biographies).
All other Monday evenings: concerts featuring artists from the city and the region, or ensembles traveling through the area.
- Workshops for Berlin music students led by the international artists in cooperation with the conservatory Hanns Eisler.
- A Tuesday concert with workshop participants, together with the featured artist.

Detailed description of our vision

We believe that Berlin is the ideal city for this project. To be honest, we see Berlin as one of the few places where such an undertaking is possible to realize. From the renowned Philharmonic Orchestra to the history of DADA, to the large number of immigrants, Berlin is renowned for its cultural wealth. Contemporary music also has its place in Berlin with festivals such as Ultraschall and Märzmusik, as well as regular concert series like "Unerhörte Musik". However, for improvised art music the opportunities are more limited. The Ballhaus-Ost concert series will attempt to fill in this gap in the Berlin music scene.

We want to create a space in which one can hear the most accomplished art music improvisers, in an environment that fosters interaction between musicians and the public and where a diverse cultural audience feels at home and interacts with the artists from around the world. In other words, a space where the social context plays a central role... (etc.)

Let's break down this proposal. I begin with the location of the project, which turned out to be in flux. What was originally designed for the Kohlenquelle, a cavernous series of connected basement rooms beneath a cafe and bar in a quickly gentrifying part of Prenzlauerberg, eventually migrated down the road a piece to Ballhaus-Ost (from whence this official proposal stems). Ballhaus-Ost was an upstart theater housed in a beautiful old, in need of renovation ballroom from the 20s which was being renovated and organized by the same architects and entrepreneurs that were running the Kohlenquelle. The owners were willing to let us use their space for the pittance of a percentage of the bar in return for the publicity and prestige that international artists and government subsidies would bring. Eventually the project wound up being realized far away in Stralau⁶⁸ (a squat building in which railway workers used to shower and prepare meals in) with Jürg Bariletti who, to his credit, thought the whole narrative⁴⁷ I built around international, inter-cultural musicians was absurd. But that is another story.

Next, in parenthesis we write 'Subway U2, Eberswalder Str.' which foregrounds the location of the venue, which is near one of the busiest intersections in the area. Then, instead of calling the music 'improvised' or Echtzeitmusik, we called it 'improvised art music.' This is in order to justify applying for the same funds that Western art musicians apply for. Immediately thereafter we reference multi cultural collaboration: African American music and radical Jewish culture. From that point on in the proposal, we

⁴⁷ To be clear, there are two forces at work here that are not interdependent. 1) I more or less believed in what I wrote. 2) What I wrote was in line with what the jury wanted to hear. However, it is the frequent confluence of these forces - belief and necessity - that I find to be most problematic.

continually refer to social context, international collaboration, multiculturalism, and a flexible and dynamic relationship with the space itself.

Referencing John Zorn was very intentional, since we could strengthen our proposal by appealing to politically correct German sensibilities regarding Jews. Zorn himself, and many practitioners of Radical Jewish Culture have enjoyed significant success in Germany, receiving funding from State and local initiatives for a variety of projects. But in addition to the calculated manipulation of German guilt, there is something far more complex at work here in our cultural reference to the recently manufactured category of 'Radical Jewish Music.' As Adam Shatz writes in the New York Times:

Mr. Zorn hopes to simplify the problem of "Jewish music" by invoking an atavistic form of identity politics. Under the heading "Great Jewish Music," for example, he has compiled album-length tributes to musicians whose Jewish ancestry is incidental, if not irrelevant, to their work, notably the French chanteur Serge Gainsbourg and the proto-punk guitarist Marc Bolan.

In other words Zorn, who like myself is an 'ethnic' Jew (i.e. only in an atavistic sense), is able to flexibly deploy his music and identity in ways that reflect a privileged, relatively unbounded position in the cultural field. It is not just his experimental Klezmer band Masada, but also the postmodern pastiche of *Kristallnacht* that he can claim as Jewish music.⁴⁸ And when he performs with his quasi punk band Naked City the only hint at it being 'Jewish music' requires an insider's knowledge of the name 'Naked City' which references a work by the (Jewish) artist Arthur Fellig (aka Weegee).

Consider by contrast the case of Ranya Orfaly, a Palestinian who as a child was

⁴⁸ I hope its clear that this says nothing about the quality of the music itself, or about John Zorn himself. It is rather a manifestation of the choices and categories and freedoms available to individuals in the cultural field. On the one hand, I do not know John Zorn personally well enough to pass judgment on his decision making processes, and on the other - I thoroughly enjoy much of his musical output.

paralyzed from the waste down by the Israeli army and fled with her family to Berlin. Ranya is by training a jazz singer, she wants to explore free improvisation, and of course speaks fluent German. Instead, she primarily sings traditional Arabic music because there are well paying gigs subsidized by the government and various community organizations for that sort of music. She cannot hide, arbitrarily abstract, or manipulate her identity as easily as John Zorn can, and is frustrated by the opportunities that present themselves to her because they encourage her to engage with an identity that while she certainly finds important is not what she is most musically drawn to.

Maybe Zorn is right to call his music 'Jewish', maybe it also has a sort of instinctive strategic importance (such as increasing his authenticity within the jazz canon by distancing himself from other, 'white' jazz musicians). But regardless of these nuances, what is important again is who, what and how processes of exclusion function: We were able to utilize Zorn in our proposal because we can call anything he does Jewish, and with little questioning reap support and rewards from any number of institutions. And when we want to, we can remove the metaphorical star of David from improvised music's sleeve, and no one will be the wiser. But from Orfaly's subject position, bounded by more idiomatic percepts, she can by contrast perform neither of these maneuvers so easily.

To get back to the proposed concert series, the project was eventually approved, but only after we tweaked it to remove art music references and applied for funds reserved for popular music projects – foregrounding jazz and electronic music. In addition, we secretly promised a member of the jury funding for one of their own projects in return for support. For our second application to the more community oriented

Quartiers management, we emphasized the educational value of the concert series for students and the opportunities that working with internationally established musicians would offer the local scene. When the project was finally realized, there was a lot of wonderful music curated. But the results hardly at all reflected the emphasis on diversity and an inter cultural and educational environment. And of course if we had lived up to our promise, then a whole new set of problematics would have been raised.

Three years later, when I returned to do my ethnographic work, I had a long and friendly conversation with Herr Uwe Sandhop who was my contact person for the Berlin senate grant application. Sandhop has worked the past 20yrs for the Senatsverwaltung für Wissenschaft, Forschung und. Kultur, specializing in the fields of popular music and jazz. Originally I had thought he might have some data about arts funding that I could use. He informed me that they did not really have any coherently organized data yet, but that the government had just recently decided that they wanted him to compile and organize all the grant proposals since unification – a tremendous amount of work that he seemed quite stressed and unhappy about, especially given that severe budget cutbacks had eliminated his assistant.

I joked with him that our proposal had been highly misleading anyways, so how could they trust the data in the first place? He replied that of course that was to be expected, which is what made assembling all the data rather absurd. He remembered fondly a period in the early 90s when Berlin was run by a corrupt right wing coalition and the government had paid little attention to what kinds of projects they were funding. He then added in frustration that all sorts of affirmative action type quotas were being put into place by the current left wing regime which simply created the opportunity for a

different set of obfuscating tactics in the application process.

3.3 Rebuilding and Rebranding Berlin in Realtime (or, as fast a possible)

It seems, at least in this paper, that we are dealing with two dynamic relationships between art and power. The first of these, and more difficult to trace, is how artists are constituted by, affirm, reflect and actively situate themselves in relationship to the power structures of society. The second relationship is one that is more generally understood by artists: the ability of capitalism and representative democracy to quickly adapt to and co-opt changes that are potentially threatening, rendering avant-garde political intentions quickly obsolete.

How these two relationships work together to reproduce hegemonic social, economic and spatial structures is particularly apparent in, and prescient to Berlin. Berlin is a city, as stated at the outset of Chapter 1, that has for much of its history, including the recent era of post-unification, inhabited a liminal space between order and disorder, revolutionary becoming and reactionary intervention. It is in this liminal field that the arts, and particularly the avant garde, have come to operate as effective and unusually powerful means of commodification and political control. All cities in the industrialized West face or have faced at least some similar challenges to Berlin, and have in recent years utilized the arts as a form of soft power to regain social and infrastructural control of threatened and threatening urban spaces. But it is safe to say that no city in recent memory has had to manage such heterogenous and historically charged space. The challenge for Berlin is to rebuild its fractured infrastructure, build a post-Fordist economy with a massive city debt and unemployment consistently hovering around 20%,

and become the nation's capital (and the realpolitik capital of the EU, given Germany's dominating status in Europe) while rewriting and erasing a historical legacy that seems to scream out against the logic of either nation or capital.

The consecrating, packaging and blandification of space as commodity in Berlin was perhaps best represented in one of the most audacious artistic statement of representative democracy in recent memory. On February 25th, 1995 the German government gave the go ahead to the conceptual artist Christo's proposal to wrap the Berlin Reichstag in more than 100,000 m² of fireproof polypropylene fabric. The project was conceived to symbolize a sort of re-birth of the infamous parliament building, as it prepared for its re-construction and the transfer of the capital from Bonn back to recently unified Berlin. Similar such projects have followed, such as the elaborate facade, funded by Mercedes, of the former Prussian palace which wrapped the GDR's former parliament building (the Palast der Republic). The Palast der Republic was subsequently torn down with a vague commitment to at some point (when the money is there) rebuild the old palace which before WWII bombs demolished it had stood there. Or there is the literal painting over of the East German side of the old Berlin wall, creating the 'East Side Gallery.' A project that initially began as a celebration of unification, but has become for tourists a sort of fictional museum⁴⁹ for what was actually an activity that only happened on the Western wall – most of which has been either removed or re-located to more convenient places.

The history of Berlin is not just embodied in its notable sites and monuments. A long and peculiar chain of urban development and destruction have created a

⁴⁹ Featured artists have their websites and contact info sprayed onto the images, in an apparent contradiction to graffiti's political aesthetics.

heterogeneous space that calls out its past and its becoming with every clashing angle, every pock mocked facade, every piece of abandoned real estate. Berlin is not a commodified space...yet. Its history is plainly on view to all who care to do a bit of exploring. Improvisers appear to celebrate this space, performing in abandoned water towers, in coal cellars, underground bunkers, former churches, industrial sites, empty waterfronts and every abandoned, un-integrated nook and cranny imaginable. At the same time, improvisers perform at academies, multi-cultural festivals, in jazz clubs, community centers, and train stations.

But space is not simply a container within which action is staged. The meaning of space is inseparable from the activities which constitute and continually produce it and it follows that one does not have to change a form to change meaning. The Berlin based artist Christina Kubisch illustrates this relationship between space and production well in her black lighting installations of historic sites which reveal the restoration efforts vested in making a space appear authentic. (Graevenitz) But what about the productive forces that are gathered in order that her own activities engage the space?

As I have said before, not just improvisers, but the flexible and adaptable arts subculture in general performs these colonizing tasks within Berlin. This is part of a typical branding and gentrification process. But it is also more intense than just that. Because of Berlin's unique position, we are witness to a great social and artistic experiment, with improvisation at the forefront. That this 'magnificent' experiment will ultimately produce sameness and control should not at this point come as a surprise.

No musical practice in Berlin's emergent urban space seems quite so adaptable, transportable, responsive...and cost effective as realtime music. Improvisers not only

perform in diverse environments but, a la Ranciere, share space with galleries, museums, churches, community centers, and theaters. For galleries, concerts accompany vernissages (easily being fitted in to the theme of the featured artist(s)) and generate additional revenue for the bar. For theaters, improvisers perform on the days when there is no theater and/or in secondary parts of the theater (cafe, mezzanine). The art form itself one could almost say is ancillary. This was not always so strongly the case in Berlin, as Ignaz Schick explained to me. There are more and more opportunities and spaces for improvisers to play, but regular venues have become increasingly rare or short lived. This is not unique to Berlin, or even Europe. Noted organizers of improvised music, such as Jeff Kaiser and Ignaz Schick, interested in regularly organizing concerts over the long term instead prefer to establish concert series that are unbound to place (or, for annual festivals, pick temporary sites of interest).

It is very telling that stable fixed sites for improvisation have been more than ever struggling, moving, closing, and popping up only momentarily in Berlin. Over the past four or so years Stralau68, Zentrale Randlage, Staalplaat, Club der Polnischen Versager, alberta ukebana, Tesla, and Ballhaus Naunynstrasse⁵⁰ are all well known known spaces that have either moved or closed. On the other hand, improvisers have never had more opportunities and places to play in. Even though virtually every musician I spoke with is pessimistic about the long term political, social, and urban future of Berlin, there is an explosion of art.

Between September 2007 and September 2008 there were more than 400 concerts for improvised music listed on echtzeitmusik.de. That number does not include many

⁵⁰ The case of Ballhaus Naunynstrasse is a bit different as it is a government run arts center. Director Elke Mollrecht, known for organizing avant-garde and particularly improvised music concerts, had her position terminated and the space was re-branded for theater.

concerts that are more closely linked to the academy or jazz clubs which tend to publicize concerts through more official and mainstream channels. That is a large number, even for cities more than twice as large, such as London or New York. But consider that between September 2008-2009 the number jumps to more than 800 such concerts (see Appendix). When I arrived to do my field research in August, I was a bit nervous because the summer had in past years been a time when improvised music all but stopped, just like the opera houses and symphonies. This time however, there were an average of almost two concerts per night. As soon as September hit, that number jumped up, to more than three. (see Appendices)

In terms of the number of improvisers living in Berlin, that has also increased dramatically. Jürg Bariletti estimates the number in the low hundreds, and sampling from the echtzeitmusik.de archive indicates that this is a very conservative approximation. Within a two week period in September 2009 106 separate musicians that live in Berlin performed. However, musicians living in Berlin tend to use the city primarily as a platform for organizing and exporting their art (because of the low cost of living), while on an individual basis they do not perform all that frequently given the opportunities available. This suggests that additional two week samplings would have fewer redundancies than expected.

Audience sizes have also increased moderately. I counted an average of 25 people per concert, with three concerts bringing in close to or more than 100 (these were not counted in the averaging). I have no statistical evidence that this is an increase other than having lived in Berlin a few years before, but other people concurred with the assessment. Not that anyone really goes to the concerts other than friends, fellow artists,

and the odd East German or computer programmer. The audience tends to be gender balanced (something that was not the case even a few years ago), although the performers are almost exclusively, and seemingly increasingly male (less the case, indicatively, in more fixed band⁵¹ formations).

Ignaz Schick complains that it is becoming hard to perform in other cities because everyone is moving to Berlin and there is no one left to organize events elsewhere⁵². Staalplaat (Netherlands), Sowieso (Netherlands), Club der Polnischer Versager (Poland), Ohrenhoch (Switzerland), ausland⁵³ (Switzerland) and White Rabbit (Belgium) are run by foreigners, as are assuredly numerous other venues whose proprietors I did not have the fortune to interview for this project. In discussions with the organizers for White Rabbit we joked about it being Belgium's art embassy to Berlin, given the number of Belgian artists that perform and exhibit there. And in fact, Berlin is generally considered the capital of improvised music in Europe and the World.

For the city of Berlin to function as a real capital it is very important to have a visible international base. Business people are one sort of cosmopolitan base. Politicians exist defacto in a capital city. Immigrants are a third class. And avant-garde artists are a fourth category. One could say that these artists offer the best of all worlds: they produce culture and visibility disproportionate to their quantity, participate in the political and historical discourse of the city, effectively export it to other 'important' sites around the globe, and attract visitors and new, easily integrated inhabitants.

Artists are much smaller in number, usually come from other wealthy countries

51 It should be axiomatic that in our nuclear family oriented society the most nomadic lifestyles tend to favor men – ironic as it might be to position a 'band' as fixed and stable.

52 Weisepuff, a recently opened venue in Neukölln, was actually a well established artist run performance space in Hamburg that literally packed up and moved to Berlin.

53 As noted earlier, Ausland is collectively run, but the founder is Swiss.

and tend to be more easily integrated and almost necessarily less organized than other potentially dissident segments of the population. As Sarah Cohen observes in the case of Liverpool, "when music-makers tried to convince the authorities that they represented a respectable, well organized industry they were perceived as being too bureaucratic and businesslike, and not creative, entrepreneurial or dynamic like the music industry was supposed to be."(142) Related to this perception of the arts and creative industries, artists produce the authenticity and prestige that conventional business and political operations cannot. They express history and political will while having little productive power without business or government approval (tacit or active). And artists travel to and occupy more international space than most militaries. Embassies and foreign state funds are quick to sponsor art projects by their nationals within the capital, as in the case of Jürg Bariletti's *Klangkoffer*. Over two weeks in September 2009 83 separate performers from 27 different counties performed (sometimes more than once, and more than occasionally with institutional support from abroad).

These numbers may seem small when compared to other sectors of a city's economy. However, in terms of colonizing space, representing the city to the world and showcasing the rhetoric of contemporary capitalist and political trends, the service that improvisers perform is invaluable. But as always, there is an inherent tension and tipping point, where the success and popularity of Berlin undermines the very artistic authenticity of the product itself. Consider these two contrasting recent statements from the summer of 2009:

'Berlin is poor, but sexy,' runs the German capital's advertising slogan, a catchphrase that appears to be working as Berlin bucks the trend in the crisis-hit global tourist industry. Playing on its reputation as a cheap, yet cool, destination for holidaymakers, Berlin lured 7.9 million tourists in

2008, breaking its own record for the fifth consecutive year with a gain of 4.2 percent from 2007. (Filon)

And:

Berlin Is Little More than a Beer-Drenched Tourist Paradise

After the Wall fell, Berlin became a vibrant place teeming with creativity and excitement. But now Berlin has lost its soul and become a playground for the partying hordes of tourists who are driving away the very people who made the place so attractive and unique. It's gotten as bad as Mallorca. (Mohr)

While most of my discussion of the effects of improvisation have centered around producing value for the state and city as a whole, I would like to conclude with a brief example of a very recent project that showcases the role improvisers can play within the private sector. Again, while it might be absurd to imagine improvisers performing a vital function for older forms of industry, in the context of the new 'creative industries' sector improvisers have the opportunities to play important complimentary roles.

My friend Harald Theilmann, referenced earlier in the paper, has recently started up an exciting new performance venue, the Clinker Lounge, in an old ice cream manufacturing room. The space is part of a larger complex of renovated industrial buildings known as the Backfabrik (Bake Factory), and is located on the border between gentrifying Friedrichschain, gentrified Prenzlauerberg, and luxus Mitte. All these areas of East Berlin have undergone substantial rebuilding and now even have significantly higher real estate and rental rates than most of West Berlin. (*Nirgends wohnt man so günstig wie in Eberswalde*)

As Theilmann puts it, the owners of the buildings do not care what kind of events he puts on, as long as they are artistic and generate publicity. The owners have even promised to provide infrastructure and publicity. They have followed through in

remarkably short order (a matter of a few weeks) with a well designed, corporate looking website - www.clinker-lounge.de. There are no concerts as of this writing that have been listed or officially planned. It is in effect a content free site. This again returns to the theme that the music itself is of little overall interest or impact (and also, that the content can be speedily filled in). Instead, it is the reproduction of social, discursive and productive structures at all levels of realtime music production that facilitates the music's participation in and reinforcement of the production of new forms of commodified space.

In a similar sense to the indescript presence of art, the unique architecture and history of the buildings itself is value additive, regardless of what contradictions the specifics of the architecture and history actually might convey. The relationship between space as container, historical space, and actual lived/produced space are constituted primarily as an arbitrary commodity surface to be tactically deployed towards a pre-ordained totality that reinforces the dominating beliefs of society while denying the underlying frictions, contradictions and alternatives. The Backfabrik produced bread (and ice cream) for all of East Berlin before the wall came down. Post unification, the factory was sold and the workers laid off. For another 7 years the factory operated under ownership of the West German bakery tycoon Horst Scheisser, before declaring bankruptcy in 1997 as a result of poor investment and mismanagement. Over the next few years parts of the buildings were used as clubs, for left wing organizing, tango, and even a skating rink. The complex of buildings was subsequently bought by the real estate consortium 'Real Estate Merger and Management' in 2000 and renovated to provide retail, production and loft spaces. In 2002 the social democrat politician Wolfgang Thierse delivered a speech at the opening of the renovated complex. Thierse was both a

member of the former East German government and an active organizer in the opposition movement that eventually brought an end to the regime. (Wikipedia)

The way Harald sees it, the areas surrounding the Backfabrik are not at risk for gentrifying – since it already is almost completely gentrified. Instead, it is simply an opportunity for him, with his wife expecting a child and him working part time doing catering, to fulfill his artistic vision in a supportive environment. Politics be damned! I sympathize. It is however indicative to see how well the improvised aesthetic meshes with the 'creative industrial complex' of the Backfabrik, which presents itself as follows:

PART OF YOUR DREAMS.

The BACKFABRIK – in six historical buildings once part of an industrial bakery located in the Central district of Berlin—is a place for companies with creative knowledge workers. On 25,000 square meters of original brick construction you can find the ideal conditions for modern communication. And you will find more: the conviction that life and work belong together, that people are only able to work effectively and creatively in a place where they feel at home and at ease.

LOCATION

It is just five minutes north of the Alexanderplatz; you can see the Hackeschen Höfe from the roof; Prenzlauer Berg with its countless restaurants, bars and shops starts right on your doorsteps. The U-Bahn station Senefelderplatz as well as the Alexanderplatz with S- and U-Bahn connections are a short distance from the BACKFABRIK. In the underground garage there are parking places for 300 cars, as well as bicycles and mopeds.

LOFTS AND MORE...

Open rooms with ceilings between 4 and 6 meters tall can be easily transformed: the smallest units are about 200 square meters; the largest with more than 1,000 square meters can be appropriately connected with surrounding areas of several thousand square meters. Space for restaurants and shops are located around the main Piazza. For special events and conferences the former ice cream production locations and other areas of the BACKFABRIK can be reserved through our Event- Management team.

COMMUNITY

Companies can network in countless creative ways - in the Bistro, the restaurant or simply playing Boccia on the main Piazza. Food-to-go or dry cleaning and shoe repair service all make life easier. A lively work atmosphere creates the feeling of being in the right place at the right time.

DECOR

The look is created by classical factory architecture with exposed brickwork, tiled ceilings and glazed wall tiling. The floors can be fitted with parquet, linoleum or fitted carpet; spotlights and ample space for office kitchens is available in every unit. From a technical standpoint, the buildings are equipped with structured category-7 cabling direct to the individual workstations. Transverse cable carriers and open pipes in the offices facilitate transformation and expansion. In our LAN-center five carriers offer their services, and our own electricity is provided at the best possible prices. (Backfabrik – History)

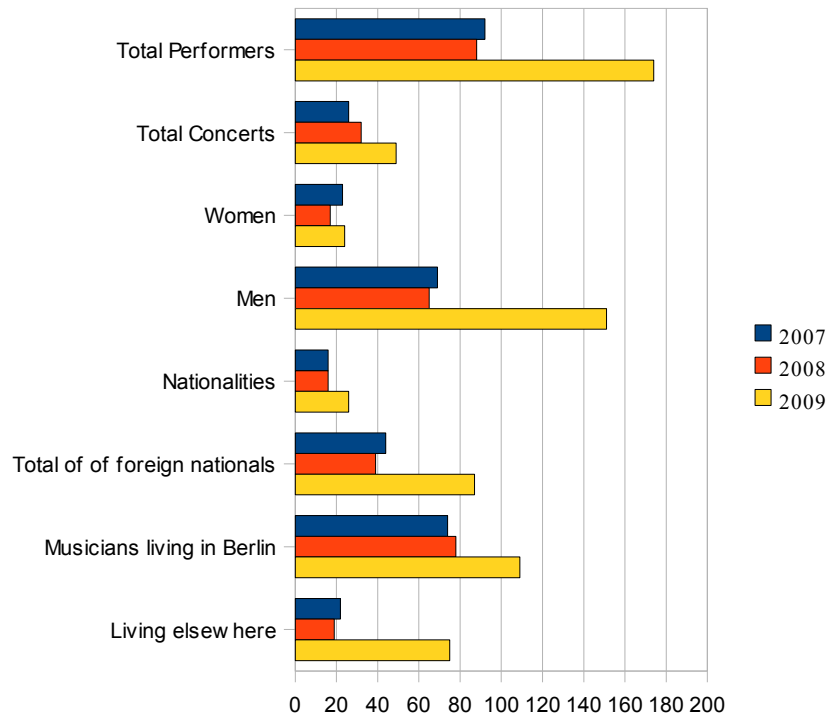
Is there not some irony here that this utopian modern lifestyle has so quickly been built upon the remains of a decimated manufacturing sector? What happened to all the workers that were laid off? Can their families still afford to live in the surrounding neighborhoods? Who are the people that now live and work here? In contrast to Ranciere's belief that the artist and the worker are coming together, it seems more like artists are playing with the decimated remains of an increasingly dominated class of people, while serving the interests of emergent structures of power. That this is a necessary, albeit painful, phase in the march of progress is absurd. People need bread as much now as before. Whether people need designer furniture and fashion...

It will be interesting to see whether the people living and working in the Backfabrik attend concerts and engage with realtime music. If they do take an active interest in the music, this could be taken as a sign that the music itself has cultural appeal and use value. It is of course more likely that the music will occur there as only a value additive cheap, flexible, social and discursive representation of the ideals of the space.

Theilmann is of course fully capable of playing the subversive trickster by undermining the ideology and spatial practices of the Backfabrik. And, knowing him personally, he likely will do so. Whether or not in the final tally subversive content

(which before anything else needs an actual public of consequence) outweighs the value additive forces of realtime art is not the primary concern of my endeavors here. But what to me seems most certain is that the act of making improvised music is itself not a radical endeavor and is not a form of resistance to the hegemonic field of contemporary capitalist production. Indeed, realtime musical practices are most closely aligned with and beneficial to the dominant power structures, and are part of the processes dynamically and speedily transforming Berlin into Capital and commodity.

Appendix



Berlin improvised music concert listing totals, September 1-14th 2007, 2008, and 2009 (source: echzeitmusik.de)

Analysis

Total Performers: Note the doubling between 2008 and 2009.

Total Concerts: In 2009 there were an average of 4.2 performers per concert. Given that a plurality of the concerts featured two or more sets with different performers, the average size of an ensemble is closer to 2.

Women/Men: This was the easiest available information on identity to sort. The data indicates that not only do women make up a tiny fraction of the performers, but that this situation might be becoming even more extreme.

Nationalities: Most of the nationalities listed are from Western Europe, North America, Japan and Australia.

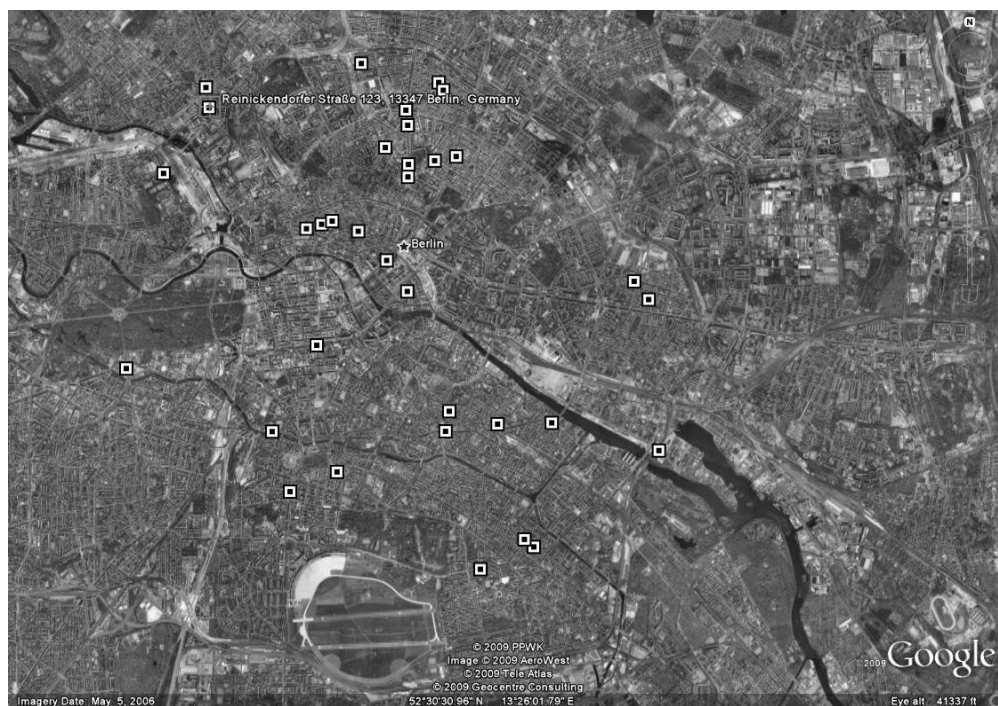
Total of Foreign Nationals: Foreigners make up about 50% of the performers.

Musicians living in Berlin: The majority of musicians live in Berlin.

Living Elsewhere: Based on anecdotal evidence it seems that improvisers are moving to Berlin to the detriment of musical communities elsewhere. The statistics of 2007 and 2008 might seem to support such an opinion, however the 2009 data indicates a greater influx of touring musicians from abroad. It is hard to draw any precise conclusions from this however, given that there are so many variables not considered here that would lead musicians to travel to Berlin to perform.



72 Concert locations, September 1st-November 30th 2009. Note the new cluster on the lower right indicative of a new 'scene' and gentrification in Neukölln.



34 Concert locations, September 1st-November 20th 2007.

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